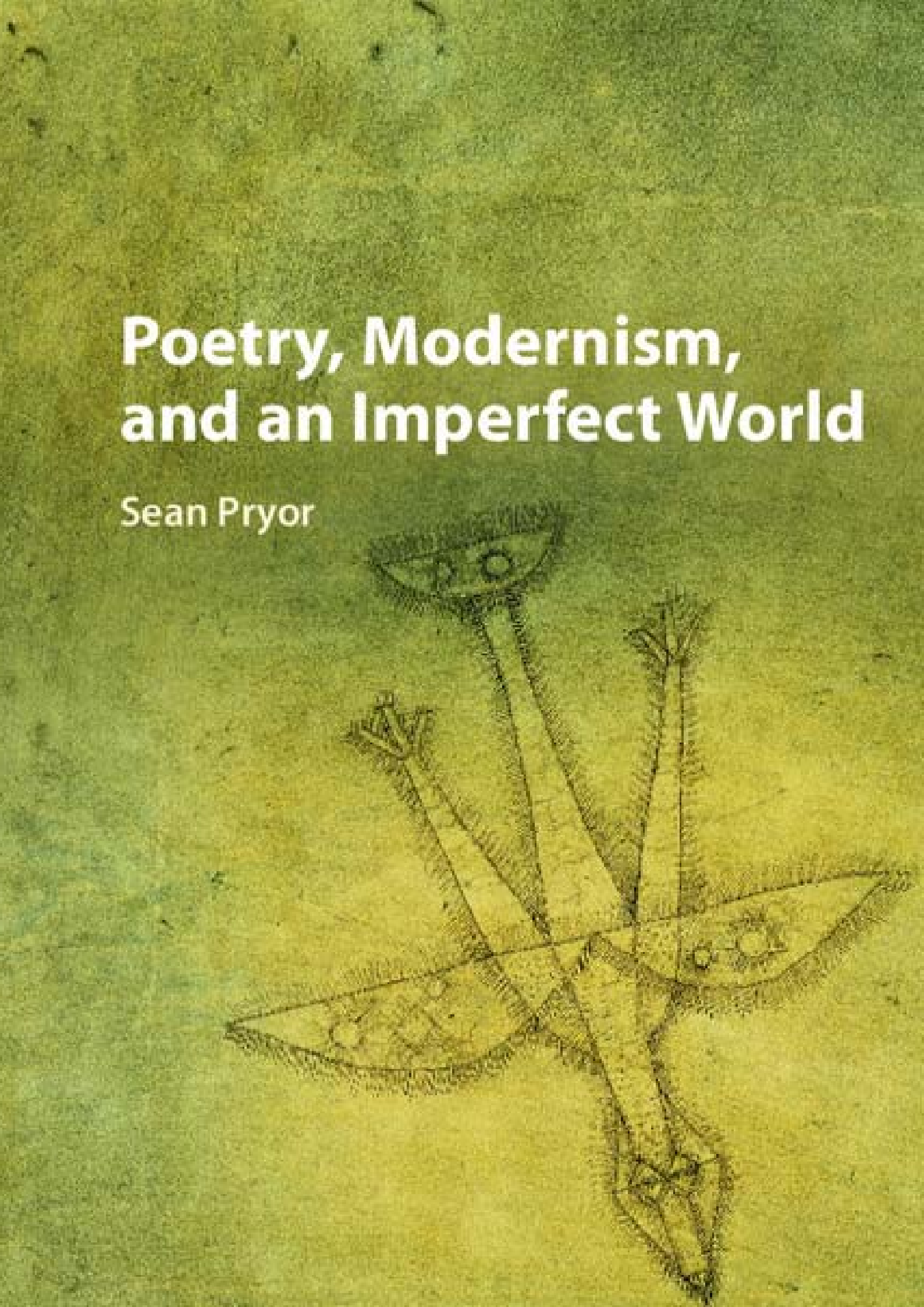
Poetry, Modernism, and an Imperfect World

Sean Pryor



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Diverse modernist poems, far from advertising a capacity to prefigure utopia or save society, understand poetry to be complicit in the unhappiness and injustice of an imperfect or fallen world. Combining analysis of technical devices and aesthetic values with broader accounts of contemporary critical debates, social contexts, and political history, this book makes a formalist argument about how these poems understand themselves and their situation, and a historicist argument about the meanings of their forms. The poetry of the canonical modernists T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, and Wallace Stevens is placed alongside the poetry of Ford Madox Ford, better known for his novels and his criticism, and the poetry of Joseph Macleod, whose work has been largely forgotten. Focusing on the years from 1914 to 1930, this book offers a new account of a crucial moment in the history of British and American modernism.

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Most of all, I am grateful to Sally Smith for her patience and her love. This book is for Joseph.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I

'But all this beauty is exactly what does not exist', says the creature in Kafka's 'Der Bau', 'and I must get to work'.[1] The creature has been speculating about the form his burrow could have taken, the happiness he could have had, and now he resolves to work on the burrow again, to implement another plan and so attempt another form of happiness. The creature's resolution pivots from a contrast between the world he can imagine and the world as it is, to a contrast between the world as it is and the world he can make. Probably he cannot make a burrow as beautiful as the burrow he can imagine, though they both oppose the state of things, and possibly such beauty is only ever what does not exist. Possibly the thought of such beauty is oppressive. At the beginning of the story the creature had seemed pleased: 'I have established my burrow, and it seems to be a success.'[2] But that beauty exceeds this success, and he must get to work.

Imagine the creature's resolution as a motto for the great labours of modernity, aesthetic and political, from modernism to socialism: the tremendous effort to get to work because of what exists. Kafka's creature must work precisely with what exists, including the burrow he has made for himself, and the burden of that work is part of what makes the present world ugly and unhappy. But the burrow he creates and recreates, a work in perpetual progress, is a refuge from the world which proves no refuge at all. It offers an allegory for the isolations and anxieties of modern life, and for a labour of thinking which can never rest, which incessantly dissatisfies. The burrow seems an allegory for Kafka's story too, and more broadly for the work of art: a part of the world which promises a refuge from that

[1] Franz Kafka, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), p. 180.
[2] Kafka, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, p. 162.

world. The creature's resolution is a model for the projects of modernity in this, that with a simple enigmatic conjunction ('and') it holds together art and the world, imagination and work. These oppositions do not coincide, for art means both imagination and work, and so does the world which art opposes. The friction between the oppositions generates the energy, the compulsion, the 'must'. Even art fails the beauty which does not exist, or not yet.

It seems to me that modernism could not but resolve to redeem or transform a new world of ugliness, suffering, and injustice, and at the same time reflect on its failure or its inability to do so. In 1929, looking back on the renaissance which had promised so much, and having helped to edit the *Little Review* for more than a decade, Jane Heap remarked that the 'actual situation of art today is not a very important or adult concern'.[3] 'Art is not the highest aim of man', she says; 'it is interesting only as a pronounced symptom of an ailing and aimless society'. Heap speaks without melodrama of 'the passing of the arts'; the transformations required today are just 'too big a job for art'. Others believed that those very transformations would eliminate the need for art. If modernist aesthetics were the symptom of a 'historically unstable form of society and an undecided epoch, in which drastically variable futures were lived as immediately possible – among them, saliently but not exclusively, socialist revolution'[4] – then the advent of one or more of those futures promised not just the passing of modernism, but the passing of the aesthetic. Were life 'ever to be ordered within the perfect state', Nietzsche prophesied, 'there would no longer exist in the present any motive whatever for poetry and fiction'.[5]

This book is about modernism as the art of an imperfect or fallen world, and modernity as a world in which art is imperfect or fallen. Most of all, this book is about poetry. I want to argue that modernist poetry responds to these dilemmas with power and insight when it understands itself as a fallen art in a fallen world. The poems I read here bring their complicity to self-consciousness; they present their complicity and implicate poetry as such. They do so by confessing their participation in some other compromised category, as for instance when *The Waste Land* (1922) represents the ruin of civilisation and represents itself as a product of civilisation, or when *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (1923, 1925) represents learning language as

[3] Jane Heap, 'Lost: A Renaissance', *Little Review* 12.2 (May 1929): 5–6 (p. 6).
[4] Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 53.
[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 112.

a fall into the semiotic, and so damns itself for using language. More importantly, these poems do so by implicating in that world of ugliness, suffering, and injustice precisely what distinguishes them from short stories, philosophical treatises, political speeches, and casual conversations: the verbal devices, cultural expectations, and aesthetic values which make them poetry. For these poems, whatever hope, happiness, or consolation poetry offers, poetry is also and as a consequence wretched, unhappy, and unconsoling.

Yet Matthew Arnold hoped that poetry could save us,[6] and more recent theorists sometimes call poetry 'a form of utopia', since poetry 'invents within language new ways of being with oneself, others, and the world'.[7] Whether in the poems of today or of the past, some critics find a poetics 'capable of birthing a new, and newly redemptive, culture'.[8] Poetry's 'complex testing operations' represent 'an anxious utopianism',[9] or a particular poetic movement, such as Objectivism, is driven by an 'aesthetic-political utopian impulse'.[10] If this is true for the poems I discuss, it is only because they know they cannot redeem themselves and cannot redeem the world. Their promise is negative. Writing in the *Dial* in 1920, Maxwell Bodenheim called the poet 'brilliantly futile', even as she makes a 'daring attempt to show men the potentialities which forever slumber within them'.[11] Bodenheim's 'forever' forecloses utopia; his 'futile' makes it possible. Although art 'is compelled toward absolute negativity', compelled to oppose the fallen world, 'it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative'.[12] But it must be unremittingly negative, even towards itself, and even the poems I have chosen probably fail that imperative. I do not therefore make the sociological argument that, despite appearances, poetry serves capital or power or the existing state of things. Art is social, says Adorno, it participates in the social world,

[6] Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960–1977), 9.63.

[7] Gabriella Bedetti and Henri Meschonnic, 'Interview: Henri Meschonnic', *Diacritics* 18.3 (Autumn 1988): 93–111 (p. 106).

[8] Julie Carr, *Surface Tension: Ruptural Time and the Poetics of Desire in Late Victorian Poetry* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 2013), p. 26.

[9] Joel Nickels, *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 19.

[10] Ruth Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 90.

[11] Maxwell Bodenheim, 'Modern Poetry', *Dial* 68.1 (January 1920): 95–8 (p. 96).

[12] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 305.

> not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.[13]

The autonomy is complicit. Modernist works engage with their social world through 'forms of relative autonomy', contingent upon and compromised by their historical situation.[14] 'The detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant', and 'the only advantage of the former is insight into his entanglement'.[15]

So certain modernist poems bring their complicity to self-consciousness, and they do so by implicating poetry in the 'fallen society' of modernity,[16] 'the fallen world of the here and now'.[17] The features which, for these poems, distinguish the art of poetry, and on which my readings focus, are sometimes technical and sometimes conceptual. They range from lineation to the desire for every element or aspect of a poem to be necessary and significant. But no criterion for poetry is secure or binding, and in the first decades of the twentieth century, every criterion was contested. 'If we speak of a work like the Orlando Furioso as a poem', reasoned Richard Aldington in 1920, 'can we deny that praise to a work like Du Côté de Chez Swann, which contains beauties, perceptions, and thoughts of which Ariosto was incapable?'[18] Metre and rhyme may define verse, or may have defined it once upon a time, but they do not define poetry. Technical distinctions thus seem to yield to conceptual identities. 'Even if you make poetry a matter of verbal harmony', Aldington continues, 'there are in M. Proust's book finer cadences, more lovely conjunctions of sound, more original rhythms'.[19] And yet Aldington derives even these criteria from works categorised by other criteria. He cannot call *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (1913) a poem without thinking of *Orlando Furioso*.

Many other modernists sought to define the matter of poetry, and the way that poetry matters or no longer matters, and they did so in many

[13] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 296.
[14] Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.
[15] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 26.
[16] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 178.
[17] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 23.
[18] Richard Aldington, 'The Art of Poetry', *Dial* 69.2 (August 1920): 166–80 (p. 167).
[19] Aldington, 'The Art of Poetry', pp. 167–8.

other ways. The problem remained a source of fascination, a spur to experiment, and the cause of some anxiety; I shall return to it repeatedly. The situation of poetry, for modernism, was one of acute crisis. 'Modern civilization seems to demand that the poet should justify himself not only by writing poems', observe Laura Riding and Robert Graves, 'but furthermore by proving with each poem the contemporary legitimacy of poetry itself'.[20] This tension between the instance and the idea, between poems and poetry, is crucial. It means that, as Peter Nicholls puts it, 'the exemplary modernist poem deliberately invites the question "Is it poetry?"'[21] Each work had to earn the name of *poetry* anew, as classification or evaluation. Descending to the particular, it could try to do so by employing techniques of versification. Ascending to the universal, it could try to do so by epitomising the concept of art. Yet neither those techniques nor that concept are eternal laws; they are the measures of a historical moment. In modernism, poetry opposes a necessary other at every level: prose, narrative, the novel, the world. It opposes science, religion, and capitalism. It opposes mechanical reproduction: 'A prose kinema, not [. . .] the "sculpture" of rhyme', writes Ezra Pound in 1920,[22] before criticising a passage in the drafts of *The Waste Land* as mere 'photography'.[23] Given this situation, poetry vanishes in a cloudy abstraction or crumbles into that contingent set of verbal devices, cultural expectations, and aesthetic values. At every level, poetry is a refuge which proves no refuge. My argument is that modernist poetry engages powerfully with the fallen world when it reflects on its peculiar falls or failings, and so this book attends to some of those distinguishing features.

II

The labours of modernity are not separate. Both the notion that poetry is a form of utopia and the notion that poetry is complicit in an imperfect

[20] Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: William Heinemann, 1927), p. 260.

[21] Peter Nicholls, 'The Poetics of Modernism', in Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 51–67 (p. 52).

[22] Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), in *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), pp. 183–202 (p. 186).

[23] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. 10–11. Hereafter abbreviated as *F*. For discussion of modernist poetry's productive antagonisms with film, photography, and other technological media, see Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

world involve aesthetic work in politics. In the first decades of the twentieth century, political work involved aesthetics, too, and it involved poetry in particular. This, like the crisis concerning the nature of the art, characterised its situation. To a surprising degree, social criticism and political comment turned to poetry in order to understand fallen modernity. So as to appreciate what is at stake when, in 1922 or 1925, a poem implicates poetry in the present state of things, I want to spend some time working through these contemporary arguments. For socialists and conservatives alike, whether in London or in New York, the problem was to decide whether poetry only imagines a beauty which can never exist, or instead makes a beauty which has not yet existed.

When A. R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson relaunched the *New Age* on 2 May 1907, the magazine appeared under a new subtitle: 'An Independent Socialist Review of Politics, Literature, and Art'. The first editorial then set out the magazine's guiding concept of socialism. Just as 'Religion is the will of the individual towards self-perfection', the editors declare, so socialism is 'no less than the will of Society to perfect itself'.[24] Orage and Jackson thus invert Oscar Wilde's claim, in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' (1891), that socialism works towards the perfection of the individual.[25] (In that same first issue, Jackson calls for a cheap reissue of Wilde's 'important essay' as 'a matter of urgency'.[26]) But like Wilde, the editors of the *New Age* develop their argument by comparing socialism to religion. In order to span politics, literature, and art, the editorial paints its programme in the broadest of brush-strokes. The new magazine did address specific political and economic issues. Its very first pages treat the purpose and the fate of the British Empire, then being debated at the Colonial Conference in London; the budget recently delivered by Asquith, Chancellor of the Exchequer; and major reforms to the British Army about to be passed through Parliament. In each case, the magazine offers direct judgements and specific recommendations. 'The Socialist objection to the army is that it is a class army', and the only remedy is 'to make the army national and democratic and transfer its control from a class to the whole people'.[27] But the socialism of the *New Age* always had one eye on the stars: a beauty beyond shadowed the work being done today.

[24] Anonymous, 'The Future of the "New Age"', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 8.
[25] Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', *Fortnightly Review* 49.340 (February 1891): 292–319.
[26] Holbrook Jackson, 'Book Notes', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 13.
[27] Anonymous, 'The Outlook', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 1–2 (p. 2).

Over the next fifteen years, the *New Age* featured prominent articles and regular columns by Orage, Florence Farr, G. K. Chesterton, Ramiro de Maeztu, T. E. Hulme, Hilaire Belloc, and Edwin Muir.[28] H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw argued vigorously against private property. Katherine Mansfield and Wyndham Lewis published short stories, F. S. Flint published poems and reviewed others' poetry, and Pound reviewed art and music, provided countless articles on sundry other topics, and published his own poetry too. The magazine quickly found a new subtitle, becoming simply 'A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art'. Many of its contributors set about analysing the failures of modern Britain and, more broadly, of modernity, and Orage gave space to conflicting opinions and approaches. But balancing the emphasis on modern life was a sense that life's imperfection was older or more permanent. On 3 October 1907, in the first instalment of a series entitled 'Towards Socialism', Orage wrote that

> Most great men have had to build for themselves an imaginary heaven in the skies as a retreat from the condition of men on earth. All the angels and isles of Avilion conceived by poets and philosophers are no more than a tragic testimony to the inadequacy of earth. The worse earth the better heaven must be imagined![29]

Tennyson has King Arthur depart for 'the island-valley of Avilion',[30] and the long history of such dreams of the otherworld implies that our earthly condition is fixed, but in fact Orage heralds an imminent and drastic change. Where poets had failed, socialists could succeed: 'at last, our great men are venturing to fix their heaven upon earth. We desire, said one of them recently, that the heaven which men expect after their death shall be attained on earth during their life.'[31] Like Heap, Orage subordinates art to social transformation, but he lacks her disillusionment. The urgent task was twofold. It was crucial to imagine the perfection towards which society should aim, and it was crucial to imagine that perfection is possible. It was as if to say, 'all this beauty is exactly what does not exist, and we

[28] For recent accounts of Orage's time as editor, see Ann L. Ardis, 'Democracy and Modernism: *The New Age* under A. R. Orage (1907–22)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1: Britain and Ireland 1880–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 205–225; and Paul Jackson, *Great War Modernisms and* The New Age *Magazine* (London: Continuum, 2012).

[29] A. R. Orage, 'Towards Socialism', *New Age* 1.23 (3 October 1907): 361–2 (p. 361).

[30] Alfred Tennyson, 'Morte d'Arthur' (1842), line 259, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987), 2.3–19 (p. 18).

[31] Orage, 'Towards Socialism', p. 361.

must get to work to bring it into existence'. 'We must kill the force in us that says we cannot become all that we desire', Farr counselled in the same issue, 'for that force is our evil star which turns all opportunity into grotesque failure'.[32]

Across the Atlantic, social and cultural critics in New York made comparable arguments. Take, for example, the magazine *Seven Arts*, founded in 1916 by James Oppenheim.[33] *Seven Arts* published work by D. H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, Amy Lowell, and Alfred Kreymborg, and though Pound criticised the magazine's compromise with popular taste, he did offer Oppenheim the manuscript of Ernest Fenollosa's essay on 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry' (1919).[34] Perhaps the essay seemed, as Pound suspected it would, too 'exotic', for it was declined. Oppenheim's attention was turned to more immediate matters, for in the July 1917 editorial he announces 'the coming of a new heaven and a new Earth'.[35] The good news of this redemption had been 'heard in France during the Terror', had been 'heard by such different spirits as Karl Marx and Nietzsche', and had most recently resounded in revolutionary Russia: 'we see Russia now as that hopeful chaos, that confusion of the nebula, out of which a new world shapes itself'. The February Revolution had erupted but four months earlier, and the October Revolution would soon follow. That April, caught by the fervour of epochal change and hailing Jefferson, Lincoln, and Whitman as America's 'national poets', Oppenheim demands a twentieth-century successor, someone to lead the United States towards its heaven on earth: 'A new poet must appear among us.'[36]

So whereas Orage envisions socialism superseding poetry, Oppenheim's grandiloquence conflates the two. Max Eastman took a third approach during his tenure as editor of the socialist magazine the *Masses*, choosing to juxtapose poetry with politics as parts of a common project. Just as at the *New Age*, Eastman and his contributors 'addressed a variety of issues' beyond the strictly political and economic: 'suffragism, free love, birth

[32] Florence Farr, 'Our Evil Stars', *New Age* 1.23 (3 October 1907): 358–9 (p. 358).

[33] For a good, summary account of *Seven Arts*, see Victoria Kingham, '"Audacious Modernity": *The Seven Arts* (1916–17); *The Soil* (1916–17); and *The Trend* (1911–15)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II: North America 1894–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 398–419.

[34] Ezra Pound, letter to John Quinn, 10 January 1917, in Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn, 1915–1924*, ed. Timothy Materer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 93.

[35] James Oppenheim, 'Editorial', *Seven Arts* 2.3 (July 1917): 340–43 (p. 342).

[36] James Oppenheim, 'Editorials', *Seven Arts* 1.6 (April 1917): 627–30 (pp. 629, 630).

control, religion, race relations'.[37] In a 1913 essay, having distinguished between genuine revolution and mere reformism, 'between the party of the people and the parties of the people's money', Eastman pauses to consider the state of contemporary poetry.[38] He scorns 'the connotations and the music of ancient phrases' and instead urges poets to 'go down to the street, and out into the fields and quarries and among the sips [sops?] and chimneys, the smoke and glory of living reality'. Other issues of the *Masses* featured Eastman's own poems, including a ballad for Wat Tyler,[39] and in his 1913 critical study, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, Eastman proclaims the poet a 'restorer' and a 'prophet'.[40] 'All creeds and theories serve' the poet, he writes, for the poet imparts to us 'the spirit of bounteous living'. But Eastman never argues that the poetry of fields and quarries will deliver revolution; instead he makes poetry one aspect of a broader social and cultural project. In a similar vein, many contributors to the *Masses* aligned socialism with religion or framed socialism in religious terms. The May 1912 issue featured essays on Christian charity by Will Irwin and on the temptation of Jesus by Charles P. Fagnani, professor at Union Theological Seminary. Moses is 'the class-conscious hero of the Hebrews', Fagnani writes, and Christ 'the supreme class-conscious hero of humanity': 'Without class-consciousness we cannot be saved.'[41] So, too, in January that year the magazine's founder, Piet Vlag, attacked the American Federation of Labor for compromising with capital. Mere 'individualists', its members have 'no dream of a better world'.[42] Their 'heaven is a fair day's work for a fair day's pay *for themselves*', Vlag protested, not a new earth for and through the collective. 'What is Socialism?' asked Frank Stuhlman in October 1911: 'Socialism is Salvation!'[43]

Such conjunctions of politics, religion, and art were more than passing rhetorical ploys. At the *New Age*, Orage 'promoted the need for a cultural revolution to sit alongside revolutionary political change',[44] and in general British socialism tended 'to evoke the socialist future not through conventional political declarations or detailed policy formulations but through

[37] Benoît Tadié, 'The Masses Speak: *The Masses* (1911–17); *The Liberator* (1918–24); *New Masses* (1926–48); and *Masses & Mainstream* (1948–63)', in Brooker and Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II*, pp. 831–56 (p. 836).
[38] Max Eastman, 'Knowledge and Revolution', *Masses* 4.4 (January 1913): 5–7 (p. 6).
[39] Max Eastman, 'To Wat Tyler – A Ballad', *Masses* 8.2 (December 1915): 18.
[40] Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 198.
[41] Charles P. Fagnani, 'The Temptation of Jesus', *Masses* 3.5 (May 1912): 10.
[42] [Piet Vlag], 'Brains or Bombs?', *Masses* 3.1 (January 1912): 5–7 (p. 5).
[43] [Horatio Winslow and Frank Stuhlman], 'What Is Socialism?', *Masses* 1.10 (October 1911): 15.
[44] Jackson, *Great War Modernisms*, p. 25.

aesthetics, myth, Christian symbolism and idioms, metaphor and other forms of literary embellishment, dreams and various kinds of utopian imagining'.[45] Many radical and progressive American writers did so, too. But these analogies and tropes introduce conceptual complications. Christianity teaches that salvation is impossible without God's grace, however much an individual may will it, and for some writers socialism was similarly limited by our earthly condition. 'We know that individual interests and raw temperaments will always clash', Eastman warns in October 1916.[46] To believe 'that anything remotely approaching a Brotherhood of Man', he then continues, 'can be engendered in a race with our hereditary nature, is as utopian a dream as it is unexciting'. In the November 1907 issue of the *New Age* Cecil Chesterton remarks that the abolition of class would be 'as near an approach to justice as we are likely to get in this imperfect world'.[47] But for Orage such arguments betray an entrenched conservatism, the conviction that things 'will never improve, and there is no salvation'.[48] Instead, true socialism aims at nothing less than 'the re-creation of Eden'. Seizing on this second way, Orage rises to a Pelagian proclamation: 'Men must redeem themselves, and they must redeem the world.' And yet in time Orage's convictions changed. In October 1918, more than a decade after calling for a new Eden and a few weeks before the armistice, he laments the decline of the religious spirit, since religion is 'the study and practice of perfection', but rather than heralding perfection as an imminent future, Orage now calls it an 'impossible and infinite aim'.[49] Women and men must work to redeem themselves, knowing that they never will.

In this way, though these magazines' various contributors analysed poverty, labour, class, and gender, they often addressed what Jackson called 'the more remote and philosophic aspects of Socialism'.[50] Hulme was no socialist, but it was in the *New Age* that he elaborated his opposition of romanticism and classicism, recasting Orage's early distinction between socialism and conservatism. Classicism, Hulme explains in October 1915, means

> the conviction that a man is by nature bad or limited, and can consequently only accomplish anything of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic or political. In other words, it believes in Original Sin. We may define Romantics, then,

[45] Thomas Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 4.
[46] Max Eastman, 'Towards Liberty. III. The Aim of Agitation', *Masses* 8.12 (October 1916): 23–5 (p. 23).
[47] Cecil Chesterton, 'The Problem of Equality', *New Age* 2.4 (21 November 1907): 69.
[48] Orage, 'Towards Socialism', p. 361.
[49] R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 23.27 (31 October 1918): 429–30 (p. 429).
[50] Jackson, 'Book Notes', p. 13.

> as all those who do not believe in the Fall of Man. I believe this to be the most fundamental division that can possibly be made in the region of thinking about society.[51]

Two months later, Orage countered that, though an insistence on original sin may be necessary, the 'complementary doctrine of the Redemption' was 'equally in need of affirmation'.[52] Hulme believed humanity to be 'radically imperfect',[53] while Orage urged that 'there are no base instincts, no evil tendencies'.[54]

On the one hand, such arguments obscure pressing problems of political economy with an old theological conundrum, with appeals to an unchanging human nature. On the other hand, the recovery of old theological, mythological, and philosophical solutions was itself a symptom of the moment. These debates emerged out of well-established nineteenth-century controversies. Nietzsche, for instance, had chastised the 'paradisiac prospect' envisioned by socialism, its demand for the rights of 'Man in his original goodness'.[55] But the unprecedented catastrophe of the Great War gave these debates new urgency, as did the revolution in Russia. In February 1916 Hulme argued that pacifists foolishly rely on the goodness of human nature, confident that progress will of its own accord deliver a harmonious society. War is necessary, Hulme counters, not because it will achieve some 'great *liberation* of mankind', but 'merely in order that bad may not get worse'.[56] Hulme calls this a 'quite *abstract* matter', but the problem of the condition of women and men on earth was inseparable from the problems of contemporary society. The war gave the theory its concrete occasion, making its abstractions possible and valuable. The same

[51] T. E. Hulme, 'The Translator's Preface to Sorel's "Reflections on Violence"', *New Age* 17.24 (14 October 1915): 569–70 (p. 570). For the later version that appeared with Hulme's translation of Sorel, slightly altered and with additional footnotes, see *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 246–52 (p. 250). For further discussion of Hulme's theory of original sin, see C. D. Blanton, 'The Politics of Epochality: Antinomies of Original Sin', in Edward P. Comentale and Andrzej Gasiorek, eds, *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 187–208.

[52] R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 18.8 (23 December 1915): 181–2 (p. 181). Ardis notes that some of the contributions signed 'R. H. C.' may not be by Orage ('Democracy and Modernism', p. 209, n. 12), but though this piece was not included in Orage's later collection of articles from the column, *Readers and Writers* (1922), the insistence on redemption seems characteristic of him.

[53] T. E. Hulme, 'A Notebook', *New Age* 18.13 (27 January 1916): 305–7 (p. 305); Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 444.

[54] A. R. Orage, 'Towards Socialism. II', *New Age* 1.24 (10 October 1907): 375.

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 91.

[56] North Staffs [T. E. Hulme], 'War Notes', *New Age* 18.15 (10 February 1916): 341–2 (p. 341); Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 397.

logic allowed Hulme to herald the return to an austere and geometric aesthetic, proposing an art conscious of human limitation as the art of the new century,[57] and it allowed Maeztu to protest that liberal democracy merely caters to humanity's inherent hedonism.[58] Having abandoned his early socialism, Maeztu first diagnoses the progress of civilisation as the development of self-consciousness and self-interest, and then, rather paradoxically, calls that development 'the apple that Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden'.[59] An ahistorical condition thus figures a historical process. Maeztu laments that the 'ideal of perfection has almost disappeared in modern men', and deduces that this 'is why the consciousness of original sin has also become so weak'.[60] It is as if modernity had newly fallen from the Fall.

On the contrary, said Muir: 'The belief in Original Sin – that was itself Man's original sin.'[61] Muir stridently opposed Hulme and Maeztu. 'A battle in which victory is impossible', he complained in 1917; 'a contest in which man has to climb continually in order not to fall lower; existence as the tread mill: that is what is meant by Original Sin'.[62] Later that year, Matthew Walker Robieson warned that to 'drag the doctrine of Original Sin into politics suggests a day of humiliation in which we all in a general confession admit that we are miserable criminals'.[63] The 'modern problem' therefore needs 'a new solution', Muir argues, not a reversion 'to the old dogmas'.[64] He blames 'the aridity of modern life' on familiar culprits:[65] 'man appears as the helpless appendage of a machine too mighty for him',[66] 'Religion has dried up',[67] and 'Art has decayed from an idealisation of life into a reflection of it.' Muir ties the fate of art to the fall into modernity, but he also ties society's hope to art's resurrection: after religion, only art can envision society's proper perfection. If Arnold conceives of culture as 'the study and pursuit of perfection',[68] Muir proclaims that 'in the ideal

[57] T. E. Hulme, 'A Notebook', *New Age* 18.6 (9 December 1915): 137–8 (p. 138); Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, pp. 426–7.
[58] Ramiro de Maeztu, 'More Disconnected Connections', *New Age* 18.24 (13 April 1916): 561–2 (p. 561).
[59] Ramiro de Maeztu, 'Disconnected Connections', *New Age* 18.20 (16 March 1916): 466–8 (p. 466).
[60] Ramiro de Maeztu, 'A Reflection upon Sin', *New Age* 19.1 (4 May 1916): 9–10 (p. 10).
[61] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.17 (22 February 1917): 401–2 (p. 402).
[62] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.12 (18 January 1917): 280–82 (p. 280).
[63] O. Latham [Matthew Walker Robieson], 'An Apology for the Liberty of the Person. VII', *New Age* 22.9 (27 December 1917): 166–7.
[64] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.7 (14 December 1916): 160–61 (p. 161).
[65] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.14 (1 February 1917): 327–8 (p. 328).
[66] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.3 (16 November 1916): 63–5 (p. 64).
[67] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'We Moderns', *New Age* 20.20 (15 March 1917): 470–71 (p. 471).
[68] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 61.

society of the future everyone will be a poet'.[69] When Orage launched the *New Age* he had hoped that socialists might achieve what poets had only dreamt about. Writing in October 1921, less than a year before Orage left the magazine, Muir declares that perfection would consist in practising 'life as an art'.[70] He gazes from an imperfect world and its imperfect art to a heaven in which the world and art are perfected, reconciled. Still, Muir probably did not imagine life in that society to be like the poems published alongside his article. In the same issue, for example, Maurice Reckitt put new words to the tune of the old Scottish song 'Bonnie Dundee' and gave the refrain to a 'Chorus (of Real Creditors)':

> *So fill up your forms with a carbon beneath,*
> *To check all your figures we're armed to the teeth;*
> *For never a scrap of efficiency's lost,*
> *And the cost of the costing will go into cost.*[71]

Satire in support of Social Credit seems a far cry from art's idealisation of life, but in dreaming of the ideal society Muir idealised poetry.

Seven Arts held out equally high hopes. In its inaugural issue, Romain Rolland hailed the 'writers and thinkers of America': 'You must make of your culture a symphony that shall in a true way express your brotherhood of individuals, of races, of cultures banded together. You must make real the dream of an integrated and entire humanity.'[72] The issue's editorial then prophesied an American renaissance, in which the arts would 'become not only the expression of the national life but a means to its enhancement'.[73] And whereas the editorials of this and other early issues featured Oppenheim's rousing prose, those of the final three issues rhapsodised in verse. In the August 1917 editorial Oppenheim cries out for a 'prophet of the proletariat', apostrophising 'holy Russia':

> Rise, ever higher, more splendid,
> Be as the divine dawn sending the rays of thy promised
> joy into the wilderness of madness,
> Call us with thy clear lips,
> Call us to the Day of Man, to the Planet of Humanity,
> Call us into thy triumphing Revolution.[74]

[69] [Muir], 'We Moderns' (16 November 1916): 64.
[70] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir], 'New Values', *New Age* 29.26 (27 October 1921): 306–7 (p. 306).
[71] Maurice Benington Reckitt, 'Counting the Cost', *New Age* 29.26 (27 October 1921): 304.
[72] Romain Rolland, 'America and the Arts', trans. Waldo Frank, *Seven Arts* 1.1 (November 1916): 47–51 (p. 50).
[73] [James Oppenheim and Waldo Frank], 'Editorials', *Seven Arts* 1.1 (November 1916): 52–6 (p. 52).
[74] James Oppenheim, 'Editorial', *Seven Arts* 2.4 (August 1917): 489–92 (pp. 490, 491).

Here, political idealism undoes poetic triumph or success. Indeed, the pretensions of idealistic poets and the conflation of poetry and politics were ripe for satire. In the January 1916 issue of the *Masses*, William Rose Benét mocks the substitution of art for action: 'It is easy to preach Revolution', he sings, 'But if ever it came to an uprising of the people, / How many pale poets would stand in the leaders' shoes?'[75]

Nevertheless, the fate of society was regularly bound to the fate of poetry. When Harold Monro launched *Poetry Review*, two years before the war and ten years before *The Waste Land*, he reflected in a preface that 'the best poetry of the time is the poetry of despair, a cry of the lost'.[76] In the past, however, there had 'been periods when labour was joyful and beautiful, and the poet sang because the community required his song'. Monro's simple conjunction, his 'and', makes the poetry of the present a product and an expression of life under capital: the alienation and division of labour, the ideology of the individual, and the antagonism of art and society. Monro recognised that the cry of the lost was better, now, than deceived or disingenuous cries of joy: 'the expression of our joy has fallen into the hands of literary tinkers and pedlars, or it is muffled in the roar of cities'. But Monro dreamt of a future when poetry would again 'become natural and keen', when 'there will be *improvisatori* again, who will lavish us their poems carelessly, like a plant its flowers'.[77] 'In its final majestic simplicity', Monro concludes, poetry 'will flower into natural and perfect language, bright with dreams and tense with meaning'. The substance of this stirring call to quills is typical: both Mallarmé and Pound dreamt of perfect languages. It is the resolution of a writer who understands what exists, including the poetry of his time, and yet who also, caught in the dialectic of that time, imagines the beauty which does not exist to involve poetry too.

III

The debates pursued in these little magazines are the background of my picture, and the figures in the foreground are the subjects of each chapter: Ford Madox Ford, T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, Wallace Stevens, and Joseph Macleod. Eliot did read the *New Age*, which published a letter by Ford in 1911.[78] Ford's essay on literary Impressionism appeared in Monro's second

[75] William Rose Benét, 'Revolution', *Masses* 8.3 (January 1916): 24.
[76] [Harold Monro], preface to *Poetry Review* 1.1 (January 1912): 3–5 (p. 3).
[77] Harold Monro, 'The Future of Poetry', *Poetry Review* 1.1 (January 1912): 10–13 (p. 13).
[78] Ford Madox Ford, 'Woman's Suffrage', letter to the editor, *New Age* 8.15 (9 February 1911): 356–7.

journal, *Poetry and Drama*, while Eliot published essays and poems in Monro's third journal, the *Chapbook*. I return to Hulme's theories in particular in my chapter on Eliot. When Oppenheim launched *Seven Arts* Loy had recently arrived in New York, and when Vlag launched the *Masses* Stevens was working there as a lawyer, though many years later, despite describing himself as 'headed left', he dismissed 'the ghastly left' of the *New Masses*.[79] But the little magazines matter because they represent common preoccupations, not because they were decisive influences on or sympathetic forums for these poets. In 1907, when Orage proclaimed from London that men must redeem themselves and the world, Loy moved from Paris to Florence and Eliot was studying at Harvard. In 1912, when Monro envisioned poetry's final majestic simplicity, Macleod was still a boy. Moreover, only Macleod became a socialist, and many modernists drifted instead towards fascism, or hurtled towards it. Socialism and poetry were names for work which resists the state of things, but the temptation of the time was to conflate politics and art too swiftly, to force their relation, to make an analogy a programme.[80] Still, Orage separates the impotent speculation of poets from the real work of socialists, even as he proposes their common dream, and Eastman makes poetry but one part of a broader social and cultural revolution. Not even Monro promises that poetry alone will solve the problems of political economy, only that, those problems solved, poetry will be magnificently transformed. These little magazines respond to the pressing problems of their historical moment, and they do so by thinking about the situation and the nature of poetry. This book is about the response of poetry itself: the ways in which some modernist poems, rather than idealising life or reflecting the fallen world of the here and now, probe their part in that world.

One of the most powerful aesthetic values at this time was, as we have seen, the idea of poetry as ideal. In the happy society of the future, Muir muses, everyone will be a poet. In reading Ford's 'On Heaven' (1914) I examine conflicts between this ideal and the ideal of heaven, both in its orthodox theological forms and in its secular adaptations. These conflicts place Ford's poetry in an impossible position, caught between metaphysics and materialism, leisure and labour, sincerity and satire, the poetic and the prosaic. I then argue that these contradictory imperatives bring both the poem and its heaven down to earth; poetry itself becomes fallen,

[79] Wallace Stevens, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 286.

[80] I owe much of my thinking about this relation to T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 8–10.

incapable of marrying aesthetic success and heavenly bliss. In my reading of Stevens's *Harmonium* (1923, 1931) I turn to conflicts between happy order and joyless necessity, cruel chance and blissful accidence. Here, too, modernist poetry responds to contemporary preoccupations, from anxieties about mechanical causality, through the monotony of the modern working day, to the enduring notion that the poem is 'a world ideal in its harmony and its permanence'.[81] In a poem, that is, every element should be deliberate and significant. I show how Stevens's first volume reworks this aesthetic value by conceiving of accidence as another form of happiness, and that this bliss thus remains beyond both the art of poetry and the mundane world of necessity and routine.

My readings of *The Waste Land* and *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* turn instead to prosodic techniques which, believed by some to be quintessential to poetry, were the subject of intense debate: the verse line and phonemic repetition. In order to understand how Eliot involves lineation in the wretchedness of modernity I place his work in the context of the politics of the 1920s, of the belief in original sin, and of contemporary arguments about free verse. The movement of Eliot's lines, continually determining and negating each other, both represents and participates in the antagonisms of an ugly, unhappy, unjust world. To show that Loy's phonemic repetition condemns poetry to this world too, I consider her work in relation to Freud's theory of verbal wit and to her contemporaries' theories of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and other forms of patterned sound. Exceeding every customary justification for such devices, the sounds of her poem prove more than satiric or beautiful; they are also indifferent to the fallen world of which the poem speaks, and they thereby confess poetry's inability to redeem that world.

Eliot's and Loy's poems involve prosodic techniques in a broader tensing of poetry, taut between the existing state of things and a transformed state of things, between the present and the future. This invokes an age-old cultural expectation, the idea of poetry's powers of prophecy, to which I turn, finally, in reading Macleod's *The Ecliptic* (1930). Structured according to the sequence of the zodiac, Macleod's long poem narrates the birth, life, and death of the modern subject, fractured within and isolated without. Though the use of the zodiac implies cosmic determinism and secure foresight, in fact Macleod's complex constellations of astrological, literary, and linguistic signs mean that each of its prognostic or revolutionary signs

[81] Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry* (1924; London: Martin Secker, 1926), p. 23.

only ever delivers another sign. Thus, whereas Oppenheim happily uses verse to celebrate imminent revolution, Macleod's poetry refuses to imagine a new heaven and a new earth, suggesting instead that every dream of an integrated society forestalls its realisation.

In this way, even as these various features distinguish poetry as an art, crystallising its opposition to the fallen world and promising happiness, they betray the poems and their distinction to that world. In attending to these features, my readings keep low to the ground, though I do also offer accounts of contemporary aesthetic debate, of social context, and of political history. I take this approach, not because phonemic repetition is intrinsically wretched or guilty, but because the poems themselves frame such features as complicit. This, then, is a formalist argument about poems negating themselves, and it is a historical argument about the meaning of those forms and negations at a particular time.

My book concentrates on a brief but important moment in the history of poetry in English, from about 1914 to 1930 or so. This period put poetry under a pressure different from that which, for example, drove W. B. Yeats's struggles to emerge from the 1890s, and from that which spurred the most interesting developments of the 1930s, whether in the work of W. H. Auden or Muriel Rukeyser, Charles Madge or Louis Zukofsky. Each chapter examines a particular poem or volume. Though I sometimes make comparisons with other works from this period, from *The Hollow Men* (1925) to the poems of Edith Sitwell, I rarely discuss the later works of the writers in question, wonderful as are Loy's last poems, written in the Bowery, or *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942) and *The Rock* (1954). My chronology follows Tyrus Miller's suggestion that something different takes hold towards the end of the 1920s, a development he calls late modernism.[82] David Trotter has recently repeated this argument, thinking in particular of the scientific and technological advances which emerged on the scene in or around 1927, and of their rapid impact on literary experiment.[83] Even at the time, there seemed something distinctive about the poetry which was written between the beginning of the Great War and the General Strike of 1926, or between December 1910, when, as Virginia Woolf famously put it, 'human character changed', and

[82] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[83] David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 37.

the Wall Street Crash of October 1929.[84] In 1928 Riding diagnosed the situation of her contemporaries as

> a short and very concentrated period, already nearly over, of carefully disciplined and self-conscious poetry. It is almost just to say that at the present moment there is no poetry but rather an embarrassing pause after an arduous and erudite stock-taking. The next stage is not clear.[85]

This is the period or pause or crisis on which I focus.

But I should explain my unlikely choice of poets. The story I have to tell about poetry's complicity is only one of the stories of modernism. Some writers shared the hope that poetry could herald or deliver the beauty that does not exist. Pound once poked fun at Henry Newbolt for defining poetry as 'man's universal longing for a world more perfect', but that is a rather good account of *The Cantos*, Pound's poem on and for a *paradiso terrestre*.[86] In 1924 Lascelles Abercrombie wrote that 'Every poem is an ideal version of the world we most profoundly desire; and that by virtue of its form.'[87] Yet I do not mean to insist on strict divisions. The works I discuss implicate poetry in an imperfect world with particular force and rigour, but other works by other writers do so, too, and other works by Ford, Eliot, Loy, Stevens, and Macleod do not. I have also tried to balance major and minor writers, partly in order to question that distinction, and I have tried to balance writers for whom poetry was their major form with writers who worked successfully in other literary forms and other arts. Though there were long periods in which he wrote no poetry, Stevens was centrally a poet, but Loy trained as a painter, wrote novels and short stories, and constructed found-art assemblages. In 1917, while living in New York, she appeared in the *Evening Sun* as the epitome of the 'modern woman'; if Loy was modern throughout her career, poetry was only one of many arts open to her, and in this her work measures the possibilities of poetry.[88] So, too, Macleod wrote novels as well as poems, and for a time he worked as an actor, director, and playwright. Perhaps Eliot seems pre-eminently a poet, though he spent much of his career as an essayist and editor, and eventually

[84] Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols, ed. Andrew McNeillie and Stuart Nelson Clark (London: Hogarth, 1986–2011), 3.421.

[85] Laura Riding, *Contemporaries and Snobs*, ed. Laura Heffernan and Jane Malcolm (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), p. 55.

[86] Ezra Pound, 'Books Current', *Future* 2.8 (July 1918): 209–210 (p. 209). Newbolt's formula appears in Henry Newbolt, *A New Study of English Poetry* (London: Constable, 1917), p. 75.

[87] Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 215.

[88] Anonymous, 'Do You Strive to Capture the Symbols of Your Reactions?', *Evening Sun*, 13 February 1917, p. 10.

turned from poetry to the theatre, while we tend to think of Ford as a novelist and editor who also penned memoirs and dabbled with poems. Ford sometimes encouraged that judgement. To understand the situation of poetry it can help to look from the outside.

So the differences between these figures, and the different ways in which they approached poetry, are instructive. In these chapters I read the works of an American in England, an Englishwoman on the Continent, a Scot in England, an American, and an Englishman. The poems in question were published during the heyday of modernism, or of high modernism, though it is notoriously difficult to define modernism in any secure or stable fashion. One could argue either that 'On Heaven' represents an early modernism alongside *Cathay* (1915), or that it anticipates a modernism soon to arrive, a precursor to *A Draft of XVI. Cantos* (1925). In either case, arguments about Ford's and Pound's formal experimentation would necessarily involve some biographical account of their mutual influence: the modernism would lie both in the works and in the histories of their production and reception. At the same time, one might argue that Thomas Hardy's *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* (1928), one of the great volumes of this period, is contemporary with but independent of modernism.[89] For my purposes, it is helpful to think of modernism neither as a label for everything written between two dates nor as the lifelong commitment of particular writers, but as an available mode or moment. Hope Mirrlees is a good example, publishing the audaciously experimental poem *Paris* in 1919 and never again repeating the experiment. At least according to some definitions, Macleod never published so modernist a work as *The Ecliptic*, moving later to a socialist and documentary poetics spliced with a prosody adapted from the Gaelic. Perhaps the path from *The Waste Land* to *Little Gidding* (1942) is, if less drastic, comparable. Works like *Paris* and *The Ecliptic* may measure modernism as well as *Geography and Plays* (1922) or *Spring and All* (1923). They represent modernist aesthetics passing through writers who do not quite belong, or not yet: poets who could like a seismograph register the impact of the earthquake, and poets whose impacts we might still register.

[89] For discussion of an alternative tradition of poets who, like Hardy and Edward Thomas, 'read, reviewed and wrote in the context of modernism, but who remained unconverted' (p. 2), see Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 2

Ford's Fall

see now, a carelessness, the part of a man
that is homeless here on earth.
William Carlos Williams, 'To Ford
Madox Ford in Heaven'[1]

I

'You say you believe in a heaven; I wish you'd write one for me', Violet Hunt once challenged Ford Madox Ford.[2] Later, when they had separated for good, she remembered it having been a pettish demand. 'I want no beauty; I want no damned optimism; I want just a plain, workaday heaven that I can go to some day and enjoy it when I'm there.' It was a demand for a gift or a tribute from the writer she was losing, for Ford was newly enamoured with the beautiful and much younger Brigit Patmore. Hunt implicitly asked not for a couple's heaven, but a heaven she could enjoy alone, and this heaven was not to be some facile escape. Her disillusioned demand attacked the hope and consolation Ford found in religion. But then Ford could be deeply sceptical himself, and even irreligious, so the demand also attacked his inconsistency and pretension. Hunt wanted no tall tales or cheap beauty, just an ordinary, humdrum heaven, like the ordinary world of the 'hard-working girls in flats' in her 1906 novel, *A Workaday Woman*.[3] Anything else – anything like the pastoral idyll of Eden or the dazzling new Jerusalem or even William Morris's utopia – would be impossible optimism and probably, on arrival, not very enjoyable.

[1] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 2: 1939–1962*, ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1991), p. 96.
[2] Violet Hunt, *The Flurried Years* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1926), p. 216.
[3] Violet Hunt, *The Workaday Woman* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1906), p. 122.

Ford's account is different. 'To V., who asked for a plan for a working Heaven', records the dedication to the work he wrote for her, probably in early 1914.[4] It's no accident that Hunt appears here only as 'V.' The disastrous scandal that had put such strain on their relationship in 1912 and 1913, when Ford's wife, Elsie, successfully sued the society magazine the *Throne* for labelling Hunt 'Mrs. Hueffer', had hinged on the issue of her surname. In the context of social disgrace and private crisis, Ford conceives his heaven not as workaday, but as working. He emphasises success rather than the humdrum or prosaic: life with Hunt having broken down, he imagines a heaven that functions properly. At the same time, he can only offer a plan, so his phrase is torn between achievement and anticipation. But the difference between Hunt's and Ford's accounts may not be so great. One might ask for the workaday because the too mythological or metaphysical no longer works, and Michael Levenson has duly praised the work Ford wrote for refusing transcendence, for never overstepping 'human limits to pass into the supernatural'.[5] A working heaven could therefore be, as Hunt suggests, a heaven in which modern women and men would actually like to live. But a working heaven could also be one which, while they are still here on earth, those women and men can sincerely desire. The success of the heaven would then be a function of earthly imaginative effort, of the work. So Hunt's demand was, finally, a challenge to Ford's writing. And the elder statesman of modernism, the great novelist, editor, and critic, chose to write a poem.

Ford's most recent novel, *The Young Lovell*, had only just appeared, in October 1913.[6] Set in the late fifteenth century, *The Young Lovell* is a riotous blend of history, romance, and fantasy. The novel ends with its eponymous hero walled up in a miserable monastic cell, cut off from all earthly light and love, but his spirit ascends to an Elysium that floats over a valley in

[4] Ford Madox Ford, 'On Heaven', *Poetry* 4.3 (June 1914): 75–94 (p. 75). Hereafter abbreviated as *OH*. As Ford cut an important passage when he republished the poem in 1918, and as part of my aim is to situate the poem in its historical moment, I quote from this first version. For the date of composition, see Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.590, n. 12.

[5] Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 113.

[6] Dates of publication for Ford's works are taken from David Dow Harvey, *Ford Madox Ford, 1873–1939: A Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (New York: Gordian, 1972). Ford seems to have begun writing *The Young Lovell* in February 1913, and he mentions it in a letter to James B. Pinker on 17 March. See Max Saunders, 'From Pre-Raphaelism to Impressionism', in Laura Colombino, ed., *Ford Madox Ford and Visual Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 51–70 (p. 66); and Ford Madox Ford, *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Richard M. Ludwig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 56.

Corsica, there to engage in knightly contests and indulge in carnal pleasures. The ironies are impeccable: mortification of the flesh assuages the soul's Christian conscience, and a pagan spiritual vision satisfies the body's desires.[7] Clearly this is not Hunt's heaven, but nor is it Ford's. The novel ends in an impasse, its countless conflicts – between matter and spirit, instinct and morality, pagan and Christian – unresolved. As the story goes, Ford sat down to begin his next novel on 17 December, abandoning historical fiction and supernatural fantasy for the collapse into modernity and for labyrinthine impressionist narration.[8] In *The Good Soldier*, published in March 1915, John Dowell concludes that he shall never again find 'heaven', not even in Provence, 'because there is only Hell'.[9] Irreconcilable imperatives damn every major character to ruin.

So in a sense there was no choice. If Ford were to write a heaven, it would have to be a poem. The major creative work separating those two novels, 'On Heaven' was published during modernism's golden summer, in the June 1914 issue of *Poetry*. The inaugural imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes*, had appeared in the spring, putting another of Ford's poems alongside works by Pound, H. D., and William Carlos Williams. Then came the summer of *Dubliners, Responsibilities*, and *Tender Buttons*. The first issue of *BLAST* arrived in July, with an excerpt from *The Good Soldier*. Nowhere more so than in London, it was modernism's moment in the sun. In a letter to Harriet Monroe in May, Pound hailed 'On Heaven' as 'the most important poem in the modern manner'.[10] Four months later he wrote to her again, calling 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) 'the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American'.[11] If Ford's poem is not the modernist masterpiece that Eliot's is, nevertheless its attempt to make so anachronistic a subject new again has a modernist logic. By 1920 the 'rhythmical developments' and the 'rhyming *points d'appui*' of Ford's free verse seemed to one reader to mark him as 'a modern experimental poet', though the 'individual atmosphere' and 'independence of his outlook' suggested 'the type of big figure that is said to be extinct'.[12] It is certainly true that, as Max Saunders remarks, modernism 'would have

[7] For a detailed reading of the novel's ending, see Sara Haslam, *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 166–7.
[8] For the date of composition of *The Good Soldier*, see Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, 1.592–3, n. 28.
[9] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, ed. Martin Stannard (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 149.
[10] Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe, 23 May 1914, in Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 37.
[11] Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe, 30 September 1914, in Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 40.
[12] Recorder [Alec Waugh], 'A Bibliography of Modern Poetry: With Notes on Some Contemporary Poets', *Chapbook* 2.12 (June 1920): 3–47 (p. 23).

looked very different without Ford'.[13] He experimented with the form of the novel in *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End* (1924–1928), and as editor of the *English Review* and the *transatlantic review* he published an impressive range of modernist writers, from Lawrence and Lewis, through Pound and Gertrude Stein, to Djuna Barnes and James Joyce. Ford's conviction that 'poetry should be written at least as well as prose' had a decisive influence on Pound and the other imagists,[14] and for some critics this theory outweighs his practice, Ford being 'little more than a minor poet himself'.[15] Still, many modernists respected Ford's poetry. When Basil Bunting edited a special number of *Poetry* in February 1932, an issue which also featured work by Macleod, he opened with Ford's late poem, 'Buckshee' (1931). That same year Williams wrote to Pound: 'I have wanted to kick myself (as you suggest) for not realizing more about Ford Maddox's [*sic*] verse.'[16] Other critics have therefore sought to position Ford's poetry as early modernist or proto-modernist, and sometimes with specific reference to 'On Heaven'.[17] In July 1914 Aldington went so far as to call it 'the greatest poem written in this century – at least in English'.[18] Ford wrote poems throughout his long career, some of them good poems, but here his poetry came especially close to the modernism of 'Les Jeunes', who, as he later commented, 'made a very pretty movement for themselves'.[19] And yet the resulting amalgam of satire and sentimentality, of rambling free verse and heavy rhyme, cannot be called a triumph. Neither Ford's heaven nor his poem quite works.

The near miss can sometimes be more illuminating than the masterpiece. Ford's peculiar, partial failure tells us about the specific pressures

[13] Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, 1.399.

[14] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 373. For discussion of Ford's relationships with Imagism, Futurism, and Vorticism, see Paul Skinner, 'Poor Dan Robin: Ford Madox Ford's Poetry', in Robert Hampson and Tony Davenport, eds, *Ford Madox Ford: A Reappraisal* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002): 79–103.

[15] Eric Homberger, 'Pound, Ford and "Prose": The Making of a Modern Poet', *Journal of American Studies* 5.3 (December 1971): 281–92 (p. 284).

[16] William Carlos Williams, letter to Ezra Pound, 14 June 1932, in Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, *Pound/Williams: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams*, ed. Hugh Witemeyer (New York: New Directions, 1996), p. 119.

[17] See, for instance, D. I. B. Smith, 'Ford Madox Ford and Modernism', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 51.1 (Fall 1981): 61–77 (pp. 69–70); Joseph Wiesenfarth, 'The Ash-Bucket at Dawn: Ford's Art of Poetry', *Contemporary Literature* 30.2 (Summer 1989): 240–62 (pp. 256–9); and R. G. Hampson, '"Experiments in Modernity": Ford and Pound', in Andrew Gibson, ed., *Pound in Multiple Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 93–125 (p. 103).

[18] Richard Aldington, 'Reviews', *Egoist* 1.13 (1 July 1914): 247–8 (p. 247).

[19] Ford Madox Ford, *Thus to Revisit: Some Reminiscences* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1921), p. 59. Hereafter abbreviated as *TR*.

that bore down on modern poetics in and around 1914, in ways that a familiar success by an H. D. or a Yeats does not. The question of success focuses the problem identified by Riding and Graves, the need for every modern poem to prove 'the contemporary legitimacy of poetry itself'. This is a question of form. Writing to Monroe in November 1914, a mere seven months after praising 'On Heaven' so highly, Pound referred to Ford as 'that copious novelist and critic'.[20] The decision to write a poem, taken by a writer whose greatest successes were in other forms, helps us to understand the situation of poetry at the time. Yet Hunt had put Ford and his poem in an impossible predicament. If Harold Monro dreamt of a utopian poetry, a poetry of 'final majestic simplicity', Ford had no choice but to write a poem which could not marry anticipation and achievement. He had no choice but to bring heaven down to earth, and so to grapple with poetry's part in the unfinished, mean, and complex world of his day. Modernity had fallen from the possibility of an ideal or transcendent heaven, and poetry seemed to have fallen with it.

Ford understood something of his failure. Indeed, he understood some failure to be inevitable: 'the small word "failed" is a small word and little more to artists who are for ever going on until they give over a game that must be lost'.[21] But some works deserve the judgement more than others, and when Ford included 'On Heaven' in his 1918 collection, *On Heaven and Poems Written on Active Service*, he criticised the poem as 'sloppy'.[22] He was only willing to republish it, he said in the book's preface, in the hope that it would 'bring comfort to the hearts of some of my comrades and some of the womenfolk of my comrades'. He also revised the poem's dedication: '*To V. H., who asked for a working Heaven*'.[23] The initial for a surname ruefully declines to decide between 'Hunt' and 'Hueffer', while removing 'plan', removing that sense of deferral, seems consistent with the poem's new function as consolation. Seemingly innocent, this is an extraordinary move. Ford suffered serious trauma fighting in the Great War: he was severely concussed in the battle of the Somme and he later weathered a gas attack and pneumonia. Surely even Ford must be in earnest here. 'For we *must* have some such Heaven', his preface continues, 'to make up for the deep mud and the bitter weather and the long lasting fears and the cruel hunger for light'.[24] So it looks as though Ford unwisely reframes a study of domestic trouble as a consolation for the catastrophe of war, or even as

[20] Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe, 9 November 1914, in Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 46.
[21] Ford Madox Ford, *Rossetti: A Critical Essay on His Art* (London: Duckworth, 1902), p. 181.
[22] Ford Madox Ford, *On Heaven and Poems Written on Active Service* (London: John Lane, 1918), p. 6.
[23] Ford, *On Heaven*, p. 79. [24] Ford, *On Heaven*, p. 8.

a substitute for religious hope. But a cancelled passage in a draft of the poem suggests that Ford had contemplated a faithful creed from the start: 'and so I sit and write / That those not dead take comfort in the night; / And / On that I take my stand'.[25] Yet how could a work which identifies heaven as an adulterous tryst in the south of France, in which two leisured lovers idle away their time at café tables and on long drives through the countryside, in which God is just a man with a dog and an indulgent smile for illicit liaisons, in which every pleasure is compromised, in which supposed bliss teeters over into anxiety, sorrow, or bathos – how could such a poem be sincerely offered as a heaven to hope for and to die for in good faith?

The contradiction is constitutive; it speaks to Ford's impossible task. He dismisses 'On Heaven' as a botched effort and elevates it as the volume's title poem. (It subsequently took pride of place as the first work in his 1936 *Collected Poems*, separated from the rest of *On Heaven*.) He seems to have known that 'On Heaven' would be controversial, and he later claimed that the Home Secretary prevented its publication in the *Fortnightly Review* on the grounds of blasphemy. But he also boasted dryly that the Department of Propaganda had actively circulated the poem in the hope that it 'might encourage young men who were about to die if they thought they would go to a nice heaven'.[26] It can be difficult to decide whether the work behind these dubious stories is a serious effort of the spiritual imagination or a materialist satire. The phrase 'nice heaven' suggests irony or scepticism, but when Monroe reviewed *On Heaven*, she extolled Ford's book for 'justifying our modern spirituality – our twentieth-century ideals which have fought and won the greatest of all wars'.[27] Conversely, a hostile reviewer in the *Nation* complained that, though a soldier might 'dream of wine and kisses', no poet should ever identify 'the mouth either of bottle or woman with the fulfilment of man's spiritual aspirations'.[28] Houghton Mifflin refused to include 'On Heaven' in Lowell's anthology *Some Imagist Poets* (1915) on the grounds that it was blasphemous.[29] None of these responses captures the poem in its ambivalence. It may instead be a serious effort of the materialist imagination, an attempt to give Hunt a workaday

[25] Ford Madox Ford, typescript draft of 'Of Heaven', p. 11, in Ford Madox Ford Collection (4605), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library (box 15, folder 19).
[26] Ford Madox Ford, *Return to Yesterday: Reminiscences 1894–1914* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), p. 420. Saunders is sceptical about these stories (*Ford Madox Ford*, 1.591, n. 17).
[27] Harriet Monroe, 'Great Poetry', *Poetry* 13.4 (January 1919): 219–24 (p. 220).
[28] O. W. Firkins, 'The Point of War', *Nation*, 30 November 1918, pp. 660–61 (p. 661).
[29] Helen Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries: Ezra Pound, H. D. and the Imagists* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 708.

heaven that worked, but even then we need to account for the poem's unabashed metaphysics and its odd mix of naivety and weariness.

'On Heaven' labours under the shadow of contradiction. What Pound called 'the best poem yet written in the "twentieth-century fashion"'[30] is also, to borrow a term Pound used in reviewing Ford's *High Germany* (1912), merely 'doggerel'.[31] 'On Heaven' is poetic and prosaic, sincere and satirical, materialist and metaphysical. It attempts a workaday heaven and a working heaven. It offers a plan and its realisation. Like few other works it registers the fraught situation of modernist poetry, and it is just another minor effort by a writer whose real gifts lay elsewhere.

II

Before coming to 'On Heaven' itself, we need first to consider Ford's poetic theory and his religious sensibility. For whether or not Ford believed unfailingly in heaven, the concept fascinated him. He understood that 'those myths shining so graciously down the ages' – from Avalon and Eldorado to Eden and the Hesperides – had been discredited by the conquest of the globe and by the decline of religious faith.[32] Intellectually we may know that heaven on earth is impossible, but 'in our inmost selves, automatically, we never acknowledge it'.[33] The myths therefore persist in productive opposition to modernity: 'Our necessities, our modes of travel, our very speech, have changed; the necessity for that ideal remains.'[34] Ford's description of the Shepherd's Bush Exhibition, in the preface to his 1913 *Collected Poems*, pictures these competing necessities:

> a great square of white buildings all outlined with lights. There was such a lot of light – and I think that what I hope for in Heaven is an infinite clear radiance of pure light! There were crowds and crowds of people – or no, there was, spread out beneath the lights, an infinite moving mass of black, with white faces turned up to the light, moving slowly, quickly, not moving at all, being obscured, reappearing.[35]

The emotion roused by this sight, Ford says, ought to be the stuff of modern poetry. But though the sight of everyday people bathed in artificial light is like heaven, it is not heaven itself. That ideal or hope remains

[30] Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 373.
[31] Ezra Pound, 'The Book of the Month', *Poetry Review* 1.3 (March 1912): 133.
[32] Ford Madox Ford, *The Heart of the Country: A Survey of a Modern Land* (London: Alston Rivers, 1906), p. 4.
[33] Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, p. 8. [34] Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, p. 7.
[35] Ford Madox Ford, *Collected Poems* (London: Max Goschen, 1914 [1913]), p. 15.

separate, generating a gap between here and there, anticipation and achievement. At the same time, Ford offers rapturous prose in order to inspire future poets; he gives a prose plan for a working poetic.

Two particular ideals could thus be said to collide in the literary culture of the first decades of the twentieth century. The first is the ideal of heaven: an object of hope, a target for satire, and a cause for despair. In *The Young Lovell* the hero's friend Francis, a monk, tells the story of a local saint: 'Being an evil and lascivious queen she had in sleep a vision of the joys of paradise and so she said that she never ceased from sighing for them all the days of her life.'[36] The queen then goes on crusade and saves forty thousand souls, but the novel makes no guarantee that her good works, or anyone else's good works, will be rewarded. The queen seems a quaint figure from a fairy-tale or hagiography, and even the Young Lovell's final fate, enjoying carnal visions in that monastic cell, seems ambiguous at best and parodic at worst. Indeed, a famous attempt to imagine heaven on earth drove both Ford and Pound to parody. 'At Innesfree there is a public house', begins Ford's spoof.[37] 'Give me in due time, I beseech you, a little tobacco-shop', runs Pound's.[38] The land of heart's desire disappears in puffs of smoke. 'I am off for some Hesperides / Of street pianos and small beers!' sings Eliot in an unpublished early poem, mocking both the mythic past and the modern present.[39] Yet in the 1917 lyric sequence, *Look! We Have Come Through!*, Lawrence seeks to transform the myths of the Hesperides and Eden and Elysium, making them new for the modern world. The sequence narrates his adulterous affair with Freida Weekley, who left her first husband and her children to travel with Lawrence in Europe, and then their eventual marriage upon returning to England. The course of the relationship becomes a journey to heaven: 'Paradise Re-entered' is the title of one poem at a turning point in the sequence, 'New Heaven and Earth' the title of another. In many ways this is a materialist project: heaven, Lawrence writes at the end, 'is only a projection of this strange but actual fulfilment, / here in the flesh'.[40] Ford had published Lawrence's work in

[36] Ford Madox Ford, *The Young Lovell: A Romance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), p. 133. Hereafter abbreviated as *YL*.

[37] Ford Madox Ford, 'Literary Portraits – XXXIX. Mr. W. B. Yeats and his New Poems', *Outlook* 33.853 (6 June 1914): 783–4 (p. 783).

[38] Ezra Pound, 'The Lake Isle' (1916), in Pound, *Personae*, p. 121.

[39] T. S. Eliot, 'Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines) IV' (1910), in T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 1.248–9 (p. 249).

[40] D. H. Lawrence, *The Poems*, ed. Christopher Pollnitz, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.218.

early issues of the *English Review*, including the shorter sequence 'A Still Afternoon' (1909) and the short story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' (1911), and many years later Lawrence remembered that Ford had been 'very kind' to him: 'the first man I ever met who had a real, and a true feeling for literature'.[41] Just as some thought *On Heaven* blasphemous, so Lawrence's publisher, Chatto & Windus, objected to his 'mixing love and religion' in *Look! We Have Come Through!*[42] Chatto & Windus insisted on substantial revisions and the omission of two poems.[43] Even still, the 'orthodox will scent blasphemy', warned a review in the *Athenaeum*.[44] But far from simply satirising traditional religiosity, Lawrence's blasphemy seeks to turn the force of the old mythologies to faith in new ideals: 'we storm the angel-guarded / Gates of the long-discarded / Garden, which God has hoarded / Against our pain'.[45]

The second ideal is that of poetry, whether it be a particular conception of the art form, a set of poetic principles, or the sheer possibility of poetry that works, and this can also lead to despair. That is how Pound defines Ford: 'it is well that one man should have a vision of perfection and that he should be sick to the death and disconsolate because he cannot attain it'.[46] The remark measures Ford's practice against his theory and, as it happens, the remark appears in the same issue of *Poetry* as 'On Heaven', in Pound's review of Ford's 1913 *Collected Poems*. The ideals of heaven and poetry did sometimes converge, and they certainly do in Pound's own work, but more often than not the two ideals conflict. Modern poetry could seem incompatible with the idea of heaven. Ford himself campaigned tirelessly against the contemporary glut of 'poets who try to reconstitute golden ages in obsolescent dialects'.[47] In the essay 'Modern Poetry', first published in the December 1909 issue of the *Thrush*, he argues that poets have a duty to treat their own time and place, however 'charming' or 'restful' it may be 'to lose ourselves in meditations upon the Isles of the Blessed'.[48] Appearing earlier in that issue, Thomas Mullett Ellis's 'The Garden' neatly illustrates

[41] D. H. Lawrence, 'Foreword to *Collected Poems*' (1936), in Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.651–4 (p. 653).
[42] Lawrence, 'Foreword to *Collected Poems*', p. 654.
[43] For a detailed account of the concerns raised by the readers at Chatto & Windus, see Andrew Nash, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Publication of *Look! We Have Come Through!*', *Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 12.2 (June 2011): 142–63.
[44] Anonymous, 'List of New Books', *Athenaeum* 4626 (February 1918): 97–108 (p. 103).
[45] Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.198.
[46] Ezra Pound, 'Mr. Hueffer and the Prose Tradition in Verse', *Poetry* 4.3 (June 1914): 111–20 (p. 111); Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 371.
[47] Ford Madox Ford, 'Literary Portraits – LXXI. Enemies', *Outlook* 35.885 (16 January 1915): 79–80 (p. 79).
[48] Ford Madox Ford, 'Modern Poetry', *Thrush* 1.1 (December 1909): 39–53 (p. 50).

Ford's point: 'There is a garden sweet; / A paradise complete, / [. . .] There hangs immortal fruit, and there the lyre / Thrills through the soul in ecstasies of fire.'[49] But Ford had more immediate reasons for thinking such charms no longer worked, since much of his early verse succumbs to the same temptation. One poem in his *Poems for Pictures and for Notes of Music* (1900) dutifully fits out 'Avalon the rest place' with harps, choirs, still waters, and golden turrets.[50]

The incompatibility of poetry and heaven points to the fear that haunts Ford's poetics. It was now very possible that poetry had become a defunct art form. Later, in 1928, Riding argued that, for modern poets acutely sensitive to the times, 'historical conditions had put an end to poetry'.[51] Nevertheless, she continued, if poetry had 'had all subjects taken away from it, there was always one subject of which poetry could not be deprived, namely, that poetry had come to an end'. In *Mister Bosphorus and the Muses* (1923), the other work in which Ford most closely approaches the modernism of *les jeunes*, he traces the art's decline and eventual murder by capitalism, materialism, and the 'prose age'.[52] Figured by the hapless Bosphorus, poetry's fate is to be consigned forevermore to a mock Elysium. In a letter to Joseph Conrad, Ford called the work his *Dunciad*, as if satire were the only way forward, but the satire turns upon itself.[53] Nor could poetry be resurrected simply by swapping trams for turrets. As early as the 1913 preface, Ford seriously considers whether 'something about the mere framing of verse, the mere sound of it in the ear', means that it must always descend to 'the sentimental, the false, the hackneyed aspects of life' – as false and hackneyed as daydreams of Eden.[54] Poetry's only hope consequently lies in no longer being poetry. Caught in what Adorno calls the secularisation of transcendence, through which both heaven and poetry have fallen, poetry must incorporate the prosaic and the workaday; it must itself become prosaic and workaday. *Mister Bosphorus* mixes verse, prose, drama, cinema, and music hall in a madcap mélange. Along similar lines, Eliot recalled having learnt from Baudelaire and Laforgue that poets now need 'to make poetry out of the unexplored resources of the unpoetical'.[55] The imperative represents modernity's 'aesthetic conception of antiart':

[49] Thomas Mullett Ellis, 'The Garden', *Thrush* 1.1 (December 1909): 27–35 (p. 27).
[50] Ford Madox Ford, *Selected Poems*, ed. Max Saunders (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 4.
[51] Riding, *Contemporaries and Snobs*, p. 8.
[52] Ford Madox Ford, *Mister Bosphorus and the Muses* (London: Duckworth, 1923), p. 86.
[53] Ford Madox Ford, letter to Joseph Conrad, 8 November 1923, in Ford, *Letters*, p. 157.
[54] Ford, *Collected Poems*, p. 19.
[55] T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 126.

'art must go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to that concept'.[56] Because the very art of poetry risks anachronism, modern poets must somehow cultivate what Ford calls an 'absolutely "unpoetic" frame of mind' (*TR* 212).

Judgements as to what is and what is not poetry or poetical, and judgements as to what will make poetry new, are particular to their historical moment. The logical consequence of Ford's theory, as Conrad Aiken argued in his review of *On Heaven*, seemed to be that his practice was redundant: 'If prose could convey subtler emotional moods and impressions than poetry', if prose could dispel the clouds of falsehood and sentimentality, 'why write poetry?'[57] More broadly, the difficulty was to manage the period's shifting antagonisms between prose fiction and the lyric. If prose is 'the ineradicable reflex of the disenchantment of the world', surely the only honest literary forms are the novel and the short story.[58] *The Good Soldier* is, after all, a virtuoso study in disenchantment. Edward Ashburnham administers the viaticum to poetry when, not long before cutting his own throat, he sentimentally quotes Swinburne.[59] On the one hand, Ford's praise for poetry could be extravagant: 'I believe the conception – and if possible the writing – of poetry to be the only pursuit worthy of a serious man, unless the vicissitudes of his time call on him to be also a soldier' (*TR* 129–30). On the other hand, Ford could also declare that he had 'for years and years held that the only occupation to which a serious man could seriously put himself was the writing of novels', for fiction is the only literary art 'in which it is possible to find a New Form'.[60] Even Ford's praise for poetry relies on partly – but never quite entirely – abstracting poetry from verse. 'I take it', Ford later reflected, 'that as much poetry has been written in prose as in verse, or more'.[61] He justifies the abstraction by appealing to a European context. It is a peculiar affliction of the Anglo-Saxon world, he argues, that the word *poetry* means only 'something silly, impracticable and rhymed' (*TR* 185). In contrast, *Dichtung, poésie*, and *poesia* range across the literary gamut, from novels through essays to verse. Holding to that broader conception, Ford's attempts to define poetry are frequently diffuse. Like many of his contemporaries, he is reluctant to insist on formal criteria. Abercrombie argued that even

[56] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 37.
[57] Conrad Aiken, 'The Function of Rhythm', *Dial* 65.777 (16 November 1918): 417–18 (p. 417).
[58] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 99. [59] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 159.
[60] Ford Madox Ford, letter to Herbert Read, 19 September 1920, in Ford, *Letters*, p. 126.
[61] Ford Madox Ford, 'Pound and "How to Read"', *New Review* 2.5 (April 1932): 39–45 (p. 42).

when 'all the outward signs of poetry' are present – 'rhythm, rime, imagery, metaphor, euphony, unexpected power of words' – 'it is notorious that poetry itself may be absent'.[62] 'I sometimes think that poetry isn't so much what we write as what we feel', Mrs Hilbery muses in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* (1919).[63] For Ford, the 'stuff' of poetry can be 'imaginative sympathy' (*TR* 186) or 'the exact rendering of the concrete and material happenings in the lives of men'.[64] Sometimes poetry is a value rather than a category, as though it were simply the word for literary work that works: 'the question of Immortality, of Literary Permanence, of Genius – in short, of poetry!' (*TR* 192–3). ('*Poet* has in our time become a term of laudation rather than description', cautioned C. S. Lewis, 'so that to speak of a "bad poet" is for some almost an oxymoron'.[65])

When poetry means aesthetic success, it tends to become an ideal: 'a vision of perfection', something to hope for and despair over. This was the case for Edwin Muir and Harold Monro, too, but Ford clearly distinguishes the conception of poetry from the writing of poetry. As an ideal, the concept defers or condemns the act; poetry floats high above the workaday world of actual poems. The belief that poetry is 'the only pursuit worthy of a serious man', he says, is 'a confession of faith' (*TR* 129). For all that great literature is merely 'a pleasant thing, an alluring thing', a 'thing of amusement', it is also a thing 'of Salvation' (*TR* 12). Measured against that ideal, the impracticable rhymed verses of 'On Heaven' were doomed to fail, and even to seem silly.

III

We can begin now to approach 'On Heaven' itself. Though Ford urged poets to render 'the concrete and material happenings in the lives of men', and though Hunt had asked for the workaday, she later protested that 'On Heaven' was too idealistic. The false logic and the shallow rhetoric of sacred love had overtaken the earthly relationship which the poem pretended to celebrate. The effect, Hunt said, was 'vaguely metaphysical':

[62] Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 26.
[63] Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*, ed. Suzanne Raitt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 448.
[64] Ford Madox Ford, 'Mr. Conrad's Writing', *Spectator Literary Supplement*, in *Spectator* 123 (17 November 1923): 744, 746 (p. 746).
[65] C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 94.

> Love without breadth, depth, or thickness, without dimension. Subjective, purely. For the object – set up like an ikon to be worshipped, perfunctorily, with genuflections and lip-service, a queen in the game of knights and castles – any sort of fetish, glittering, shining, compelling, will do.[66]

It is not hard to guess what bothered her. At the very start of the poem Ford's speaker explains that he wants to write about heaven because his beloved 'is very tall and quaint / And golden, like a *quattrocento* saint' (*OH* 75). The beloved thus enters the poem as an impossibly perfect, immaterial ideal, not a fallible woman of flesh and blood. The effect is quite different in *The Good Soldier*, when Dowell describes Florence as 'a *cinque cento* Italian lady saying good-bye to her lover'.[67] The cheated Dowell's ironic comparison targets his wife's duplicity, suggesting the atmosphere of Renaissance intrigue. In 'On Heaven', the man's language is perfunctory, naïve – a too easy daydream cribbed from some lost pre-Raphaelite notebook.

Yet Hunt also calls the poem profane. 'The introduction of earthly love into heaven could not but be profane according to the usual canons', she notes.[68] To compare a saint with a fallen women is blasphemously to confuse virtue and guilt, spirit and matter. Ford understood this well enough, and quipped that if he had written a materialist heaven, he couldn't help it. And in any case,

> in these sad days and years, we have got to believe in a Heaven – and we shall be all the happier if it is a materialist's Heaven. I know at least that I would not keep on going if I did not feel that Heaven will be something like Rumpelmayer's tea shop, with the nice boys in khaki, with the haze and glimmer of the bright buttons, and the nice girls in the fashions appropriate to the day, and the little orchestra playing, 'Let the Great Big World. . . .'[69]

It is a typical Ford vignette, equal parts sincere creed and wry satire. The satisfaction of material desires, insofar as it would redeem the unhappiness of modernity, of 'these sad days and years', involves an ideal. That is why Ford needs the concept of heaven, a happiness to believe in and to hope for. A reviewer remarked that although Ford offers 'what many would call a material heaven', it is 'the heaven of the sun of normal desires, of matter idealised'.[70] But the desire for merely material satisfaction is also bathetic: it proves impossible to imagine an ideal except in material terms. The great big harmonies of heavenly joy are piped by a tea-shop band.

[66] Hunt, *The Flurried Years*, pp. 217, 219. [67] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 64.
[68] Hunt, *The Flurried Years*, p. 218. [69] Ford, *On Heaven*, p. 7.
[70] Anonymous, 'A Queue of Muses', *Saturday Review* 125 (11 May 1918): 413–14 (p. 414).

The conflict between matter and spirit preoccupied Ford, and it complicates the tensions in his work between poetry, heaven, and modernity. His 1904 poem 'Grey Matter' presents a dialogue between a man who happily accepts that our souls die when our brain tissue ceases to function and a woman who despairs at the thought that there is no afterlife or further dimension to this life. She rails against 'this dead-dawning century that lacks all faith, / All hope, all aim, and all the mystery / That comforteth'.[71] Rather unexpectedly, the man who defends modern materialism is a poet. At other times, Ford ties poetry to that threatened spirituality. In a review of *Des Imagistes*, he aligns the works of Pound, Aldington, and company with the 'reaction from materialism' in recent art.[72] Futurists and Cubists may not be devout Catholics, he writes, but they do 'represent a frame of mind that, scientifically speaking, is religious – that is, at least, otherworldly'. The best new artists are 'trying to paint the soul of the world'. Woolf makes a comparable argument in 'Modern Fiction' (1925), labelling the older generation of Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H. G. Wells 'materialists': 'they have disappointed us', she writes, 'because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body'.[73] Ford often relies in just this way on a distinction between 'the higher things – which are mysterious and connected with the soul' – and those lower things which are 'materialistic, and affect the welfare of the body'.[74] Modernity represents the growing dominance of those lower things, the merely 'fortuitous materialism of a bewildering world'.[75] But as the dream of Rumpelmayer's tearoom demonstrates, Ford was not always hostile to materialism. In 1915 he concedes that a 'materialistic view of civilization' has its place: 'You must, I suppose, eat before you can talk of the higher things.'[76] Though a 'poet cannot be both a materialist and a visionary', either vantage will work.[77] And in a chapter on utopia in *The Desirable Alien* (1913), a book co-authored with Hunt and published not long before she demanded her workaday heaven, Ford describes the German country town in which they are staying

[71] Ford, *Selected Poems*, p. 23.
[72] Ford Madox Ford, 'Literary Portraits – XXXV. Les Jeunes and "Des Imagistes"', *Outlook* 33.849 (9 May 1914): 636, 653 (p. 636).
[73] Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4.158.
[74] Ford Madox Ford, *The Critical Attitude* (London: Duckworth, 1911), p. 25.
[75] Ford Madox Ford, *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911), p. 62.
[76] Ford Madox Ford, *When Blood Is Their Argument* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 302.
[77] Ford, *When Blood Is Their Argument*, p. 282.

as an 'earthly paradise'.[78] There is nothing transcendent about the town, which presents a happy combination of old and new, rural and urban, culture and industry; it has been built with healthy good sense, and in particular with proper financial management. It is precisely what Ford calls a materialist's heaven.

'Modernism and materialism go together', T. J. Clark observes, and they do so even when their relation is vexed or antagonistic.[79] In 'On Heaven' this materialism can be comic. Dante's pilgrim may be vouchsafed a glimpse of divine radiance, but Ford's lovers give thanks that their car kept running: 'And that day there was no puncturing of the tires to fear; / And no trouble at all with the engine and gear; / [. . .] For the dear, good God knew how we needed rest and to be alone' (*OH* 83). The tone here is difficult to judge. Ordinary pleasure and gratitude are spliced with a pastiche of biblical parataxis. There is a conversational levity to 'no trouble at all' and a sentimental excess to 'the dear, good God'. One might have hoped that the Creator could do more than keep an engine running smoothly. One might have hoped for more from the redemption of material reality. And precisely those hopes impel the speaker to invoke God, to attribute an untroubled drive through the countryside to a benevolent divinity. Good fortune and sufficient funds would not be enough, would not constitute heaven. The tension eventually leads the speaker to figure God as both 'a very clever mechanician' and 'a very great magician' (*OH* 92), a mock master of matter and of spirit. The speaker knows and we know that the man with the dog is not really God. And so the tension goes slack. Religious salvation proves a quaint conceit for what compromised and contingent happiness this world has to offer.

Reconciling materialism with metaphysics is an old problem, and crucial to the Christian concept of salvation. In a limited sense Ford takes that tradition at its word: if redemption means the resurrection of the body, it ought to mean the resurrection of bodily desire and satisfaction. The suffocating moral codes of English society repress 'Human longings' (*OH* 78). They stifle the natural

> desire to slake
> The thirst, and the long, slow ache,
> And to interlace

[78] Ford Madox Ford, 'Utopia', in Violet Hunt, *The Desirable Alien: At Home in Germany* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1913), pp. 45–51 (p. 51).
[79] Clarke, *Farewell to an Idea*, p. 139.

Lash with lash, lip with lip, limb with limb, and
the fingers of the hand with the hand
And. . .

You will have forgotten. . . .
But they will all awake;
Aye, all of them shall awaken
In this dear place. (*OH* 79)

So in Ford's heaven lusts are redeemed like the righteous: 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (Daniel 12:2). But legitimating earthly pleasure with the rhetoric of spiritual revelation also belittles that pleasure, and recasting inherited beliefs about heaven with a profane allusion resurrects those beliefs. An urgent need for redemption has become easy toying with both matter and spirit.

As the tension falls slack, so too does Ford's poetry. In *The Good Soldier*, when Nancy Rufford realises at last that she loves Ashburnham, she thinks of clichés chanced upon in books: 'she remembered to have heard that love was a flame; a thirst; a withering up of the vitals'.[80] In 'On Heaven', without being attributed to other books, the metaphors of slaking, aching, and interlacing seem merely tired. The sumptuous phonetic play and the lingering long line wring giddy linguistic pleasure out of the conventional itemisation of lovers' bodies. The immediate rhyme makes 'And' a knowing wink and the ellipsis coyly declines to locate desire's consummation. Ford should have known better, we might protest. He once confessed having been unable to read poetry for years, for the 'rhymes, accents, stresses, assonances, alliterations, vowel colourings, and the other devices of poets, embarrassed me as a reader' (*TR* 132). He warned that in any rhymed poem 'a certain percentage of it *must* be fake': 'you will look about for a rhyme to the word *stream* and you will find *cream* and be led away into imaging your lady as a milkmaid'.[81] Yet the shift from 'awake' to 'awaken' is made only for the sake of a rhyme with 'taken', two lines later, and the whole passage comes to rest with satisfaction on facile affirmation: 'Aye'. The 'dear place' complements the 'dear, good God', the Virgin Mary's 'mild, dear eyes' (*OH* 90), the 'dear, pretty angels of God' (*OH* 91), and most of all the beloved herself: his 'dear' (*OH* 85, 87, 90, 93), his 'dear one' (*OH* 91), and his 'dear, dear bride' (*OH* 94). A moment

[80] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 142.
[81] Ford Madox Ford, 'Notes for a Lecture on Vers Libre', in *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 155–62 (p. 161).

later Ford likens the dear place to 'the softness of sweet tears, / And the clearness of a clear brook' (*OH* 79). It is embarrassing. There are genuine pleasures represented in 'On Heaven' and a legitimate critique of conventional morality, but they cannot sustain such rapturous celebration. The language of gushing idealism reduces the material heaven of free sensual pleasure, let alone of a warm climate and a well-oiled motorcar, to bathos.

IV

Perhaps Ford should have known better, but he made no great claims for his abilities. Though he had been publishing books of verse since 1893, the first of which Yeats praised for its 'right lyrical vehemence',[82] Ford called himself a mere 'dabbler in verse'.[83] Subsequent readers have sometimes agreed, arguing that his 'practice did not always – or even very often – approach his stringent standards'.[84] In the 1913 preface Ford sets out his programme for the renovation of poetry and then concedes that, 'For myself, I have been unable to do it; I am too old perhaps, or was born too late – anything you like.'[85] This was not the case with prose, 'that conscious and workable medium'.[86] With prose, Ford feels on sure footing. He knows what he wants to do and how to do it.

> But the writing of verse hardly appears to me to be a matter of work: it is a process, as far as I am concerned, too uncontrollable. From time to time words in verse form have come into my head and I have written them down, quite powerlessly and without much interest, under the stress of certain emotions.[87]

This seems disingenuous because, nevertheless, Ford does outline that programme for poetry. He seems to know very well what a poem ought to do: 'I have kept before me one unflinching aim – to register my own times in terms of my own time'.[88] 'Your poetry should be your workaday life', he advised Lucy Masterman that same year; contemporary poetry 'is too much practised in temples and too little in motorbuses'.[89] Critics who seek to defend Ford sometimes argue that he offers 'a completely integrated

[82] W. B. Yeats, *Early Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles and Reviews Written Between 1886 and 1900*, ed. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre, The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, IX (New York: Scribner, 2004), p. 217.
[83] Ford, 'Literary Portraits – XXXV. Les Jeunes and "Des Imagistes"', p. 653.
[84] Smith, 'Ford Madox Ford and Modernism', p. 66.
[85] Ford, *Collected Poems*, p. 19.
[86] Ford, *Collected Poems*, p. 10.
[87] Ford, *Collected Poems*, p. 9.
[88] Ford, *Collected Poems*, p. 13.
[89] Ford Madox Ford, letter to Lucy Masterman, 23 January 1913, in Ford, *Letters*, p. 54.

theory' and that his theory and his practice are consistent.[90] But here Ford's conscious ambition is caught in a conflict, which he never quite formulates, with his concept of poetry. The modernity he calls for in prosody, diction, and theme clashes with an investment in spontaneous expression. If the muses dictate the slack repetition of an allusion to Daniel, there is nothing to be done about it. Prose is a workable medium, but poetry is not.

This stance occasioned some mockery. 'Does Mr Hueffer claim to be merely a sort of tube', inquired one reviewer, 'through which the spirit of Poesy blows her subtle melodies?'[91] Because Ford emphasises unguarded expression, readers must decide whether his work represents 'artful artlessness'[92] or 'leisurely slapdash'.[93] He more than once claimed to have composed 'On Heaven' in unrhymed free verse and then, dissatisfied with the results, to have added the rhymes,[94] though there is no evidence for this in the surviving manuscripts. These show relatively little revision, only the addition of fully formed passages and the occasional correction of a word or phrase.[95] It may be that other drafts have been lost; it may be that Ford worked over long sections in his head before committing them to paper; or it may be that he was mostly happy with his first efforts. So the problem of how to interpret Ford's apparent carelessness remains. Pound commented that Ford's 'To All the Dead' (1912) could have been more successful, but only 'with much more labour, to be sure, on the author's part'.[96] And yet, though Ford sometimes denied that writing verse was a matter of work, he could also act the humble workman. Contradicting the ideal of unpremeditated composition, he boasted of having conducted extensive metrical experiments during the war, devoting himself entirely to 'the practical side of verse-writing' (*TR* 129). Reviewing the first two volumes of George Saintsbury's *A History of English Prosody* (1906, 1908), Ford laments that poets too often skip the 'arduous labours' involved in learning the art.[97] He recommends instead 'the constant practice of verse', which 'drills both the

[90] Wiesenfarth, 'The Ash-Bucket at Dawn', p. 255.
[91] W. G. Hole, 'A Consciously Unconscious Poet', *Poetry Review* 4 (April 1914): 204–210 (p. 205).
[92] Milton Bronner, 'Ford Madox Hueffer – Impressionist', *Bookman* 44 (October 1916): 170–75 (p. 175).
[93] Peter Robinson, '"Written at Least as Well as Prose": Ford, Pound, and Poetry', in Jason Harding, ed., *Ford Madox Ford, Modernist Magazines and Editing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 99–113 (p. 111).
[94] Ford, 'Literary Portraits – XXXV. Les Jeunes and "Des Imagistes"', p. 653; *TR* 214.
[95] See Ford Madox Ford, typescript studies for 'On Heaven', in Ford Madox Ford Collection (box 22, folder 18); and Ford, typescript draft of 'Of Heaven'.
[96] Pound, 'The Book of the Month', p. 133.
[97] E. R. [Ford Madox Ford], Review of George Saintsbury's *A History of English Prosody, English Review* 1.2 (January 1909): 374–6 (p. 375).

eye and the ear'.[98] In a very early article Ford invites the reader into his workshop, detailing the long and laborious process of writing his short lyric 'A Lullaby' (1900). He worries over excessive alliteration and over impasses produced by 'hopelessly hackneyed' rhymes.[99] Each line 'cost nearly a whole day', Ford complains, and in the end all but one line was 'rubbish'. Later, in his poem 'Canzone à la Sonata' (1912), Ford plays the older, minor craftsman to Pound's younger, brash genius: 'Blazon our fineness, Optimist, I toil / Whilst you crow cocklike.'[100] Pound boasts proud birdsong, and poetry for Ford is hard work.

However hard Ford worked at 'On Heaven', and whether or not he added the rhymes at a late stage, we might decide that he ought to have removed or improved them. Not least since his own criticism rings the death knell for poetry's lifeless conventions, he ought to have worked against those conventions in his poems. But the ideal modern poem would, in this respect, contradict the ideal of heaven. When God expels Adam and Eve from the garden he condemns them to labour: Adam tills the soil to which he will return and Eve bears children in sorrow (Genesis 3: 16–19). Work is a sign of the Fall, of our need for redemption. As the speaker explains late in 'On Heaven', God will reward all who labour in this earthly life: 'Such as bear heavy loads / He takes note of, and of all that toil on bitter seas and frosty lands' (*OH* 93). In turn, this conception of manual labour shapes the burden of aesthetic toil. 'It's certain there is no fine thing / Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring', reflects the poet in Yeats's 'Adam's Curse' (1901).[101] So it makes some sense to align the carefree ease of Ford's unlaboured verse with the lovers' Provençal tryst. Ford defended the rhymes in 'On Heaven' by arguing that they make it seem 'shorter and less wearisome'. 'I fancy that the reason for this', he continues, 'is that the mind, looking out for rhymes, hastens the tempo of its reading in order to achieve satisfaction' (*TR* 214–15). In this regard Ford's theory and practice oppose the usual modernist virtues of compression and complication. If there are faults in Ford's poems, Pound once said, they 'are faults of intention, not of performance'.[102] Limpidity better serves Ford's workaday heaven since that heaven is really more of a holiday.

[98] [Ford], Review of Saintsbury's *A History of English Prosody*, p. 376.
[99] Ford Madox Ford, 'The Evolution of a Lyric', *Outlook* 3.64 (22 April 1899): 387–8 (p. 388). Ford tells a similar story in 'The Making of Modern Verse', *Academy and Literature* 1563 (19 April 1902): 412–14 (p. 412).
[100] Ford, *Selected Poems*, p. 61.
[101] W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright, rev. edn (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), p. 107.
[102] Pound, 'The Book of the Month', p. 133.

Nevertheless, we are told, some minimal degree of work is a blessing, for it makes heaven meaningful: it sets heavenly bliss in its proper light. Even in heaven, 'There shall be a little labor and enough of toil / To bring back the lost flavor of our human coil' (*OH* 91). But though the man celebrates the cool of evening as an escape from 'the burden and toil of the days' (*OH* 91), the lovers, like the locals, seem for the most part free from Adam's curse. The man and his beloved rendezvous in a small town outside Lyon, where market women seem not to have to work; instead they lounge in dappled sunlight (*OH* 76). The gendarme snoozes his days away and the postman makes his deliveries 'only in the shady, / Pleasanter kind of streets' (*OH* 77). This leisure, or the appearance of leisure, is pointed. Just as heaven must incorporate the work against which its bliss is defined, 'On Heaven' is blind to work and fascinated by it.

This is clear from the poem's very first lines:

> That day the sunlight lay on the farms,
> On the morrow the bitter frost that there was!
> That night my young love lay in my arms,
> The morrow how bitter it was!
>
> And because she is very tall and quaint
> And golden, like a *quattrocento* saint,
> I desire to write about Heaven;
> To tell you the shape and the ways of it,
> And the joys and the toil and the maze of it,
> For these there must be in Heaven,
> Even in Heaven! (*OH* 75)

The double character of work leaves this opening precariously pitched. To say that 'these must be' in heaven is seemingly to express desire: surely such things must be possible somewhere. The trouble is that 'these' refers to the desirable, the undesirable, and an ambiguous third term: the joys, the toil, and the maze. The passage's final line seems then to explain this difficulty away. That these things must exist in Heaven is a necessary concession, a limitation set on the satisfaction of desire. Heaven has to mean labour and a labyrinth. But joy falls within this concession, too: even in heaven, alas, there must be joy. As it happens, this complication was the product of some aesthetic work, for in a draft Ford had written: 'To tell you the pain and the joy of it / For pain there must be in Heaven'.[103] In the

[103] Ford, typescript studies for 'On Heaven'.

finished poem, toil and joy converge, and the contradiction speaks to the heart of the poem's representation of romantic love.

The opening quatrain complicates matters further. When the man cries that it was bitter on the morrow, 'it' may be the state of things in general or his relationship with the woman in particular. These lines also imply the toil attendant on love's joy. But the first couplet deals with aesthetic rather than romantic experience: the farms look beautiful in the sunlight; the frost is painful. So from the beginning the entire romantic plot, with its blisses and its labours, obscures manual work. Just as the townspeople are said to idle away their time, the countryside has no working farms. The sunlight has nothing to do with the produce the market women sell; the frost has nothing to do with arduously tilling the fields. Jenny Plastow writes that Ford had 'a certain unchanging fascination' with the idea of work, a fascination she traces to his grandfather, the painter Ford Madox Brown, whose large canvas *Work* (1865) depicts a group of navvies, a flower seller, two intellectuals, several unemployed labourers, and two wealthy figures on horseback.[104] The first issue of the *English Review* carried an essay by Ford on the unemployed and the working classes. 'It is astonishing', he reflects, 'how little literature has to show of the life of the poor'.[105] In 'On Heaven', material toil becomes visible precisely because the man on holiday is blind to it. In fact, aesthetic appreciation gilds over both manual and romantic labour, for the whole poem is motivated by the beloved's likeness to that painting. As an aesthetic product in a world of divided labour, the poem thereby betrays its own dependence on manual work. As Andrew Goldstone has recently argued, 'far from excluding the world of labor', modern literature 'avows its dependence on it, dialectically incorporating that avowal into its formal effects'.[106] The form of that avowal, here, is the lyric subject. The issue comes to a head when, at the very end of 'On Heaven', the man assures himself and us that God will redeem even the 'poor old cook, / Cooking your dinner' (*OH* 93). The speaker, the reader, and the poem itself, in heaven and on earth, are implicated in culpable escapism.

So, though it seems to celebrate a blissful ignorance, 'On Heaven' openly declares heaven's involvement in social and political antagonisms. The problem with any earthly paradise is its partiality: rather than a new

[104] Jenny Plastow, 'Englishness and Work', in Dennis Brown and Jenny Plastow, eds, *Ford Madox Ford and Englishness* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 177–94 (p. 177).
[105] [Ford Madox Ford], 'The Unemployed', *English Review* 1.1 (December 1908): 161–4 (pp. 162–3).
[106] Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy*, p. 16.

heaven and a new earth, rather than total redemption, some small pocket of the world is walled off from the fallen wilderness. Kafka's creature builds himself a burrow, or two English lovers escape families and friends in France. But both the burrow and France are connected to the outside world. The little town near Lyon has three or four cafés, a town hall, and – odd detail – 'a shipping agency' (*OH* 76). Sitting at one of those cafés the man reads *La Libre Parole*, an anti-Semitic newspaper published in Paris and notorious for its role in the Dreyfus affair (*OH* 77). (Dowell compares Ashburnham to Dreyfus in *The Good Soldier*,[107] and in *Parade's End* General Campion calls Christopher Tietjens 'a regular Dreyfus'.[108]) The details of this workaday heaven, being necessarily drawn from the workaday world, are often sinister, dubious, or incongruous. The townspeople are kind to the man, especially the laughing children, but he has bought their affection: 'And the boy I often gave a penny, / And the *maire* himself, and the little girl who loves toffee / And me because I have given her many sweets' (*OH* 77). The sequence from boy to mayor to girl is strange. We do not know whether the man simply wanders absent-mindedly from thought to thought, unaware of the implications, or whether instead he recognises that the mayor, like the innkeepers in this out-of-the-way town, is happy for the custom of foreigners with pounds and pennies to spare, and willing not to ask too many questions.

Ford's other writings suggest that he, at least, was well aware. *The Young Lovell* clearly satirises the economic relations that manage belief in salvation. Francis predicts that a certain earl shall enjoy his just reward in heaven, but only after he has made a generous donation to Francis's monastery (*YL* 119). In *The Critical Attitude* (1911) Ford mocks the modern equation of salvation with money: 'if we are no longer so tranquilly confident that there is a heaven to get into, we are at least perfectly certain that a flaccid and self-satisfied commercialism is not the only way to obtain to a sure and certain hope of the blessed resurrection'.[109] Or take this August 1918 letter to Stella Bowen, with whom Ford was falling in love:

> I wonder if there will ever be any summer again – in the sense of long, warm days when one has nothing to do – & plenty of servants. . . Because the worst of your hammock & heath ideal is that one has to go & do the

[107] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 105.
[108] Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades* (1925), ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 146. For Ford's long-standing support of Zionism, see Ford, *Letters*, pp. 207, 217, 280, 312–14.
[109] Ford, *The Critical Attitude*, p. 29.

> washing up *some* time. At the same time, if one is in a hammock on a heath, the idea of servants in the background, spoils it, I know. So that there is only heaven![110]

Like the lovers' escape, Bowen's hammock and heath ideal is compromised by the necessity of work. Someone must labour, so neither the heath nor Provence can really be heaven on earth.

In 'On Heaven', this results in an interpretative quandary. On the one hand, we can salvage the poem by emphasising its ironies. The heaven it offers would then be the morally compromised daydream of a fallible narrator on the model of John Dowell. The poetry's effusive passion, silly rhyming, and anachronistic references – in fact, the whole conceit of identifying an adulterous tryst with religious salvation – would signal an affluent man's artless sentimentality. Objecting to that sentimental conceit, Monro called 'On Heaven' 'that beautiful poem, with the absurd title'.[111] But the title's preposition suggests an examination, an account of the need to imagine a heaven, rather than a representation, for which a simple 'Heaven' would have sufficed. On the other hand, we can salvage the heaven by emphasising the poem's sincerity: an ideal rather than a conceit, this is indeed a heaven to live and to die for. Aldington felt the poem's 'primary appeal' was to the reader's 'sentiment'.[112] For Aldington, that is what separates Ford from *les jeunes*, the elder poet of 'kindliness and toleration' from the younger poets 'of immense arrogance and considerable talent and much impatience'.[113] One critic even calls 'On Heaven' 'a hymn of gratitude'.[114] But the poem would then be culpably implicated in the partiality and injustice of that ideal, and its artistry would again fall short of Ford's unflinching strictures. The poem would be a 'somewhat self-indulgent fantasy', 'a Bohemian writer's leisure-dream of shaded squares and café tables'.[115] The contradiction Ford therefore confronts is that heaven can only work when poetry fails, and poetry when heaven fails.

[110] Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, ed. Sondra J. Stang and Karen Cochran (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 10.
[111] Harold Monro, *Some Contemporary Poets* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p. 85.
[112] Aldington, 'Reviews', p. 247.
[113] Aldington, 'Reviews', pp. 247–8
[114] Derek Stanford, '"The Best Poem Yet Written in the Twentieth-Century Fashion": A Discursive Note on Ford Madox Ford's "On Heaven"', *Agenda* 27.4–28.1 (Winter 1989–Spring 1990): 110–19 (p. 111).
[115] Dennis Brown, '"But One Is English": Ford's Poetry 1893–1921', in Dennis Brown and Jenny Plastow, eds, *Ford Madox Ford and Englishness*, pp. 255–74 (p. 261).

V

To understand this quandary we need to explore the ways in which Ford's lyric configures the individual subject and society at large, and so how the form of Ford's poem shapes its representation of guilt. For it is not simply that labour means suffering and that it would be much more pleasant to go on holidaying forever. It is that we make work for each other, we are responsible for the suffering of others, both when illicit loves grieve cheated wives and husbands, and when cheating spouses enjoy the means to flee the country. In equating lovers' toils with farmers', the man seeks to assuage his guilt, sexual and economic. Ford's celebration of heavenly leisure and adultery seems clearly ironic since, in the Christian tradition which the poem provocatively adapts, heaven would mean redemption from guilt, from our fallen condition. It was a condition which Ford felt acutely. In his first memoir, *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections* (1911), Ford tells of having had from early youth a profound sense of 'original sin'.[116] He describes his earliest memory as that of being scolded by his grandmother, Emma Brown, for disturbing some ringneck doves in a breeding box. For 'many days afterwards', he recollects, 'I thought I had destroyed life and that I was exceedingly sinful'.[117] He acquired what he calls an abiding conviction of 'deep criminality'.[118]

A sense of fundamental stain also pervades the novels Ford wrote before and after 'On Heaven'. 'The beastliness of human nature is always pretty normal', Tietjens reflects in *No More Parades* (1925).[119] The epigraph to *The Good Soldier* – 'Beati Immaculati' – separates those 'who walk in the law of the Lord' (Psalm 119:1) from those who transgress, and Dowell famously likens his and his wife's life with the Ashburnhams to 'a goodly apple that is rotten at the core'.[120] *The Young Lovell* alludes twice to the biblical story of Adam and Eve (*YL* 98, 205), but more importantly its entire narrative is generated by a first disobedience. Having sworn to keep vigil in a small chapel the night before his marriage, the Young Lovell inexplicably breaks his vow (*YL* 1). He is then tempted away from the wedding by a mysterious white lady, a sister to Keats's belle dame. All our hero's subsequent misadventures and his final fate hinge on this first act. In a gesture to the inheritance of Adam's curse, we then learn that the Young Lovell's father committed the very same sin (*YL* 23, 80). Francis the monk has in turn committed his own capital sin, for which he atones

[116] Ford, *Ancient Lights*, p. viii.
[117] Ford, *Ancient Lights*, pp. viii–ix.
[118] Ford, *Ancient Lights*, p. ix.
[119] Ford, *No More Parades*, p. 195.
[120] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 12.

continually: once, when out hunting, he unwittingly shot his cousin (*YL* 40). When Francis, like his friend, is tempted by the vision of an alluring woman, she comes in the form of that very cousin, compounding murder with lust (*YL* 233). Carnal desire, gluttony, violence, and greed are recurrent themes throughout the novel. But the problem goes deeper than any particular sin. Even an unidentified soldier, superfluous to the plot, is said to lean against a wall with his eyes shut, 'saying prayers in penance for a crime he had committed' (*YL* 190).

Because *The Young Lovell* is tonally unstable – a black comedy on humanity's corruption and a daydream about the age of chivalry – it is difficult to know how seriously to take all this. The novel's preposterous mediaevalism allows Ford to parody excessive preoccupation with sin. An evil knight condemns the 'monstrous wicked, idolatrous, blaspheming' hero for dancing with 'fair naked witches', though the knight's 'liquorish manner' betrays the fact that he does not believe the accusations (*YL* 73–4). Ford also produces distance by blending cynical narration with free indirect discourse. Raising an army to reconquer his ancestral castle, the Young Lovell accepts the aid of a group of men and women who had once served his father: 'all were well fed and found, so what they had done in the meantime it was better not to inquire' (*YL* 208). Both the Young Lovell and the narrator can comfortably assume that the men and women have not occupied themselves virtuously: invariably people do not. Later, when our hero has laid siege to the castle, a group of enemy soldiers decides to desert: 'they had neither desirable wine nor women; not much prospect of meat nor gold, and what else could keep them? Therefore they rode away' (*YL* 269). Sinfulness is ubiquitous, even workaday, and we are invited not to condemn but to raise an indulgent eyebrow.

In 'On Heaven' the tonal instability is if anything greater, since here the irony of a fallible narrator confronts the conventional sincerity of lyric. It is so much easier to distance Ford from Dowell – the American Protestant, incapable of adultery – than it is to distance him from his poem's anonymous speaker. Ford's biography dovetails with 'On Heaven' more closely than with Dowell's sad story, for after the scandal with the *Throne* he and Hunt also fled to France. But a kind of doubt, a potential for some distance, persists. To the man who has brought his beloved to Provence, heaven is a place to pursue the affair free from guilt. The lovers have fled an England hidebound by morality, but the French apparently accept their assignation with 'kindly, fresh benevolence' (*OH* 78). At the end, God is said to smile equally on all 'poor lovers, married or never yet married' (*OH* 94). Such moments are suspicious; they suggest sheer delusion,

strained pretence, or wry euphemism. In *Last Post* (1928) Tietjens reflects that a 'Papist obviously could not regard a marriage before an English registrar or a French *maire* as having any moral validity', and the appearance of the *maire* in 'On Heaven' reminds us that the lovers have not come to be married.[121] The irony of two adulterers staying at the 'Hotel of the Three Holy Bells' or the 'Inn of the Real Good Will' certainly seems clear (*OH* 85).

Nevertheless, the need to escape oppressive moral strictures represents a serious critique of the society which Ford and Hunt so scandalised:

> Well, you see, in England
> She had a husband. And four families—
> His, hers, mine, and another woman's too—
> Would have gone crazy. And, with all the rest,
> Eight parents, and the children, seven aunts
> And sixteen uncles and a grandmother.
> There were, besides, our names, a few real friends,
> And the decencies of life. A monstrous heap!
> They made a monstrous heap. I've lain awake
> Whole aching nights to tot the figures up!
> Heap after heaps, of complications, griefs,
> Worries, tongue-clackings, nonsenses and shame
> For not making good. (*OH* 80–81)

The man begins to tell their story with weary flippancy, tallying the immediate and extended family members whom the lovers have outraged. 'This is not so much the numeration of a love idyll's *dramatis personae*', comments one critic, 'as the list of characters from a farce'.[122] But flippancy cannot separate the lovers from the society which condemns them. In invoking the decencies of life, the man appeals to a social value. Lovers, families, friends, and decencies make that monstrous heap together. In the next line, 'They' seems simply to gather the various parties and values involved, but the contrast of 'They made' and 'I've lain awake' suggests a second meaning or motive. The line betrays a desire, however conscious, to disown responsibility: *I* cannot be blamed for what *they* have done. The final sentence then ties the knot by declining to attribute the griefs and worries and nonsenses, which are both laughable and culpable. The man mocks others' clacking, blames it, excuses his own clacking, and confesses the harm it has done.

[121] Ford Madox Ford, *Last Post* (1928), ed. Paul Skinner (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 99.
[122] Stanford, '"The Best Poem Yet Written in the Twentieth-Century Fashion"', p. 112.

At the end of the poem, the ledger in which the man had struggled in vain to tot the figures is superseded by a 'golden book' in which God keeps 'the accounts of his estate' (*OH* 94). Ford liked the metaphor, for in *No More Parades* Tietjens imagines God as 'a great English Landowner', Christ as 'an almost too benevolent Land-Steward', and the Holy Ghost as 'the spirit of the estate'.[123] But whereas Tietjens, while in a base camp in Rouen, imagines the whole of Creation as an English estate, the man in 'On Heaven' has fled from England to Provence, because only there are the figures totted properly, the moral accounts squared. If we traditionally reach heaven through repentance, good works, and God's grace, Ford's adulterous lovers only repent half-heartedly, and they persist in their sin. Their bliss consists in enjoying the affair unmolested. It is as if Paolo and Francesca were to find themselves, a little bewildered but otherwise unchanged, in the *Paradiso*. Moreover, this inversion of traditional belief seems clearly to critique the suffering caused by conventional morality. The greatest sin would then be an unhealthy preoccupation with sin, just as, for Muir, humanity's original sin was only the belief in original sin. In turn, properly to square the moral accounts would be to cancel the debts as unjust. This world's moral economy becomes, like the burden of work, a condition of fallenness. Earth itself could be heaven if only society would treat married and unmarried lovers alike.

Salvation, the man reflects, thus means the fulfilment of each individual's particular desire, not of collective or social need. God gives 'to each man after his heart', whether the heaven he desires be a nightclub, the south of France, or a sea voyage (*OH* 92). This should mean freedom from the pain we cause to others in pursuing our desires, and so from the guilt that invariably accompanies pleasure. But Ford suggests that this is impossible. Dining on ratatouille in the cool of the evening requires a cook:

> God knows that the lesson we learn from life is that our very existence in the nature of things is a perpetual harming of somebody – if only because every mouthful of food that we eat [is] a mouthful taken from somebody else.[124]

Every pleasure in 'On Heaven' runs this risk. It is not only that aggrieved families have been left behind or that others must work to support a holiday. There is a very real risk that the man buys his heaven at the expense of the woman he loves, of the person who seemingly makes his heaven a heaven. The antagonism between individual and society, between desire and repression, recurs as an antagonism between individuals. And so

[123] Ford, *No More Parades*, p. 96. [124] Ford, *Ancient Lights*, p. ix.

the easy separation of heaven and earth – of us and them, here and there, freedom and obligation – collapses.

This returns us to the problem of genre and to poetry's complicity in our imperfect world. Ford's programme for poetry matched the experiments of *les jeunes* in many ways, but he insisted on a poetics of lyric expression. In contrast, he said, the Futurists, the imagists, and the Vorticists had 'abolished not only the Illusion of the Subject, but the Subject itself' (*TR* 140). In 'On Heaven' the expression of the individual's desires and satisfactions takes the form of lyric, seeming to limit poetry to the subject's thoughts and feelings. 'Subjective, purely', said Hunt of Ford's poem. This is signalled as soon as the woman enters heaven, lighting 'absently down' from her 'swift red car' (*OH* 77). That absent-mindedness is presumed and unverifiable; punningly, it makes her presence in the poem an absence from the start. The man seems reluctant to acknowledge her arrival for fear of disapproval, and only goes to her when an old woman reassures him that 'nobody here will think harm' (*OH* 78). It is difficult to decide how self-conscious such moments are. Does he confess unkind reluctance or is he oblivious to it? Having stepped down from the car his beloved looks round, he says, 'with some fear': 'it must be strange to come from England / Straight into Heaven', he reasons (*OH* 80). Ostensibly he means that she fears he will not be there to meet her, but the reasoning is dubious. The woman might also or instead be afraid that he will be there, afraid of him and of their tryst, afraid of an unknown and precarious future, and in that case the conceit of coming straight into heaven would be another euphemism, this time bitter. Alternatively, the woman might be afraid that, however much they are now in love, the man will subsequently desert her. That, at least, is Sylvia Tietjens's fear. 'Why in the world couldn't you get a man to go away with you', she wonders to herself, 'for a whole, a whole blessed week-end. A whole blessed life.'[125] And even then, she reflects, 'he would not be faithful to you'.

Lyric's ostensible restriction to an individual subject leaves these conflicting interpretations open. Perhaps the man is simply, blissfully unaware:

> What if she's pale? It must be more than strange,
> After these years, to come out here from England
> To a strange place, to the stretched-out arms of me,
> A man never fully known, only divined,
> Loved, guessed at, pledged to, in your Sussex mud,

[125] Ford, *No More Parades*, p. 129.

> Amongst the frost-bound farms by the yeasty sea.
> Oh, the long look; the long, long searching look!
> And how my heart beat! (*OH* 80)

Just as she has had to 'divine' him, we must divine him, and we can but guess at her. We do not know why she looks pale or what her long searching look means. She may not be pale with fear at all, but with anxious indecision, regret, or guilt. Circumstances in England may have given her no choice but to come. A straightforward romantic plot would dictate that his heart is set beating at the sight of her, though he might at the same time be blind to her real state. Alternatively, exposed in its guilt by her searching look, his heart could beat with knowledge of the predicament he has put her in. To the reader, neither lover can be 'fully known'.

In *A Man Could Stand Up*— (1926), Mrs Wannop writes novels about lovers 'contracting irregular unions of the mind or of sympathy'.[126] In 'On Heaven', the very form of the poem prevents or obscures such union. Because we cannot know the woman's thoughts or feelings, the man's sentimental effusions are continually compromised. How wonderful, he tells us, that in their long drive south along the Rhone they 'had nothing any more to talk of' (*OH* 83). How wonderful to be free from all that chatter and recrimination – unless they actually sit in sad or bored or uncertain silence. Even the details of their union are doubtful. Sitting at a café table thinking over their past, he remembers their 'kisses, nine, maybe, or eleven— / If you count two that I gave and she did not give again' (*OH* 86). Had he forced their first two kisses? Had she withdrawn from the last two? For the man the woman is an object, a possession; Hunt calls her a 'fetish'. The man proudly notes that the local men cast admiring glances at his beloved: 'ah, it is Heaven alone, to have her alone and so near!' (*OH* 87). More than once he rhapsodises on this theme: 'And we were alone, alone, alone. . . . / At last alone' (*OH* 83). But the rhapsody is his and his alone. The poem's form makes the lovers like Milton's exiled Adam and Eve, taking their solitary ways.

Though it also identifies earthly love with heaven, there is little of this doubt in *Look! We Have Come Through!* Lawrence's poetry seeks to make all experience explicit, the toil as well as the joy. We know that his lovers quarrel: 'This love so full / Of hate has hurt us so.'[127] We know that

[126] Ford Madox Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up*— (1926), ed. Sara Haslam (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 202.
[127] Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.186.

sometimes they feel at one with each other, and sometimes they feel divided. One poem ends with an ascent to union: 'And I am sure of that. / We are sure of that.'[128] The next begins by descending to separation: 'And yet all the while you are you, you are not me. / And I am I, I am never you.' In an early poem the man remembers the woman's exclamation, 'But this is joy!', only then to reflect that 'the shadow of lying was in [her] eyes'.[129] In a much later poem, the woman celebrates the 'beauty' of 'myself and him / Balanced in glorious equilibrium'.[130] There seems little cause to doubt these moments, whether the accusation of deceit or the bliss of balance, precisely because, though most of the lyrics are in the voice of the man, others are in the voice of the woman, some transcribe the lovers' dialogue, and some are in the third person. Though no moment of love or hate lasts, everything here is made explicit, known.

But the form of 'On Heaven' prevents this resolution. The poem's most painful moment comes in a passage which Ford cancelled after its first printing. The Virgin approaches the lovers' table and promises them that, if they make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, they will be blessed with a son. 'And my dear one sat in the shadows; very softly she wept:— / Such joy is in Heaven' (*OH* 91). The woman may weep for joy at the genuine possibility of a son, she may weep with grief at its impossibility, or she may weep because their son would find himself in a world of guilt and uncertainty, toil and joy. Indeed, because the 'Such' in 'Such joy' can specify degree or kind, the words may praise unalloyed bliss or be bitterly ironic. We do not know what the woman feels as they sit at their café table, nor do we know what the man knows of her feelings. Samuel Beckett once defined our fallen condition as the impossibility of real communication: 'We are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known.'[131] For Ford this Fall happens even in heaven, and he makes the lyric, with its epistemological limits, the poetic form of our unhappiness.

VI

Ford famously formulated his poetic ideal as 'verse that was like one's intimate conversation with someone one loved very much' (*TR* 213). This was his figure for lyric expression. Naturally it would mean painting oneself

[128] Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.202. [129] Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.167.
[130] Lawrence, *The Poems*, 1.205.
[131] Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p. 49.

> a shade more virtuous or more picturesque than one actually is. But then, if the person to whom you are talking loves you very much, or knows you very well, they will know you for the odd creature that you are. (*TR* 213)

Ford wrote 'On Heaven' while living with Hunt and Patmore in a 'cottage by the sea' in West Sussex, and Hunt recalled that when he had finished the poem he 'read it to us in the little dark drawing-room [. . .] tactlessly evincing his honest joy in his own work'.[132] Saunders suggests that this 'dual address' explains the poem's 'tonal confusion, hovering purgatorially between ecstasy and despair'.[133] Yet the trouble with the poem is that the man is not talking to his beloved, and unlike a listener who already knows him well, the reader encounters him here for the first time. The lovers' heavenly liaison is so hard to credit because the poetry allows so little intimacy. In comparable fashion, Dowell is left to tell the story of his love and of others' loves by imagining himself 'at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me'.[134] But *The Good Soldier* is about earthly damnation, while 'On Heaven' turns gauchely towards salvation. Ford's two favourite nineteenth-century poets were Christina Rossetti and Robert Browning, and 'On Heaven' proves an improbable blend of her limpid hymning and his dramatic monologues, the new Jerusalem and self-incrimination.[135]

The poem does propose to justify this formal contradiction, precisely when it offers to explain the presence of joy and toil in the experience of heaven. On blessed days God will ensure that everything works – the swift red car, the weather, the carefree conversation or comfortable silence –

> But, on other days, just as you must have perfect shadows to
> make perfect Rembrandts,
> He shall afflict us with little lets and hindrances of His own
> Devising—just to let us be glad that we are dead. . .
> Just for remembrance. (*OH* 84)

This aesthetic logic returns upon the poem itself, justifying its tints of idealism, of bathos, of work, of guilt, of loneliness. Just as Muir dreams that in a perfect society life will be an art, here suffering and conflict are redeemed by the aesthetic whole. For the lovers, remembering the 'terrible harassments' and the 'cold and the frost and the pain' of their past life has

[132] Hunt, *The Flurried Years*, p. 217. [133] Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, 1.397.
[134] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 15.
[135] Though they seem an unlikely pair, Ford repeatedly names Browning and Rossetti as the best Victorian poets. See Ford, 'Modern Poetry', pp. 43–5; Ford, *Ancient Lights*, pp. 54–69; Ford, *Collected Poems*, pp. 22–3; and *TR* 131, 154.

become a pleasure, since it is 'As if we were looking at a picture' (*OH* 86). According to this logic, the shades of virtue assumed by the lyric voice and its implicit appeals for sympathy are fallible and necessary. Even Ford's sloppy workmanship forms a 'perfect shadow' in this southern light. The landscape of his verse is 'a prospect very rich and fair', one reader wrote in 1916, 'despite the ugly spots which the artist has not deigned to eliminate, and which, as a fact, he has deliberately retained'.[136] Salvation is to be found neither in the workaday nor the working, but in the artwork.

Yet the poem's figure for life as art is painting, and the painting of an old master at that. The abstractions of art or poetry must at some point be grounded in actual artworks, much as heaven must be brought down to earth. And according to the dialectic of aesthetic salvation, poetry here looks to the visual arts and modernity looks to the past. Though the ideals of poetry and heaven promise finally to converge, 'On Heaven' thus seems to know that it itself cannot save us. Having to explain the logic of success is a confession of failure. True aesthetic reconciliation hovers over the materials assembled by 'On Heaven' as an unachieved, unrepresentable ideal – whether to hope for or despair over. The poem labours under the shadow of contradictory imperatives, and these, it says, determine our imperfect world. It is no longer a question simply of flawed rhymes or a merely adulterous tryst. In thrall to lyric, enchanted with transcendence, even a poem on heaven must also be prosaic, disenchanted, and materialist. Heaven cannot be heaven, but must also be guilty and bathetic, complicit with the very world from which it offers an escape.

This is the situation which 'On Heaven' represents, a crisis for modern poetry. The problem of whether or to what degree Ford's is an 'art that conceals art' remains,[137] and in the end it seems to me impossible to decide. The value of 'On Heaven' is that it is open to those contradictory imperatives, not that Ford resolved them. At this level, the subject of the poem, crystallising the conflicts of a historical moment, is not individual but collective. If there is a sign of the poem's self-consciousness, a word in this modern hymn for our imperfect world, it is the disenchanted *even*. 'Even in Heaven!' (*OH* 75), the man cries at the thought that toil must also be there. Later he says that they have 'come quietly home / Even to Heaven' (*OH* 82), as though he cannot quite believe it, but also as though it were not the home he had hoped for. The concession, the doubt, and the disappointment both constitute and negate salvation. They undo even

[136] Mary C. Sturgeon, *Studies of Contemporary Poets* (London: George G. Harrap, 1916), p. 127.
[137] Hampson, '"Experiments with Modernity"', p. 103.

the bliss of balance or equilibrium, 'the cool of the even in Heaven' (*OH* 85). Everything that the lovers desire 'shall prove as fair as we can paint it' (*OH* 91), the man promises the woman, for that is God's will: 'Thus he has made Heaven; / Even Heaven' (*OH* 92). But because 'On Heaven' is only as fair as we can paint it – ugly and unjust – this heaven is our fall.

CHAPTER 3

Eliot's Line

> ce corps d'une idée qu'est un vers (corps qui au contraire des corps humains n'est pas devant l'âme comme un obstacle opaque qui empêche de l'apercevoir mais comme un vêtement purifié, vivifié, où elle se diffuse et où on la retrouve)
>
> Marcel Proust, *Le Côté de Guermantes*[1]

I

'Hostile à l'univers plutôt qu'indifférent': the first of the old men in Baudelaire's swarming city, in 'Les Sept vieillards' (1861), is hostile to the universe.[2] Unlike indifference, hostility is active, warm. Hostility means a positive relation to the universe of degradation and death; it gives the old man and his world significance; it redeems the world from unreality. Baudelaire's old man tramps in the snow and the mud as though crushing the dead under his old shoes: 'Comme s'il écrasait des morts sous ses savates'. The line treads indignantly, its sibilance squelching in the snow. The very prosody warms itself with hostility.

The most hostile lines T. S. Eliot ever wrote begin *The Waste Land*, tramping on the earth and snow, crushing the dead who will not stay buried. Unhappily, as Levenson notes, they do so in the voice of a buried corpse.[3] Eliot cites 'Les Sept vieillards' in a note to the line 'Unreal City',[4] and elsewhere he admires Baudelaire's 'deliberately broken

[1] Marcel Proust, *Le Côté de Guermantes*, ed. Theirry Laget and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 42. '[T]hat body of an idea which is a verse (a body which, unlike human bodies, does not stand before the soul like an opaque obstacle that prevents our seeing it, but like a purified garment, vivified, in which the soul is diffused and in which it is discovered)' (my translation).

[2] Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–1976), 1.88.

[3] Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p. 172.

[4] Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 56, line 60, and p. 73. All subsequent references to *The Waste Land* are to this edition, with line numbers cited parenthetically. All other references to Eliot's poetry are to this same edition, hereafter abbreviated as *PE*.

alexandrines'.[5] In turn, one could admire the first line of *The Waste Land* for deliberately breaking the iambic pentameter, just as its allusion inverts Chaucer: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding' (line 1). That is a customary approach to Eliot's prosody, in keeping with his famous suggestion, in 'Reflections on *vers libre*' (1917), that 'the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the "freest" verse'.[6] Some hear a chorus of ghosts haunting the first lines of 'The Burial of the Dead' – iambic pentameter, accentual tetrameter, dactylic hexameter, French Alexandrine – and then liken this chorus to 'the multicultural confusion' soon made explicit as theme.[7] But Eliot's lines make their own music: dangling present participles breed new lines like lilacs; enjambment mixes memory and desire, each line reaching back to its precursor and forward to its successor; versification is cruel spring rain to the dull roots of language. Lines and lilacs and 'we' (line 9) are wretched. Line after line, the inexorable generation of the poem is, from its opening, a condition of the waste land. So Eliot's hostile lines are also hostile to themselves, to the prosody which makes them poetry. This is my theme: Eliot's poem confesses its complicity and implicates the art of poetry in our far from perfect world.[8]

Eliot seemed to some excessively hostile to life, or to modern life in particular. The opening of *The Waste Land* associates this problem with the nature of poetry, or of modern poetry. The association is clearest when we think of prosody as mimesis. We are liable to read the sounds of 'sous ses savates' and the enjambment of 'breeding / Lilacs' (lines 1–2) metaphorically. The poetry is like squelching snow or cruel April. Soon, summer surprises us by not breaking the line after 'coming', by letting the new line fall instead with a sudden shower of rain (lines 8–9). Eliot was sensitive throughout his career to the manifold effects of enjambment. But prosody cannot be reduced to metaphor or symbol; that would be to conceive it as an indifferent container, mere form for mere content, so that a sense of damnation to life fills the vacant technique of lineation. As the poem

[5] T. S. Eliot, '"Poet and Saint . . . "', *Dial* 82.5 (May 1927): 424–31 (p. 430).
[6] Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 187.
[7] H. T. Kirby-Smith, *The Origins of Free Verse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 208. For similar arguments, see J. V. Cunningham, 'How Shall the Poem Be Written?', in *The Collected Essays of J. V. Cunningham* (Chicago: Swallow, 1976), pp. 256–71 (pp. 270–71); and Chris Beyers, *A History of Free Verse* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2001), pp. 87–99.
[8] For helpful readings of the opening of 'The Burial of the Dead', see Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, pp. 168–72; Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), pp. 95–7; and Anthony Hecht, 'Permanent Surprise', in James Olney, ed., *T. S. Eliot: Essays from the* Southern Review (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 325–8.

proceeds, it proves impossible to reconcile lineation as breeding with lineation as mixing, and as stirring, covering, feeding, raining, and so on. The urge to read for metaphor is strong, here and throughout *The Waste Land*, but it is also too strong. It constantly overdetermines and undoes itself.

So we need to understand how, at a given moment in the history of poetry or within a given poem, the meanings made by particular lines shape and are shaped by the meanings of the poetic line as such. This, rather than the fragment, the allusion, or the quotation, will be my focus in reading *The Waste Land*. If the first lines of 'The Burial of the Dead' are hostile to the universe, they are also histrionic, ostentatiously lines of verse. There is what F. R. Leavis once called a 'certain heaviness about the gestures'.[9] These first lines foreground the technique of lineation, and they do so through more than especially heavy or hard enjambment. Just before recommending metrical ghosts in 'Reflections on *vers libre*', Eliot protests that Cyril Tourneur 'will polish off a fair line of iambics even at the cost of amputating a preposition from its substantive'.[10] Worst of all, 'in the *Atheist's Tragedy* he has a final "of" in two lines out of five together'. Yet that seems no more grave a sin than amputating participles from their substantives, and in *The Dry Salvages* (1941) even Eliot indulges in a final 'of' (*PE* 1.199). The difference presumably lies in the intent: like Baudelaire's broken alexandrines, Eliot's hard enjambments are deliberate; Tourneur's are merely expedient. Marlowe was better, Eliot thought. In a 1919 essay he praises the 'new driving power' which Marlowe generated for blank verse through the 'rapid long sentence, running line into line'.[11] And as early as 'A Fable for Feasters', published in the *Smith Academy Record* in 1905, Eliot cuts his own lines severely, for good comic effect. Needing a rhyme for 'entirely' and 'friarly' he writes:

> Spirits from that time forth they did without,
> And lived the admiration of the shire. We
> Got the veracious record of these doings
> From an old manuscript found in the ruins. (*PE* 1.227)

But here, just as in 'Les Sept vieillards', metre and rhyme dictate the choice of where to begin the new line. Even in the free-verse passages of 'On Heaven', rhyme determines lineation: Ford's lines sometimes run on to twenty syllables or more, simply to reach a rhyme. In contrast, at the

[9] F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932; Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1963), p. 67.
[10] Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 187.
[11] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 122. Hereafter abbreviated as *SE*.

start of *The Waste Land* the choice is free. Though a present participle propels each new phrase and a line-break follows every present participle, this nonce measure survives for a mere two sentences, long enough only to pretend to be binding or stable. When summer continues on past 'coming', the pretence peters out. The metrical allusions pass too quickly even to pretend. Determined by neither metre nor rhyme, each new line is an active choice and a singular birth.

So 'breeding / Lilacs' is a synecdoche for this poem and a metonymy for poetry. It sets the poem going as poetry, figuring the movement from line to line, because it lays bare the technique of enjambment, independent of metre or rhyme. Even in the most heavily end-stopped verse, the possibility of enjambment reveals poetry's constitutive tension between line and syntax. For this reason, Agamben calls enjambment 'the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose'.[12] To switch figures, enjambment amplifies the interference between sound and sense, though these are not discrete. 'Sound and sense are not two substances but two intensities', Agamben continues, 'two *tonoi* of the same linguistic substance'.[13] The sound of poetry has its own sense, which may rub against a poem's other senses, and these in turn all have their sounds. The deliberate, singular birth of 'Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing' (line 2) contradicts the natural, inevitable breeding of plural, undifferentiated lilacs. The moment concentrates the antagonism, pitilessly played out through the rest of the poem, between individual and collective, particular and universal, freedom and determinism. These conflicts waste the land within the poem and the world beyond it. Though they are present in concept and image, the conflicts are there in the being and movement of lines. The technique of lineation tells us what it means for April to be cruel. A poem's tune does not represent or signify 'a proposition held elsewhere and containing the meaning', or does not only do so; 'the tune itself is already the meaning'.[14] There is a driving power to Marlowe's blank verse before it treats Tamburlaine's conquests or Faust's bargain. John Hollander has shown, in similar fashion, how the enjambments in *Paradise Lost* reveal not only 'the local sense of the lines which they connect', but also 'the mind of the whole poem'.[15] I want to argue that there is a wasting power, a wretchedness to lineation in *The Waste Land*.

[12] Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem* (1996), trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 109.
[13] Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, p. 114.
[14] Simon Jarvis, 'The Melodics of Long Poems', *Textual Practice* 24.4 (August 2010): 607–621 (p. 609).
[15] John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 96.

This is why Eliot's lines are hostile to the world and hostile to themselves, to the prosody which makes them poetry. We enter the poem through this conflict between metaphor and metonymy, clashing over and in the line.

In February 1923 Monro said that in *The Waste Land* 'the poetry of despair' had 'itself become desperate'.[16] In this poem, form is part of the world it forms. Because the poetic line has its own meanings, specific to this period and this poem, it can judge and be judged; it can despair and it can deserve hostility. Eliot began drafting 'The Burial of the Dead' in late January or early February 1921; the extant typescripts were made in May.[17] Towards the end of March he wrote a short article on Baudelaire for Lewis's *Tyro*. 'More than any poet of his time', Eliot says, 'Baudelaire was aware of what most mattered: the problem of good and evil', and this relation between poetry and morality was more than a matter of maxims or systems.[18] 'As for the verse of the present time', Eliot continues, most poets' 'lack of curiosity in technical matters' only indicates 'their lack of curiosity in moral matters'. Good and evil inhere in technique – in enjambment, for example. Later Eliot would concede – or insist – that 'we cannot say at what point "technique" begins or where it ends'.[19]

And that helps to explain why Eliot returned to the form of 'breeding / Lilacs' again, in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), 'Marina' (1930), and other later poems: 'restoring / One who moves' (*PE* 1.92), 'meaning / Death' (*PE* 1.107). When Yeats makes *ottava rima* stanzas or Auden crafts a sestina, prosody partly serves as a symbol for literary, cultural, and historical modes of thinking and feeling. This is true for Eliot's *terza rima* and his iambic pentameter, too. 'Metered lines of metrically variable verse', writes Annie Finch, 'can reveal the poet's attitudes toward the meter's cultural and literary connotations'.[20] But the dangling participle and immediate line-break became a symbol of Eliot's earlier work, of hostility to the universe and to verse. It was not a convenient trick, to be redeployed at whim. Its combination of movement and rupture figures the dialectic of particular lines and the line as such. The voyage beyond *The Waste Land* can seem a quest to redeem the technique of lineation. In time, Eliot sought

[16] Harold Monro, 'Notes for a Study of *The Waste Land*', *Chapbook* 34 (February 1923): 20–24 (p. 24).
[17] For the dating of the drafts and typescripts of *The Waste Land*, here and throughout, see Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting* The Waste Land (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 34–6.
[18] T. S. Eliot, 'The Lesson of Baudelaire', *Tyro* 1 (Spring 1921): 4. For the dating of Eliot's article, see T. S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 214, n. 1.
[19] T. S. Eliot, preface (1928) to *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1950), pp. vii–x (p. ix).
[20] Annie Finch, *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 1.

redemption for hostility by limiting it to this world only. By 1930, he could write that 'the hatred of life is an important phase – even, if you like, a mystical experience – in life itself' (*SE* 190). Transfigured by hope for another world, the hostility should involve love. The question is really whether there ought to be any redemption for poetry.

II

If 'breeding / Lilacs' marks a decisive moment in modern poetry, the breeding of lilacs remains one of life's eternal cycles. And if calling spring cruel inverts an ancient tradition, the poetry that says so continues the ancient art of composing in lines. This contradiction, between a historical moment and a permanent condition, is crucial to Eliot and to modernism more broadly. It will recur throughout my readings of *The Waste Land*. It shapes both the work's sense of poetic form and its sense of waste, its hostility or despair. But before returning to the poem, we need to remember the shifting emphases this contradiction produced in Eliot's thinking, and in particular his thinking about the need for redemption.

Certainly, if Ford had an abiding conviction of deep criminality, Eliot had long felt what Pascal calls *notre misère*, our misery or wretchedness. 'In a word', Pascal counsels, 'man knows that he is wretched', but though he is wretched, he is 'great because he knows it'.[21] In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' or 'Gerontion' (1920), that knowledge or self-consciousness seems instead to confirm damnation, but then even damnation is better than *notre misère moderne*. In September 1930 Christopher Isherwood published a translation of Baudelaire's *Journaux intimes*, and in an introduction to the volume Eliot argues that, though Baudelaire was beset by bustling modernity, he nevertheless remembered that 'what really matters is Sin and Redemption':

> the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation – of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living. (*SE* 427)

[21] Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter, with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: J. M. Dent, 1931), p. 110.

Eliot slips quickly, here, from sin as a stain on humanity to sin as the stain of modernity. His writings shuttle between these two ideas. Theologically, modernity's ennui or meaninglessness is subordinate to, is only the latest manifestation of, the Fall. Experientially, a Fall seems the only explanation for the world we find ourselves in, here and now. Even the myth of Adam and Eve expresses the eternal in historical terms; in presenting our permanent stain as narrative, it gives humanity a happy before and an unhappy after, and this myth then allegorises the before and after of every human act; it offers a narrative for the wretched way things happen. In 'the temptation and the fall' of Milton's Adam and Eve, Eliot said many years later, we recognise 'the faults and virtues, the abjection and the nobility, of all their descendants'.[22] Still, conceiving of fallenness as life in time is very different from conceiving it, in specifically historical terms, as life at this time, in 1922 or 1930. In the introduction to Baudelaire the misery of modernity is still raw; its particulars have not yet been wholly assimilated by theology's abstraction.

A month later, in October 1930, Ernest Rhys wrote to Eliot asking him whether he might like to introduce a translation of Pascal's *Pensées*. Eliot said that he would, largely because he could use the opportunity to oppose a recent and 'obnoxious' essay by Aldous Huxley.[23] Huxley had attacked Pascal for thinking life detestable, for his 'worship of death'.[24] Pascal's 'world-view and his way of life are a blasphemy and an ingratitude', he complained.[25] In contrast, Huxley advocated the worship of life, in all its imperfection: 'life on this planet is valuable in itself, without any reference to hypothetical higher worlds, eternities, future existences'.[26] Eliot more than once objected to valorising *life*, that 'insidious catchword',[27] and in his riposte to Huxley he praised Pascal's 'disillusioned analysis of human bondage' (*SE* 412). There is an empirical moment to this argument –

> his despair is in itself more terrible than Swift's, because our heart tells us that it corresponds exactly to the facts and cannot be dismissed as mental disease; but it was also a despair which was a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith

[22] T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 156.
[23] T. S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 5 vols, ed. Valerie Eliot, John Haffenden, and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber and Faber, 2009–2014), 5.351. Hereafter abbreviated as *L*.
[24] Aldous Huxley, *Do What You Will* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 275.
[25] Huxley, *Do What You Will*, pp. 273–4.
[26] Huxley, *Do What You Will*, p. 276.
[27] T. S. Eliot, 'The Function of a Literary Review', *Criterion* 1.4 (July 1923): 421. For further objections, see *SE* 478; and T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 12.47 (January 1933): 244–9 (p. 248).

– but because Pascal is not Baudelaire, those facts are not specifically modern. Rather, the facts are that the universe is divided between three 'discontinuous' orders: 'the order of nature, the order of mind, and the order of charity' (*SE* 416). 'The infinite distance between body and mind', Pascal explains, 'is a symbol of the infinitely more infinite distance between mind and charity; for charity is supernatural'.[28] There is no bridging those infinite distances, except through Jesus Christ. But for Huxley, this theory turns a convenient classification into 'a primordial fact of human psychology and cosmic structure', and it does so to disastrous effect.[29] It prostrates the human intellect before its own golden calf, before the 'images carved by ourselves out of the world'.[30] Not so, retorts Eliot: these are the facts, and they are facts 'about which the modern world would do well to think' (*SE* 416).[31]

The dialectic is impeccable. Pascal's analysis of the human condition has new value for and in Eliot's historical moment. Modernity's miserable particulars and theology's disillusioned abstractions are mutually implicated. That is why, in a final footnote to the essay, Eliot mentions that an 'important modern theory of discontinuity, suggested partly by Pascal, is sketched in the collected fragments of *Speculations* by T. E. Hulme' (*SE* 416, n. 2). When *Speculations* appeared in 1924, seven years after Hulme had been killed in the Great War, Eliot hailed its importance for the modern world: Hulme was 'the forerunner of a new attitude of mind, which should be the twentieth-century mind, if the twentieth century is to have a mind of its own'.[32] Hulme offers something more, therefore, than a simple return to the seventeenth century; something more was needed, in 1924, than the affirmation of eternal verities.

Of course, Hulme and Eliot frequently invoke the eternal or absolute. Eliot ends his introduction to Baudelaire with a ringing quotation in which Hulme declares that, in the light of absolute values, 'man himself is judged to be essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin' (*SE* 430). The passage Eliot quotes here first appeared in the *New Age* in January 1916, a salvo in the extended debates which, as we have seen, were conducted in that magazine by Hulme, Ramiro de Maeztu, Edwin

[28] Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, p. 234. [29] Huxley, *Do What You Will*, p. 230.
[30] Huxley, *Do What You Will*, p. 229.
[31] For further discussion of Eliot, Huxley, and Pascal, see Tim Kendall, '"Joy, Fire, Joy": Blaise Pascal's "Memorial" and the Visionary Explorations of T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and William Golding', *Literature & Theology* 11.3 (September 1997): 299–312.
[32] T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 2.7 (April 1924): 231–5 (p. 231). For Hulme's influence on Eliot and Pound, see Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 2007).

Muir, and A. R. Orage.[33] It is impossible to say whether Eliot read that particular issue upon publication, though he almost certainly did meet Hulme sometime that year.[34] In *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (1917), Eliot comments that the *New Age* 'has always been strongly opposed to metrical innovations',[35] and this suggests considerable familiarity with the magazine. Eliot then quotes an August 1915 article, in which Orage had praised Pound's 'The Seafarer' (1911).[36] But whether or not he had read Hulme by this point – more than ten years before he converted to Christianity – Eliot shared Hulme's conviction.[37] From October to December 1916, Eliot gave Extension lectures on modern French literature for Oxford University, and the syllabus for his lectures identifies, at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'a return to the ideals of classicism': 'The classicist point of view has been defined as essentially a belief in Original Sin – the necessity for austere discipline.'[38] Here, too, the return to classicism is also a new departure, for it represents a modern shift from theology to aesthetics, and indeed to every other facet of life.

As Ronald Schuchard observes, 'Hulme separates Original Sin from its formal theological moorings in Christian dogma and faith and uses it as his primary assumption for discussion and revaluation of literature, metaphysics, politics, and esthetics.'[39] For Eliot, too, radical imperfection conditioned art, philosophy, language, history, politics, and the most intimate personal relations. No realm of experience was exempt, and no abstraction successfully accounts for the particulars – neither the unstable opposition of classicism and romanticism, nor the theological doctrine of the Fall. *After Strange Gods* (1934) does insist on the importance

[33] Hulme, 'A Notebook' (27 January 1916), p. 305; T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1924), p. 47; and Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 444.

[34] Ronald Schuchard, 'Did Eliot Know Hulme? Final Answer', *Journal of Modern Literature* 27.1–2 (Autumn 2003): 63–9.

[35] T. S. Eliot, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), p. 17.

[36] R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 17.14 (5 August 1915): 332–3 (p. 332). By 1920, however, Eliot told Sydney Schiff that 'I never see the *New Age*' (*L* 1.500).

[37] Eliot's conversion is important, though he later described the process of conversion as imperceptibly gradual. See T. S. Eliot, 'Christianity and Communism', *Listener* 7.166 (16 March 1932): 382–3 (p. 383). Many critics similarly emphasise continuities across his career. 'Eliot's formal conversion to Christianity in 1927 did not make for any radical change in his poetry', writes A. David Moody, 'but enforced its natural development'. See A. David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 12.

[38] Ronald Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916–1919', *Review of English Studies* 25.98 (May 1974): 163–73 (p. 165).

[39] Ronald Schuchard, 'Eliot and Hulme in 1916: Toward a Revaluation of Eliot's Critical and Spiritual Development', *PMLA* 88.5 (October 1973): 1083–94 (p. 1089).

of original sin,[40] and Eliot does touch on the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius in his introduction to the *Pensées* (*SE* 413). But stray comments elsewhere intimate a conviction preceding or exceeding the theory. In 1919: 'Great simplicity' in poetry represents 'the triumph of feeling and thought over the natural sin of language' – and a rather Pelagian triumph at that.[41] In 1927: 'Thinking is painful and requires toil, and is a mark of human incompleteness.'[42] Finally, Eliot's historical sense often generates narratives of happy before and unhappy after: the 'disintegration of the intellect' after the thirteenth century;[43] the birth, 'some hundred and fifty years ago', of 'that deceitful goddess of Reason';[44] or a lone individual's lapse, 'Which an age of prudence can never retract' (line 404). Even the theological doctrine was, in some sense, subject to history. Modernity had compounded the Fall with denial or disbelief: 'with the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, [. . .] the human beings presented to us both in poetry and in prose fiction to-day [. . .] tend to becomes less and less real'.[45] This, then, is the contradiction between permanent condition and historical moment with which Eliot's poetry wrestles.

III

So the first readers of *The Waste Land* found there both dismay at life in general and dismay at the 'strange disease of modern life'.[46] Two examples will suffice. For Monroe, *The Waste Land* 'gives us the malaise of our time, its agony, its conviction of futility, its wild dance on an ash-heap before a clouded and distorted mirror'.[47] For Edmund Wilson, the poem says not only that life is 'sterile and futile', but also that 'men have tasted its sterility

[40] T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 42.

[41] [T. S. Eliot], 'The Post-Georgians', *Athenaeum* 4641 (11 April 1919): 171–2 (p. 171). Eliot's reference to the 'natural sin' of language has received considerable comment. See, especially, Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 6, 188, and 240, n. 10; Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 115–32; and John Xiros Cooper, '"What shall I cry?": *Four Quartets* and Language in a Fallen World', *Journal of the T. S. Eliot Society of Korea* 21.1 (Spring–Summer 2011): 1–16.

[42] T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 6.6 (December 1927): 481–3 (p. 482).

[43] T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p. 223.

[44] T. S. Eliot, 'Catholicism and International Order', *Christendom* 3.2 (September 1933): 171–84 (p. 179).

[45] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, p. 42.

[46] Matthew Arnold, 'The Scholar Gypsy', line 203, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965), pp. 331–44 (p. 342).

[47] Harriet Monroe, 'A Contrast', *Poetry* 21.6 (March 1923): 325–30 (p. 326).

and futility a thousand times before. T. S. Eliot, walking the desert of London, feels profoundly that the desert has always been there.'[48] If *The Waste Land* thus encourages us to think of wretchedness as age-old and brand-new, that contradiction is submerged in *The Hollow Men*, the Ariel poems (1927–1931), and *Ash-Wednesday*, because they do not seem to deal explicitly with the modern world. Though 'Animula' (1929) mentions the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and a man 'blown to pieces' (*PE* 1. 105–6), perhaps in the Great War, these poems otherwise feature no taxis or gramophones. At one level, their modernity retreats – or advances – into technique. Indeed, when Paul Elmer More introduced Eliot as Harvard's Professor of Poetry in 1932, he complained that the modernist prosody in *Ash-Wednesday* corrupts its religious material: 'an experience born of the Anglo-Catholic faith' is given 'a metrical form and freakishness of punctuation suitable for the presentation of life regarded as without form and void'.[49] More seems to have ignored or forgotten the objection Eliot made in a letter two years earlier: 'if there is one thing I do know, it is how to punctuate poetry' (*L* 5.361). Eliot certainly knew that, in poetry, experience and prosody are inseparable. A 'different metre is a different mode of thought', he later explained, since 'it is a different kind of *punctuation*'.[50] With two sections from *Ash-Wednesday* already in print, he argued in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* that 'verse, whatever else it may or may not be, is itself a system of *punctuation*; the usual marks of punctuation themselves are differently employed'.[51] Eliot had felt this way for some time. In July 1922 he wrote to John Quinn with concerns about the printing of *The Waste Land*: 'I only hope the printers are not allowed to bitch the punctuation and the spacing, as that is very important for the sense' (*L* 1.707). And in 1926, reflecting on the plan he had once had to write a book on Elizabethan dramatists, Eliot explained that the book would have explored 'the connexion between their versification and dramatic form and the underlying philosophy of the age' (*L* 3.140). That connection would be one way of understanding the disappearance of the taxis and the gramophones. Despite the fiddles and the unicorns, the roots of Eliot's religious verse are in its time, in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism and the wider decline of religious belief. Its doubt, its faith, and its enjambment are modern.

[48] Edmund Wilson, 'The Poetry of Drouth', *Dial* 73.6 (December 1922): 611–16 (p. 613).
[49] Quoted in B. A. Harries, 'The Rare Contact: A Correspondence between T. S. Eliot and P. E. More', *Theology* 75.621 (March 1972): 136–44 (p. 139).
[50] Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 129.
[51] T. S. Eliot, 'Questions of Prose', *Times Literary Supplement* 1391 (27 September 1928): 687.

So, too, are the rhymed quatrains in 'Whispers of Immortality' (1918) and the nursery rhyme at the end of *The Hollow Men*. It is easy to read these traditional forms as pastiche or satire. Thinking of prosody as symbol, it is easy to decide that such moments suggest a Fall in the history of poetry – some collapse of tradition or civilisation, whose forms can now only function ironically. The problem, then, is to decide how the opposition of permanent condition and historical moment affects the meaning of verse, whether traditional or experimental, regular or free. After all, lineation is ancient, and it seems strange to think that the poetic line itself might mean fallenness. Surely *The Waste Land* is no more wretched, in its movement from line to line, than the *Paradiso* or *Pearl*.

Take, for example, 'A Game of Chess'. The section begins with baroque blank verse and concludes with the heavily end-stopped conversation of a London pub. Between these comes a failed exchange between a woman and a man – a wife and her husband, perhaps, or two lovers. The blank verse and the pub conversation offer a dead form and the lifelessly prosaic, while the domestic scene seems modern because its verse is so ostentatiously irregular. This is partly Pound's doing, for it was Pound who scissored 'Do' from its original line – 'Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember' (*F* 12–13) – and pasted it above, a line unto itself like the lone 'But' (line 127). Possibly Pound shifted the word to complete a pentameter begun with what was then the previous line: 'Away the little light dead people' (*F* 12–13). In that case these two typographical lines would constitute one metrical line. Eliot subsequently employs this typographical convention in 'Death by Water' and 'What the Thunder Said', splitting pentameters across two lines of type and indenting the second: 'And the profit and loss. / A current under sea' (lines 314–15), 'To controlling hands / I sat upon the shore' (lines 422–3). Yet that logic does not explain 'Carrying' or 'But', the other two words in this passage of the typescript which form independent lines. Moreover, Pound objected on the previous leaf that Eliot's blank verse was 'too penty' (*F* 10–11): too much pentameter, or too monotonous a pentameter. Perhaps instead Pound thought to bring out a pattern of indented words or short phrases: 'Carrying', 'Do', 'I remember', and 'But'. Whatever Pound's thinking, the lines in the poem which Eliot published are prosodically independent; its lineation is free from the determination of metre or rhyme, and the result is certainly suggestive. Alone, 'Do' becomes an early, distant rumble of the thunder's 'DA' (line 400). Isolated, the auxiliary verb gains something of the force of an imperative. It mixes the active verb of the woman's last question – 'What is the wind doing?'

(line 119) – with the form of her rapid commands: 'Speak' (line 112), 'Think' (line 114). Enjambment pivots the question between suspicion and indignation, between '*Do* you know nothing?' and 'You know *nothing*?'

Lineation makes these conflicts and divisions, just as much as the woman and the man do, because lineation is an incessant differentiation or negation. The poetic line makes a limit which is then exceeded. 'Whatever is confined within the limits of a natural life', Hegel explains, 'cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death'.[52] Eliot's lines live and die in this constant uprooting; they give form to the movement of life and, in particular, of consciousness. A prosody is a mode of thought, as Eliot said, and his poetry makes incessant negation self-conscious. In November 1922, the same month in which *The Waste Land* appeared in the *Dial*, Robert Bridges argued that, since free-verse lines lack the constraints of metre and rhyme, 'they are conscious of their length; they pose with a sort of independence and self-sufficience'.[53] Having continually to decide when to begin each new line, free verse is newly self-conscious, or self-conscious in a new way. But because the pose of independence is shared, it exposes dependence, too; the lines live only because they limit or negate each other. In *The Waste Land*, this dialectic becomes especially explicit. In 1923 Virginia Woolf typeset the poem for the Hogarth Press with her 'own hands',[54] and the following year she wrote:

> As I sun myself upon the intense and ravishing beauty of one of his lines, and reflect that I must make a dizzy and dangerous leap to the next, and so on from line to line, like an acrobat flying precariously from bar to bar, I cry out, I confess, for the old decorums.[55]

Eliot's verse lives in the void between those bars, the void which differentiates one line from another. At the same time the line of verse lives in its internal scissions – as sound and sense, as independent unity and dependent part. And the line is in motion; it has an acrobat's momentum; it is subject to the relentless necessity of birth and death. For Hegel, the myth of the Fall in Genesis tells precisely of this self-conscious negation, spirit's

[52] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §80, p. 51.

[53] Robert Bridges, 'Humdrum and Harum-Scarum: A Paper on Free Verse', *London Mercury* 7.37 (November 1922): 54–63 (p. 58).

[54] Virginia Woolf, letter to Barbara Bagenal, 8 July [1923], in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols (London: Hogarth, 1975–1980), 3.56.

[55] Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 3.435.

'othering of itself'.[56] Eliot's 'Do' makes this othering manifest: here, othering is poetry's fallen way of doing.

In 'A Game of Chess', each of the woman's questions is also an imperative: her questions coerce and define. Each of the man's unvoiced answers is a denial, a refusal to engage. After Pound returned the typescript, Eliot changed the man's answer to the woman's question about the wind. Whereas the man had first thought to himself that the wind was 'Carrying / Away the little light dead people' (*F* 12–13), he now thinks 'Nothing again nothing' (line 120). The result is a strange chiasmus: 'doing?" / Nothing again nothing. / "Do' (lines 119–21). It is as if 'Nothing' were a present participle, like the 'Carrying' it replaced and the 'doing' which compels it – as if absence were an action, negation a presence. Nothing is the something which the wind does, he thinks. She then says that nothing is the thing he knows, the thing he sees, and the thing he remembers. But nothing is also his take on her repeated questions ('*again* nothing'), and so it is his take on her: she and her noises are nothing to him. In similar fashion, the line 'The wind under the door' (line 118) answers, ignores, and describes her question, 'What is that noise?' (line 117). Or, a little later, the lone 'But' counters 'nothing in your head' (line 126) and is countered in turn by an 'O' (line 128), a zero and an exclamation. The drive of these lines depends as much on the fact of the line, a thing determined by external and internal difference, as on the scene to which the lines refer, a scene between a man and a woman. The lines frequently refer to each other as lines; the verse turns on itself, self-consciously. Nothing is what the woman and the man do to each other and make of each other, in a wretched, mutual negation. And this is so because nothing is the something which lines do, limiting and dividing.

We can extend this condition of doing and nothing across 'A Game of Chess' if, interpreting prosody as symbol and attending to the story, we read the blank verse as irony and remember Lil's abortion. But the wretchedness of the waste land seems inseparable from the nature of verse, whether or not the lines are put to pastiche or narrate birth and death. This wretchedness is not restricted to the passages of free verse. Matching the metaphorical association of misery with particular lines, the metonymic association of lineation with the waste land is pervasive. Even in the passages of metrical and rhymed verse, every new line is a choice; every new pentameter is acutely conscious of its length, for in this poem, the regularity is always at risk. The exchange between the woman and the

[56] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §775, p. 468.

man thus begins with four forcefully end-stopped pentameters, and yet each line divides into discrete syntactic units, and each line flows into the next, linked by a syntactic or conceptual sequence:

> 'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
> 'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
> 'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
> 'I never know what you are thinking. Think.' (lines 111–14)

This is no less conditioned by negation than 'Is there nothing in your head?" / But / O O O O' (lines 126–8). The poetic line as such becomes a wretched way of doing and thinking. But though lineation means movement in time, it is a general condition. If a new line is miserable, there is nothing newly miserable about any given line. Neither 'But' nor 'Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing' nor a passage of the freest verse can be, in the progress of the poem or the history of poetry, the advent of a historical Fall. You cannot lay the blame on a particular line – not even on a poem's first enjambment. At the level of prosody, the wretchedness seems to be age-old after all.

Nevertheless, the meanings of lineation in Eliot's poetry are historically specific. They cannot be separated from early 1921, when Eliot began drafting *The Waste Land*, or from late 1922, when the poem appeared in the *Criterion* and in the *Dial*. Pure, ahistorical prosody is a phantom. The poetic line does not mean fallenness in 'Songs to Joannes' (1917) or *Spring and All* or *XLI Poems* (1925), and nor does free verse. Eliot's poetry puts the line under intense pressure, and it makes particular meanings with the line. It makes what Stephen Cushman calls a fiction of form.[57] There is certainly an abstract or universal moment to this. *The Waste Land* does say that lineation breeds and has always bred misery. But that was said at a particular time by this particular poetry, so self-consciously modern, and working on a particular set of materials. This poetry says misery with its lines only.

IV

Eliot's work appeared at a time in which debates about the nature of poetry, about the difference between verse and prose, and about the reasons

[57] See Stephen Cushman, *Fictions of Form in American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

for composing in lines were especially vigorous.[58] The rise of free verse and of prose poetry gave the discussion new urgency, though in many respects the arguments were old. One might think of Aristotle, or of Shelley, who warned that the 'distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error'.[59] Walter de la Mare called it an 'entrancing and perplexing problem', on which thinkers have pondered 'all but in vain'.[60] Eliot was both fascinated and frustrated by the unruly jostling of the terms *poetry, prose*, and *verse*. (*Poetical* and *prosaic* were even less well behaved.) In May 1917 he published an essay in the *New Statesman* entitled 'The Borderline of Prose'. The 'only absolute distinction to be drawn', he proposes, 'is that poetry is written in verse, and prose is written in prose'.[61] He thus cuts the Gordian knot by collapsing the distinction between poetry and verse. In 1922, Bridges went even further, suggesting that, since the only valid distinction is between verse and prose, it would be 'expedient to get rid of the word *Poetry*'.[62] Nevertheless the debates raged on. They are important even if and precisely because they tended to posit what Todorov calls a 'transcultural and transhistoric "poeticity"'.[63] The permanent criteria or absolute values put into play at any given moment in the history of poetry help to define that moment in particular.

In an unsigned review of Eliot's *Poems* (1919), Leonard Woolf ventriloquised the 'ordinary' reader who was, he said, certain to ask sceptically: 'Is this poetry?'[64] The rhymed quatrains in four of the volume's seven poems were, it seems, insufficient proof; even traditional verse-forms were no guarantee of poetry. Some other feature was essential. On 9 July 1920 an anonymous review of Flint's *Otherworld: Cadences* (1920) appeared in the

[58] For a broader discussion of the relation between prose and verse in modernism, see Beyers, *A History of Free Verse*, pp. 55–60.

[59] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 509–35 (p. 514). Aristotle distinguishes metre from mimesis and insists that only mimesis makes ποίησις, though ποίησις means something quite distinct from our word *poetry*. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447b, in *Aristotle: Poetics; Longinus: On the Sublime; Demetrius: On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, and W. Rhys Roberts, corrected edn, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 30–31.

[60] Walter de la Mare, *Poetry in Prose* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1935), p. 49.

[61] T. S. Eliot, 'The Borderline of Prose', *New Statesman* 9.215 (19 May 1917): 157–9 (p. 158).

[62] Bridges, 'Humdrum and Harum-Scarum', p. 54.

[63] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (1978), trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 60.

[64] [Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf], 'Is This Poetry?', *Athenaeum* 4651 (20 June 1919): 491. Leonard wrote the section of the review dealing with *Poems*, while Woolf wrote the section on John Middleton Murry. See Woolf's letter to Eliot, 28 July [1920], in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 2.437.

Athenaeum, complaining that Flint never attained 'the fever temperature of the intensest poetical emotion' because he used 'poetical forms that are practically indistinguishable from the prose of everyday statement'.[65] This reviewer would presumably have preferred the rhymed quatrains of Flint's earlier work, in which he had once 'brooded o'er pools in the forest'.[66] But in the preface to *Otherworld*, Flint had justified his new manner by explicitly separating poetry from verse, whatever the variety: 'There is only one art of writing, and that is the art of poetry [. . .] whether it is in the form we call prose, or in rhyme and metre, or in the unrhymed cadence in which the greater part of this book is written.'[67] Here, again, poetry means literary art or success. Flint and Eliot had both published pieces in the March 1920 issue of Monro's *Chapbook*, though in August Eliot would privately criticise Flint for saying 'a good many silly things about verse and prose' (*L* 1.497). Eliot probably read the review of *Otherworld*, too, for he had an essay in the same issue of the *Athenaeum*, and he may well have read Ford's defence of Flint in a letter to the editor the following week. In the grip of emotion, Ford retorts, poets do not 'retire to studies and compose in words jigsaw puzzles: they relieve their minds by rhythmical utterances', and these can very happily take the form of free verse.[68] The debate thus slips between diverse and competing criteria: poetry can consist in verse-form, rhythm, emotion, psychology, elevation above the everyday, or aesthetic achievement. In a condescending note appended to Ford's letter, the editor of the *Athenaeum* accuses Ford and Flint of 'the old Wordsworthian heresy', and so of being 'open to the old Coleridgian criticism', though that accusation shifts Ford's emphasis on verse-form to an emphasis on poetic diction.[69] No criterion for poetry was chief, and every criterion was in doubt, including even the use of lines.

In April 1921 another special issue of the *Chapbook*, entitled *Poetry in Prose*, featured contributions by Eliot, Aldington, and Frederic Manning. (Eliot was drafting 'A Game of Chess' at the time.) 'Verse is a primitive, a spontaneous and irrational mode of expression', Manning argues, which has found its proper modern development in prose.[70] Aldington urges that, since 'poetry has become desiccated and childish', the concept of poetry

[65] Anonymous, 'Poetic Temperatures', *Athenaeum* 4706 (9 July 1920): 46.
[66] F. S. Flint, *In the Net of the Stars* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1909), p. 20.
[67] F. S. Flint, *Otherworld: Cadences* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1920), p. v.
[68] Ford Madox Ford, 'Rhyme and Metre or Vers Libre', *Athenaeum* 4707 (16 July 1920): 93–4 (p. 93). Eliot's essay 'The Perfect Critic' appeared in two parts, in the issues for 9 July and 23 July.
[69] Ford, 'Rhyme and Metre or Vers Libre', p. 94.
[70] Frederic Manning, 'Poetry in Prose', *Chapbook* 22 (April 1921): 10–15 (p. 14).

must be renewed: 'we must seek our poetry among the prose poets'.[71] A month later, John Middleton Murry dismissed this expansive use of the term *poetry*: it is simply 'confusing', he complains, to make *poetry* mean any form of 'creative literature'.[72] Eliot disagreed with Aldington, too, though this time he rejects 'the identification of poetry with verse', for 'good poetry is obviously something else besides good verse; and good verse may be very indifferent poetry'.[73] But that did not solve matters either. Two months later Eliot quips: 'What is man to decide what poetry is?' (*SE* 315).

Part of the trouble is the overlapping of broad and often vague aesthetic categories and values with seemingly concrete matters of technique. Whatever their differences, Eliot shared with Ford, Bridges, Williams, and Marianne Moore a conviction that technique is never a superficial or secondary concern. In 1926 he named 'Versification and the history of English Prosody' as the only subject in which he was expert (*L* 3.142). He gave it minute attention, and he protested when he thought others had neglected it. He liked Sitwell's 'peculiar way of seeing things', but condemned her 'technique, which is insufficient'.[74] In 'The Borderline of Prose' he remarks archly that 'poetry which looks like prose, and prose which sounds like poetry, are assured of a certain degree of odium and success'.[75] Eliot's verbs are telling, since they decline to decide whether verse is essentially sonic or visual. Poetry may *look* like prose, for instance, because it takes the form of paragraphs or unusually long lines: it looks like prose because of its appearance on the page. (Alternatively, poetry might look or seem like prose because it mentions railway stations.) The question of the sonic and the visual was a point of considerable dispute. Matters of technique proved far from concrete after all. To take but two examples, both Flint in the preface to *Otherworld* and John Gould Fletcher in his preface to *Irradiations: Sand and Spray* (1915) insisted that poetry was something more than 'a certain way of printing, with a capital letter at the beginning of each line'.[76] Irregular forms exacerbated the problem. Orage criticised free verse because its 'mechanical devices' were 'largely typographical',[77] while Aldington praised Paul Fort for recognising that,

[71] Richard Aldington, 'A Note on Poetry in Prose', *Chapbook* 22 (April 1921): 16–24 (p. 19).
[72] John Middleton Murry, 'A Matter of Form', *Nation & The Athenaeum* (28 May 1921): 328–9 (p. 328).
[73] T. S. Eliot, 'Prose and Verse', *Chapbook* 22 (April 1921): 3–10 (p. 3).
[74] T. S. Eliot, 'London Letter', *Dial* 70.4 (April 1921): 448–53 (p. 452).
[75] Eliot, 'The Borderline of Prose', p. 158.
[76] John Gould Fletcher, *Irradiations: Sand and Spray* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), p. x. See, also, Flint, *Otherworld*, p. xii.
[77] R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 20.11 (11 January 1917): 254–5 (p. 255).

since most poetry is merely 'a matter of typography', he could incorporate poetic rhythms into his prose poetry.[78] For Monro, on the other hand, Flint's free-verse rhythm is, like the rhythms of metrical verse, 'so definite that it seems fully to warrant the typographical device of the division into lines'.[79] For Monro, visual form serves sonic form. 'Line-arrangement is merely musical arrangement', explained Oppenheim, 'and the end of a line denotes a pause'.[80] Yet Eliot's line-breaks are often inaudible. In recorded readings of *The Waste Land* he never pauses between 'breeding' and 'Lilacs', or between 'mixing' and 'Memory'; he pauses with the commas and the full stop. On 26 February 1922, soon after he had finished drafting the poem, he told a prospective publisher that it consists of 435 lines which, 'with certain spacings essential to the sense', amount to '475 book lines' (*L* 1.638). So when we consider the meaning of the poetic line in Eliot's work, and when we speak of a tension between sound and sense, we also mean a tension between sense and vision. We mean, most importantly, a limit of some form.

A great deal of modernist writing experimented with the interplay of sound and vision, and with the borderline between verse and prose. In the first issue of *Seven Arts*, Oppenheim proposed that free verse was 'an attempt to synthesize the values of both prose and classic poetry, producing a third medium, a child which resembles both parents, but is neither'.[81] Having measured performances of verse and prose by conducting extensive experiments in sound-photography, William Morrison Patterson disagreed. In *The Rhythm of Prose* (1916) he argues that there can be no third genre, only 'an unstable compound', 'a jumping back and forth from one side of the fence to the other'.[82] In the introduction to his 1930 translation of Saint-John Perse's *Anabase* (1924), Eliot offered yet another configuration of these refractory terms. 'Poetry may occur', he suggests, 'at any point along a line of which the formal limits are "verse" and "prose"'.[83] Perse's writing is itself difficult to locate on that

[78] Richard Aldington, 'The Poetry of Paul Fort', *Little Review* 2.2 (April 1915): 8–11 (pp. 9–10).

[79] Harold Monro, 'The Imagists Discussed', *Egoist* 2.5 (1 May 1915): 77–80 (p. 80). For further contemporary thinking on this issue, see Bliss Perry, *A Study of Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), pp. 205–6; Paull Franklin Baum, *The Principles of English Versification* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), pp. 152–3; and J. N. N., 'Visual Poetry', *Poetry* 31.6 (March 1928): 334–8.

[80] James Oppenheim, '"Lazy" Verse', *Seven Arts* 1.1 (November 1916): 66–72 (p. 72).

[81] Oppenheim, '"Lazy" Verse', p. 70.

[82] William Morrison Patterson, *The Rhythm of Prose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), pp. 77–8. Though she questioned Patterson's theory of *vers libre*, Monroe reviewed his book favourably in 'Dr. Patterson on Rhythm', *Poetry* 12.1 (April 1918): 30–36.

[83] Saint-John Perse, *Anabasis*, trans. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), p. 9.

continuum. *Anabase* looks like prose, Eliot explains, but its 'system of stresses and pauses, which is partially exhibited by the punctuation and spacing, is that of poetry and not of prose'. *Anabase* wavers somewhere between the line and the paragraph, for its paragraphs, though they often contain multiple sentences and spill on for many lines of justified type, are sometimes enjambed:

> Such is the way of the world and I have nothing but good to say of it. – Foundation of the City. Stone and bronze. Thorn fires at dawn
> bared these great
> green stones and viscid like the bases of temples, of latrines,
> and the mariner at sea whom our smoke reached saw that the earth to the summit had changed its form (great turf-burnings seen afar and these operations of channelling the living waters on the mountains).[84]

By the 1930s Eliot was clearly interested in exploiting that continuum himself. 'Difficulties of a Statesman' (1931) and the choruses from *The Rock* (1934) feature lines sometimes so long as to look like prose paragraphs, while 'Triumphal March' (1931) incorporates passages of found prose. Yet even the continuum assumes fixed poles, those 'formal limits'. And when Eliot sternly separates poetry from prose in 'The Borderline of Prose', the real villain is the odious prose poem. 'The prose poem is an aberration which is only justified by absolute success', he declared in 1919.[85] The fact that Eliot published only one prose poem, 'Hysteria' (1917), and that he declined to publish at least two further prose poems, 'Introspection' and 'The Engine' (*PE* 1.273–4), suggests that absolute success proved elusive. Though Eliot admires Aldington's prose poems, nevertheless, he says, they 'hesitate between two media'.[86] The thing to remember, Eliot adds, is that both prose and verse have their proper 'arbitrariness': 'whichever we are writing, there are moments when we simply have to conform to the limitations of the medium we have chosen'. (Prose, too, is a choice.) The prose poem has forgotten those limits.

What, then, is the significance of a limit? In June 1921, having already drafted 'The Burial of the Dead' and 'A Game of Chess', Eliot argued that limitation is 'a necessary condition of all art'.[87] To balance 'the expression

[84] Perse, *Anabasis*, p. 33. A slightly emended text of this passage appears in *PE* 1.95.
[85] [Eliot], 'The Post-Georgians', p. 171. [86] Eliot, 'The Borderline of Prose', p. 158.
[87] T. S. Eliot, 'London Letter', *Dial* 71.2 (August 1921): 213–17 (p. 214). Rainey dates the article to mid-June (Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land*, p. 238, n. 1).

of life', art needs 'the counter-thrust of strict limitations of form'.[88] This sounds like the discipline of a specific verse-form – the villanelle, say – but the principle goes deeper than that. Modernism was amongst other things a project to think through the limitation or the arbitrariness of prosody in general and of the line in particular. One response was to dismiss free verse, or failed free verse, for being merely arbitrary. Lowell warns that 'when it is bad it is not *vers libre* at all, but prose cut into arbitrary lines'.[89] Lineation may thus be no more than a 'surface device' signalling literary 'elevation', a ruse to persuade the reader that this is indeed poetry; lineation may seek to smuggle in value or distinction.[90] Alternatively, rhymed or metrical verse may be accused of toying with artificial jigsaw puzzles. Bodenheim called traditional prosody a merely 'decorative straight-jacket'.[91] Both arguments imply that successful prosody is motivated: it must be metaphorical or symbolic, punctuate sense or generate momentum, mimic meaning or make meaning. The poet 'should never let us question for a moment that his form is the inevitable form for his content'.[92] Without real motivation, prosody is a dry husk.

But in the 1920s Eliot made the husk sing. The very arbitrariness of verse is complicit in the waste and wretchedness. In April 1921 Eliot refers to 'the barrier of verse which must at the same time be affirmed and diminished'.[93] That barrier is particular and universal: the way each line ends and the need for every line to end. The poetic line disappears in the meanings of particular lines, only to reappear as a universal condition of experience. And yet, 'from any other point of view than that of art', versification is 'a superfluity'. By imposing an arbitrary limit on language, Eliot says, versification represents a 'concession to the desire for "play"', and his scare quotes make it clear that this play is a serious affair. The exercise of freedom requires constraint, for unconstrained play would have nothing to play with or against. That is why Eliot insists, famously, that 'No *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job.'[94] In 'Reflections on *vers libre*' his argument depends on the presence, however ghostly, of metre: 'freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial

[88] Eliot, 'London Letter' (August 1921), pp. 214–15.
[89] Amy Lowell, *Poetry and Poets: Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 70.
[90] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Linear Fallacy', *Georgia Review* 35.4 (Winter 1981): 855–69 (p. 861).
[91] Maxwell Bodenheim, 'The Decorative Straight-Jacket: Rhymed Verse', *Little Review* 1.9 (December 1914): 22–3.
[92] Eliot, 'The Borderline of Prose', p. 158.
[93] Eliot, 'Prose and Verse', p. 9.
[94] Pound quotes Eliot's remark in his review of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), in *Poetry* 10.5 (August 1917): 264–71 (p. 269). It reappears in 'A Retrospect' (1918), in Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 12.

limitation'.[95] But because the ghost can come and go, 'in moments of the first intensity' a poem can escape that artificial limitation. By the time of *The Waste Land* the artificial limitation is verse itself, inescapable.

The idea of a limit is important because it gives prosody philosophical, spiritual, and political significance. In *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, a pamphlet published in 1925, Graves said that in order to 'write rhyme correctly one must give that general sense of free-will within predestination which is a comfort to many' – and the same may be said for writing lines.[96] Eliot read Graves's pamphlet with interest, and contemplated a reply (*L* 2.710). He had been concerned with the notion of free will from as early as 1914, when he wrote a university paper on causality (*PE* 1.1164), and twenty years later the notion was central to his thinking: 'The ultimate meaning of liberty is that each individual should be free to determine his own eternal salvation or damnation.'[97] In the secular sphere, too, 'the problem of political liberty comes eventually to the general problem of free will'. Prosody is a poetic form of this freedom, precisely because it involves a limitation or constraint. Art always requires 'something compulsory', Kant argues: 'a mechanism, without which the spirit, which must be free in the art and which alone animates the work, would have no body at all and would entirely evaporate (e.g., in the art of poetry, correctness and richness of diction as well as prosody and meter)'.[98] The arbitrariness of verse guarantees the *liberum arbitrium*. The free spirit is responsible, for only spirit can be hostile or wretched, can sin or despair.

Take the embodied spirit of *Ash-Wednesday*:

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn
> Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
> I no longer strive to strive towards such things
> (Why should the agèd eagle stretch its wings?)
> Why should I mourn
> The vanished power of the usual reign? (*PE* 1.87)

[95] Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 187.
[96] Robert Graves, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry: A Political Analogy* (London: Hogarth, 1925), p. 35.
[97] T. S. Eliot, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* 16.3 (19 January 1935): 88–90 (p. 90).
[98] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §43, p. 183.

One way to read the body of such lines is to attend to the incorporation of other men's materials: quotations, images, metres. Translation and adaptation do involve compromise between freedom and constraint. Eliot's speaker has to reckon with the peculiarities of English when translating Cavalcanti's Italian, though he does not have to translate it this way. Dante Gabriel Rossetti offers 'Because I think not ever to return', but by choosing *again*, rather than *ever*, Eliot can have the adverb at the end of the line and still maintain an iambic pentameter.[99] (Rossetti's 'ever' captures the Italian 'giammai' as well as or better than Eliot's 'again', but then fidelity to Cavalcanti is not the issue here)[100]. So, too, Eliot's speaker has to substitute 'gift' for Shakespeare's 'art', since he is concerned with what a man cannot change, with what has been given or determined. At the same time, his art chooses 'gift' and he artfully chooses not to change himself.

Yet translation and adaptation are not compulsory, even in Eliot's poetry. Nor is metre, for though a pentameter ghost lurks here, it does not dictate where to end the line. The compulsory body of *Ash-Wednesday* is the technique of lineation. Each new line is both necessary and deliberate, an act with semantic and ethical consequences. When the speaker 'turn[s]' from 'again' to 'Because' he claims inexorable logic and disclaims responsibility. How can I hope to turn again when I find I do not even hope? When the speaker then turns from 'hope' to 'Because' he distinguishes hope in general from a specific hope. What would hope matter if it were not hoping to turn? The object towards which one might turn or turn again, or for which one might hope, remains unnamed. One might turn to God or one might turn to the usual imperfect satisfactions. In 1926 Eliot condemned modern literature for placing its faith in earthly objects, which would inevitably disappoint: 'whether you seek the Absolute in marriage, adultery or debauchery, it is all one – you are seeking in the wrong place'.[101] But there is surely small virtue in rejecting those satisfactions, 'such things', when compelled by logical necessity ('Because') and by a self which is given rather than chosen ('Because I'). In this context, even 'I no longer strive to strive' suggests a self discovered as though it were someone else, a self objectively determined. And yet a free spirit animates the selection and expression of what has been given. Poetry is responsible, here, because the given is given as lines, each of which represents a choice. The speaker is not

[99] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems and Translations, 1850–1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 414.

[100] Guido Cavalcanti, *The Selected Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti: A Critical English Edition*, ed. and trans. Simon West (Leicester: Troubador, 2009), p. 66.

[101] Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 115.

a stable identity whom we can imagine existing prior to the poem; such as he is, the speaker is made by these lines, which are riven with difference. Each 'Because' is new; each 'hope' is new. Syntactical relations rapidly become contradictory, as lines function subordinately and in apposition. The fourth line, for instance, names both the speaker's current state and the state for which he does not hope. Turning again may mean turning to the same object or a new object; turning may be a unique event or an ongoing process; turning may signify heresy or repentance. The difficulty is not to solve each aporia, but to understand how meaning and sin inhere in verse (*vertere*, to turn).

As in *The Waste Land*, the lineation of *Ash-Wednesday* is thus a movement of negation. The guilty spirit could not animate the speaker or the poem without the body of verse, and without guilt there can be no redemption. 'I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity', Eliot explained soon after *Ash-Wednesday* was published, 'than feel that this was only a children's game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes in the end' (*L* 5.210). Eliot's Baudelaire finds a form of salvation in damnation. The hope of *Ash-Wednesday* is that sin may involve repentance, for there is no escape, here, from the sin of poetry. 'Can sinful pride be driven out / Only by more sinful?', cries Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935).[102] 'Can I neither act nor suffer / Without perdition?' *Ash-Wednesday* commits and confesses verse.

V

It is tempting to link the limitation of verse with an inevitable imperfection and guilt. For Hulme, after all, the meaning of original sin is precisely 'that a man is by nature bad or limited'.[103] Classicism is therefore the proper aesthetic of those who, recognising our fallenness, willingly submit themselves to limits. It is the poetics of ascesis. As the syllabus for Eliot's Extension lectures explains, submission to monarch or state is classicism's political mode, submission to discipline and authority its religious mode.[104] 'The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of

[102] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 255.

[103] Hulme, 'The Translator's Preface to Sorel's "Reflections on Violence"', p. 570; Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 250 (slightly altered). The syllabus for Eliot's 1916 Extension lectures recommends Hulme's translation of *Reflections on Violence* (Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as Extension Lecturer', p. 168).

[104] Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as Extension Lecturer', p. 165.

man', Hulme announced before the war.[105] Like a line in the sand, the human limit speaks of the ideal or divine beyond. As the inescapable horizon of *Ash-Wednesday*, the poetic line leaves space for grace, for an Absolute beyond the finite poem and its finite world. But when it becomes a theory of prosody, the schema of classicism and romanticism breaks down. Shelley is as subject to the arbitrariness of verse as Dryden; *Ash-Wednesday* and 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' (1918) are equally guilty. Eliot's work says that the technique of lineation goes deeper than literary, political, or religious affiliations.

The temptation is thus to think of the meanings of the limit of verse, like 'the natural sin of language', as being always already with us. That would be to reduce prosody to a corollary of fallenness: poetry is wretched because it is written by wretched people in a wretched world. As a human faculty, 'art ends always by revealing in some way the weaknesses of man', writes Jacques Maritain.[106] Eliot does sometimes suggest this in his later writings. At one point he likens poetry to Virgil: noble but unredeemed. Poetry reveals a credible order in ordinary reality and then, like Dante, we 'proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther'.[107] And yet precisely when *Ash-Wednesday* turns to envision regions beyond this world, the poem returns to the present participle and immediate line-break, that symbol of sublunary poetry first assayed in *The Waste Land*.

Eliot had a particular interest in writers who borrowed from their own earlier works, and he discussed such borrowings in a series of essays in 1928, just as the first sections of *Ash-Wednesday* were appearing in periodicals.[108] The poem's fourth section overtly declines the form of 'breeding / Lilacs', since it allows the present participles 'Going' and 'Talking' to begin new lines rather than to end them (*PE* 1.92). Then, later in the section, the old technique seems to be redeemed:

> The new years walk, restoring
> Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
> With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem

[105] Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', in *The Collected Writings*, pp. 59–73 (p. 62). Csengeri thinks 'Romanticism and Classicism' was probably delivered as a lecture in London on 15 July 1912 (Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 59). It was first published in *Speculations*.

[106] Jacques Maritain, 'Poetry and Religion', trans. F. S. Flint, *Criterion* 5.1 (January 1927): 7–22 (p. 10).

[107] Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 87.

[108] See T. S. Eliot, 'John Webster', *Times Literary Supplement* 1356 (26 January 1928): 59; T. S. Eliot, 'Poets' Borrowings', *Times Literary Supplement* 1366 (5 April 1928): 255; and T. S. Eliot, review of *The Complete Works of John Webster*, ed. F. L. Lucas, *Criterion* 7.4 (June 1928): 443–6 (p. 444).

> The time. Redeem
> The unread vision in the higher dream
> While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

Eliot needs to describe redemption in prosodic terms, because the wretchedness has been prosodic. At one level, ancient rhymes figure the 'primordial consonance' of Eden.[109] At another level, hackneyed rhymes like *tears* and *years* figure sins to be forgiven. But rhyme is sporadic, the line ubiquitous. Verse restores rhyme, we are told, and enjambment identifies restoration with the movement of verse. Yet this verse, as it moves, means negation. Shaped by that enjambment, the bright cloud of tears is both a means and an obstacle to restoration. The 'tears' and 'the years' are apposed and opposed, as are the 'new years' and 'the years'. When 'Redeem / The time' is read metaphorically, the arrival of each 'new verse', each line, redeems the temporality of verse as such, achieving a 'new verse', a new poetry. But the imperative reserves redemption for a future beyond the poem, condemning verse to another unredeemed line: 'The time. Redeem'. In an act of self-conscious othering, both the time to which that line refers and the line as a whole are objects of the first 'Redeem'. The section then ends, after an Edenic vision, with the line 'And after this our exile'. In the Salve Regina, 'this' modifies the phrase 'our exile': 'and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus'. By cutting the prayer, by making a new verse out of the religious verse, Eliot implies that 'this' refers to the vision of Eden, to the whispers of the yew tree in the previous line, or to the previous line itself, as a line. The section's final line narrates as a single event the Fall that has been happening all along.

The ironies of 'a new verse' are clear enough. Coupled with the previous line's dangling present participle, the phrase's own verse or line recycles *The Waste Land*. This section of *Ash-Wednesday* remakes Baudelaire, the *Purgatorio*, St Paul, Lancelot Andrewes, and other sources.[110] One might think as well of Kreymborg's *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse*, in which Eliot first published 'Portrait of a Lady' in September 1915. The phrase 'new verse' was common, and could be applied to quite different works or movements. It could mean the recent or the radically experimental. Edward Thomas, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, and others appeared in a 1918 collection called *Twelve Poets:*

[109] Cooper, '"What shall I cry?"', p. 6.
[110] See B. C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to The Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp. 116–17.

A Miscellany of New Verse. In *A Study of Poetry* (1920) the critic Bliss Perry, who taught at Harvard while Eliot was a student there, instead used 'the New Verse' as a name for free verse.[111] When Eliot reviewed *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917), edited by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, he paid particular attention to the title, wondering 'whether a whole generation can arise together and insurrect'.[112] Eliot was himself implicated in that insurrection, for the anthology reprinted 'Portrait of a Lady'. In *Ash-Wednesday* 'new verse' certainly invokes modernism – what Pound called 'our modern experiment', the project to make it new – but it does so uneasily.[113] The phrase signifies the new verse of 1930 and any new verse, much as 'The time' signifies modernity in particular and the present in general. Here, again, we are caught between a historical moment and a permanent condition. *Ash-Wednesday* seeks to recuperate modernism as a force for restoration, rather than for rupture or rebellion, and to recuperate history under the aegis of eternity: the indifferently new. In each case recuperation contradicts the wretchedness of these particular lines.

This is the seed of Eliot's late poetics, and it is important because it throws *The Waste Land* in relief. *Ash-Wednesday* can afford its contradictions because the poem's imagery and its allusions intimate a reconciliation, a redemption possible only beyond poetry and its world, which is this world only. This is the poetics Eliot would later elaborate in *Four Quartets* (1935–1942) and the plays. Poetry offers no less and no more than a 'humble shadow or analogy of the Incarnation, whereby the human is taken up into the divine'.[114] This is not a utopian poetics. Eliot was certain that I. A. Richards was wrong to look to poetry to save us, as Arnold had been wrong before him.[115] In religious terms, poetry would be wrong to attempt real reconciliation, for that would be a Pelagian consummation. It would usurp God's grace, 'without which human operations are vain'.[116] In a lecture on 'The Modern Mind' (1933) Eliot quotes Maritain: 'It is a deadly error to expect poetry to provide the supersubstantial nourishment

[111] Perry, *A Study of Poetry*, p. 220.
[112] T. S. Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', *Egoist* 4.10 (November 1917): 151.
[113] Ezra Pound, letter to Felix E. Schelling, 9 July 1922, in Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 180. Pound's *Make It New* was published in 1934.
[114] T. S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', *Adam International Review* 17.200 (November 1949): 10–16 (p. 12). Eliot anticipates the metaphor of Incarnation in his Clark Lectures (Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 54) and in his preface to *Collected Poems of Harry Crosby*, by Harry Crosby, 4 vols (Paris: Black Sun, 1931), vol. 2: *Transit of Venus*, pp. i–ix (p. viii).
[115] See T. S. Eliot, 'Literature, Science, and Dogma', *Dial* 82.3 (March 1927): 239–43 (p. 243).
[116] T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 96.

of man.'[117] There is a tension, here, between spirit's need for God, the good, the ideal, or the Absolute, and the modern artwork's need for autonomy, its bid for independence from religious or political schemas and traditions. 'It is the function of a literary review', Eliot wrote in the *Criterion*, 'to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature, and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature [. . .] to all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life'.[118] And because poetry maintains those relations, because it is a part of the world from which it stands apart, poetry would be wrong to pretend to reconciliation when the world remains wretched. Even in secular terms, the trouble is with partial, premature, or unjustified reconciliation. The autonomy of art would then mean culpable indifference.

The question remains: To what kind of reconciliation might poetry pretend in the first place? We tend to imagine redemption as order or unity. We turn to Tiresias, uniting all the inhabitants of the waste land, or we cite Eliot's mythical method, 'giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'.[119] We think of Bradley's Absolute, gathering together the world's finite centres or windowless monads.[120] We look to tradition, to an ideal order of existing monuments, continually adjusting itself to the new works of the individual talent (*SE* 15). We dream of shoring fragments, selecting and arranging the ruins of civilisations. We urge the readers of *The Waste Land* to 'bracket off the historical specificity of the various styles, and think instead about the mythical substratum uniting them all'.[121] Many of the poem's commentators have in this way 'overlooked its broken images in search of the totality it might have been'.[122] In each case life's miserable particulars are redeemed by a pattern or ideal. The soul longs for reconciliation with God; the fragment longs to regain completion lost. But for what other world or blissful condition does the poetic line long?

[117] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 124. Cf. Maritain, 'Poetry and Religion', p. 20.

[118] Eliot, 'The Function of a Literary Review', p. 421. For a recent account of Eliot's theory of impersonality in terms of aesthetic autonomy, see Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy*, pp. 68–109.

[119] T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *Dial* 75.5 (November 1923): 480–83 (p. 483).

[120] For Eliot's early interest in Bradley and Leibniz, see T. S. Eliot, 'The Development of Leibniz's Monadism', *Monist* 26.4 (October 1916): 534–56; and T. S. Eliot, 'Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers', *Monist* 26.4 (October 1916): 566–76.

[121] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996), p. 225.

[122] Maud Ellmann, 'Eliot's Abjection', in John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, eds, *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 178–200 (p. 179).

It is important that the line is not merely a form of fragment or finite centre. Even in Eliot's most explicitly broken passages, the line has a life of its own:

> London Bridge is falling down falling down
>
> *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*
> *Quando fiam uti chelidon*—O swallow swallow
> *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
> These fragments I have shored against my ruins
> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. (lines 426–32)

In the third and the sixth of these lines, clearly, the line and the fragment do not coincide. The hemistich from the *Pervigilium Veneris*, expressing the wish to be like a swallow, belongs well enough with the invocation of a swallow in English, or with allusions to Swinburne and Tennyson (*PE* 1.705–6). The hemistich from *The Spanish Tragedy* belongs with the play's (abbreviated) subtitle: *Hieronymo Is Mad Againe*. And this logic of belonging is grounded in the integrity of the line as an independent unit. The quotations from Dante and Nerval have lines to themselves, but they are already complete lines in the *Purgatorio* and 'El Desdichado' (1853). Conversely, the first line actively refuses the nursery rhyme's customary lineation, a lineation which would have offered another metaphor for enjambment: falling down. (In fact, why not 'falling / down'? That would have been emphatic.) As it happens, most printed versions of 'London Bridge' available before 1922 do not have the triple repetition of 'falling down', or even the word 'falling'.[123] Moreover, the printed lineation of nursery rhymes is secondary. As Derek Attridge reminds us, a nursery rhyme 'preserves its strong rhythm through a number of visual permutations. Its words are transmitted orally, and lodged in the brain on the basis of its memorable rhythmic form.'[124] Eliot's poem fixes that oral rhythm with a visual limit, establishing its own prosodic unit; it makes a new verse of the old rhyme. Finally, whatever the sources of particular lines, the passage leads us to identify line and fragment because it seems to refuse enjambment, and yet you can only refuse what has been offered. Agamben

[123] See, for instance, William A. Wheeler, ed., *Mother Goose's Melodies* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1878), pp. 75–6 (p. 75): 'London bridge is broken down, / Dance o'er my lady Lee; / London bridge is broken down, / With a gay lady.' See, also, James Orchard Halliwell, *The Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: Frederick Warne, 1886), pp. 98–9.

[124] Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 120.

calls this zero enjambment, which is not at all the same thing as prose.[125] The possibility of enjambment makes a difference.

When Eliot drafted these lines, they were more heavily end-stopped, for full stops followed *affina*, 'swallow', and 'ruins' (*F* 80–81). The lines also appeared in a different order: Hieronymo came after Dante, and the thunder came after the ruins. Eliot then added the line about swallows and shifted Hieronymo, before removing most of the punctuation. So the movement from specific line to specific line took time to achieve, and the result is far from 'mere scraps, related by simple juxtaposition'.[126] Though each line looks discrete, senses and sounds stride from line to line. Here, too, lineation means negation. While the nursery rhyme suggests a metaphor for the falling of line after line, *Poi s'ascose* narrates the moment after London Bridge has fallen down, or after the act of saying the bridge is falling. It is as though the child in the nursery, the song she sings, and the bridge itself were to disappear into the refining fire. (The Italian verb makes no distinction between person and thing.) And yet that is equally to emphasise the difference between sinful souls and lifeless stones. So, too, the *fi* in *affina* compels *fiam* and, since the Italian verb is indicative and the Latin subjunctive, it thus links purification with hope or desire. Unfulfilled desire undoes the process of fulfilment, and we go backwards, chronologically, from Italian to Latin. The swallow is the prince in the tower, like the sweet birds who once sang in bare ruined choirs, and the prince is the 'I' who has shored fragments about swallows. (In Nerval's poem, the speaker describes himself as 'Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie'.) 'These fragments' rephrases *la tour abolie*, and the ruined tower constitutes the ruins against which those fragments have been shored. At last the poem turns, in search of healing sanity, from Hieronymo's madness to 'Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata', and Hieronymo is mad 'againe' when he turns again, with another new line, to the thunder's mad or maddening imperatives.

Can there be redemption for this? For some readers, the poem's 'web of reference appears as nothing less than an alternative civil society'.[127] In the face of social breakdown, its 'quotations are citizens in an ideal community'. But whatever order is given to the shored fragments is given through their

[125] Giorgio Agamben, *The Idea of Prose* (1985), trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 39.

[126] C. D. Blanton, *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 43.

[127] Michael Levenson, 'Does *The Waste Land* Have a Politics?', *Modernism/modernity* 6.3 (September 1999): 1–13 (p. 11).

incorporation as verse, and that verse generates antagonisms. Any reconciliation of the fragment is undone at the level of the line. Eliot's poetry blames itself for the making of lines, for the movement of negation and the perpetuation of exile. The free spirit actively chooses its *misère*. Fragments may recall lost wholes, and we may look to build with them new wholes, but from its birth the line is determined by internal and external difference.

In *The Waste Land*, therefore, the poetic line intimates no reconciliation – unless the final line does, for a poem's final line cannot undo or be undone by a successor. Indeed, 'if poetry is defined precisely by the possibility of enjambment, it follows that the last verse of a poem is not a verse'.[128] In the final line of a poem – perhaps even when it lacks a full stop – prosody and syntax seem to coincide at last: sound and sense should happily coalesce. That is why Eliot is so often so pitiless towards his last lines. The correspondence of two tripartite lines at the end of *The Waste Land* is especially striking. The thunder's instructions have already been explicated, within the poem, while 'Shantih shantih shantih' (line 433) requires a note, and the note abandons explication: '"The Peace which passeth understanding" is a feeble translation of the content of this word' (*PE* 1.77). To separate the word from its content in this way is to deny the coincidence of sound and sense promised by a final line, yet that content can only be conveyed by chanting this word. 'Shantih shantih shantih' is torn between peace and exhaustion; the line is a capstone and another tumbled ruin. The words are magical and echolalic, so that sense saturates sound and sound is desiccated.

VI

Because Eliot's poetic line turns from redemption, we need finally to consider what this means for the unredeemed world which the poem represents and in which it lives. We need to think through the social and political meanings of lineation. 'Articulations of poetic technique in modernist poetics are politically sensitive at the most micro-logical level.'[129] Especially in America, free verse was frequently associated with political freedoms, whether in terms of democracy or individualism.[130] But that was not Eliot's understanding.

[128] Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, p. 112.

[129] Drew Milne, 'Politics and Modernist Poetics', in Peter Middleton and Nicky Marsh, eds, *Teaching Modernist Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 25–44 (p. 32).

[130] See Mark Whalan, 'Freeloading in Hobohemia: The Politics of Free Verse in American World War I Periodical Culture', *Modernism/modernity* 21.3 (September 2014): 665–88.

Consider the society of the hollow men, and the verse they speak. Four of the five sections of *The Hollow Men* give voice to a collective – 'We are the hollow men' (*PE* 1.81) – and one section gives voice to an individual: 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams'. But the individual voice is also a general lyric subject, and the collective voice of the final section is ventriloquised: *Here we go round the prickly pear* (*PE* 1.83). The collectivity often seems forced or inauthentic. When 'We grope together / And avoid speech', speech about speechlessness suggests a lone voice speaking *for* a group but *to* himself, or to us. The poem thus sets plural against singular, expression against quotation, the sense of the words against the fact of the words. But the hollowness or the wretchedness is already there in the movement of the lines:

> Is it like this
> In death's other kingdom
> Waking alone
> At the hour when we are
> Trembling with tenderness
> Lips that would kiss
> Form prayers to broken stone. (*PE* 1.82)

Because the poetic line is an independent unity, 'we are' means that we exist and this 'we' exists for a brief time only, the 'hour' in which sounds an *our*. Because the poetic line is a dependent segment, we are alone when we tremble with tenderness. One's lips would tenderly kiss another's, and our lips would tenderly kiss each other's. It is like this, here, because the lines are never only alone, and they never cohere. They form neither question nor statement nor prayer. The contradictions of social life do not happen to the lines; the lines do not wake to find it so. The contradictions happen as lines.

Yet *The Hollow Men* seems immune to the particulars of contemporary politics or history. In the first issue of Ford's *transatlantic review*, published in January 1924, Eliot complained of younger writers who, if they have any genuine politics to speak of, 'mix them up with their literature instead of keeping their literature clean' (*L* 2.252). Eliot repeatedly sought to separate the *Criterion* from contemporary politics during this period (*L* 2.205, 238, 255, 305, 349). Yet though *The Hollow Men* is abstract and elusive, the question of who 'we' might be, and of how to represent or speak for an *us*, was an especially vexed problem during the months in which Eliot composed and published the sequence. On 11 August 1924 he confessed to Kreymborg that he had written nothing but commentaries for the

Criterion: 'Otherwise, I have been speechless for nine months' (*L* 2.472). In September, the Allies and Germany agreed to the Dawes Plan, an effort to resolve Germany's failure to pay reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. At Lloyds Eliot specialised in war debts (*L* 2.2, 255), and he offered to write an exposition of the Dawes Plan for Monro (*L* 2.498, n. 2). Instead he wrote poetry. On 30 September he told Monro that he had been 'trying to get down a little verse' (*L* 2.496). Two days later the leader of the Conservatives, Stanley Baldwin, whom Eliot had admired for some time (*L* 2.331), addressed a large and sympathetic audience in Newcastle. Baldwin discussed the Dawes Plan, advocated a loan to Germany (to be raised by private subscription), and rejected a proposed loan to the Soviet Union (to be guaranteed by the British state). 'Western Europe has a civilization to preserve', he declared, 'and it is our duty to do all we can to preserve it in these days'.[131] On 5 October Eliot sent Monro the third section of *The Hollow Men*, in which 'we are' for our hour (*L* 2.498). He also implied that further sections had been drafted. On 29 October Baldwin led the Conservatives to a landslide victory over Britain's first Labour government. (The following week, in the United States, Calvin Coolidge won the presidential election handsomely.) The morning before the British election, an editorial in *The Times* had emphatically opposed the dangers of socialism: 'The fundamental principle of Socialism, the doctrine from which all others flow, is the complete subjection of the individual to the State.'[132] Years later Eliot mocked the 'British Massenmensch' and mourned the demise of the 'English Individualist'.[133] But the month after the election he published the third section of *The Hollow Men* in the November issue of the *Chapbook*, together with 'Eyes that last I saw in tears' and 'The wind sprang up at four o'clock'. That same November, the first section of the sequence appeared in the Paris journal *Commerce*.

The Hollow Men looks universal in its scope, encompassing all the living and the dead, but its experience of life and death is European. The poem has Europe in its bones – in its imagery, its allusions, and its prosody. (At the same time, this was 'only possible' for an American poet 'sufficiently detached' from Europe 'to see from the outside'.[134]) Across Europe

[131] 'Russian Loan Folly', *The Times*, 3 October 1924, p. 17.
[132] 'To-morrow', *The Times*, 28 October 1924, p. 13.
[133] T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 5.3 (June 1927): 283–6 (p. 286). For a recent discussion of Eliot's preoccupation with communism, especially in the pages of the *Criterion*, see Blanton, *Epic Negation*, pp. 133–57.
[134] Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet* (London: W. H. Allen, 1960), p. 120.

it was a turbulent time. In the notes to *The Waste Land* Eliot quotes Hermann Hesse's description of the Russian Revolution and other upheavals in Eastern Europe (*PE* 1.76).[135] Eliot discussed Britain's vexed relations with the Soviet Union in the July 1924 issue of the *Criterion*,[136] and on 6 November he encouraged Francis Bain to contribute something on the Russian Revolution (*L* 2.531–2). The year before he told Bain that he hoped socialism's 'intellectual hold' on the young was weakening (*L* 2.206). Lenin had died on 21 January 1924, the United Kingdom had officially recognised the Soviet Union on 1 February, and Stalin had seized power soon after. That same February Hitler was put on trial for the Beer Hall Putsch, and the Fascists won the Italian elections in April. The previous October, Eliot had suggested that Aldington might 'look about at Fashismo [*sic*], find out whether it has any general philosophy and if so whether its general ideas can in any way be attached to our own' (*L* 2.245). Later, in 1928, Eliot would write an extended review of recent works on Fascism.[137] In a speech delivered on 3 January 1925 Mussolini discarded any semblance of party politics and proclaimed his singularity: 'I declare before this assembly and before the Italian people that I alone assume the moral, political, and historical responsibility of all that has taken place.'[138] That month's issue of the *Criterion* included 'On the Eve', a short story by Eliot and his wife, Vivien, though it was signed by Eliot only. The characters' desultory conversation flits from Mussolini to Russian loans, from anarchism to capitalism, from democracy to dictatorship. Here, too, the problem of 'we' looms large: 'we shall be completely and utterly ruined if there is an extreme socialist government', exclaims one character.[139] '*We* shall be destitute. But *they* won't suffer.' The second and the fourth sections of *The Hollow Men* appeared in the same issue. 'I am still in doubt as to how I wish this suite to be arranged', Eliot wrote on 30 June; 'as a matter of fact, it is not quite complete' (*L* 2.692). Either he had not yet written the fifth section, or he envisaged further parts. In August the French withdrew their troops from the Ruhr, ending an occupation spurred by Germany's defaults on war reparations, and in October the Allies and Germany negotiated the Locarno Treaties, in yet another attempt to stabilise

[135] Eliot subsequently called the Russian Revolution 'the most important event of the War'. See T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 6.2 (August 1927): 97–100 (p. 98).
[136] T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 2.8 (July 1924): 371–5 (p. 372).
[137] T. S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', *Criterion* 8.31 (December 1928): 280–90.
[138] 'Fascist Violence', *The Times*, 5 January 1925, p. 12.
[139] T. S. Eliot [and Vivien Eliot], 'On the Eve: A Dialogue', *Criterion* 3.10 (January 1925): 278–81 (pp. 278–9).

European relations. The Soviet Union abstained from the treaties. Eliot was well aware of these developments: he referred to the occupation of the Ruhr in a letter to Bain in September 1923 (*L* 2.205), and a month later he mentioned Germany's dangerous unrest in a letter to Ottoline Morrell (*L* 2.232). Finally, on 23 November 1925, *The Hollow Men* appeared as a complete sequence in *Poems 1909–1925*. In less than six months' time, the Trades Union Congress called the General Strike.

The point is not that the hollow men are workers or voters, Tories or Whigs, socialists or Fascists. Nor can 'our lost kingdoms' (*PE* 1.83) be reduced to Roman, British, or Austro-Hungarian empires, despite Eliot's declaration in an October 1923 letter to Ford: 'I am all for empires, especially the Austro-Hungarian empire, and I deplore the outburst of artificial nationalities' (*L* 2.251). (The Ottoman Empire fell in the same month *The Waste Land* appeared in the *Dial*.) The point is that this was the world in which *The Hollow Men* was composed and published, a world riven by the antagonism between individual and collective, and that the poem thinks through that same antagonism by thinking in lines. The lines, which make the work a poem, make the unreconciled society of hollow men. The poetry thinks politically.

The hollow men hope for a 'Multifoliate rose' (*PE* 1.83), a single line that neatly unites singular and plural, and one might decide that the multiple lines of *The Hollow Men* approximate or prefigure just such a heavenly rose. Conversely, one might decide that the poem's lines represent the broken societies of post-war Europe. In each case prosody is metaphor, and in each case the metaphor is insufficient. The force of Eliot's prosody lies instead in its compromised autonomy – neither wholly cleansed of nor wholly contaminated by revolutions, elections, treaties, debts, and wars. As a movement of negation, lineation resists first any pretence to beatitude, and second any consoling capture of the state of things. In *The Waste Land*, this logic is taken as far as Eliot ever would take it. Perhaps Pound recognised as much when he cut from the typescripts a reference to Socrates's ideal city: 'Not here, O Glaucon, but in another world' (*F* 30–31). The line had counterpointed Eliot's 'Unreal City' (line 207), and without it the poem is thrown back on that city, on this world. It can seem as though the ideal city had to be cut because 'the developing theme of urban and imperial apocalypse refused to accommodate so firm a hope'.[140] But the problem was more than one of theme or representation; it was formal. If 'On Heaven' displaces aesthetic reconciliation onto the

[140] Eleanor Cook, 'T. S. Eliot and the Carthaginian Peace', *ELH* 46.2 (Summer 1979): 341–55 (p. 351).

painting of the past, onto the balanced light and shade of a Rembrandt, the incessant and self-conscious negation of the poetic line in *The Waste Land* makes naming that hope impossible. As Michael North argues, the only hint of redemption left to the poem comes through 'the very exhaustion of the negative'.[141] This is its 'affirmative *ineffabile*', paradoxically open to a salvation that is closed to *Four Quartets*.[142] For *The Waste Land*, poetry would be wrong to pretend to otherworldly reconciliation in an unreconciled world. It is better even to make lines.

This is a modernist poetics of the line; it accompanies new political configurations, the adaptation of old theological motifs, and significant crises in the concepts of poetry and of verse; but it is not common to the works of Eliot's contemporaries, nor even to all his own works. At its most acute, it is specifically the poetics of *The Waste Land*. When the poem moves from 'breeding' to 'Lilacs', lineation is a metonymy for the art of poetry. The choice of lines is the choice to be a poem, and the poem's guilty spirit is pervasive or collective: no line is wretched alone, for no line is a line alone. This lineation comes to mean wretchedness because, in working upon these particular materials, from post-war Europe to the present participle, it works as difference and negation. The prosody is active, warm. The society of lines is more, therefore, than merely a metaphor. The arbitrariness of verse distinguishes the work from the world; the poem attacks the world by asserting its autonomy, rather as the single line asserts its independence. The poem will not be wholly beholden to political programmes, theological systems, or aesthetic theories, and the line will not be wholly beholden to the sentence or the poem. But these, finally, are not happy or exact correspondences. Because the poetry relates antagonistically to the world, the poetry's antagonisms do not simply replicate the world's.

Eliot peoples the waste land with crowds, characters, and voices. The poem is horrified both by the 'hooded hordes' (line 368) and by the 'I' imprisoned in his isolation, thinking of his isolation (lines 411–14). Equally horrifying is their mutual implication in the movement of lines:

> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many. (lines 62–3)

[141] Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 104.
[142] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 305.

The crowd is only a crowd, one of many, and it is compound, made of so many. The singular crowd and the singular 'I', each at the head of a line, face each other warily. Yet as both Hugh Kenner and Christopher Ricks have observed, the weird grammar of 'so many' undoes the concept of a single crowd.[143] The phrase ought to be 'so large'. (The *Inferno* has no ungrammatical shift from singular to plural; it separates the 'lunga tratta / di gente' from the 'tanta' whom death has undone.[144]) Shifting within the line from 'A crowd' to 'so many' resists the easy opposition of thoughtless collective and thinking individual, just as the next line, in shifting from 'I' to a new 'so many', binds them together. The verbatim repetition at the end of the lines emphasises differences between the first 'so many' and the second. As a grammatical subject, the first bridges the 'crowd' and the 'I'. Yet when read with the next line, the first 'so many' is an object like the second, firmly othered by the subject, the 'I'. Poised at the end of the line, a half-formed thought wavers. When the thought then flows over into the new line, the speaker is also subject to a death, for the speaker's new thought is of not having thought, like a thoughtless figure in a compelled crowd. Not to have thought, to flow, and now to think are also to be undone. Lines flow and lines think too, but not as simple figures for the immense crowds and the lone voices of 1921 or 1922. Together, these lines think through the antagonism of individual and collective; the antagonism happens as one line limits and negates another. 'Well', Socrates says of the ideal city, 'perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven'.[145] In *The Waste Land*, the line is a citizen of the *polis poietikos* – an earthly city, but not London or Athens. Far from indifferent, Eliot's lines think about modern life by undoing our easy names for it: *waste, fragment, falling*. In their own wretchedness they meet the world's.

[143] Kenner, *The Invisible Poet*, p. 49; Christopher Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 138.

[144] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* 3.55–7, in *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair, 3 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939–1948), 1.48.

[145] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935, 1937), 2.414–17 (592b).

CHAPTER 4

Loy's Cries

> The vowel demands to be repeated; the consonant demands to be repeated; and both cry aloud to be perpetually varied. You may follow the adventures of a letter through any passage that has particularly pleased you; find it, perhaps, denied awhile, to tantalize the ear; find it fired again at you in a whole broadside; or find it pass into congenerous sounds, one liquid or labial melting away into another.
>
> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'On Style in Literature'[1]

I

When Mina Loy and Sigmund Freud met in Vienna in 1922, she drew his portrait and he read her short story, 'Hush Money'.[2] We know little more about the encounter tha.n that. One wonders whether they talked at any length, and what they might have talked about. They shared an interest in sexual instincts and their repression, so maybe Loy inquired about *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and its theories of Eros and of the death drive. Maybe instead they reflected on their shared Jewish heritage, or debated the nature of religion. Before too long Freud would publish *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), his meditation on the origins, logic, and fate of religious belief, and Loy subsequently wrote an essay on the 'History of Religion and Eros'.[3] Elsewhere, she rather mischievously dubbed Freud 'a second savior', second to Christ in history and in insight.[4] 'While Freud believes

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'On Style in Literature: Its Technical Elements', *Contemporary Review* 47 (April 1885): 548–61 (p. 557). We know that Loy liked Stevenson when young, though not whether she read this particular essay. See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 78.

[2] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 313.

[3] Mina Loy, *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. Sara Crangle (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 2011), pp. 237–52.

[4] Mina Loy, 'Notes on Religion', ed. Keith Tuma, *Sulfur* 27 (Fall 1990): 13–16 (p. 15). Tuma suggests that Loy wrote these notes in the early 1940s.

man to be moved by instinct', she explained, 'Jesus saw him to be actuated by humbug'. For good reason, critics have often thought to pair the two in terms of religion, race, and sexuality. Loy seems to have first encountered Freud's work in Florence before the war.[5] As early as 1913 she told Mabel Dodge that he had made the unconscious 'a dumping ground for cast off impressions', leaving little 'room in it for evolving creative inspiration'.[6] So, though she was often ambivalent towards his ideas, Loy had long been interested in Freud when they met in Vienna. As he finished reading 'Hush Money', he called the story 'analytic',[7] a word which, coming from an analyst, suggests a certain affinity.

Maybe instead modernism's wittiest poet talked to the doctor about wit. Loy left Florence for New York in 1916, the same year in which appeared the first English translation of Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud's theories were as popular in the avant-garde circles of America as they had been in Italy.[8] And whether Loy read him in English or, having once spent a year in Munich as an art student, in German, she might have found Freud's discussions of wordplay, often with an emphasis on Jewish humour, especially interesting.[9] They certainly appealed to H. D., who undertook sessions with Freud in 1933.[10] So it is a small shame that Loy chose to show him 'Hush Money' rather than 'Gloria Gammage'. In that story the eponymous Gloria, modelled on Dodge, socialises 'with other young matrons of her millionheir class',[11] and as it happens one of Freud's first examples of wit is Heine's sparkling portmanteau, *famillionär* (combining *familiär*, familiar, with *Millionär*, millionaire).[12] Had she chosen 'Gloria Gammage', Loy and Freud might have talked of puns and portmanteaus, or speculated more widely on the nature and the function of wit.

I do not mean to imply that Freud or Heine prompted Loy's pun. She may have seen it in *Thrift*, Bolton Hall's popular guide to managing money, which was also published in 1916, and in New York:

[5] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 119.
[6] Mina Loy, letter to Mabel Dodge, 28 March 1913, in Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (MSS 196, box 24, folder 664).
[7] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 313.
[8] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 214.
[9] For speculation about Loy's reading in German, particularly during her year in Berlin in 1922 and 1923, see Cristanne Miller, 'Feminist Location and Mina Loy's "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"', *Paideuma* 32.1-2-3 (Spring-Fall-Winter 2003): 75–94 (p. 82).
[10] H. D., *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 2012), p. 103.
[11] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 25.
[12] Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1905), p. 5; Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1916), pp. 9–10.

'A millionaire is one who got a million; a million heir is the one who inherited it, and the million heiress is the one who spends it.'[13] She may have picked the pun up in conversation; she may have simply made it up. She liked it well enough to use it in at least one other prose work, an account of her relationship with Arthur Cravan.[14] Loy also liked to play with portmanteaus. In 'Lunar Baedeker' (1923), a poem published the year after she met Freud, the stars in the night sky are 'Stellectric signs'.[15] In Loy's long poem, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the infant Ova famously mishears the word *diarrhea* (διά, through + ῥέω, to flow) as 'Iarrhea', thereby transforming the flow of excrement into the flow or forming of the subject, the *I*.[16] Not that Loy is likely to have played a learned etymological game, since, unlike H. D. or Pound, she had not studied classical languages.[17] But Freud might have liked her neologism's witty way with infant misunderstanding and adult analysis, the body and language, play and taboo. The first part of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* appeared in the spring 1923 issue of the *Little Review*, and though Carolyn Burke suggests that Loy began the poem in 1922 in Berlin, she might even have had sections in draft when, before Berlin, she visited Vienna.[18] But Loy seems not to have met Freud as a poet. She drew his portrait and he read her story, a prose work in which she refers wryly, aloofly, or perhaps even guardedly to 'that delicate feminine intuition of poets'.[19]

Quite possibly Loy talked with Freud about the city of Vienna, or the fractious politics of the fledgling Republic of Austria. But had the two

[13] Bolton Hall, *Thrift* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1916), p. 72.

[14] Mina Loy, 'Colossus', excerpts printed in Roger L. Conover, 'Mina Loy's "Colossus": Arthur Cravan Undressed', in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), pp. 102–119 (p. 113).

[15] Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 81. Hereafter abbreviated as *LLB96*. When possible I quote from this edition of Loy's works, and otherwise I quote from Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands: Jargon Society, 1982). Hereafter abbreviated as *LLB82*.

[16] Mina Loy, 'The Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', in *The Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (Paris: Three Mountains, 1925), pp. 137–94 (p. 146). Hereafter abbreviated *CC*. Since the text of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* in *LLB82* differs at points from the poem's first printings, and since part of my aim is to situate the poem in its historical moment, I quote from those first printings, with references to the corresponding page in *LLB82*. In addition to *CC*, these are: Mina Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', *Little Review* 9.3 (Spring 1923): 10–18; and Mina Loy, 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose (Continued)', *Little Review* 9.4 (Autumn and Winter 1923–1924): 41–51. Hereafter abbreviated as *LR1* and *LR2*, respectively. I have, however, silently substituted hyphens for em dashes when used to form compounds. Marisa Januzzi offers a reading text and a helpful collation of the various versions in '"Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]": Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics', PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997, pp. 377–458.

[17] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 312.

[18] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 349.

[19] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 33.

discussed wit and gone on to discuss poetry they would have found much to say. When Freud analyses wit, he turns to the nonsense of the nursery and to poetry's phonemic play. As a child begins to learn to speak, he observes, 'it connects words without regard for their meaning in order to obtain pleasure from the rhyme and rhythm'.[20] Moreover, 'pleasure in rhyme, alliteration, refrain, and other forms of repetition of similar sounding words in poetry, is due merely to the discovery of the familiar' – to repetition where we expect difference.[21] Like poets, children experiment with the material of language, but the child's pleasure in sound is soon curtailed or repressed by the demands of sense. In turn, wit endeavours to 'revive the old pleasure in nonsense or the old pleasure in word-play', and in this wit resists the pressure of critical reason.[22] We seem to know perfectly well that the Italian *stella* and the English *electric* do not belong together; nor do the Latin *stella* and *electrum*, or excrement and the first-person pronoun. Neither the assonance of *Freud* and *Loy*, nor the rhyme of *Freud* and *Lloyd* (Cravan's real and Loy's legal surname), guarantees a genuine affinity. For Freud, wit releases a pleasure long since repressed; it exerts pressure back upon the schooling, the socialisation, the civilised forms of thinking and feeling to which we are each rapidly subjected. But wit has its sense, too. Stars and electricity both give light: both the signs of the zodiac and the electric signs of a modern metropolis might light one's way – or lead one astray. So, too, bodies, subjects, and phonemes all flow, and pleasure in the one may mean pleasure in the others. Wit thus says things which conventional reason and morality disallow. This gives wit its rhetorical force, its aggression, and makes wit so suitable for satire, such as the satire on late Victorian British society in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*. And yet, though Loy's long poem rhymes and chimes incessantly, as countless critics have remarked, her phonemic play is not always or simply satiric. It is also a release of pleasure, and that pleasure offers a diversion from the unreason and injustice of society. Her sounds speak of their moment in history in other ways, too, and of the situation of poetry. Yet Loy's verse is nothing like Ford's, whose rhymes risk silliness and embarrassment. Like Eliot's, it amplifies the interference between sound and sense, but not as a movement of limitation and negation. I want to argue here that the force of Loy's phonemic play turns on poetry itself, because the very pleasure proves complicit in the state of things.

[20] Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 191.
[21] Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 185.
[22] Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 271.

When Pound read Loy's poems in the 1917 *Others* anthology, he famously paired her with Moore and coined the term *logopoeia*, 'a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas'.[23] Less famously, he called their work the 'utterance of clever people in despair, or hovering upon the brink of that precipice'.[24] That seems if anything more true of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* than the short poems which appeared in *Others*, whose satire is relatively assured: 'At the Door of the House', 'The Effectual Marriage', and 'Human Cylinders'. The years between the anthology and the long poem were difficult for Loy. In January 1918 she married Cravan in Mexico; in November Cravan disappeared, never to be seen again; and by 1920 Robert McAlmon had the impression of 'real discouragement, almost despair behind her trifling'.[25] The next year Loy wrote to Dodge of 'this dark homeless moment'.[26] 'I've had a hell of a time off and on the last few years', she confessed; 'it has fired my imagination – must vent it or break'. In Paris in 1923, Monroe thought Loy displayed 'a gayety that seems the worldly-wise conquest of many despairs'.[27] Because it can seem strange to think of cleverness as the conquest of despair, let alone as its expression, Pound also calls Loy's work 'a mind cry, more than a heart cry'. There are no tears or weeping to this, nothing which Pound or his contemporaries might disdain as a conventionally feminine poetic. The phrase is apt, too, since the Anglo-Saxon *wit* and *gewit* meant mind or intellect or understanding, a sense which still persists in certain usages.[28] This is the meaning Pound has in mind when he 'wonders what the devil anyone will make of this sort of thing' – of poetry like Loy's and Moore's – 'who has not in their wit all the clues'.[29] Presumably one key clue to Loy's wit and her despair is Pound's classification of logopoeia, melopoeia, and imagism. (The term *phanopoeia* arrived later, in November 1918, as Pound's title for a sequence of three lyrics.[30] Replacing *imagism*, it

[23] Ezra Pound, 'A List of Books', *Little Review* 4.11 (March 1918): 54–8 (p. 57). Pound's review is partially reprinted as 'Marianne Moore and Mina Loy' in Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909–1965*, ed. William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 394–5.

[24] Pound, 'A List of Books', p. 58.

[25] Robert McAlmon, *Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction*, ed. Edward N. S. Lorusso (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), p. 74. Though published in 1923, McAlmon's short novel *Post-Adolescence* was written in 1920. I follow both Edward N. S. Lorusso and Burke in identifying Gusta Rolph, a character in *Post-Adolescence*, as a portrait of Loy (McAlmon, *Post-Adolescence*, p. xvi; Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 293).

[26] Mina Loy, letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 3 July [1921], in Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers (box 24, folder 664); partly quoted in Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 304.

[27] Harriet Monroe, 'The Editor in France', *Poetry* 23.2 (November 1923): 90–96 (p. 96).

[28] For an account of the term's history, see Lewis, *Studies in Words*, pp. 86–110.

[29] Pound, 'A List of Books', p. 57.

[30] Ezra Pound, 'Φανοποεια', *Little Review* 5.7 (November 1918): 2–3.

then joined *logopoeia* and *melopoeia* in the 1929 essay 'How to Read'.) Pound's tripartite schema seems to separate Loy's mind cry from trifling with consonants, yet in defending Loy and Moore against the criticism that they contravene the customary canons of poetic propriety, he commends an unnamed Provençal poet for employing no fewer than 'six "s"'s and one "z" in a single line'.[31] Loy would rival that melopoeic intricacy or excess in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, for in dancing on the precipice of despair, both music and wit proved essential.

Freud, too, could marry cleverness and despair. Midway through his study, after a series of examples of cynical or self-critical wit, he notes that the 'pessimistical stories' he has chosen speak of 'the manifold hopeless misery of the Jews'.[32] In turn, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* tells the story of an Hungarian Jew named only Exodus who, exiled from Budapest, moves to London as if to a promised land; of his unhappy marriage to a prudish English Protestant, an 'English Rose' variously named Alice and Ada; and of the birth and early years of their first child, Ova, torn between thwarted parents and tormented by conflicts of race, religion, gender, money, and art. In fact, as Rachel Potter has argued, all three central figures are in some sense Anglo-mongrels, constituted by those conflicts.[33] It is a poem of aliens and alienation, and Ova's homelessness perpetuates her father's exodus. Recasting Loy's own unhappy childhood and, obliquely, her recent despairs, it is a poem about misery in the wilderness of modernity. Or, in Williams's unembellished phrase, Loy's poetry faces 'a shoddy world'.[34] *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* reaches from private to public experience, to the social violence and suffering of Loy's time. In 1929 Kreymborg called despair 'the keynote of the latest generation'.[35] The sense of a dark homeless moment was common.

Sceptical of every mirage in the desert, Loy sometimes satirises false promised lands. In 'The Effectual Marriage', for example, Gina is said to have 'flowered in Empyrean / From which no well-mated woman ever returns' (*LLB96* 37). At other times Loy mocks the shoddy belief that this

[31] Pound, 'A List of Books', p. 57. The Provençal poet was probably Arnaut Daniel, for both Dante and Pound praised Daniel's canzone beginning with the line 'Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz'. See Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (1910; rev. edn, London: Peter Owen, 1952), pp. 23, 26–8.

[32] Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 171.

[33] Rachel Potter, 'Worldly Exile: Mina Loy's "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"', in Nadia Valman, ed., *Jewish Women Writers in Britain* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), pp. 66–80 (p. 78).

[34] William Carlos Williams, 'Mina Loy', in Mina Loy, *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables* (Highlands: Jonathan Williams, 1958), pp. 9–11 (p. 9).

[35] Alfred Kreymborg, *Our Singing Strength: An Outline of American Poetry (1620–1930)* (New York: Corward-McCann, 1929), p. 526.

world is necessarily a desert, that it will always need to be redeemed, and that this life's mortal body is inevitably sinful: 'that ineffable moment / When Rigor Mortis / Divests it of its innate impurity' (*LLB96* 9). Even when at art school in London, Loy remembered, she had been preoccupied with the problem of original sin, not, as for Hulme, as a figure for human imperfection, nor, as for Ford, as a terrible conviction of guilt, but as an intellectual question, a moment 'in the logical process of thought'.[36] The preoccupation persists in Loy's late poems, which cite '*the sins of the world*' (*LLB82* 203) and 'the apple / the devil / delivered to Eve' (*LLB96* 127). In her early 'Feminist Manifesto' (1914) Loy declares directly, 'in defiance of superstition', that 'there is *nothing impure in sex* – except in the mental attitude to it' (*LLB96* 156). Except in our humbug, one might say. Yet the realisation that there is nothing impure in sex will, Loy continues, 'constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine'. The manifesto thus prophecies an oddly deferred promised land, managed by rather subdued wordplay on *generate*. However momentous that future liberation, it is as if this generation must resign itself to the unregenerate wilderness, or be consigned there by a few defiant free spirits.

And yet, confronting so shoddy a world, Loy does often herald or hope for forms of redemption, revolution, or evolution – for some essential transformation, 'a new social system' (*LLB82* 282). The year before meeting Freud she proclaimed a new movement in the *Little Review*: the movement was to be called Psycho-Democracy, and it would apply a 'psychological gauge [. . .] to all social problems, for the interpretation of political, religious and financial systems' (*LLB82* 277). Utopia here seems certain:

> For it is but logical to suppose that if the slight amount of magnetism in the make-up of the world's leaders of today is sufficient to rush great peoples on to death and agony, it will be a simple task to persuade great peoples to the effort of self realization in a life-amplifying ideal. (*LLB82* 282)

Yet the logical simplicity of 'it will be a simple task' is conspicuously precarious; the rhetoric undoes itself, persuading no one. For Rachel Blau DuPlessis, though Loy's manifestos anticipate 'an apocalypse of immediate and total change', they seem as a consequence the work of 'a woman both protesting, and protesting too much'.[37] Yet if, as Helen Jaskoski writes, Loy's

[36] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 33.

[37] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, '"Seismic Orgasm": Sexual Intercourse, Gender Narratives, and Lyric Ideology in Mina Loy', in Ralph Cohen, ed., *Studies in Historical Change* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 264–91 (p. 265).

'gift was for satire rather than for theories or programs of social improvement', perhaps at the same time her manifestos are themselves satiric or playful.[38] Even the exuberance of Loy's 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914) hovers on the brink of bathos. If the 'Future is limitless' (*LLB96* 150), offering limitless possibilities for human development, but also extending limitlessly beyond the present, how shall the present ever realise those possibilities? It was a perfectly apt paradox, as Loy would have known, for it perpetuated Marinetti's own: 'We Futurists, on the other hand, affirm the continuous perfection and endless progress of humankind.'[39] Loy enjoyed the irony, and returned to it repeatedly. 'Are you a Futurist?', asks the eponymous protagonist of 'Pazzarella', one of Loy's short stories.[40] 'For the present', replies Geronimo, her lover, 'and the present you may have noticed is the time for accomplishment – while the future – keeps you waiting'.

So the question remains, whether an avant-garde or modernist dance on the precipice of despair, music dancing with wit in a world of injustice and unreason, could ever lead to a happy future or a sunny home. In 1924, in a letter to the *transatlantic review* about Stein, Loy calls modernism 'a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized nature that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time' (*LLB82* 297). She thus figures modernism as John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3) or as the voice that prophesies the restoration of Jerusalem, when 'the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain' (Isaiah 40:3–5). (Freud might have enjoyed the Authorized Version's sonorous assonance and alliteration, but neither nonsense nor wit account for them.) Loy then argues that, so to speak, the coming of Christ or the entrance into Canaan would, for modernity, mean opening our aesthetic consciousness to each and every experience. 'The flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears', she urges, and yet we look for beauty only in galleries, museums, and libraries (*LLB82* 298). One wonders what fate Loy imagined for the arts in a paradise of universal aesthesis, and whether that aestheticism would really reconcile the contradictions of modernity. In her essay on 'Modern Poetry' (1925), Loy offers art as a model and a proxy for paradise: 'for surely if there were a heaven it would be where this horrible ugliness of human life should arise

[38] Helen Jaskoski, 'Mina Loy Outsider Artist', *Journal of Modern Literature* 18.4 (Fall 1993): 349–68 (p. 361).

[39] F. T. Marinetti, 'War, the Sole Cleanser of the World' (1911), in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), pp. 53–4 (p. 53).

[40] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 75. See, also, the satire on Futurism in Loy's early play 'The Sacred Prostitute', and in particular on the desire to seize the future in the present (Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 195).

self-consciously as that which the poet has made of it'.[41] 'On Heaven' makes a similar suggestion, when Ford likens the balance of pleasure and pain in heaven to the balance of light and shade in a painting by Rembrandt. But again one wonders whether 'ugliness' is adequate to the horrors of life in 1925, and one wonders what the beauty poets make *of* this life means *in* this life, when rather than arising the beauty remains below. A poet's practice and her theory need not always or wholly agree. In this chapter, I want to ask how the art of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* cries in the wilderness. Specifically, do its sounds herald deliverance or do they wittily, cynically, or self-critically condemn us, and condemn poetry, to exile? Loy's poem seems rather less sure than her letter on Stein, and much less sure than Matthew or Isaiah, that the kingdom is at hand.

II

Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose rhymes and chimes like no other modernist poem, but to understand its peculiar way with phonemic repetition we need to listen, too, to the poetry of Loy's contemporaries, and to consider her contemporaries' diverse theories of sound in poetry. We need also to reflect on ideas about rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and similar devices which modernism inherited, though Loy's attitude to literary inheritance was changeable. In *Insel*, Mrs Jones muses that she too could 'achieve an act of creation', if only she might 'go back, begin a universe all over again, forget all form I am familiar with'.[42] Loy said the same thing of her poetry. 'I tried to forget that I had ever in my life read anything', she recalled of her experiments in free verse, as if modern poetry could come only by consigning the past to oblivion.[43] Such freedom inverts Eliot's concept of tradition; in properly Futurist fashion, it suggests 'a kind of historical vacuum'.[44] Yet in her essay on modern poetry Loy celebrates the innovative 'structural movements' of contemporary verse – verse such as Eliot's and her own – precisely for their 'rebellion against tradition'.[45] To rebel against the past is also to remember it. And like Ford and Pound, it took Loy some

[41] Mina Loy, 'Modern Poetry', *Charm* 3.3 (April 1925): 16–17, 71 (p. 17). *LLB96* prints 'should' as 'would' (*LLB96* 159).
[42] Mina Loy, *Insel*, ed. Elizabeth Arnold (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014), p. 20.
[43] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 381.
[44] Carolyn Burke, 'The New Poetry and the New Woman: Mina Loy', in Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom, eds, *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), pp. 37–57 (p. 47).
[45] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 16; *LLB96* 157.

time to join the rebellion, for the earliest of her surviving poems are decidedly traditional.[46]

Loy's first enthusiasm was for the works of Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti, and by 1911 she was reading Stein.[47] Critics have since adduced a disparate array of precursors, from Dickinson and Donne, through Skelton and Laforgue, to Ovid and Lucretius, though direct influence is sometimes difficult to substantiate.[48] In a letter to Carl Van Vechten she mentions reading Chekhov's short stories; in another she notes 'a line I picked up of Laforgue's', only to add: 'I am so very illiterate.'[49] When Loy's estranged first husband, Stephen Haweis, read her first published poems he said, contemptuously, that she needed to 'study literature for a few years'.[50] Yet despite her misgivings and his condescension, Loy's works feature wide-ranging references and allusions. Insel's favourite writer is Kafka, and elsewhere the novel invokes Shakespeare, John Gay, and the Brontës.[51] In October 1921 Loy published a poem on Edgar Allen Poe, and the first section of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* ends with an allusion to the *Roman de la Rose* (*LR1* 18; *LLB82* 121). In contemporary poets, too, her tastes were eclectic. Reading an early issue of *Others*, in which her 'Songs to Joannes' was soon to appear, she especially enjoyed the work of Orrick Johns.[52] She read John Rodker's *Hymns* (1920), playfully quoting from one of his lyrics in a short riposte to his review of the 1919 *Others Anthology*.[53] She knew Stein's work well, called Pound 'the masterly impresario of modern poets', and seems to have read Eliot carefully, too.[54] 'What are you thinking of?', Insel asks Mrs Jones, repeating a snippet of conversation

[46] Elizabeth Arnold, 'Mina Loy and the Futurists', *Sagetrieb* 8.1–2 (Spring–Fall 1989): 83–117 (pp. 91–2).

[47] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, pp. 40–41, 129–30.

[48] Conover canvasses many of these in his introduction to *LLB82*. See, also, Alan Marshall, 'The Ecstasy of Mina Loy', in Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson, eds, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (Cambridge: Salt, 2010), pp. 166–87 (pp. 170–71, 176–7); Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On and Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 198; Peter Nicholls, '"Arid Clarity": Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue', *Yearbook of English Studies* 32 (2002): 52–64; Sandeep Parmar, 'Mina Loy's "Colossus" and the Myth of Arthur Cravan', *Jacket* 34 (October 2007): http://jacketmagazine.com/34/parmar-loy.shtml; and Kenneth Rexroth, 'Les Lauriers Sont Coupés, No. 2', *Circle* 1.4 (1944): 69–72 (p. 70).

[49] Mina Loy, letters to Carl Van Vechten, no date, in Carl Van Vechten Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Za Van Vechten, box: Loy-Lug, folder: Loy, Mina).

[50] Mina Loy, letter to Carl Van Vechten, no date, in Carl Van Vechten Papers (box: Loy-Lug, folder: Loy, Mina); quoted in Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 189.

[51] Loy, *Insel*, pp. 6, 15, 17, 48.

[52] Mina Loy, letter to Carl Van Vechten, no date, in Carl Van Vechten Papers (box: Loy-Lug, folder: Loy, Mina).

[53] Mina Loy, 'John Rodker's Frog', *Little Review* 7.3 (September–December 1920): 56–7.

[54] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 17.

from 'A Game of Chess': Loy thus gives the words of Eliot's nervous woman to a needy man.[55] Her allusions often involve inversions of this sort. When Pazzarella sobs on the stone stairs outside her apartment, Loy's story echoes 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916), but whereas Eliot's speaker rhapsodises on the sunlight in the hair of the girl on the stairs, savouring the memory of the moment as 'a gesture and a pose' (*PE* 1.28), Pazzarella slips from Geronimo's grasp by mocking herself: 'I feel like the heroine of a melodrama.'[56]

So Loy read widely, in the writings of the past and of the present, but it remains difficult to identify formative influences, or influences whose forms she had to make new. It is easier, in comparison, to observe Eliot's verse working with and against Jacobean playwrights and French Symbolists. We might instead look, not to illustrious forebears, but to the routine practice of the day. The same year in which 'Love Songs' (1915) appeared in *Others*, Loy told Van Vechten that she had been reading the first issue of the *Gypsy*, a new magazine edited by Alan Odle in London, and that it was of no account: '"we" are doing much better in America – England is still writing love poems which I consider *extremely* unwell'.[57] (Though Loy was still living in Italy, her cautious *we* registers a partial identification with American modernism, on the page if not in person.) She then quotes four forgettable lines by Louis J. McQuilland. Loy's love songs are as alien as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to the poems she had read in the *Gypsy*, works by the likes of McQuilland, Richard Middleton, and Richard le Gallienne. English poets 'cannot evaluate a reaction to any stimulus except through juggling with standard poetical phrases', she concludes in her letter to Van Vechten. So when Loy speaks of rebelling against 'tradition', she means the history of a genre, such as love poetry; a particular movement in British poetry, such as fin-de-siècle decadence and its epigones; and established formal decorums, such as a Victorian vocabulary or Augustan rhyme.

But the rebellion went further than that, for to rebel was also to forget, and to forget not just the sonnet or the heroic couplet, but the whole history of poetry as it bore upon the present, the art form itself. When John Collier reviewed McAlmon's *The Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (1925), which featured the last parts of *Anglo-Mongrels and the*

[55] Loy, *Insel*, p. 75. [56] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 94.
[57] Mina Loy, letter to Carl Van Vechten, July 1915, in Carl Van Vechten Papers (box: Loy-Lug, folder: Loy, Mina).

Rose, he called Loy's poem a timely illustration of 'the need for objective standards related to, if not necessarily in accordance with, tradition'.[58] Loy had seemingly dispensed with tradition entirely, forging no meaningful relation with the past. And the problem was with her verbal music: her work lacked metre, rhythm, 'or any such relation of sounds to justify the *vers libre* arrangement'. This is what Collier had read:

> The guests spreading their gleaming
> faces forward to convey
> that they
> remember *nothing* since the Garden of Eden
> the garish innocence
> of adult guilt
> in the presence of children. (*CC* 138; *LLB82* 133)

And, a few pages later:

> The staring baby
> stumbles to the fire
>
> Her consciousness
> sluggish to raucous surfaces
> of necessities
>
> quickens
> to colour-thrusts
> of the quintessent light. (*CC* 141; *LLB82* 136)

The sounds of these lines are intricately related – as melopoeic as the line by Pound's Provençal poet – but let us for the moment accept Collier's assumptions and conclusions. Perhaps that intricate relation does not justify the verse. Only by 'some monstrous exertion of faith, or self-hypnotism', Collier writes, could Loy have 'come to regard the results of her labours as poetry'.[59]

Williams had pre-empted the same objection when, at the beginning of *Spring and All*, he ventriloquised an imaginary critic: 'Is this what you call poetry? It is the very antithesis of poetry. It is antipoetry.'[60] Keith Tuma has argued that *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* does not represent a 'postmodern antipoetic', and that it does not reject the 'poetic' outright.[61] But it does

[58] John Collier, 'Contemporaries', *New Age* 37.14 (6 August 1925): 164–5 (p. 164).
[59] Collier, 'Contemporaries', p. 164.
[60] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1: 1909–1939*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 177.
[61] Keith Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Readers* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 153.

involve, I think, a modernist antipoetic, for it critiques poetry as such, an art form suffering a crisis of identity. On the one hand, Loy employs phonemic repetition to customary effect. A ringing rhyme neatly completes the tableau of adult repression and hypocrisy: 'to convey / that *they*' – and they alone – retain their innocence. Loy sounds the sense of 'since', of a paradisal past, in 'innocence' and 'presence', and so mocks the present projection of a past paradise. Finally, it is as if 'guilt' distils 'garish' (/g/ and /ɪ/) and 'adult' (/lt/), and pronounces judgement upon them. On the other hand, the lines on Ova's quickening consciousness are more than witty or emphatic or expressive. Their phonemic repetition exceeds those common if commonly contradictory justifications. In a limited sense, therefore, Collier was right: this is not poetry as he knew it. Loy once praised Pound for having a 'poet's instinct for poetry', and probably she meant that most of those who pass for poets could boast no such instinct.[62] The phrase also implies that her own instincts were insecure or divided, and a trained painter like Loy may at least have a distinct instinct for poetry. Discussing the difficulty of deciding on Loy's literary lineage, Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson remark that 'she came at writing by way of visual art', and that 'her poems often bear the formal imprint of avant-garde painting, sculpture or collage'.[63] It is appropriate, then, that Loy met Freud as an artist and a short-story writer. For long periods of her life, Loy wrote few poems, if any. 'I was never a poet', she once said (*LLB96* xii). The sounds of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* cultivate an alien relation to the concept of poetry inherited by modernism, and the poem thus ties the fate of the art to the wilderness it faces.

By this I mean more than the fact that *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* is a 'generic hybrid',[64] turning the lyric precisions of 'Songs to Joannes' to the novel's 'ironic portraiture of social life',[65] and so making the lyric sequence into a form of *Künstlerroman*.[66] Loy's satire on social life is also a satire on poetic technique, or on inherited concepts of technique. Though the poem does sometimes invoke specific genres and movements – from the nursery rhyme to fin-de-siècle decadence – its rhyming and chiming are a metonymy for the art itself, just like Eliot's lineation. But to make that argument properly we need a better sense, as Marjorie

[62] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 17; *LLB96* 158.
[63] Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson, introduction to *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 1–11 (p. 1).
[64] Januzzi, '"Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]": Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics', p. 429.
[65] Jim Powell, 'Basil Bunting and Mina Loy', *Chicago Review* 37.1 (Winter 1990): 6–25 (p. 13).
[66] Andrew Michael Roberts identifies the poem as a *Künstlerroman* in 'Rhythm, Self and Jazz in Mina Loy's Poetry', in Potter and Hobson, eds, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 99–128 (p. 107).

Perloff puts it, of what the word *poem* meant for Loy, and of how she and her contemporaries conceived of verse.[67] 'More than to read poetry we must listen to poetry,' Loy advised in 1925.[68] Late in life she said she had only written her poems 'for the *sake* of the sounds of the words',[69] and though that is an exaggeration, we can approach the problem by asking what poetry's phonemic play meant to modernists like Loy.

III

Freud relates rhyme, alliteration, refrain, and other forms of repetition to wit, and many modernists put that wit to work in the service of satire. One might think of the way Lewis adapts the rhyming couplet in *One-Way Song* (1933). Yeats called Eliot a contemporary Alexander Pope;[70] Pound cut a long pastiche of Pope from the drafts of *The Waste Land*; and Pound also proposed Pope as a precursor to Loy's and Moore's logopoeia.[71] Yvor Winters thought Loy's 'The Black Virginity' (1918) and 'Lion's Jaws' (1920) 'need give little if any ground before the best of Pope or Dryden'.[72] Remember, too, that Ford called *Mister Bosphorus and the Muses* his Dunciad.[73] Inspired instead by Gautier's quatrains, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) features bravura examples of satiric punning and rhyme and echo. But perhaps the most elaborate orchestration of sounds in Pound's *A Draft of XVI. Cantos* accompanies moments not of wit but mythopoeic vision: 'And the blue-gray glass of the wave tents them, / Glare azure of water, cold-welter, close cover'; 'And the wave / green clear, and blue clear, / And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple'.[74] Alternatively, the thick alliterations of Canto I invoke Anglo-Saxon verse; their function as allusion is historical. And when the sounds of *Ash-Wednesday* approach echolalia, they figure the conflicts of freedom and compulsion, sense and senselessness, truth and falsehood: 'Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled' (*PE* 1.94). Repeated sounds were,

[67] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Mina Loy Mysteries: Legend and Language', *American Book Review* 18.1 (October–November 1996): 16–17, 26 (p. 17).
[68] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 16; *LLB96* 157.
[69] Mina Loy, 'Interview with Paul Blackburn and Robert Vas Dias', in Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1998), pp. 205–243 (p. 214).
[70] W. B. Yeats, introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), in *Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell, The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, v (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), pp. 181–203 (p. 191).
[71] Pound, 'A List of Books', p. 57.
[72] Yvor Winters, 'Mina Loy', *Dial* 80.6 (June 1926): 496–9 (p. 498).
[73] Ford, *Letters*, p. 157.
[74] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996), pp. 6, 77.

as they had ever been, put to many and varied uses, and subject to almost as many theories.

We know that in Florence Loy read Henri Bergson alongside Freud, and for Bergson poetry's repetitions act as a narcotic, suspending disbelief:

> By a certain arrangement of rhythm, rhyme and assonance, it is possible to lull the imagination, to rock it to and fro between like and like with a regular see-saw motion, and thus prepare it submissively to accept the vision suggested.[75]

In just these terms, Loy links Bergson to Stein in her letter to the *transatlantic review*: 'by the intervaried rhythm of this monotone mechanism', she says of Stein's 'Aux Galeries Lafayette' (1915), 'I was connected up with the very pulse of duration' (*LLB82* 289).[76] We also know that, while she was still in London, Loy's enthusiasm for Dante Gabriel Rossetti had been spurred by a review of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892), in which Nordau attacks Rossetti's rhymes as the symptoms of a decadent mind.[77] For the degenerate, Nordau argues, the 'mere similarity of sound determines the current of his thought':

> Ignorant persons are inclined to call the rhyming and punning of imbeciles witty, not bearing in mind that this way of combining ideas according to the sound of the words frustrates the purposes of the intellect by obscuring the apprehension of the real connections of phenomena.[78]

If for Freud the repetition of sound resists the strictures of reason, for Nordau such sound is pathologically indifferent to it. Later he condemns Maeterlinck's assonance for having reached 'the extreme limits of idiocy'.[79] Like children, he concludes, poets who give themselves to the 'game of rhymes' seek to stand 'above the precepts of morality and good sense in use among adults'.[80] In the unpublished poem 'Child Chanting', Loy names and plays this same game: 'infancy's / idiotic-angelic / preference for iterance' (*LLB82* 239). Nordau's prejudice certainly persisted into the

[75] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900), trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 61.

[76] For further discussion of Loy and Bergson, see Sara Crangle, 'Desires Dissolvent: How Mina Loy Exceeds George Bataille', *Journal of Philosophy* 6.13 (Fall 2010): 41–53.

[77] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 40. Not citing the review itself, Burke says only that Loy read it in 1897. It may have been an essay published that year by W. J. Courthope, in which he discusses Nordau's objection to Rossetti. See W. J. Courthope, 'Life in Poetry: Poetical Decadence', *Nineteenth Century* 42.245 (July 1897): 124–41 (pp. 135–6).

[78] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892; London: William Heinemann, 1895), p. 65. Nordau censures Rossetti's rhymes on p. 94.

[79] Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 229.

[80] Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 284.

twentieth century. In 1906, John Davidson conceded that, even 'at its best, rhyme is a decadent mode'.[81] And in the August 1920 issue of the *Dial* Aldington declared that to 'put sound first and meaning afterwards in poetry is decadence'.[82]

As examples of decadence, Aldington is careful to nominate 'the columns and flutes' of the Greek Anthology and the calligrams of Apollinaire, both the ancient and the modern, but Nordau's complaint slips swiftly from an age-old vice to the vice of an historical moment, the decadence of the fin de siècle. Like the meanings of lineation, the meanings of sound in poetry can be considered under the aegis of eternity or of history. Echoing Bergson, Pound could say that melopoeia tends 'to lull, or to distract the reader from the exact sense of the language', but Dryden would hardly have agreed.[83] If anything, the rhyme of 'distract' and 'exact' attracts attention to the sense. The poets and critics of the early twentieth century enjoyed long and spirited debates over techniques of phonemic repetition: assonance, alliteration, and, most of all, rhyme. In one sense the emphasis on rhyme is false or limited, being the consequence of a terminology which distinguishes some forms of repetition only. (Our imperfect attempts to separate perfect or full rhyme, off rhyme, false rhyme, near rhyme, half rhyme, light rhyme, internal rhyme, and so forth are good evidence that the boundaries are blurred and the implicit hierarchy a problem.[84]) But insofar as it marked an established poetics in British and American verse, the emphasis on rhyme has an historical truth. Moreover, because rhyme conspicuously combines identities and differences, coupling sounds and senses, it may be taken as a 'general law of textual effects'.[85] At least, rhyme may serve as a principal, if provisional, model for poetic effects. As Hollander observes, rhyme has often been made 'to stand for verse structure itself, and even, ultimately, poetic convention of any distinguishing sort'.[86] In 1921, Basil de Sélincourt called rhyme 'the flower of poetry': 'we have here, in rounded design, in

[81] John Davidson, 'On Poetry', in *Holiday and Other Poems with a Note on Poetry* (London: E. Grant Richards, 1906), pp. 131–56 (p. 132).

[82] Aldington, 'The Art of Poetry', p. 170. For a recent account of modernism as a form of decadence, though without reference to Loy, see Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[83] Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 26.

[84] For a sensible caution about such terms, see T. V. F. Brogan, et al., 'Rhyme', in Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman, eds, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1182–92 (especially pp. 1190–91).

[85] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 278.

[86] Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, p. 117. Garrett Stewart makes a similar argument in *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 97.

distillation, virtues which are the very life of poetry'.[87] When poets and critics debated not just the various functions of rhyme, but its necessity or legitimacy, and whether they argued for rhyme or against it, they were often debating the necessity and legitimacy of poetry itself. This is partly why Loy's rhyming and chiming figure the art form within and against which she has to work.

In worrying over the nature and function of poetry, these debates extend those we have already encountered in reading Ford and Eliot. They also emerge out of earlier, nineteenth-century theories and practices, for rhyme was an inheritance from the past to be made new or abandoned entirely.[88] In an article on Wordsworth and Kipling, Bridges declared that 'serious rhyme is now exhausted in English verse'.[89] That was in 1912, before Loy had even published a poem. Three years later, Fletcher wrote that the life cycle of rhyme, having begun in the Middle Ages, had 'now passed through all the stages of reduction to formula, eclecticism, archaistic reaction, vulgarization, gramaphone popularity, and death'.[90] In some ways the discussion repeated the familiar arguments of the Renaissance. It hinged on questions of freedom and constraint, on whether sound leads sense astray. Eunice Tietjens defended rhyme in the *Little Review* as a 'winnowing, weighing process', which 'the form of free verse lacks'.[91] Rhyme makes a poet sift and sort her words, Tietjens said, discarding lazy first thoughts and eliminating casual associations. But as we have seen, Ford warned that 'a certain percentage' of any rhymed poem '*must* be fake': at some point sense will be sacrificed to sound. In the tradition of Blake, Bodenheim called rhyme a clanging set of 'useless fetters'.[92] (Yes, said Tom Hood in his Victorian guide to versification, rhyme is a fetter, but 'Only the skilled can dance gracefully in fetters.')[93] In this context, the rise of free verse proved divisive and decisive. Henry Lanz reflected in 1931 that 'free verse is too delicate and sensitive to operate with rime'.[94] When Ford wrote to the

[87] Basil de Sélincourt, 'Rhyme in English Poetry', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* 7 (1921): 7–29 (p. 9).

[88] For a recent discussion of rhyme in Romantic and Victorian verse, see Peter McDonald, *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[89] Robert Bridges, 'Wordsworth and Kipling', *Times Literary Supplement* 529 (29 February 1912): 81.

[90] Fletcher, *Irradiations*, p. xiv.

[91] Eunice Tietjens, 'The Spiritual Dangers of Writing Vers Libre', *Little Review* 1.8 (November 1914): 25–9 (p. 26).

[92] Bodenheim, 'The Decorative Straight-Jacket', p. 22.

[93] Tom Hood, *The Rules of Rhyme: A Guide to English Versification* (London: James Hogg & Son, 1869), p. 47.

[94] Henry Lanz, *The Physical Basis of Rime* (1931; rpt, New York: Greenwood, 1968), p. 324.

Athenaeum in 1920 defending Flint's theory of the 'cadence', the newspaper entitled his letter 'Rhyme and Metre or Vers Libre'.[95] Tietjens had assumed the same distinction. But anyone who had read Ford's first *Collected Poems* or Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) knew that much free verse did rhyme. Indeed, Loy applauded E. E. Cummings for having 'united free verse and rhyme', techniques which 'so urgently needed to be married'.[96] It was Eliot who famously proposed that the modern 'liberation from rhyme might be as well a liberation *of* rhyme'.[97] And before Eliot, Fletcher had argued that, once rhyme is freed from functioning 'as a mere tag at the end of a line', it can take its seat alongside assonance and alliteration in 'the poetic orchestra'.[98] Only then can it be 'used intelligently as a device for adding richness of effect'. That poetic orchestra is a loose figure for what I have been loosely calling Loy's rhyming and chiming.

There is an implicit but important distinction here, between phonemic repetition as principle or structure, as for instance the alliteration of Anglo-Saxon verse or the end rhyme of a sonnet, and phonemic repetition as intermittent and unpredictable, a decoration or a richness. (Hollander would term this a difference between metre and rhythm.[99]) This also suggests a distinction between general meaning and local meaning, to which we shall return. For the moment, in order to be more specific in our analysis of poetry's repetitions, and of the meanings they had for British and American poets in the 1920s, it will help to have a point of comparison. Having turned a deaf ear to *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, Collier concludes his review of the *Contact Collection* by commending Sitwell's contribution. Like Loy, Sitwell insists that, contrary to common opinion, 'free verse is often most intricately rhymed'.[100] Even when metrically regular, Sitwell's score exploits a large poetic orchestra to rich effect. Here is a stanza from 'An Old Woman Laments in Spring-Time' (1925), one of her two poems in the *Contact Collection*:

> And all the laden fruit-boughs spread
> Into a silver sound, but dead
> Is the wild dew I used to know,
> Nor will the morning music grow.[101]

[95] Ford, 'Rhyme and Metre or Vers Libre'. [96] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 17; *LLB96* 159–60.
[97] Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 189. [98] Fletcher, *Irradiations*, p. xiii.
[99] Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, pp. 135–64.
[100] Edith Sitwell, *Poetry and Criticism* (London: Hogarth, 1925), p. 24.
[101] Edith Sitwell, 'An Old Woman Laments in Spring-Time', in *The Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers*, pp. 297–8 (p. 298). For an earlier comparison of Loy and Sitwell, see Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 58–70.

The repetition of sound here extends from couplet rhyme, through simple assonances and alliterations ('boughs' and 'sound', 'silver' and 'sound'), and through the double assonance of 'Nor will' and 'morning', to the complex echoes of 'wild' in 'dew I' (/waɪ/ echoing in the glide across /uː aɪ/) and of 'dew' in 'used to' (wherein /t/ elides /d/, so that /djuː/ echoes in a /tuː/ or /tʊ/).

Even richer and more experimental effects appear in the following lines, which Sitwell published in *Bucolic Comedies* (1923):

> Rose Castles
> Those bustles
> Beneath parasols seen!
> Fat blondine pearls
> Rondine curls
> Seem. Bannerols sheen
> The brave tartan
> Waves' Spartan
> Domes—(Crystal Palaces)
> Where like fallacies
> Die the calices
> Of the water-flowers green.[102]

This poem plays wittily with the conventional canons of rhyme, and in particular with the function of rhyme as a tag to mark the end of the line. The so-called perfect rhyme of 'Rose' and 'Those', for instance, rather improperly precedes the half rhyme or consonance of 'Castles' and 'bustles'. Those 'bustles' then echo in 'parasols' (/b/ to /p/, /slz/ to /sɒlz/), but 'parasols' is kept from the end of its line by 'seen', and 'parasols' echoes again in 'Bannerols'. In turn, that 'seen' inverts the /niː/ in 'Beneath', internally rhymes with 'blondine' and 'Rondine', reverse rhymes with 'Seem', and at last rhymes properly or conventionally with 'sheen'. Sitwell's syntax then complicates the rhythm of these repetitions. Though 'Castles' and 'bustles' have the same contour of stressed and unstressed syllables, the word 'Rose' may, being a significant adjective before its noun, have more stress than the merely demonstrative 'Those'. (Unless of course we hear a distinction between *those* bustles and *these* bustles, otherwise unmentioned, in which case 'Rose' may be less significant.) Finally, the first sentence's syntactic inversion, the fifth line's heavy enjambment, and the third sentence's regular syntax give 'seen', 'Seem', and 'sheen' very different rhythmic contexts. The first of these, for instance, may either be emphatic –

[102] Edith Sitwell, 'Water Party', in *Bucolic Comedies* (London: Duckworth, 1923), pp. 70–71 (p. 70).

to have at last seen beneath those parasols! – or relatively unimportant, a humble verb trailing behind the bustle of the nouns.

This, too, is witty and even satirical. Sitwell soon introduces the figure of 'the Dean', who explains to 'the Queen' how 'Each chilly / White lilly / Has her own crinoline', and Sitwell complements the early reference to the Crystal Palace, built for Prince Albert's Great Exhibition in 1851, by likening the water's waves to Balmoral Castle, the Scottish estate which Prince Albert and Queen Victoria purchased in 1852. (The following poem in *Bucolic Comedies*, 'Hornpipe', refers specifically to Victoria and Albert.) So the white lily of the Blessed Virgin suggests the fallacy of pious Victorian prudery, imposing on each young girl a prophylactically stiff petticoat; the English 'Rose' of those castles is decidedly not a Scottish thistle; and the rhyme of 'tartan' and 'Spartan' attacks the false pomp and privilege of royalty. Perhaps the title of the poem, 'Water Party', invokes the *Water Music* which Handel composed for George I, links the last British monarch of the German House of Hanover to the first, and thus laughs at a foreign monarch's enthusiasm for a subject Scotland. (The previous poem in *Bucolic Comedies*, 'Herodiade's Flea', cites 'a dance-tune by Handel', and in 1915 Sitwell had published a poem called 'Water Music'.[103]) At the same time, Sitwell's own irreverent music mocks the august institutions of Crown and Church. Queens, deans, and castles pass in time like waves in water. That stiff 'crinoline' props up no proper rhyme, falling instead between the 'seen' and the 'lilly' which precede it, and the 'recline' and 'divine' which follow. And in addition to such local effects, the general mode of this phonemic repetition means for some readers a serious satirical attack. Graves observed in 1925 that Sitwell not only employs 'false rhymes, French rhymes, Cockney rhymes, assonances, stressed with unstressed, and similar violences', but also lets 'the rhymes seem to guide the sense'.[104] That, again, was the vice Aldington censured as decadence. We might well ask, when the Dean tells the Queen that watery 'seraphs recline / On divans divine / In a smooth seventh heaven of polished pitch-pine', whether that North American conifer is really relevant. (Or maybe the conifer recalls the colonies Victoria's grandfather lost.) But for Graves, this perverse verse challenges 'the ethical system with which the orderly use of rhyme is associated'; it propounds 'a view of life as being wedded in error and ugliness, and ruled by caprice'.

To accept that reading, we need to allow that only some rhymes are proper rhymes. According to this logic, a good rhyme like a good pun makes sense out of nonsense, and a good rhyme repeats the same phonemes

[103] Sitwell, *Bucolic Comedies*, p. 69. [104] Graves, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, p. 35.

with the same stresses. Our judgement of such identities can differ and change. Hood helpfully counselled that such 'atrocities as "morn" and "dawn," "more" and "sure," "light in" and "writing," "fought" and "sort," are fatal to the success of verse', though others, before and after Hood, might judge the first and fourth of these rhymes perfectly perfect, and the second and third quite lively.[105] Sitwell would probably have baulked at this notion of propriety, and Loy would surely have yawned. When she praised Cummings for marrying free verse and rhyme, she also praised his rhymes for being 'fresh', giving as an example the rhyme of 'radish-red' and 'hazarded'.[106] But all three poets understood that others deemed fresh rhymes improper. The irony in Sitwell's 'crinoline', like the effect of Wilfred Owen's pararhymes, depends on that tradition. For Lanz, such rebellion had a specifically historical meaning. Modern poetry could not rhyme properly because the early twentieth century was an age of wars and revolutions, political, intellectual, and aesthetic. Living 'amidst the tragedy that he describes', the modern poet 'either rimes in dissonance or he does not rime at all'.[107] Revolution is essentially hostile to proper rhyme, Lanz argues; falsely 'suppressing bitterness', proper rhyme would only 'sweeten' tragedy with sentimentality.

In a sense, Lanz reads modern poetry against an Augustan poetics, just as Graves reads Sitwell's. Both invoke a poetics in which orderly rhyme bespeaks an orderly world of truth and beauty, ruled by reason. Pope, for instance, can seem to deploy 'Incongruous rhymes for satiric observation' and 'normal rhymes for the realm of law'.[108] But Pope knew well enough that this correspondence was a device, a fiction; he knew that orderly rhyme guarantees no orderly cosmos. Indeed, J. Paul Hunter has argued that, whether in the 1720s or the 1920s, rhymed poetry is

> a poetry of fallen nature; it depends for its full effect on readers trapping themselves by hoping for a more rational, more whole world in which there are symmetries and harmonies everywhere but where belief in them leads inevitably to disappointment, dissonance, and mortal grief.[109]

But that is an argument about rhyme as such. For Graves, only improper rhymes are disappointing, dissonant, and grievous. Neither fiction of form

[105] Hood, *The Rules of Rhyme*, p. 48. [106] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 17; *LLB96* 160.
[107] Lanz, *The Physical Basis of Rime*, p. 337.
[108] Hugh Kenner, 'Rhyme: An Unfinished Monograph', *Common Knowledge* 10.3 (Fall 2004): 377–425 (p. 390).
[109] J. Paul Hunter, 'Seven Reasons for Rhyme', in Lorna Clymer, ed., *Ritual, Routine, and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 172–98 (p. 188).

is an eternal truth; like a poetics in which lineation means wretched negation, each is historically contingent. So, too, are the theories of Freud and Nordau. Freud would have agreed that Sitwell's poetry, which so often recalls children's wordplay, resists established philosophical and ethical systems, but not because she repeats sounds in one way rather than another. Nordau would have agreed that the result is error, ugliness, and caprice, but because of the degree rather than the kind of repetition. By this logic, Sitwell's poetry sickens and dies from phonemic surfeit, from the excess of it.

Sitwell herself wrote in 1925 that 'This world is sick', only to add that 'men make the better doctors'.[110] Though women's poetry is not 'of a lower order than men's', it should instead 'lull the sick world with music like a summer wind, honeyed as the bee-winged warm lights of an afternoon'. That consolatory lull sounds like Bergson, but Sitwell's remarks on prosody are inconsistent. Sitwell also liked Stein, and she praised Stein's work as a lesson in abstraction. 'The question of the making of abstract patterns', she argues, 'is far more important at this time than any question of whether free verse is on as high a level as other forms of verse'.[111] Thinking of repetition as abstraction, we might decide that the phonemic repetition of 'Water Party' makes redundant our questions about the logic of the sentence, about the emphasis on particular words such as 'seen'. Abstraction undoes satire on Victorian society, for pure sound dispenses with sense. Yet sometimes that very abstraction can form meaningful ironies. A disregard for sense may pointedly disrespect the high sententiousness of deans and queens. So, too, though the alliteration of 'silver sound' in 'An Old Woman Laments in Spring-Time' may be heard to mimic the rustling of the boughs' leaves, the assonance of 'boughs' and 'sound' is hardly onomatopoeic, and the poem's melopoeia certainly does not mimic the 'morning music'. That music, after all, fails to arrive or 'grow'. Thinking again of abstraction, we could instead say that, apart from any of the sounds to which it refers, the poem sings its own mourning music or lament, though that reading relies on a pun; there is nothing intrinsically mournful about alliteration on /m/, nor about the repetition of sound as such. (Nor is alliteration or any other form of repetition ever entirely separate from a poem's puns and metaphors and themes.) Nevertheless, Graves suggests that liquid consonants, labials, and open

[110] Edith Sitwell, 'Some Observations on Women's Poetry', *Vogue* (London) 65.5 (Early March 1925): 59, 86 (p. 59).
[111] Sitwell, *Poetry and Criticism*, p. 24.

vowels give 'smoothness', aspirates and dentals give 'force', and gutturals give 'strength'.[112] And Sitwell sometimes suggests sound symbolism, too. In 1928, discussing another poem from *Bucolic Comedies*, she explains that 'the alternation of dull muted R's and sounded R's' achieves 'the effect of the hoarse voice of an animal'.[113] This is a kind of onomatopoeia, since that poem is about a bear, but elsewhere she speaks of essentially 'dark' vowels and 'light' vowels, meanings which seem independent of any given poem or theme.[114] And sometimes, finally, prosody gives form to abstract concepts. The sounds of a poem dealing with 'materialism and the hopeless decay of the spiritual life in this modern world', she says in 1930, are 'at once like the sound of a drum at a fair, and like the uneven beating of a dying heart'.[115]

These many and various justifications for phonemic play are typical, as are the tensions between them. The repetition of sound in Loy's poetry has enjoyed the same range of readings. One critic hears an 'onomatopoeic mimesis of pigeon sounds' in a late poem.[116] Another hears sound symbolism in Loy's use of 'ir', 'ri', and 'gr', sounds which 'articulate' both 'rage' and 'laughter'.[117] Some readers hear her rhyme as the parody of traditional verse-forms,[118] some hear rhyme as an ironic attack on her subject matter,[119] and some hear an 'an aural overload of s's and p's' leading to 'ironic excess'.[120] Sometimes that overload is less excess than tedium. In 'The Black Virginity', one critic argues, the 'repetitive sounds' are 'as monotonous and lifeless as the priests they depict'.[121] Like lineation, phonemic play is readily made into metaphor. Alternatively, the same reader reads the repetition of the letter *i* and its sounds – whether as /aɪ/ in 'eye' or as /ɪ/ in 'flicker' – as an emphasis on the first-person singular pronoun, and so as a metonymy for the self.[122]

[112] Graves, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, p. 29.
[113] Edith Sitwell, 'Modern Poetry: A Few Remarks on Sitwellism', *Time and Tide* 9.14 (6 April 1928): 332–3 (p. 333).
[114] Edith Sitwell, 'Modern Poetry', *Time and Tide* 9.13 (30 March 1928): 308–9 (p. 309).
[115] Edith Sitwell, 'Modernist Poets', *Echanges* 2 (June 1930): 77–91 (p. 88).
[116] Powell, 'Basil Bunting and Mina Loy', p. 16.
[117] Anita Helle, 'Playing with Elegy: Mina Loy's Poetry of Mourning', in Shreiber and Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, pp. 319–40 (p. 325).
[118] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 153.
[119] Alex Goody, 'Empire, Motherhood and the Poetics of the Self in Mina Loy's *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*', *Life Writing* 6.1 (April 2009): 61–76 (p. 65).
[120] Carolyn Burke, 'Becoming Mina Loy', *Women's Studies* 7.1–2 (1980): 137–50 (p. 150, n. 15).
[121] Suzanne W. Churchill, *The Little Magazine* Others *and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 212.
[122] Churchill, *The Little Magazine* Others, p. 197.

In this way, Loy's readers return repeatedly to the customary logic of repetition: sound must in some way relate to sense. In its disordering of our usual usage, Loy's heavy alliteration figures a scene's 'awkward grotesquerie',[123] and in uncovering unsuspected or repressed order, her rhyme 'underlines the affinities' between its terms.[124] Melopoeia enriches her poetry 'by reinforcing the sense of words, by opposing that sense, or by forging connections between words not usually associated, thus generating new meanings'.[125] Thinking more abstractly, one reader argues first that Loy's phonemic play 'foregrounds the very physicality of words', and second that this mirrors the poetry's interest in physical bodies.[126] Similarly, the verbal surface or pattern of sounds in 'Brancusi's Golden Bird' (1922) 'points to itself' in apparently pure abstraction, but is for just this reason just 'like Brancusi's surface', like the formal perfection of his polished sculpture.[127] Repetition unmotivated at a local level thus proves motivated at a general level. And finally, for some, there is no justification: 'Over-alliteration is a problem. She goes on sound-binges, gets stuck on plosive consonants, can't stop' (*LLB82* xxxi). A single poem by Loy may respond to many or all of these theories, as to Sitwell's and to Graves's, to Bergson's and to Freud's. The satiric force of her poetry is strong, but so is the urge towards abstraction. Order and disorder, sense and nonsense circle each other. Poetic technique critiques the sick world or fiddles while Rome burns.

IV

Yet for all that their phonemic play seems so similar, Collier liked Sitwell's poetry and disliked Loy's. One significant difference is that, though Sitwell does play with rhyme's function as a tag to mark the end of the line, that principle still predominates. The difference may be a matter of degree, but it is decisive. As Collier put it, there is the question of how a relation of sounds justifies the *vers libre* arrangement. To be fair, 'An Old Woman Laments in Spring-Time' is in regular quatrains, and

[123] Goody, 'Empire, Motherhood and the Poetics of Self', p. 65.
[124] Susan Gilmore, 'Imna, Ova, Mongrel, Spy: Anagram and Imposture in the Work of Mina Loy', in Shreiber and Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, pp. 271–317 (p. 293).
[125] Debora Van Durme, 'Conjuring Melodies from Arid Air: Mina Loy and Pound's *Melopoeia*', *Cambridge Quarterly* 37.3 (September 2008): 324–48 (p. 333).
[126] Rachel Potter, 'Obscene Modernism and The Wondering Jew: Mina Loy's "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"', in Potter and Hobson, eds, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 47–70 (p. 57).
[127] Ellen Keck Stauder, 'The Irreducible Surplus of Abstraction: Mina Loy on Brancusi and the Futurists', in Shreiber and Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, pp. 357–77 (p. 367).

though Sitwell's other poem in the *Contact Collection*, 'The Drum', features a few irregular and a few unrhymed lines, they tend to be heavily end-stopped. But Collier does not object to free verse as such; he approvingly quotes a passage from Pound's Canto XX, which also appeared in McAlmon's collection. Collier allows that the relation of sounds can sometimes justify a *vers libre* arrangement. And even in Sitwell's 'Water Party', which is much more free than 'The Drum', the principle of end rhyme prevails. Take that poem's longest line, much longer than any other in the poem: 'In a smooth seventh heaven of polished pitch-pine'. This brings to a rousing conclusion the tetrameter lilt that has been established: 'Each chilly / White lilly / Has her own crinoline'; 'And the seraphs recline / On divans divine'. But unlike 'chilly' and 'lilly', 'smooth' and 'heaven' do not rhyme, and unlike 'recline' and 'divine', nor do 'heaven' and 'pine'. Sitwell could have paired 'seventh' and 'heaven', but though she half rhymes 'Castles' and 'bustles' at the beginning of the poem, and though she later lets single words serve as whole lines for the sake of a perfect rhyme ('Castellated, / Related'), here she chooses not to. Nor will she let 'In a smooth seventh heaven' form an unrhymed line (or let it rhyme loosely with 'divine'). As in much of Ford's 'On Heaven', rhyme determines or marks the lines.

Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose features much end rhyme, proper and improper, fresh and stale, but it is not the principle on which the poem depends. Loy's repetitions might instead be compared to Stevens's play on the sounds of *c* in 'The Comedian as the Letter C' (1923), but Stevens frames that free play with blank verse. They might be compared to Moore's 'light' rhymes – Eliot called Moore 'the greatest living master' of rhyming stressed and unstressed syllables – but Moore employs those end rhymes to structure regular syllabic stanzas.[128] In *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, neither rhyme, alliteration, assonance, nor any other form of the repetition of sound is a general structure, a metrical form:

> The guests spreading their gleaming
> faces forward to convey
> that they
> remember *nothing* since the Garden of Eden
> the garish innocence
> of adult guilt
> in the presence of children.

[128] T. S. Eliot, introduction to *Selected Poems*, by Marianne Moore (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), pp. 5–12 (p. 11).

Just as Sitwell rises to a rollicking tetrameter and then subsides into less regular rhythms, so Loy sometimes alludes to traditional metres, from the nursery rhyme to Milton's pentameter: 'the garish innocence / of adult guilt'. But what distinguishes this passage is a restless repetition. The first line assonates 'guests' and 'spreading'; the second line alliterates 'faces' and 'forward'. The second and third lines rhyme properly, while the first line chimes 'spreading' and 'gleaming' internally, though some judges would censure the repetition of a mere participial ending. That ending soon echoes again in '*nothing*', which is at least a noun. This restlessness means that Loy's 'every line starts with an effort of resumption', as John Wilkinson has rightly remarked.[129] Every line must form its own principle, and for some readers the result is 'indistinguishable from prose'.[130] Loy's essentially 'prose form', Collier concludes, is lineated merely 'for the more conspicuous exhibition of the just words', of *les mots justes*.[131] Sound seems to have been sacrificed to sense.

The orchestral scoring of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* thus privileges neither rhyming nor chiming as structure. Henri Meschonnic describes the effect well when he writes that modern poetry has 'diffused rhyme to the entire mass of saying and said'.[132] Extending Eliot's speculation, Meschonnic adds that the 'disappearance of rhyme at the end of the line is a passage toward the recovery of rhyme'. Along similar lines, Donald Wesling writes of modern poetry in which, through phonemic repetition in combination with lineation, a 'pattern emerges and a tone is managed, though without the help of an abstract metrical scheme'.[133] This frees Loy to play, in properly modernist fashion, with inherited principles and values. Because end rhyme does not govern *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the poem's parodies of it are sharper than Sitwell's, and especially so in their satire on the technique itself. When Loy describes a statue of the crucified Christ 'suspended over-head', with his 'poet's feet / [. . .] neat- / ly crossed / in anguish' (*CC* 186–7; *LLB82* 169), the witty division of *neatly*, making a neat end rhyme and unmaking lexical boundaries, mocks the sculpture's and rhyme's own decorum. It does so not least since Loy

[129] John Wilkinson, 'Stumbling, Balking, Tacking: Robert Creeley's *For Love* and Mina Loy's "Love Songs to Joannes"', in Potter and Hobson, eds, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 146–65 (p. 154).

[130] Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason*, 3rd edn (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), p. 124.

[131] Collier, 'Contemporaries', p. 164.

[132] Henri Meschonnic, 'Rhyme and Life', trans. Gabriella Bedetti, *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (Autumn 1988): 90–107 (p. 95).

[133] Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 95.

elsewhere sounds similar echoes without dividing words across lines. (So, too, the figure of a 'poet's feet' indecorously mocks classical scansion.) Loy also plays repeatedly with improper or bad rhyme. In one passage four lines end with the words 'earth', 'inferred', 'preferred', and 'birth' (*CC* 166; *LLB82* 154–5), thus flouting the convention that rhyme should not repeat a root (*ferre*, to bear), should not repeat the consonant before the rhyming vowel ('-ferred'), and should not repeat a vowel across distinct but contiguous rhymes (/ɜ:/).[134] This is all quite properly satirical; the prosodic excess, disorder, or disrespect affects our sense of the subject at hand. And as Daniel Albright says of Eliot's early rhymes, this is an 'artifice that exposes its own artificiality at every turn'; the wit self-critically produces 'a kind of preciosity'.[135]

Endorsing no single prosodic principle, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* suggests what Elisabeth A. Frost calls, in a fine reading of the poem, 'strategic overwriting': 'an overdoing of poetic technique to the point of parody, an overdeterminacy of meaning in verse saturated with polysemy, alliteration, inflated diction, punning, bathos, and ironic rhyme – a rag-bag of techniques that mimic poetic convention'.[136] Loy's 'neat- / ly' certainly over-determines meaning strategically, for satiric ends. But the reduction of rhyming to chiming, the restless urge for phonemic repetition throughout the line and across lines, means something more than this too. Here Loy's repetition of *-ing*, like the echo of 'Garden' (/d(ə)n/) in 'Eden' (/d(ə)n/) and in 'children' (/drən/), is a clue. This phonemic play fastens on unstressed syllables, on the sound that does not bear emphasis, that does not announce the sense. So as to prompt the comparison of senses, proper rhyme is supposed to chime stressed syllables. For Hegel, this imperative responds to the structure of the language, and can be traced in the transition from classical rhythm to modern rhyme. Whereas the significant root of Greek and Latin words need not be marked by pitch or stress, German and English make stress and sense coincide. As a consequence, Hegel reasons, classical versification can use the whole sound of the word, the 'corporeal side of the language', while modern poetry 'emphasizes only

[134] See, for instance, R. F. Brewer, *Orthometry: A Treatise on the Art of Versification and the Technicalities of Poetry* (London: Charles William Deacon & Co., 1893), p. 157; and Joseph Berg Esenwein and Mary Eleanor Roberts, *The Art of Versification* (Springfield: The Home Correspondence School, 1913), p. 79.

[135] Daniel Albright, 'Modernist Poetic Form', in Neil Corcoran, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 24–41 (p. 26).

[136] Elisabeth A. Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), p. 32.

that wherein the spiritual *meaning* lies for the purpose of communication, and leaves the rest alone as insignificant by-play'.[137] This makes rhymed verse crude in comparison to classical verse; it gives rhyme 'a thumping sound',[138] and the same is true of alliteration, whether incidental or structural: 'I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were, / In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes'.[139] Rhyme is essentially 'barbarous', judged Fletcher; 'it derives from the stamping of feet, clapping of hands, pounding of drums, or like devices of savage peoples'.[140] But *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* makes music of that insignificant by-play, those relatively senseless sounds. This, I think, represents the poem's most radical rebellion against poetic tradition.

If Langland's alliteration on /h/ is only enriched by the sequence of 'in', 'an', and 'un-', Loy's verse has only rich sequences:

> The staring baby
> stumbles to the fire
>
> Her consciousness
> Sluggish to raucous surfaces
> of necessities
>
> quickens
> to colour-thrusts
> of the quintessent light.

In 'staring' and 'stumbles' (/st/) or 'colour' and 'thrusts' (/ʌ/) stress, sense, and repeated phoneme coincide, but in 'stumbles' and 'baby' (/b/) or 'colour' and 'quintessent' (/k/) they do not. The double /əs/ in 'consciousness', each instance unstressed, echoes again in 'raucous', 'surfaces', and 'necessities'. Trailing after a stressed syllable, the /ʃ/ of 'consciousness' trails at the end of 'sluggish', like the /z/ of 'surfaces', 'necessities', and 'quickens'. These restless repetitions are as indifferent to emphasis as they are to lineation: the /ɜː/ of 'Her', probably unstressed before 'consciousness', can happily recur, stressed, in 'surfaces'. Remembering Sitwell's 'silver sound', one might suggest that Loy's verbal surface mimics those 'raucous surfaces',

[137] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 2.1023. Attridge makes a similar point: 'Because most English rhymes involve the root rather than the inflectional ending or suffix (*looking* rhymes with *booking* but not with *liking*), the semantic contrast or parallel between the two words is more prominent than it is in French' (Attridge, *Moving Words*, p. 61).

[138] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2.1028.

[139] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd edn (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), p. 1.

[140] Fletcher, *Irradiations*, p. xiii.

but the mimicry would need to be deferred or figurative, since the surfaces figure an abstraction, those 'necessities'. Moreover, it is difficult to hear such sibilance as boisterous or noisy, in the way that Graves imagines liquid consonants to give smoothness. Most importantly, Loy's repetitions disregard the very sound which gives that sense, the 'rau-' which means hoarse or rough or loud (*ravis*, hoarse); instead they play with the suffix which simply designates an adjective, as it does in *sonorous* and *luminous*. In similar fashion, Loy frequently indulges in homoeoteleuton when the grammatical category does not much matter: 'anticipation', 'colouration', 'aspiration', 'civilization' (*LR2* 46; *LLB82* 127).[141] She equally likes to chime prefixes and prepositions, as for instance when she matches a privative *in-* to an inwards *in-* and a verbal *-in-* interred within its word (*in* + *con* + *tenere*, to hold), not to mention an outwards *ex-*: 'The incontinent / exudes into involuntary / retention' (*LR2* 49; *LLB82* 131). In these and other ways, though they might seem at odds, Loy's phonemic play exploits her frequently abstruse, technical, and classical vocabulary. (A 'large number of quasi-scientific pomposities', Collier calls them.[142])

No other modernist poet, not even Stevens, attends to the sounds of words in quite this way. Loy's urge for phonemic repetition is more than witty or mimetic, more than emphatic or expressive, more than allusive or ironic, though it can be all those things. *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* also frustrates these justifications. This, I think, is why in an early review of *Lunar Baedecker* (1923) Edwin Muir could praise Loy's 'unique' wit and deprecate her 'earnest, alliterative Babu'.[143] Loy's sounds are clever and complicated, but they cannot always be reduced to wit or satire or even, at a local level, to sense. It's telling that Muir terms Loy's alliteration 'earnest', as if it obeys a sincere and separate compulsion. Moreover, some passages in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* are relatively free from phonemic play; not even the urge to repeat sounds is a general principle or binding law. It comes and goes, restlessly. It is characteristic without being ubiquitous, essential without being structural. Loy can be witty or satiric without

[141] Of course, the grammatical category can be relevant. In the early poem beginning 'There is no Life or Death' (1914) Loy emphasises abstract condition or state by rhyming eight lines on *-ity* (*LLB96* 3). Homoeoteleuton unmotivated by such specific meaning has long been judged a fault, but it need not be. James I. Wimsatt writes especially well of its musical function in Chaucer. See James I. Wimsatt, 'Rhyme/Reason, Chaucer/Pope, Icon/Symbol', *Modern Language Quarterly* 55.1 (March 1994): 17–46.

[142] Collier, 'Contemporaries', p. 165. The best account of Loy's vocabulary remains Perloff's essay, 'English as a "Second" Language: Mina Loy's "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"', in *Poetry On and Off the Page*, pp. 193–207.

[143] Edwin Muir, 'Recent Verse', *New Age* 34.19 (6 March 1924): 223.

rhyming and chiming, and she can rhyme and chime when sombre or ecstatic:

> Ova is standing
> alone in the garden
>
> The high-skies
> have come gently upon her
> and all their
> steadfast light is shining out of her
>
> She is conscious
> not through her body but through space
>
> This saint's-prize
> this indissoluble bliss
> to be carried like a forgetfullness
> into the long nightmare. (*CC* 178; *LLB82* 163–4)

Tuma calls this 'the only genuinely affirmative moment' in a poem 'brimming with negativity'.[144] Such moments preoccupied Loy. Mrs Jones reflects that there 'is no saying in what bliss consists',[145] though Loy writes quite rapturously of ecstatic illumination in her later essay on the 'History of Religion and Eros'.[146] In *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the customary logic of phonemic repetition seems to offer ways to say bliss: the assonance that yokes 'Ova' to 'alone', 'high' to 'skies', and 'light' to 'shining'; the softer echo that binds 'standing' (/dɪŋ/) to 'garden' (/d(ə)n/), and so gives that first couplet balance, a moment's poise; the consonance of final /s/ across unstress and stress in 'conscious' and 'space', since space and not body is the medium of Ova's consciousness; and the full repetition of 'her', trailing without emphasis at the close of two contrasting phrases, a humble point of return, a fulcrum.

Yet the closing lines of this brief section, entitled 'Illumination', are different. The 'space' of consciousness echoes in that 'saint's-prize' (from /speɪ/ to /eɪ/ and /sp/), a phrase whose twin stresses recall and whose final syllable rhymes with the heavenly 'high-skies'. But if anything the 'This' matters more, for it recurs at the beginning of the next line and then echoes in 'indissoluble bliss'. Surely, here, the bliss of wordplay matches the epiphany, the sounds of the words binding together presence, permanence, and pleasure. Yet the one line's triple chime on /ɪs/ plays on the *dis-* of division (*dis*, apart, in two), not the privative *in-* which, here,

[144] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 148. [145] Loy, *Insel*, p. 117.
[146] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, pp. 242–3.

registers inviolable unity; that /ɪs/ then echoes in 'forgetfullness', in the mere suffix of abstraction; and 'bliss' doubles the '-ble' of mere potential or capability. Neither '-diss-', '-ble', nor '-ness' is stressed; they are what Hegel calls insignificant by-play. The sounds play against the sense, and when we emphasise that *in-*, insisting on the nature of this bliss, we risk hearing *sin*, 'this sin-dissoluble bliss'. In the story of the poem, that is true enough: the mother routinely censures Ova's pleasure as sin, and the presence of parents in the garden will soon dispel this moment of illumination. But in this reading, the bliss has already proved dissoluble in sound; the line is already an adieu to Eden, since it invokes the idea of Eden, a bliss forfeited through sin. Our expulsion was a 'dissolution wrought by Sin', Milton says.[147] As if to guard against that temptation, the white space between 'this' and 'indissoluble' seeks to silence phonemic slippage with graphic separation. And if, in this second reading, *sin* and *dis-* do not determine the line's phonemic play, sound and sense remain divided. The further and more grievous risk is thus that the deictic 'this' indicates only the bliss of Ova's epiphany, not the bliss of this sound. 'Illumination' is either the poetry of Ova's moment, so that those blisses coincide, or the poetry of the 'long nightmare', of a childhood subject to strict censure and the damaged adulthood which ensues. And either the sad necessity for expulsion lives with us even in the garden, since the poem prophesies that nightmare, or we have been expelled from the garden already.

If wit is supposed to attack society's unreason and injustice, here it is as though childlike wordplay undoes a child's bliss. The alternative is that this is not bliss, or is an insufficient bliss. In Loy's short story 'Incident', to take another instance of ecstasy, a 'sombre luminousness' or revelation of 'universal electricity' is also said to be only a 'ridiculous little accident'.[148] The bliss in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, a satire on social life, offers only asocial isolation. There are good reasons, then, to doubt the section's affirmation. Possibly these lines critique the adult invention of childhood innocence, a Victorian convention which directly contributes to Ova's long nightmare. Probably the lines allude ironically to Christina Rossetti, who envisions 'one red rose in a garden where all other roses are white': 'As it were alone in the garden, alone in the heavenly place, / Chief and centre of all, in fellowship yet alone'.[149] There is no fellowship for Ova, no reconciliation of the one and the many, and though she may be as solitary

[147] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 11.55.
[148] Loy, *Stories and Essays*, pp. 36, 37, 39.
[149] Christina Rossetti, '"As the Apple Tree among the Trees of the Wood"', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. R. W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers, corrected edn (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 410.

as that red rose, the rose is the symbol of her hostile mother. Her bliss is certainly no basis for social renovation, and neither is this poetry. Leaving Loy's literary inheritance aside, we may choose not to hear in 'this indissoluble bliss' an echo of Satan's sibilance: 'A dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn'.[150] Remembering that phonemic play is by no means always or essentially strategic, we may choose not to argue for a pun or even an awkward grotesquerie. But nevertheless this line is divided against itself; its peculiar way with sound plays not just against particular senses, but against sense as such. Here and throughout *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, Loy's urge for phonemic repetition is also witless, earnest in its own isolation or, better, its indifference. The poem that knows this is a mind cry.

V

'In reading modern poetry', Loy cautioned, 'one should beware of allowing mere technical eccentricities or grammatical disturbances to turn us from the main issue which is to get at the poem's reality'.[151] That reality may be the world beyond the poem, to which the poem refers: a sick world or wilderness of girls and boys, children and parents, instinct and education, prejudice and piety, mind and body, money and art. Against that reality, attending to technicalities or techniques – listening for the chiming of stray consonants – may well seem beside the point. Technique may alternatively seem essential, as for instance when it mimics or satirises reality, or when it serves as strategic overwriting. Still, such witty webs of sound at best drape a much more solid substance. But the reality may also be the world of the poem, the world it weaves. Technique never seems eccentric when we allow the poem its reality. *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* knows both realities. 'An artwork is real only to the extent that, as an artwork, it is unreal, self-sufficient, and differentiated from the empirical world, of which it nevertheless remains a part.'[152] Loy's poem displays the wilderness and displays its distance from that wilderness, because it displays the art of poetry as a restless urge to repeat sound, often indifferent to emphasis or reference, throughout the line and across lines. The lesson of 'Illumination' is that the division of reality and technique is itself a reality, in which technique is also therefore central.

[150] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 10.508–9.
[151] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 17; *LLB96* 160.
[152] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 359.

Loy's poetry divides its readers, too, especially when it comes to deciding whether her modernism heralds redemption or offers relief from the dark homeless moment. For some it 'bespeaks as tragic a sensibility as Hardy's';[153] for others it achieves 'a boisterous extreme'.[154] For some Ova emerges from the narrative a prophet of mongrel aesthetics, 'the mother of a new chosen people';[155] for others she remains in exile, and the poem 'radically fails to produce a positivistic description of modern female autonomy'.[156] That failure may be deliberate: though *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* is in many ways a fictional autobiography, there are good reasons to separate Ova and Loy, the character described and the act of description.[157] The poem may thus 'satirize a system of national- and gender-identification that its protagonist seeks to abjure but to which she is finally bound'.[158] The satire itself would then remain unbound, and this would leave the future open: partly because Loy's manifestos and aphorisms seem utopian, there are good reasons to read her work as an 'effort to discover the visionary in a fallen world'.[159] Politically, that means a properly avant-garde poetics, 'the transformation of human relations through an aesthetic revolution in consciousness'. Some readers find that revolution in Loy's logopoeia, her wit, her irreverence, her 'riotous pleasure in the materiality and instabilities of language'.[160] Other readers see that revolution thwarted or curtailed, compromised by the systems it satirises. Ova's story represents 'a model of how to mock, if not altogether escape, even the most powerful ideological control'.[161] If Ova's fate is a fall into the symbolic from the blissful babble of the nursery,[162] then that is as much the fate of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* itself, as of the adults it pictures in the drawing room. Finally, the dialectic of technique and reality suggests that the art of poetry is, like Ova, bound to the world it abjures. I want to

[153] Joshua Weiner, 'Rediscovering Mina Loy', *American Scholar* 67.1 (Winter 1998): 151–8 (p. 158).
[154] Nicholls, '"Arid Clarity": Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue', p. 64.
[155] Miller, 'Feminist Location', p. 87.
[156] Potter, 'Obscene Modernism and The Wondering Jew', p. 66.
[157] For an account of the complex relation between fact and fiction in Loy's autobiographical prose writings, see Sandeep Parmar, *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[158] Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 188.
[159] Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, '"Little Lusts and Lucidities": Reading Mina Loy's *Love Songs*', in Shreiber and Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, pp. 111–28 (p. 128).
[160] Rowan Harris, 'Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy', in Potter and Hobson, eds, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 17–46 (p. 43).
[161] Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*, p. 50.
[162] Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*, p. 55.

argue that if Loy's peculiar phonemic play does not abdicate the world, still its moment of indifferent or forgetful bliss is also complicit. 'This is a poetry which is absolutely not soothing.'[163]

That returns us to the problem of wit's relation to despair, or the intellect's relation to our shoddy world, and then, in turn, to the relation of wit and despair to witless melopoeia. Again there is division between those who argue that Loy's 'satiric irony is responsible', that it 'does not undermine itself indefinitely',[164] and those who find that 'even the ironist's pretentions to aloof superiority' collapse.[165] The risk of wit, as Hegel says, is that it becomes 'invincible', the 'universal talk and destructive judgement' of a 'disrupted consciousness'.[166] The risk is that wit plays a 'nihilistic game' with itself. But the consciousness which recognises its disruption, Hegel continues, derides the world and derides its own self. Maintaining its gaze upon the world of actuality, it both retreats into itself, in an inward negativity, and turns in a further negation 'from that world towards heaven'.[167] When Pound called Loy's and Moore's poetry the utterance of clever people in despair, he quoted Ernest Renan: 'La bêtise humaine est la seule chose qui donne une idée de l'infini.'[168] Negating the world and itself, consciousness imagines some other realm or condition, and aesthetic form may figure forth that unity and bliss. But there is a difference between the 'infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction',[169] and a satire which, 'with its bitterness against the corruption of the age', fails or refuses 'to enter the proper sphere of untroubled poetic contemplation'.[170] Loy attacks the structures of social life, and she imagines Ova alone in the garden, but true heaven or utopia remains beyond her poem, an absence. The abstraction or indifference of Loy's phonemic repetition does not console or suffice, and only thus, minimally, leaves space for a world in which technique and reality might be reconciled, because the world as a whole would have found reconciliation. This, then, is one way in which modernist poetry sought, through the interplay of sound and sense, to understand its place in the world, and if this poetics appears in

[163] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'A Letter on Loy', in Shreiber and Tuma, eds, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, pp. 499–501 (p. 501).
[164] Arnold, 'Mina Loy and the Futurists', p. 94, n. 23.
[165] Nicholls, '"Arid Clarity": Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue', p. 64.
[166] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §521, p. 317.
[167] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §525, p. 320.
[168] Pound, 'A List of Books', p. 58.
[169] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2.1200.
[170] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2.1152.

much of Loy's verse and in the verse of some of her contemporaries, it is at its most radical and rigorous in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*.

In *The Waste Land*, lineation comes to mean wretchedness when Eliot offers metaphors for enjambment, as at the beginning of the poem, and when, much more importantly and throughout the poem, the poetic line works upon its materials as a movement of negation. Whether as units of sound or vision, the lines work upon the sense, actively; the misery or the waste happens as lines, so that the art of poetry becomes complicit. Loy's rhyming and chiming work upon the sense, too, but because they also make so much of relatively senseless by-play, they produce a pleasure set apart, detached from the dark homeless moment. That itself is a negation or contradiction, a division between technique and reality, and it too implicates poetry in the state of things. We could call inner contradiction the sin that thus dissolves bliss, but the sin is not in any way an 'innate impurity' (a phrase which slips blithely from an inwards *in-* to a privative *in-* in two unstressed syllables). The sin is historically specific. It consists in the social antagonisms of 1885, when Loy was two years old in London; of 1925, when she published the last parts of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* in Paris; and of the intervening years in Florence and New York and elsewhere. But equally it consists in the poetics of her time: in the rise of free verse, in the traditions against which modernism rebelled, and in the accepted functions of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, refrain, and other forms of phonemic repetition.

I have lingered with 'Illumination' because it seems affirmative, but we should also ask what the earnest urge to repeat sound means for Loy's most hostile satire. Do technique and reality divide these lines too?

> Early English everlasting
> quadrate Rose
> parodox-Imperial
> trimmed with some travestied flesh
> tinted with bloodless duties dewed
> with Lipton's teas
> and grimed with crack-packed
> herd-housing
> petalling
> the prim gilt
> penetralia
> of a lustre scioned
> core-crown. (*LR2* 41; *LLB82* 121)

This is wonderfully acerbic.[171] The alliteration of the first line pretends to reconcile history and eternity through the nation, and alliteration soon mocks the paradox of that nation's empire, not to mention the empire of paradox, the dominion of unreason. The chiming twin stresses of 'crack-packed', 'herd-housing', and 'prim gilt' mimic the crowding of urban life – people packed into houses packed together – and they betray that life's cheap bourgeois furnishing, fashion, and behaviour. The wicked punning on 'duties', 'dewed', and 'teas' extends from moral obligation and import levy to colonial expropriation and hackneyed lyricism. (That is to say, a lyricism hackneyed by 1923. 'Sweet Rose, dew-sprent', sings Christina Rossetti, 'Drop down thy evening dew / To gather it anew'.[172]) This in turn suggests further puns: the teasing lips of an eligible English rose, sipping Lipton's tea; the guilt of gilding and of prudery; a crown of cork, rather than of gold; and even a crown cork, the world's first disposable bottle cap. In a sense Loy's wit ostentatiously travesties poetry's flesh, the 'corporeal side of the language'; it trims meaning with 'the sensuous and habitually sinful body of language' so as to satirise the conventional division of body and soul, and the humbug notion of innate corporeal impurity.[173] Here, too, there is strategic overwriting, a parody of the subject through a parody of technique, and that parody paradoxically implicates itself: a 'parodox'-poetics.[174]

Nevertheless, and even in such hostile satire, there is something in excess of that excess. The first line's emphatic alliteration on initial vowels is matched by the subtler repetition of /l/ in all three words, and then of /ɪŋ/ in 'English' and 'everlasting'. One might think that fuller repetition more emphatic than alliteration on quite distinct vowels – /ɜː/, /ɪ/, and /ɛ/ – but instead it plays indifferently across a stressed and an unstressed syllable, and works with another mere participial ending. The same is true of the subdued repetition of /r/ in 'quadrate Rose', the inversion of 'quadrate' in 'parodox' (from /kwɒd/ to /dɒk/), and the glide on /ɪm/ from 'Imperial' to 'trimmed' (when an inwards *in-* does not matter very much). That last is much less emphatic than the thump of /pær/ and /pɪər/ in 'paradox-

[171] These lines have proved central to some of the very best criticism on Loy. See, in particular, Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*, pp. 44–6; and Perloff, *Poetry On and Off the Page*, pp. 200–202.

[172] Christina Rossetti, 'A Summer Wish' (1862), in *Complete Poems*, pp. 36–7 (p. 36).

[173] Simon Jarvis, 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', *Paragraph* 28.2 (July 2005): 57–71 (pp. 62–3).

[174] *LLB82* amends 'parodox' to 'paradox'. The word is spelt 'parodox' in both the *Little Review* and *Lunar Baedecker* (Paris: Contact, 1923), p. 8, and a portmanteau of *parody* and *paradox* was by no means beyond the author of 'Stellectric'.

Imperial', and of /tr/ in 'trimmed' and 'travestied'. It is less thump against humbug than accompanying hum. So even here there is phonemic surfeit; the poem's way with insignificant by-play is more than ironic, more than a strategically gaudy or gilt poetics. A metonymy for poetry, technique itself divides, being both justified and unjustified. The earnest urge to repeat sound produces real gold, intricately and genuinely beautiful: it is a bliss. There is a heaven which the artist makes, and it arises alongside the ugliness and injustice of modern life. But that golden poetics knows itself guilty, cries its own complicity, because it is not the bliss of the world.

CHAPTER 5

Stevens's Accidence

—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

Thomas Hardy, 'Hap'[1]

I

'The earth, for us, is flat and bare', say the people to the man with the blue guitar, and they ask for him to play.[2] This may be because to him the earth seems rich and strange, or because his music could save them from their flat, bare lives, or because he and they together might yet find happiness in a 'Poetry / Exceeding music' (*CPP* 136–7). The latter would mean that the earth, for the moment, is flat and bare for the guitarist as well – for all of 'us'. Throughout *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), Wallace Stevens plays quite freely with the pronouns *us* and *you, I* and *they*. The feeling that the earth is flat and bare becomes common, extending across the poem and beyond the poem, to us. That is to say, the poetry which the people imagine exceeding music, a poetry to 'take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns' (*CPP* 137), may exceed *The Man with the Blue Guitar* itself. Or maybe, in some sense, giving voice to that desire satisfies it, achieving a happy poetry. Stevens's poem never chooses between these possibilities since, in a customary contradiction, it offers relief from the state of things, offers even to transform the state of things, and yet condemns itself for participating in that state of things. In the 1930s, when life for so many was flat and bare, or worse, Stevens thought in detail about the relation

[1] Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Samuel Hynes, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982–1985), 1.10.

[2] Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), p. 136. Hereafter abbreviated as *CPP*.

between poetry and the modern world, and about the social relations which those ambiguous pronouns configure: poet and people, individual and collective.[3] But as James Longenbach has shown, Stevens had been thinking about such things for a long time.[4] In 1935 Stevens reflected that, though the tale of Crispin in 'The Comedian as the Letter C' seems singular and extraordinary, it represents 'the sort of life that millions of people live'.[5] In another poem from the first edition of *Harmonium* he calls the motive for imagination 'the common drudge' (*CPP* 68). The noun means both someone subject to servile work and the servile work which that person performs; the adjective then makes drudgery both routine and shared: borne day in, day out, and borne by so many, or even by all of us.

These oppositions are common enough in Stevens's poems and are commonplaces for his critics: individual and collective, reality and imagination, heaven and earth. These oppositions, or versions of them, were common to many modernists. Setting out a plan for *The Cantos* in a letter to his father, Pound distinguishes the casual world of the 'quotidien' from the realm of the gods, the 'divine or permanent world'.[6] In an essay he praises Brancusi's sculpture for being 'as free of accident as any of the philosophical demands of a "Paradiso" can make it'.[7] And as early as 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time' (1892), Yeats seeks 'Eternal beauty' in the symbol of the Rose, only to insist that poetry must also remember 'common things that crave': from the 'weak worm' and the 'field-mouse' to 'heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass'.[8] Like Yeats and Pound, Stevens worked with and against these oppositions. In 'Sunday Morning' (1915) he wonders how, if there can be no 'change of death in paradise' and if death is 'the mother of beauty', we could ever be happy in a deathless world (*CPP* 55). Happiness has to happen, and to pass away. This theme recurs throughout Stevens's work; it seems to posit 'desire's fulfillment within time rather than beyond it',[9] and so to marry immanence and transcendence, the physical and the metaphysical.[10]

[3] See, especially, Alan Filreis, *Modernism from Right to Left: Wallace Stevens, the Thirties, & Literary Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Nickels, *The Poetry of the Possible*, pp. 181–217.

[4] See James Longenbach, *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[5] Stevens, *Letters*, p. 294.

[6] Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound to His Parents: Letters 1895–1929*, ed. Mary de Rachewiltz, A. David Moody, and Joanna Moody (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 625.

[7] Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 444.

[8] Yeats, *The Poems*, p. 52.

[9] David R. Jarraway, 'Stevens and Belief', in John N. Serio, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 193–206 (p. 201).

[10] David R. Jarraway, *Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief: Metaphysician in the Dark* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), p. 36.

The poem's vision of a ring of men chanting 'in orgy on a summer morn / Their boisterous devotion to the sun' (*CPP* 55–6) marries individual and collective as well, or at least it envisions that marriage. The men's 'chant of paradise' (*CPP* 56) is about paradise, desiring it, and their chant belongs to paradise, a paradise achieved. In either case, the happiness of those 'men that perish' (*CPP* 56), men who come and go, passes in time too.

But the common opposition of time and eternity conceals another problem. The question is not only whether but also how things happen. What can happening mean, and what sort of happening means happiness? Listening to *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, we should ask what would need to take place, what mode of taking place would poetry need to put in place, for poetry to take the place of empty heaven and its hymns. This problem has surfaced repeatedly in my readings of Ford and Eliot and Loy, and now it is time to address it directly. In 'On Heaven' happiness happens when nothing much happens, or nothing untoward or unforeseen: 'And that day there was no puncturing of the tires to fear; / And no trouble at all with the engine and gear'. The lovers' happy day proves, not rich and strange, but merely as free of accident as any of the mundane demands of a materialist heaven can make it. 'Smoothly and softly we ran between the great poplar alley / All down the valley of the Rhone' (*OH* 83): having made the momentous decision to abandon their past lives, the lovers' happiness now is simply to follow the road which follows the valley which follows the river, to surrender to the course laid out for them by fate or nature. Ova's moment of bliss in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* is different, for that bliss is 'to be carried like a forgetfullness / into the long nightmare'. Ova's fate is also laid out already, but as a long life in a fallen world; her bliss is fated to remain only a memory in which she can forget the present. Moreover, nothing can happen in Loy's poetry, no new sequence of sounds or new relation of sound to sense, which would reconcile the contradiction of technique and reality. Finally, whether the 'damp gust / Bringing rain' (lines 393–4) brings some relief at last, or merely condemns dull roots to stir again from winter slumbers, nothing can happen in *The Waste Land*, or to *The Waste Land*, to relieve it from the incessant negation wrought by lineation. The line becomes the condition of poetry's own movement, inescapable. At the same time, my readings have made much of particular poetic events. In a sense, no single line-break or sequence of echoing consonants is accidental, for within the distinct modes of happening established by Eliot's and Loy's poems, every such poetic event becomes significant.

The question of how things happen cuts across the commonplace opposition of reality and imagination, for both the world and the work of art may be understood in terms of accidence and necessity, or chance and fate, or freedom and compulsion. Two related problems arise, which I want now to examine by turning to Stevens's poetry and to *Harmonium* in particular. First, just as the earthly paradise may be a way of happening, rather than an absolute origin or goal, so too may be the wilderness of modernity. Common drudgery or the flat, bare earth would then be not the consequence of some single, catastrophic event, the curse of some distant Fall, but a fallen condition of events, an order of unhappy happening. Flat and bare would be how things happen, here and now. Second, this suggests that flat and bare is how things happen for and in poetry, or in modern poetry. This problem involves the poet's intentions, but more importantly it extends to assumptions underwritten by the concept of poetry current in the 1910s and 1920s. To a considerable degree, these assumptions are still with us. I am interested here in a pervasive poetic value or logic, rather than a specific technique. According to this logic, as we shall see, poetry must be as free from accident as the demands of a heaven on earth can make it. In a poem, or in a good poem, no event, however small or unexpected, is insignificant. *Harmonium* is a long and various volume, and no argument can account for all its moods, but in many of its poems that aesthetic necessity proves no happiness at all. On the contrary, here the art of poetry becomes complicit in the necessary drudge or the flat, bare order of things.

II

Harmonium repeatedly invokes the difference between earth and heaven, or earth and paradise. The gulf between this world and another world appears fundamental, a principle established in the volume's first two poems, slight though they may seem. 'Even certain smaller poems, unimportant in themselves have a function in the book-as-a-whole', Pound told Elkin Matthews, defending the shape of what would soon become *Lustra* (1916).[11] 'This shaping up a book is very important. It is almost as important as the construction of a play or a novel.' Nevertheless, 'Earthy Anecdote' (1918) and 'Invective Against Swans' (1921) do seem strangely 'intransigent' poems with which to begin one's first book.[12] The two poems

[11] Ezra Pound, *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 285.

[12] Natalie Gerber, 'Stevens' Mixed-Breed Versifying and His Adaptations of Blank-Verse Practice', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 35.2 (Fall 2011): 188–223 (p. 188).

separate earth from heaven, but the value of those worlds remains unclear. Should we celebrate the soul's metaphysical flight in 'Invective Against Swans', transcending as it does the birds' bland motions and the soiled statues, and are the bucks and the firecat of 'Earthy Anecdote' all too earthly? The diptych introduces Stevens's typically slippery reinvention of these inherited categories. 'Earthy Anecdote', in particular, seems to refrain from the judgements which commonly justify the desire for heaven or its rejection.

'Earthy Anecdote' does depict the working of this world as deliberate, necessary. There is nothing accidental about the bucks' swift, circular progress or the firecat's bristling. The world moves as if in a groove: nothing happens to happen; nothing merely falls out. This is true from the title's first word, which seems deliberately to avoid the common term *earthly*. As it happens, we know that Stevens first titled the poem 'Earthly Anecdotes', presumably imagining the poem we know as the first in a series.[13] But *earthy* still involves the gulf between this world and another world, for when Stevens returns to the word in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* it specifically opposes *paradise*: 'We have not the need of any paradise, [. . .] For easy passion and ever-ready love / Are of our earthy birth and here and now' (*CPP* 341). Stevens had precedent for this in the Bible and in Milton, an early enthusiasm. 'The first man is of the earth, earthy', writes Paul, while 'the second man is the Lord from heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:47). If Satan has 'oreleapt these earthie bounds', says Gabriel at the garden's gate, then that is because it is so hard 'to exclude / Spiritual substance with corporeal barr'.[14] Stevens's choice of *earthy* thus inflects the opposition of earth and heaven with the difference between matter and spirit, and an emphasis on earthy matter or soil recurs throughout *Harmonium*. The choice of *earthy* also promises some coarse, bawdy, or improper anecdote, and given the next poem's irreverent way with swans, those traditional symbols of poetry, *earthy* implies the anecdote's impropriety according to aesthetic canons. The word serves less to designate a single, stable meaning, and 'more as a question needing the rest of the poem to answer what it precisely denotes and connotes'.[15] The word also raises the question of its difference from *earthly*, of the motivation for choosing it. This suggests that an order of necessity governs both earthy life and earthy words.

[13] See Bart Eeckhout, 'Wallace Stevens' "Earthy Anecdote"; or, How Poetry Must Resist Ecocriticism Almost Successfully', *Comparative American Studies* 7.2 (June 2009): 173–92 (p. 177).

[14] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4.583, 585.

[15] Eeckhout, 'Wallace Stevens' "Earthy Anecdote"', p. 178.

There seems nothing accidental about the bucks and the firecat for a reason:

> Every time the bucks went clattering
> Over Oklahoma
> A firecat bristled in the way.
>
> Wherever they went,
> They went clattering,
> Until they swerved
> In a swift, circular line
> To the right,
> Because of the firecat.
>
> Or until they swerved
> In a swift, circular line
> To the left,
> Because of the firecat. (*CPP* 3)

The poem introduces its protagonists as subject to a general condition, applicable 'Every time' and 'Wherever'. The third line's indefinite article means that, subsequently, 'the firecat' need not always be the same firecat. A single firecat may repeatedly bristle in the way, or a different firecat may bristle in the way each time, wherever in Oklahoma the bucks happen to go clattering. In the latter sense especially, firecats are functional. In either case, the conspicuous verbal repetitions make the swerve to the left and the swerve to the right a kind of automatic mechanism. Not least through the pun on *line*, they also involve the movement of free verse in that automatism. The arcs of the bucks, writes Beverley Maeder, 'constitute a metaphor for any poem in its black and white form'.[16] The fourth stanza then summarises this routine:

> The bucks clattered.
> The firecats went leaping,
> To the right, to the left,
> And
> Bristled in the way. (*CPP* 3)

Events always happen in the same way, permitting only a few variables. And if, as the inaugural gesture of *Harmonium*, this anecdote and its lineation offer 'an allegory of forging a poem in an open, blank space with consciously spare, basic materials', an allegory of American

[16] Beverley Maeder, 'Sound and Sensuous Awakening in *Harmonium*', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 33.1 (Spring 2009): 24–43 (p. 26).

modernism in contrast to the traditional pentameters of 'Invective Against Swans',[17] the poem's own happening becomes itself part of that earthy condition. Stevens's lineation promises a rich and strange development – the portentous isolation of 'And' – and instead delivers bathos: 'Bristled in the way', as ever.

Yet Stevens's title also suggests an anecdotal incident, some specific event noteworthy because it did happen to fall out: a single event which might not have fallen out, or might not have been expected to. In a nuanced reading of the poem, Seth Perlow notes that its 'undecided tense effects an interpretative suspension' between continuous routine and interruptive event.[18] The sense of a single episode and an individual firecat dominates the fourth stanza, where the summary could have returned the poem to an indefinite article, but does not. The real incident, however, happens in the final couplet:

> Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
> And slept. (*CPP* 3)

'Later' suggests the chronicle of a single narrative, and so complicates the earlier sense of an unchanging routine, in which a firecat or firecats went leaping time and again. 'Later' might, at a stretch, introduce what happened after each and every episode of clattering and leaping, but much more strongly it suggests that an individual firecat one day bristled and then went to sleep. And this falling asleep does not happen like the bristling or the swerving; it seems governed by no explicitly causal logic.[19]

We can speculate about why the firecat might fall asleep, much as we can speculate about what the whole incident means, but as Robert Buttel notes, we cannot know why.[20] It may be that the firecat slips off contentedly, having enjoyed a full day tormenting bucks, or it may be that he falls asleep because night has fallen, a night in which his bright eyes gleam. 'Day is desire and night is sleep' (*CPP* 136), say the people to the man with the blue guitar, and that is part of why the earth, for us, is flat and bare. Sleep may be but another automatic mechanism. Yet 'Earthy Anecdote' mentions neither night nor contentment, and it may be that the firecat merely falls asleep at some later point: there is no clear sequence of cause and effect.

[17] Gerber, 'Stevens' Mixed-Breed Versifying', p. 190.
[18] Seth Perlow, 'The Other *Harmonium*: Toward a Minor Stevens', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 33.2 (Fall 2009): 191–210 (p. 194).
[19] Perlow, 'The Other *Harmonium*', p. 193.
[20] Robert Buttel, 'Teasing the Reader into *Harmonium*', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 6.3–4 (Fall 1982): 79–86 (p. 80).

Sleep would then offer relief not from exertion but from indifferent routine, from the unhappiness Stevens described in a letter to Elsie Moll in 1909, the year they were married: 'When I complain of the "bareness" – I have in mind, very often, the effect of order and regularity, the effect of moving in a groove.'[21] Swerving in swift, circular lines would then be very different from driving smoothly down a poplar alley by the banks of the Rhone, though both mean surrender to necessity. 'Earthy Anecdote' would instead describe something like that sad, predictable routine which means that the crows in 'Invective Against Swans' have 'already' (*CPP* 4) soiled the statues and will do so again. This shades into the 'despair' that Stevens noted in the last section of 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' (1917):[22]

> It was evening all afternoon.
> It was snowing
> And it was going to snow.
> The blackbird sat
> In the cedar-limbs. (*CPP* 76)

This picture offers as little overt emotion or judgement as 'Earthy Anecdote', but the despair is there in the movement from continuity ('snowing'), through fixed future ('going to snow'), to a simple action allowing no difference or event ('sat'), and finally to an unchanging noun: unlike the time of day, the snow, and the blackbird, the 'cedar-limbs' are simply given. The movement of the poetry allows no meaningful change: 'It was evening all afternoon', and is so line after line.

But is this true of 'Earthy Anecdote'? 'The scene seems to allow for no hope of change or fulfillment', writes Charles Altieri, though the poem's 'spareness allows consciousness to persist without lament or self-pity'.[23] Yet if sleep offers relief from regularity, the poem's final couplet might, correspondingly, merely happen to follow. The sequence or the movement of the poetry would then become quite casual. Stevens told Elsie that books alone 'shatter the groove': 'They are like so many fantastic lights filling plain darkness with strange colors.'[24] They are like the late appearance of the firecat's bright eyes, we might add, though those eyes appear to us only

[21] Wallace Stevens, *The Contemplated Spouse: The Letters of Wallace Stevens to Elsie*, ed. J. Donald Blount (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), p. 130.
[22] Stevens, *Letters*, p. 340.
[23] Charles Altieri, 'Intentionality as Sensuality in *Harmonium*', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 27.2 (Fall 2003): 163–72 (p. 169).
[24] Stevens, *The Contemplated Spouse*, p. 130.

as the firecat closes them. But even if we take 'Earthy Anecdote' as an allegory for books of free verse or for American poetry, there is something else involved in its casual quality. Pointing to the poem's moments of 'playful arbitrariness', Perlow remarks that such moments downplay any 'cosmic significance'.[25] The pleasure of the event may consist, for the firecat and for us, merely and precisely in escaping a sequence of cause and effect. And yet we normally like poems to move deliberately. Even if the firecat does not fall asleep because he is tired, or because it is night, the significance of that casual event returns the poem to the logic of necessity. The poem is still determined by a bare, ordered world.

So we also need to speculate about the choice that governs the poem's happening in time, and about whether, in a sense, the poem has any choice at all. Very little in 'Earthy Anecdote' suggests that the working of the world involves free will. The final couplet therefore poses the problem of earthy happening and of earthy happiness – how things happen and what their happening can mean – and then of poetic happening and poetic happiness. The poem is by no means simply a fable for unhappy modernity, though some have proposed that the firecat and the bucks allegorise the railroad which displaced Native Americans in the new state of Oklahoma, admitted to the Union only in 1907.[26] In that letter to Elsie about routine and regularity, Stevens complains of a life defined by 'railroading to an office and then railroading back'.[27] Well before he began writing the poems of *Harmonium*, Stevens understood the drudge of the modern working day. Other readers have wisely counselled against seeing too strict an allegory in the figures of 'Earthy Anecdote',[28] but the modern world does inflect the movement of the poem. Again, the despair in that thirteenth picture of the blackbird is there in the poetry's mode of happening, not in the things it depicts. 'Earthy Anecdote' is important because, avoiding crude allegory or symbolism, it involves 'a good deal of theory'.[29] Setting the scene for *Harmonium*, its theory is a theory of our earthy condition and a theory of poetry, or of modern poetry. If the poem's abstraction appears to leave the accidents of history behind, the theory itself is contingent upon history. Like Stevens's free verse, the theory is specific to the moment of modernism.

[25] Perlow, 'The Other *Harmonium*', p. 194.
[26] Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years, 1879–1923* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1986), p. 531, n. 1.
[27] Stevens, *The Contemplated Spouse*, p. 130.
[28] See Eeckhout, 'Wallace Stevens' "Earthy Anecdote"', pp. 179–81.
[29] Stevens, *Letters*, p. 204.

III

Since Aristotle it has been customary to argue that we prefer the sequence of events in the world and in a play to be necessary and significant. It 'makes a great difference', he writes in the *Poetics*, 'whether things happen because of, or only after, their antecedents'.[30] Even 'among chance events we find most awesome those which seem to have happened by design'.[31] For Aristotle, the logic of causation affects the value of the play, and the same is often thought to be true of poetry. A firecat may merely happen to fall asleep, but the events that make up so wonderful a poem as 'Earthy Anecdote' happen for a reason. We routinely dovetail meaning and causation in this way: if it is meaningful, it seems the effect of a cause, and if it has a cause, it seems meaningful. Some will insist less on an author's intention and more on linguistic, cultural, and historical causes, but the desire for necessity and significance is deeply ingrained in our reading of poetry and, more broadly, in our governing aesthetics.

Stevens inherited this logic. While at Harvard he read George Edward Woodberry's *Heart of Man* (1899), a volume of essays ranging across poetry, politics, and religion, in which Woodberry celebrates art as 'the process of creating a rational world'.[32] In the artwork, he urges, the 'trivial, the accidental, the unmeaning, are rejected'. Arthur Symons offers a similar formulation in his seminal study, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). Only when 'we brush aside the accidents of daily life', Symons insists, does literature achieve 'its authentic speech'.[33] For Symons and Woodberry, this is largely a question of sifting and sorting materials. For Barrett Wendell, who probably taught Stevens at Harvard and whose lectures on English composition Stevens read closely, it was instead a question of form. Wendell cautions that, though any writer may occasionally achieve 'Accidental effects', the 'difference between the artist and the dabbler' is marked by 'certainty of touch'.[34] George Santayana, another early influence on Stevens, likened poetry to music, in which 'the chance note that comes to be supported by a melody becomes in that melody

[30] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a20 (p. 65). [31] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a5 (p. 63).

[32] George Edward Woodberry, *Heart of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 122.

[33] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: W. Heinemann, 1899), p. 10. Stevens had read Symons by 1906, though he found him frustrating and confusing. See Holly Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 163.

[34] Barrett Wendell, *English Composition: Eight Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 230. Richardson notes that Stevens read Wendell and Woodberry while a student (Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years*, pp. 64, 86).

determinate and necessary'.[35] This emphasis on form was matched, sometimes, by reflecting on language itself as one of the writer's chief materials. By 1909, Stevens was reading Paul Elmer More, whose essay on 'The Science of English Verse' approvingly quotes Hermann von Helmholtz's work on acoustics and aesthetics: 'in poetry the construction of the verse serves only to reduce the external accidents of linguistic expression to artistic order'.[36]

Take, as an example, these lines by Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey, from the poem 'Accident in Art':

> What poet has not found his spirit kneeling
> A-sudden at the sound of such or such
> Strange verses staring from his manuscript,
> Written he knows not how, but which will sound
> Like trumpets down the years? So Accident
> Itself unmasks the likeness of Intent,
> And even in blind Chance's darkest crypt
> The shrine-lamp of God's purposing is found.[37]

This poem is from Carman's and Hovey's *More Songs from Vagabondia* (1896), in his copy of which Stevens inscribed an early poem of his own.[38] Though it may not have resounded down the years, 'Accident in Art' exploits the lucky chance that *spirit, a-sudden, sound*, and *staring* all alliterate on /s/, that /s/ also sounds in *verses* and *manuscript*, and that the letter *s* appears in *verses* and *his* even when it sounds a /z/. Sound and vision come together in the providence of poetry; the matter of language is redeemed. A modern poet could wish for no better sign of cosmic purposing than the happy accident that, having trumpeted the mighty *Accident*, she can pass by *Intention* and hail *Intent* instead. (This triumph presumably silences the latter's legal connotations.) She could not do so, were she looking to acclaim the likeness of Attention. Rhyme redeems contingency.

Many of Stevens's critics have inherited this logic, too. In 1932, R. P. Blackmur assured readers that Stevens's every word is 'definitely

[35] George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 283.

[36] Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays*, first series (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), p. 109. Stevens quotes essays from More's volume in a letter to Elsie on 28 February 1909 (Stevens, *Letters*, p. 133) and in his journal on 14 May (Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, p. 220).

[37] Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey, *More Songs from Vagabondia* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1905), p. 71. This is the edition which Stevens owned, now held in the Huntington Library.

[38] Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, p. 187.

meant'.[39] Though it might seem otherwise, no word is used 'at random'; Stevens never reaches for an unnecessary but elegant synonym, since synonyms are 'accidental, superficial, and never genuine'.[40] As Helen Vendler puts it, 'all language in a poem is deliberate language'.[41] Early reviewers and critics repeatedly stressed the fact that, given sufficient attention, 'each unexpected verbal manipulation' in *Harmonium* turns out to be motivated by deeper purposes.[42] Though Stevens's rhymes are experimental, though his vocabulary includes 'accidentals of alien terms', and though his 'terminations and cadences' are 'usually quite unpredictable', the result has a hidden 'inevitability'.[43] Turning to narrative, one recent critic has argued that Crispin's fate is not a 'haphazard denouement' (*CPP* 33) but 'the necessary ending'.[44] Stevens himself sometimes shared these values. Writing to Williams about *Al Que Quiere!* (1917), he remarked that the 'casual character' of his friend's poems troubled him.[45] Stevens's term dovetails sequence and significance, for *casual* (Latin *cadere*, to fall) registers both a chance event, something that merely falls out, and a minor event, an event without meaning. (It may or may not be an accident that the year after Williams published his book, Stevens published 'Earthy Anecdote'.)

But modernism put this poetics under new pressure. As we have seen, Graves blamed Sitwell's experimental rhymes for propounding 'a view of life as being wedded in error and ugliness, and ruled by caprice'.[46] It is mere whim to indulge in so many 'false rhymes' and 'French rhymes', and to 'let the rhymes seem to guide the sense'. For Graves, such poetry culpably implies that mere whim governs life itself. Much better, Abercrombie advised, is poetry in which 'all is perfect order and secure coherence'.[47] Against our mundane world of the trivial and discontinuous, poetry promises a 'world of perfectly coherent and indestructible

[39] R. P. Blackmur, 'Examples of Wallace Stevens' (1932), in Charles Doyle, ed., *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 95–125 (p. 96).
[40] Blackmur, 'Examples of Wallace Stevens', pp. 96, 107.
[41] Helen Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 39.
[42] Llewelyn Powys, 'The Thirteenth Way' (1924), in Doyle, ed., *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 64–9 (p. 65).
[43] Paul Rosenfeld, *Men Seen: Twenty-Four Modern Authors* (New York: Dial, 1925), pp. 151, 161.
[44] Jonathan Ivry, 'Stevens, Benjamin, and Messianic Time', *Wallace Stevens Journal* 23.2 (Fall 1999): 141–51 (p. 142).
[45] Williams quotes Stevens's letter in the prologue to *Kora in Hell* (1920), in William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 15.
[46] Graves, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, p. 35.
[47] Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 216.

interrelationship: the world, in fact, of completely secure significance'.[48] Eliot seems to fulfil that promise when, in a note to *The Waste Land*, he explains that the pairing of the Buddha and St Augustine at the end of 'The Fire Sermon' 'is not an accident' (*PE* 1.75). Yet Eliot's notes are nothing if not mischievous, and the apparent clarification may imply that though this pairing is deliberate, others are not. Many modernists put this poetics to the test by bringing the world of accident and irrelevance into their poems. Yeats recalls that, in the 'casual comedy' of life before the Easter Rising, he happened sometimes to pass in the street the women and men who would one day be revolutionaries, passing them with 'a nod of the head / Or polite meaningless words'.[49] But in the poem such experiences are remade; the poem makes the meaningless meaningful. The poet 'is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast', Yeats reflected in old age; 'he has been re-born as an idea, something intended, complete'.[50] Yeats's poetry shows this rebirth at work. 'Modernism could not put contingency down', writes Clark.[51] 'Contingency was a fate to be suffered, and partly to be taken advantage of, but only in order to conjure back out of it – out of the false regularities and the indiscriminate free flow – a new pictorial unity.' In our case, modernism conjures new poetic unities. In the early *Cantos* Pound presses this poetics further, bringing into the substance of his work the contents of Sigismundo Malatesta's correspondence, complete with seemingly irrelevant details, the contingent stuff of history. The documents' stray dates, manuscript abbreviations, and casual asides register the texture of a complex, lived history, and they register the texture of Pound's encounter with that history in archives and libraries across Italy. Their seeming insignificance is partly the point; it is a sign of the 'quotidien' world. Finally, if modernism makes poetry out of the contingent materials of history, it also makes poetry out of the contingent materials of language. In the space of three short lines in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the /əs/ which twice chimes in 'consciousness' happily chimes again in 'raucous', 'surfaces', and 'necessities', despite the different spellings and the various etymologies which those spellings reflect (*CC* 141; *LLB1* 136). Disregarding the coincidence of phoneme, stress, and sense, Loy's restless repetitions play with linguistic accidents. It seems fitting that, when Alfred Kreymborg and Walter Arensberg were

[48] Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 215. [49] Yeats, *The Poems*, pp. 228–9.
[50] W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction' (1937), in *Later Essays*, pp. 204–216 (p. 204).
[51] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, p. 11.

concocting their plan for *Others*, the two poets whom they most wanted to publish, the two poets who they thought best represented modernism's experimental energies, were Loy and Stevens.[52]

IV

This, then, was the situation in which 'Earthy Anecdote' appeared, first in the July 1918 issue of the *Modern School* and a year later in the final issue of *Others*. This is the situation to which that poem's 'theory' and its practice respond, as do many of the poems in *Harmonium*. If some critics look to Stevens's poems for textual harmonies, for unities conjured out of the contingencies of language, others look to his poems for contextual harmonies, for unities conjured out of the contingencies of history. They look to significant interrelationships, not between syllables or images, but between the Great War and 'Sunday Morning',[53] or between the wireless and 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman' (1922).[54] I want to argue here that the historical material out of which *Harmonium* makes its poetry includes, centrally, these debates and experiments, in which modernism wrestled with an inherited poetics of necessity. And this historical material determines, in part, what happens to the material of language in Stevens's poems, which are themselves part of their situation.

For in wrestling with these problems, the modernism of Stevens, Loy, Williams, and others touches on broader intellectual concerns and societal developments. A still popular strain of Romanticism likened human fate to the workings of nature. In his 'well thumbed' copy of William Sharp's *Sonnets of This Century* (1886),[55] Stevens would have read the sonnet by Hartley Coleridge which begins: 'Let me not deem that I was made in vain, / Or that my being was an accident'.[56] Seeking signs of greater purposing, Coleridge then turns to nature for comfort: 'Each drop uncounted in a storm of rain / Hath its own mission, and is duly sent / To its own leaf or blade'. Alternatively, the aesthetics of necessity meets modern engineering when Pound, in an essay on the 'beauty of machines', cites the dictum that 'we find a thing beautiful in proportion to its aptitude

[52] Alfred Kreymborg, *Troubadour: An Autobiography* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), p. 221.
[53] Longenbach, *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things*, pp. 72–8.
[54] Edward Allen, '"One Long, Unbroken, Constant Sound": Wireless Thinking and Lyric Tinkering in Wallace Stevens's *Harmonium*', *Modernism/modernity* 21.4 (November 2014): 919–36 (pp. 930–31).
[55] J. M. Edelstein, 'The Poet as Reader: Wallace Stevens and His Books', *Book Collector* 23.1 (Spring 1974): 53–68 (p. 58).
[56] Hartley Coleridge, 'Not in Vain', in William Sharp, ed., *Sonnets of This Century* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), p. 48.

to a function'.[57] 'There is no such thing as chance in art any more than in mechanics', Baudelaire explains, since in the successful artwork 'every detail has its justifying cause' ('tout a sa raison d'être').[58] Eliot had good warrant, then, for thinking some of Baudelaire's alexandrines 'deliberately broken'. Whatever Baudelaire may have intended by a particular line, the concept of art or of poetry suffuses the poem with justification, with 'the likeness of Intent'. This mechanical order could also figure political and social realities. In 1907, the year in which the United States annexed Oklahoma, Stevens read Davidson's *Holiday and Other Poems* (1906), and in one of Davidson's eclogues a character condemns the British Empire for being 'A drilled mechanic state / That jolts in one deep rut'.[59] Empire is the 'enemy of chance', he says, and only chance 'keeps the world in hope'.[60] Capitalism, too, seemed to reduce life to an order of necessity. Soon after arriving in New York, Stevens bemoaned the deep rut cut by getting and spending. 'All New York', he wrote in his journal, 'is for sale'.[61] 'It is dominated by necessity. Everything has its price – from Vice to Virtue.' Subject to that necessity, Stevens came in time to work as an insurance lawyer, railroading to and from the office each working day, as well as across the country on business trips, and insurance proved one of modernity's most profitable means for managing contingency. Capitalising on developments in statistics, insurance was and is, in Ian Hacking's phrase, a device for 'taming chance'.[62] At the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, Stevens's work in corporate suretyship meant responding to contingencies with forms of order.[63] Modern statistics and the burgeoning discipline of sociology showed, in turn, that the apparent accidents of daily life obey hidden necessities; they revealed a purposing behind blind chance.

As this brief sketch suggests, necessity could be a blessing or a curse. So, too, could accidence, and for poetry this produces contradictions. For instance, if poetry may be a mechanism in which each and every part is

[57] Ezra Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings: The Lost Thought of the Italian Years*, ed. Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 69.
[58] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Salon of 1846' (1846), in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 47–107 (p. 65); Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2.432.
[59] Davidson, *Holiday and Other Poems*, p. 72. [60] Davidson, *Holiday and Other Poems*, p. 71.
[61] Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, p. 72.
[62] Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[63] For a recent account of Stevens's work in suretyship, see Jason Puskar, 'Wallace Stevens's "Drastic Community": Credit, Suretyship and the Society of Distrust', in John Attridge and Rod Rosenquist, eds, *Incredible Modernism: Literature, Trust and Deception* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 181–98.

put to work, in which events are redeemed from chance by necessity, it may also be a sad, mechanic exercise in which events necessarily move in a groove or a rut, the unhappy art of a flat, bare earth. The contradiction arises partly because our language suggestively blurs conceptual distinctions. I have held off from insisting on these distinctions because their constant blurring allows modernism to engage with the wider world of its historical moment, whether with engineering or sociology. The blurring allows modernism to find meanings in the way things happen. The distinctions blur partly because terms such as *necessity, accident, chance*, and *cause* are wandering stars in shifting constellations; their meanings and their values alter with their contexts. When Baudelaire compares art to mechanics, *raison* slips between what Aristotle would call final and efficient causes, between the meaning we find in a line-break and the motion one cog transfers to another. It thus slips between spirit and matter, as do *necessity* and *cause*. These ambiguities are themselves accidents of the language we find ourselves working with. The *heure*, or hour, in French *bonheur*, happiness, and in *heureux*, happy, implies that happiness is temporal, transient, while the German *Glück* means both happiness and luck. But the English words *happy* and *happiness* imply, etymologically, both an event, a happening in time, and a chance event, mere happenstance. Again, this raises the question of causation, of a given event's relation to other events. But like *fortune*, the *hap* involved in *happy* and *happiness* may be both the outcome of chance, whether good or bad, and a good outcome of chance. This raises the further question of significance, of the meaning of the event. A casual occurrence may be random or insignificant; an accident may be a chance event or a mishap. So there is a tension between, on the one hand, the common desire for causation and meaning, and, on the other hand, a sense that happiness might also be a chance event, a casual occurrence. 'Verily, it is a blessing and not a blasphemy', proclaims Nietzsche's Zarathustra, 'when I teach that "above all things there standeth the heaven of chance, the heaven of innocence, the heaven of hazard, the heaven of wantonness."'[64] I have freed all things, he cries, 'from bondage under purpose'. While Hartley Coleridge imagined every raindrop destined for its proper leaf or blade,

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Macmillan, 1911), p. 201. We know that Stevens read Nietzsche early, that he could have done so in German, and that he probably read *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883) first. For further discussion of Stevens's encounters with Nietzsche, see Milton J. Bates, 'Major Man and Overman: Wallace Stevens' Use of Nietzsche', *Southern Review* 15 (Autumn 1979): 811–39; and B. J. Leggett, *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), especially pp. 32–51.

in an early sonnet of his own Stevens mused: 'The careless wind was happy company / That hurried past and did not question where' (*CPP* 482).

But we need to ask what it means to speak of chance. What does it mean, for example, when Crispin serves an 'apprenticeship to chance event' (*CPP* 32)? Aristotle speaks of things which are from chance or by chance: 'τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης'. His Greek configures chance as an impersonal cause, absent and unknown but an agent nonetheless, whose effects are clear. David Hume once cautioned that 'what the vulgar call chance is nothing but a secret and conceal'd cause', and so for Hume every event is determined by cause and effect.[65] Chance is merely an operation of the understanding, a failure on our part to recognise the causal workings of the world. (At the same time, Hume thinks the notion of cause and effect a projection we make onto sequences of phenomena. Necessity 'is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another'.[66]) If we accept determinism, a chance (*cadere*) occurrence only seems to fall out accidentally. We may stumble on the accidental alignment of a wheelbarrow, rainwater, and chickens, and still believe that the event is wholly determined. It is only that we did not expect, intend, or effect it. In this sense poetry, too, commonly involves a deterministic logic. When we read poems we search for secret and concealed causes. The temptation, in reading 'Earthy Anecdote', is to deny any degree of accidence (*ac* + *cadere*) to the falling asleep of the firecat or to the falling out of the poem. The assumption is that the world and poetry are somehow fated.

We can distinguish fate from determinism, too, though these notions also blur. 'Every object is determin'd by an absolute fate', Hume explains, meaning only that objects are subject to the law of necessity.[67] Hume seems untroubled by the idea, but William James resists the theory of hard determinism. Though Stevens may not have read Hume, he certainly read James, who discusses Hume's theory of causation in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911).[68] And for James a theory which denies free will, whether human or divine, and which denies chance events, in the sense of uncaused occurrences, was too

[65] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 1.89–90 (1.3.12.1).
[66] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.111 (1.3.14.20).
[67] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.257 (2.3.1.3).
[68] William James, *Writings 1902–1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 398, 449, n. 1, 1082–3.

bleak to bear.[69] It was a common response to a common concern. In 1906 Stevens read Oliver Lodge's riposte to the materialist philosophy of Ernest Haeckel, in which Lodge seeks to reconcile 'mechanical or scientific determinism' with 'freedom of the will'.[70] Later, in a letter to Elsie, Stevens expresses the need for a comparable reconciliation: 'I was about to say "Oh! For a world of Free Will!" But I really meant free will in this world.'[71] For Walter Benjamin, in turn, the subjection to necessity which we call fate means to have at 'first been condemned and then become guilty'.[72] Fate is a concept of original and natural unhappiness, Benjamin writes. 'Happiness and bliss' have no part in 'the sphere of fate'; happiness and bliss mean freedom from fate.[73] If our system is closed, if this world is wholly determined, there is no prospect of happiness. Like James, Benjamin could not accept so bleak a view. In such a world, accident and fate converge. To be fated is then to be subject to accident, passively to suffer events which we do not expect, intend, or effect, and yet which we subsequently feel could not have happened otherwise and whose meanings are clear.

Stevens worries over these problems, often explicitly, throughout *Harmonium*. Crispin's fate, for example, seems mere surrender to necessary accident. If it was 'unforeseen' that Crispin should end his days a 'fatalist', we assume that both the failure to foresee and the fatalism were fated, the necessary outcomes of his adventures (*CPP* 35). Fate looms in 'Domination of Black' (1916) as gathering planets and the colour of hemlock, while poems like 'The Snow Man' (1921) inscribe necessary laws with that inflexible verb, *must*. In 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' (1918), Mon Oncle struggles with a necessity which works within, a fate which determines his very own thoughts and actions: 'the unconscionable treachery of fate, / That makes us weep, laugh, grunt and groan, and shout / Doleful heroics' (*CPP* 14). Free weeping would be happy weeping; forced laughter is unhappy laughter; and forced heroics are doleful. This is fate as passivity, and in the ninth

[69] William James, 'The Dilemma of Determinism' (1884), in *Writings 1878–1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: Library of America, 1992), pp. 566–94.

[70] Oliver Lodge, *Life and Matter: A Criticism of Professor Haeckel's 'Riddle of the Universe'* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), p. 151. Stevens refers to 'Lodge & Haeckel' in his journal (Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, p. 168), and though he mentions no specific work, *Life and Matter* seems the most likely.

[71] Stevens, *The Contemplated Spouse*, p. 294.

[72] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 204.

[73] Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, p. 203.

stanza it becomes doubly ironic: 'the deadly thought of men accomplishing / Their curious fates in war' (*CPP* 13). To accomplish one's fate in war may be no more than to die by bullet. Though it would mean coming to an end, it would mean deciding or effecting nothing oneself; it would mean mastering neither sequence nor significance. When Mon Oncle then spurs himself to 'come, celebrate / The faith of forty', he may merely deceive himself with empty words, brandishing freedom in a fated world. In that case, the rousing imperative which presumes a choice would be a false form. Celebrating the faith of middle age would be as necessary and inevitable as reaching middle age, and no great accomplishment. The stanza's final question – 'Where shall I find / Bravura adequate to this great hymn?' – is therefore undone, first by the mismatch of adequacy and greatness, and second by the irony that the will and the ability to 'find' become fated illusions.

Harmonium is full of such compromised imperatives. From 'Fabliau of Florida' (1919) to 'Of the Manner of Addressing Clouds' (1921), they set a future against the present of the poem, which is also the present of poetry. It is one of Stevens's most common moves. Calling for difference, his imperatives reject the state of things, but they are also anxious about the possibility of change, and so about an alternative order of happening. The earth is flat and bare because a singular or redemptive event seems impossible, and especially an event redemptive in its singularity. If the 'barque of phosphor' in 'Fabliau of Florida' figures the morning star, and whether we read that star as Venus or Lucifer, the poem's redundant imperatives only call for the inevitable:

> Move outward into heaven,
> Into the alabasters
> And night blues.
>
> Foam and cloud are one.
> Sultry moon-monsters
> Are dissolving.
>
> Fill your black hull
> With white moonlight. (*CPP* 18)

Of course, part of the imperatives' force comes, not through grammar, but image and diction: those fabulous 'alabasters' and that strange 'black hull'. The two imperatives also surround a contingent present, seeming thereby to signal the possibility of change. But the poem ends by cancelling

a different future with a continuous present, indifferent to empty imperatives:

> There will never be an end
> To this droning of the surf.

The 'this' indicates the moment of the poem's occasion, as well as the sound of the surf; it indicates the situation in which the poem happens line by line and sentence by sentence, and this implicates the art of poetry. It is not that poetry is simply a sad 'droning', but that even poetry's rich and strange inventions are conditioned by that order of inevitability, a mode of happening which no imperative can change. Such instances invert the promise which I suggested animates *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, that the grammar of desire might also be the grammar of satisfaction. Or take, as a final example, 'Another Weeping Woman' (1921). That poem's injunction only bids the woman do what she is already doing, just as, the title says, so many women have before and will do again:

> Pour the unhappiness out
> From your too bitter heart,
> Which grieving will not sweeten. (*CPP* 19)

The poem denies that this would be Nietzsche's *amor fati*, for the woman can never alleviate her grief. She is condemned to passivity ('Leaves you', 'you are pierced'). Things happen to her, and the poetry says it can do nothing for her.

This is also the situation when Mon Oncle calls himself 'a man of fortune' (*CPP* 11) – not a man who has saved himself from poverty, but a man condemned to fate's inexorable whim. Things happen to him, too: 'For it has come that thus I greet the spring. / These choirs of welcome choir for me farewell.' For Mon Oncle the happening of events, their coming or befalling, is a condition of fallenness: 'This luscious and impeccable fruit of life / Falls, it appears, of its own weight to earth.' If the qualification 'it appears' raises doubts about whether the fruit of life really does cause its own Fall, the alternative is that we are responsible. We could map this as the difference between Stevens's figurative adaptation of the biblical story (the order of cause and effect; the physics of gravity; the biology of life and death) and its traditional interpretations (the fruit of our first disobedience). More importantly, the Fall that brings death, ruins relationships, and expels us from the heavenly orchard also causes that appearance. It effects our self-consciousness as fallen, in

a variation on Emerson's suggestion that the true Fall is the discovery that we exist.[74] The law by which 'it has come', and so which governs 'I greet', is also that law by which 'it appears' that life Falls. The myth of the Fall seems fated as the right and necessary figure for experience.

This logic is circular. In 'Banal Sojourn' (1919), self-conscious unhappiness and that unhappy self-consciousness mean 'a slum of bloom' or ruined Eden:

> And so it is one damns that green shade at the bottom of the land.
> For who can care at the wigs despoiling the Satan ear?
> And who does not seek the sky unfuzzed, soaring to the princox?
> One has a malady, here, a malady. One feels a malady. (*CPP* 49)

Earlier in the poem the malady had been a temporary lassitude, the sojourn of summer. Now that malady is the temporality of earthly experience in general, not now but 'here'. Yet the real trouble is that poetry's unfolding in time, the happening of the poem itself, participates in this general malady. More worrying even than the repetition of 'malady' is the shift from 'has' to 'feels', an event that brings no happiness because the discovery, the recognition, is a necessary consequence of the condition. To have the malady is to feel it, inevitably to interpret and to judge life as *maladif*. The same order of necessity and significance governs the quatrain's beginning: 'And so it is one damns.' That 'so' indicates causation, as if to say 'as a consequence', and it specifies meaning, as if to say 'in just this way'. The malady is happening as unhappiness. Given the world the poem has described, and given the poetry which describes it, fallenness and a sense of fallenness are equally fated. If there is a great difference between things happening because of, and only after, their antecedents, 'Banal Sojourn' makes necessity 'Our old bane', a condition of guilt and suffering. In modern poetry and modern life, newly conscious that the bane is old, we are fallen when nothing merely falls out.

V

How then could happiness happen? Sometimes, for Stevens, happiness is order. 'Depression Before Spring' (1918) finds unhappiness in the failure of proper sequence: 'The cock crows / But no queen rises' (*CPP* 50). Much later, *Credences of Summer* (1947) seeks the 'more than casual blue'

[74] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 487.

(*CPP* 324), and this something more need not be static or atemporal, the forbidding and 'inflexible / Order' of Ozymandias in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (*CPP* 342). It may change; it may be 'a kind of Swiss perfection' (*CPP* 334) or a world that has 'stopped revolving except in crystal' (*CPP* 351). There are kinds of order, just as there are kinds of the casual, and towards the end of *Notes* Stevens distinguishes an order we impose from an order we discover, an order we long to happen upon (*CPP* 349). Beginning with *Ideas of Order* (1935), Stevens's later works often celebrate certain kinds of order as an escape from bare happenstance. Life for Crispin, says Stevens,

> was not a straight course; it was picking his way in a haphazard manner through a mass of irrelevancies. Under such circumstances, life would mean nothing to him, however pleasant it might be. In 'The Idea of Order at Key West' life has ceased to be a matter of chance.[75]

Both the finished version of 'The Comedian' and the early version Stevens never published, 'From the Journal of Crispin' (1921), represent the problem of chance and order through the dialectic of this world and another world. If a poem like 'Earthy Anecdote' keeps such questions implicit, here the way things happen is explicitly related to redemption, whether secular, mythological, or religious. Crispin's story abounds with ironic and conflicting allusions to the paradisal or heavenly: the romantic quest narrative, the Cytherea Crispin leaves (*CPP* 988), the Eden he seeks in the New World (*CPP* 30), the serpents he finds there (*CPP* 25), the new Jerusalem of his colony, the 'Seraphic proclamations' (*CPP* 37), and so forth. It seems that Crispin's failure is a fall to the 'quotidian' (*CPP* 34). His unhappy fate is subjection to the haphazard and, as we have seen, his fate is the fate of millions.

We therefore confront another contradiction, between order as unhappy necessity and order as freedom from accidence. *Harmonium* directly involves poetry in this contradiction. Perhaps more than any other work in the volume, 'The Comedian' foregrounds tensions between chance and order in its idiosyncratic style. A 'sustained nightmare of unexpected diction', Frank Kermode once called it.[76] The surprise of thick alliteration highlights the arbitrariness of the signifier, we might say. It is an accident that 'nincompated', 'pedagogue', and 'Preceptor' all sound /p/ (*CPP* 22), just as it is accidental that 'Preceptor' chimes with

[75] Stevens, *Letters*, p. 293.
[76] Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p. 45.

'sceptre' (*CPP* 985). This is the contingent linguistic material with which Stevens had to work. But presumably that chime prompted Stevens, in revising 'From the Journal of Crispin', to replace 'The sceptre' with 'Preceptor', and presumably the phonemic repetition becomes necessary and meaningful. I do not necessarily mean that Stevens intended the repetition to identify teaching or instruction with the pates of nincompoops. An urge for phonemic repetition, seemingly independent of the sense, can itself be an intention. 'Stevens's coinages', Simon Jarvis argues, 'give the appearance of being as strongly motivated by melodic, as by thematic, necessities'.[77] And whatever Stevens intended, the poem's precept is that even the accidental is significant; the unexpected and the arbitrary become meaningful as such. To make so much of the accidents of language is to make them purposive. This is a mode of poetic happening as distinct as Eliot's lineation or Loy's restless urge for phonemic repetition. We are led even to think that, since the poem rings the changes on the sounds of the letter *c*, 'it is not accidental' that *nincompate* 'contains that letter'.[78] There is a justifying cause even for the spontaneous blooming of nonce words. Throughout the poem, consistent surprise is unsurprising. The nightmare, so to speak, lies in sustaining the unexpected with such determination.

Things are perfectly in order, too, when the rhythm of a line departs from the metrical order that most clearly governs the poem's happening in time. The regularity of Stevens's blank verse offsets the strange diction and the phonemic cacophonies. But the very first line of 'The Comedian' is a much less happy pentameter than its revision at the beginning of section four:

> Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil,
> The sovereign ghost. As such, the Socrates
> Of snails, musician of pears, principium
> And lex. (*CPP* 22)
>
> Nota: his soil is man's intelligence.
> That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find. (*CPP* 29)

As Natalie Gerber rightly notes, various scansions are possible here.[79] Giving the first line a tone of insistence would mean stressing 'is' and

[77] Simon Jarvis, 'Verse, Perversity, University: Wallace Stevens and the Melodics of Crispin', *Thinking Verse* 4.2 (2014): 101–121 (p. 115).

[78] Philip Hobsbaum, 'Wallace Stevens: *Harmonium*', in Neil Roberts, ed., *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford Blackwell, 2001), pp. 414–26 (p. 420).

[79] Gerber, 'Wallace Stevens' Mixed-Breed Versifying', pp. 191 and 220, n. 3.

skipping lightly from 'the' to 'intelligence', perhaps with an elision. But a tone of insistence seems less likely than an act of identification. No one has denied that man is the intelligence of his soil, after all. If instead we emphasise 'man', the line has an awkward string of unstressed syllables across an offbeat ('is the in-') or an extrametrical beat on 'the', just as there would be a beat on 'the' were the line to read: 'Note: man is the intelligence of his soil.' None of these problems or ambiguities occurs in the revision of the line in the fourth section. In the terms of a quest narrative, the difference between the lines recuperates the first attempt as a necessary failure: 'That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find.' Better, and distinct from the 'monotonous babbling in our dreams' (*CPP* 32), but subject still to the monotonous order of necessity and significance.

In 'Anatomy of Monotony' (1931), a poem added to the second edition of *Harmonium*, monotony is earthy: 'Hence it comes, / Since by our nature we grow old, earth grows / The same' (*CPP* 90). This monotony means both that earth grows old with us and, paradoxically, that while we age the earth, ever new, still grows. For Crispin, monotony means 'one sound strumming in his ear', a 'Ubiquitous concussion [. . .] beyond his baton's thrust' (*CPP* 23). We tend to think of redemption from monotony as difference, and especially as singular difference, something more than the 'golden quirks and Paphian caricatures' (*CPP* 3) so swiftly subsumed by routine in 'Invective Against Swans'. Difference should deliver what Benjamin describes as messianic time, a redemption from homogeneous time.[80] Stevens laments lifeless temporality when he writes in his journal that 'my days are mere blots on the calendar',[81] and Mon Oncle means something like this when he speaks of the 'flat historic scale' (*CPP* 11). In 'The Ordinary Women' (1922) Stevens offers not messianic time but a parable about routine redemption from routine. If, at the beginning of the poem, the women seek to escape their 'poverty' by flinging 'monotony' behind, at the end they seek to escape their poverty again (*CPP* 8–9), flinging behind whatever they have newly found. The women's quest for difference is constrained by the poem's chiastic structure, suggesting an inescapable cycle.[82]

Here, too, significant interrelationships bind the women's poverty to Stevens's poetry. As so often in *Harmonium*, 'The Ordinary Women'

[80] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 395–7.
[81] Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, p. 144.
[82] See Eleanor Cook, *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 36.

presents the meaningless become meaningful as such: 'Mumbled zay-zay and a-zay, a-zay' (*CPP* 8). Yet this verbal exuberance, this relentless flight from verbal routine, is identified with the women's routine escape from routine. Since the narrative undercuts whatever freedom the lacquered loges and the gaunt guitarists offer the women, the verbal freedom is compromised, and even complicit. The extraordinary poem is bound by the horizon of order. Moreover, the problem of difference is explicitly a question of heaven and earth, and of heavenly poetry and earthly poetry. In the fifth and sixth stanzas, at the centre of this cyclic poem, the women seek respite from monotony in heaven and its poetry: 'The canting curlicues / Of heaven and of the heavenly script' (*CPP* 9). But the women cannot enjoy the marital bliss about which they read in that heavenly script; Stevens's earthly script cannot wholeheartedly desire or endorse heavenly cant; and the poem's verbal exuberance cannot speak of redemption without also mocking it and itself. The earth and its script prove inseparable, and unhappy, because the force of the poem is so negative.

There is a moment in the third section of 'The Comedian' which promises something like redemptive singularity, and perhaps even produces it:

> Perhaps the Arctic moonlight really gave
> The liaison, the blissful liaison,
> Between himself and his environment. (*CPP* 28)

Of course, the irony is that this happiness is speculative. The 'hap' in 'Perhaps' may never have arrived, and subsequently the event seems to Crispin to have been only a 'minor meeting'. Perhaps, as Eliot puts it in *The Dry Salvages*, he had the experience but missed the meaning. Seeking that meaning, we might look for a bliss that happens as the poem itself falls out, unfolding in time. Elaborating 'liaison' with 'blissful liaison' separates the event described from the event of description; it foregrounds the poem's own happening; and this syntactic thrill accompanies a flutter in the rhythm. When we stress the second syllable of 'liaison', and so through assonance bind it to 'gave', an unexpected triple rhythm interrupts routine pentameters. (Byron seems to pronounce *liaison* this way in *Don Juan*: 'And oh! ye gentlemen who have already / Some chaste *liaison* of the kind'.[83]) Of course, triple rhythms need not have this effect; Stevens's

[83] George Gordon Lord Byron, *Don Juan* 3.25.193–4, in *The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 494. Stevens refers to 'the gold Don John' in 'Last Looks at the Lilacs' (1923) (*CPP* 39).

pentameter remains untroubled in the line 'And cold in a boreal mistiness of the moon' (*CPP* 27). But perhaps in 'The liaison, the blissful liaison' this difference, this metrical interruption, represents a rhythmic release, delivering bliss. Alternatively, Stevens knew French, and we could instead spread the stress evenly across the syllables of 'liaison', or tilt towards a stress on its final syllable, and so allow the blank verse to march on unperturbed, indifferent to Crispin. In either case, the poem makes meaning from the accidents of the language, whether English or French. In fact it is a false choice: at the level of poetry's happening, even the blissful event would be significant, necessary. The logic of necessity governs both the movement of the poem and Crispin's potential to experience the bliss which he intends: 'chief motive, first delight' (*CPP* 28). If he did enjoy that bliss, it was no accident.

That leaves us, finally, with a more difficult choice. Either 'The Comedian as the Letter C' achieves happiness, redeeming happenstance throughout, or those moments when it condemns Crispin to 'chance event' obscure another form of happiness. Crispin is condemned to 'hapless words' (*CPP* 31), and no word in 'The Comedian' merely happens to happen. So it is as if the poem is unable to imagine, and can only negatively register, the bliss of accidence.

VI

This is difficult, and not common. Since Stevens remarked on the casual quality of Williams's early poetry, a brief comparison will help. Of course Williams, too, was quite capable of careful craft and deliberate poise. We know that 'so much depends' upon a wheelbarrow, rainwater, and chickens, and we do not know upon what their specific alignment depends.[84] Williams declines to address the 'absolute fate' of those objects, though he insists on the necessity of an unspecified significance. The alignment of a wheelbarrow, rainwater, and chickens, and the occasion of our seeing that alignment, may in some sense be accidental, and Williams's poem certainly depends upon the contingencies of history, for the wheelbarrow he saw was owned by an old African American man named Marshall.[85] But the presentation of the sight, the abstraction from realities of race and class, and the poem's meticulous patterning are not

[84] Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1*, p. 224.

[85] For further discussion of race and class in relation to Williams's poem, see Sergio Rizzo, 'Remembering Race: Extra-poetical Contexts and the Racial Other in "The Red Wheelbarrow"', *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.1 (Fall 2005): 34–54.

accidental. Nor is the sequence which, in *Spring and All*, has 'The Red Wheelbarrow' (1923) follow the vision of 'Paradise' presented in another poem of four short couplets, 'Quietness' (1923).[86] The 'blandness' of the indifferent leaves in that paradise, 'so many' and 'so lascivious', counterpoints the difference that determines 'so much' in the much more famous poem. It would be too much to argue that, as we move through *Spring and All*, an empty heaven gives way to an earthy heaven, but we do know that our earth is not the paradise of 'Quietness', and that we must think of our earth according to that opposition. 'The fixed categories into which life is divided must always hold', writes Williams in the prose paragraph which follows, as if commenting on this necessity.[87] 'These things are normal – essential to every activity', though they are not 'dead dissections'. And yet there is no sense in which the deliberate movement of *Spring and All* and of 'The Red Wheelbarrow' actively obscures the significance of a chance event. The falling out of poetry does not, as it does repeatedly in *Harmonium*, negatively register that other bliss. The art of poetry is not in this way made complicit.

In the final stanza of 'Sunday Morning', so much depends instead upon 'casual flocks of pigeons' (*CPP* 56), though we do not quite know what. We do know that, in this vignette of our earth, an earth set against false heavens inherited from religion and mythology, 'Deer walk', 'quail / Whistle', and 'berries ripen' in an eternal present. This unchanging state circumscribes the seasonal changes in which fruit ripens and dies, and it circumscribes the quails' 'spontaneous cries'. The uncaused is determinate, the unforeseen foreseen. This is true, too, of the pigeons who make 'Ambiguous undulations', for the present tense of 'make' and 'sink' circumscribes the birds' particular movements, the undulations which they happen to make. Just as in 'Earthy Anecdote', a tension develops between the individual instance, a flock of pigeons observed one evening, and a universal order, the predictable descent of flock after flock, evening after evening. The poem concludes poised between these suggestions. It makes a difference, then, that the flocks themselves are 'casual', and not their undulations. Eleanor Cook notes that Stevens's multiple casual pigeons revise 'the one causal dove who is the Holy Spirit'.[88] The emphasis on accidence also succeeds the 'old chaos of the sun' named earlier in the stanza. Finally, the contingent collectives specifically succeed both the 'We'

[86] Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1*, p. 223.
[87] Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1*, p. 224.
[88] Eleanor Cook, *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 107.

who live in that old chaos and the ring of men who, in the previous stanza, chant in orgy on a summer morn, enjoying 'the heavenly fellowship / Of men that perish'. We know that this progress from stanza to stanza was deliberate. When 'Sunday Morning' first appeared in *Poetry*, Monroe cut three stanzas and rearranged the remaining five, but in *Harmonium* Stevens restored the poem to its original size and shape. Even when agreeing to Monroe's selection, he remarked: 'The order is necessary to the idea.'[89] At a prosodic level, too, Stevens's extended sentence, undulating across the poem's seven last lines with precise parentheses and delicate half rhymes, seems to mimic the pigeons' movements, as critics often comment. Far from casual, the poetry's mode of happening is essential. The flocks of pigeons represent the poem's final finding, then, and this is the earth in which we must find what happiness we may, but Stevens's poem remains ambivalent, because earth and poetry diverge. In poetry, order means the idea of necessity.

This problem becomes especially acute in 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad', which was first published in the *New Republic* in 1921, but which Stevens withheld from the 1923 edition of *Harmonium*. Here accidence appears as a gesture, rather than by being named ('casual'). The poem's speaker first imagines relief from the 'indifferent' and 'routine' world to be, not spontaneous cries or accidental congregation, but the persistence of a 'final slate' (*CPP* 81), as if the predictable passage of homogeneous time could be suspended, made eternal. Only then does he imagine relief to consist in spontaneous responses to that suspended eternity:

> The malady of the quotidian. . . .
> Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate
> Through all its purples to the final slate,
> Persisting bleakly in an icy haze,
>
> One might in turn become less diffident,
> Out of such mildew plucking neater mould
> And spouting new orations of the cold.
> One might. One might. But time will not relent.

Oddly, this suspension is imagined as an event ('once'), and the diffidence, mould, and spouting are imagined as following that suspension in a sequence, which is implicitly a sequence of cause and effect ('in turn'). This tension between identity and difference is compounded by the irony that, again, the hap in a 'Perhaps' never happens. Partly this is because, as Cook notes, the line about plucking neater mould echoes Hotspur – 'out of

[89] Stevens, *Letters*, p. 183.

this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety' – and because Hotspur meets an unhappy end.[90] Partly it is because in itself the gesture of speculation projects an unachieved fulfilment. The desire for that happiness cannot cause it, and the failure of happiness to happen all but entirely obscures the hap of 'Perhaps' itself – the happy happening of the speculation.

The first version of 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad' had a further four lines, which Stevens cut when he included the poem in the 1931 edition of *Harmonium*:

> The malady of the quotidian. . ..
> Perhaps, if summer ever came to rest
> And lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed
> Through days like oceans in obsidian
>
> Horizons full of night's midsummer blaze;
> Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate [. . .] (*CPP* 996)

In cutting those four lines, Stevens left the final version's third rhyming quatrain imperfect, broken between 'malady' and 'haze', and so between the malady and the speculation. In the final version, this formal rupture suggests that 'Perhaps' does begin a redemptive 'new oration', but the effect is not casual. Even when 'broken', the poem does not unfold per hap, or haply. The significance of formal difference is as determinate as the final line's heavy duple rhythm, a pentameter which 'will not relent'. Removing the speculation about summer has its consequences, too. In that first version, imagination had been tied more firmly to the routine. The repetition of 'Perhaps' had echoed the insistence on the possibility of happiness: 'One might. One might.' Repeatedly daydreaming a remedy had been part of the malady. Yet the difference between the daydreams made the substance of each daydream, if not casual, at least less necessary. If each attempt was insufficient, it was a degree more free. By contrast, the substance of the final version's single speculation is much more firmly motivated. However difficult they may be to reconcile, the suspension and the novelty answer to life's indifference and routine. No other remedy seems possible. In the final version, then, there is little or no casual character to 'Perhaps'. Its potential for happiness is subsumed by a poetics of necessity which generates the imagined satisfaction and prevents it from happening. This order of necessity means an irredeemable malady, from which the man whose pharynx is bad cannot save himself.

[90] Cook, *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens*, pp. 95–6.

This is a poem in which poetry is an unhappy condition, not because the malady means writer's block, but because this oration is no remedy. If the happiness that poetry cannot imagine is accidental, the potential for such bliss survives only in the force with which the poetry denies it.

Clearly this does not mean that poems such as 'Ploughing on Sunday' (1919) or 'The Load of Sugar-Cane' (1921) represent a flat, bare world and a flat, bare poetics. There is much joy, wit, and charm in *Harmonium*, a long and various volume. But its pleasures are set against a bleaker ground; sometimes a strong force curtails or subdues those pleasures, and the art of poetry is often made to be complicit in that unhappiness. In 'The Load of Sugar-Cane', the dazzle of simile and the surprise of colour are set, however implicitly, against the history of slavery which every boatload of sugar cane carries with it. In 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad', the movement of the poem itself prevents the bliss of a singular event, and this, too, is a historical problem and a social problem, a question of flocks and fellowships. 'The time of year' that in the poem's first sentence has grown indifferent is shared, the same for all of us. The speaker then insists on his isolation: 'the routine I know' (*CPP* 81). 'One might. One might', he intones at the end. The trouble is with his capacity for happiness, his 'might', and the trouble is with his being alone, 'One'. That trouble is impersonal – *one might*, not *I might* – and in that sense it is shared, but the only relief the man can imagine is solitary. Perhaps *we might* would have been different. Perhaps a speculation whose 'Perhaps' envisioned many haps would have been less diffident. Though he thinks of the wind in the metropoles, in the cities with their millions, the man regrets only that no lone poet stirs in his sleep; the 'grand ideas of the villages' seem no help to him. His isolation is a modern malady, the quotidian separation of individual from collective. The one hap for which he longs therefore matches this social condition with a condition of happening. In a negative sense, the envisioned lone event is social too, social in its isolation, and unhappily so: 'Perhaps, if winter once'.

CHAPTER 6

Macleod's Signs

μαντικῇι μὲν οὐ λέγω,
τοῖς πράγμασιν δέ

Euripides, *Bacchae*[1]

I

After the revolution, what will be poetry? Were we ever to achieve 'the perfect state', Nietzsche prophesied, 'there would no longer exist in the present any motive whatever for poetry and fiction'.[2] Yet in the October 1911 issue of the *Masses*, Andre Tridon speculated that after the revolution art would flourish: 'after minds have been cleansed of greed the great need of mankind will not be so much for the useful as for the purely beautiful'.[3] Still, even 'in a legendary better future', Adorno warns, 'art could not disavow remembrance of accumulated horror'.[4] Wondering what revolution would do to modernism in particular, Perry Anderson concludes that 'it would surely end it'.[5] Probably it is impossible to prophesy the fate of poetry in that better future. What then would a poem be like which, a day or a month or a year before, heralded the revolution? Could it sing serenely in a common tongue, far from diffident, assured in its anticipation? Could it take the form of rhyming quatrains, or pentameter couplets? As a poetry of revolution, these lines are very strange:

> We eschew nothing, but are poets still,
> And so shall prosper poetwise, until
> Some rhomboid planet, purple or maroon,
> Call man to island man in a balloon,
> Or give the poem of redintegration

[1] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 368–9, in *Euripidis fabulae*, ed. J. Diggle, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–1994), 3.307. 'I speak not through prophecy, but from the state of affairs' (my translation).
[2] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 112.
[3] Andre Tridon, 'What Has Art to Do with Socialism?', *Masses* 1.10 (October 1911): 15.
[4] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 407. [5] Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p. 45.

> To some souled, parallel epipedal crustacean:
> And spiralling that hypothetic gear
> Still go the fishes circling the sphere.[6]

The poem of redintegration, of individuals freed at last from insularity, of poets reconciled with women and men at large, of a society whose genuine *we* eschews no-one, will surely not be like this: an extravagant vocabulary, outlandish mixed metaphors, Augustan couplets, and a hypotactic circling from the persistence of the past, through a fixed future and through possible futures, to an unchanged present.

Pound first read this poem in manuscript in early 1930, and in 1932 he included an excerpt in *Profile*, an anthology of contemporary works which, he suggested, 'may possibly define their epoch'.[7] Returning to the poem some years later, Pound worried that, though 'every adjective adds something to the expression of meaning', nevertheless the writer in question 'uses too many adjectives. He is out of step with his time.'[8] Like the failed poet ensepulchred at the start of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, this writer has fished by obstinate isles. Not just a rhomboid planet, he says, but a purple or even a maroon one. Not just a crustacean, but a crustacean who has somehow been endowed with a soul, and whose body is formed of parallel planes (ἐπίπεδον, plane, flat surface). Why rhomboid, exactly? Mercury, Mars, and most of the other planets in our Solar System circle near the ecliptic, the plane of the sun's orbit round the earth, but perhaps this unnamed planet will instead appear in the constellation which was first named Rhombus and later renamed Reticulum Rhomboidalis.[9] Or perhaps the crustacean is specifically a crab and the rhomboid planet will herald the revolution, will be the star for modern magi, when it lies in conjunction with the constellation of Cancer. Regardless, a rhomboid planet would turn round and round (ῥέμβω) like those circling fish, and perhaps those fish are turbot or brill, flatfish of the genus Rhombus. Certain varieties of gastropod mollusc have spiralling or rhomb-shaped

[6] Joseph Macleod, *The Ecliptic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), p. 75. Hereafter abbreviated *E*.

[7] Ezra Pound, ed., *Profile: An Anthology Collected in MCMXXXI* (Milan: Giovanni Scheiwiller, 1932), p. 3. Macleod sent the manuscript of *The Ecliptic* to Pound in late 1929 or early 1930. See Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 30 December 1929, in Ezra Pound Papers Addition, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (MSS 53, box 11, folder 260).

[8] Ezra Pound, 'Three Poets Demi-Ainés . . . ', in Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (MSS 43, box 138, folder 6040). This unpublished essay is undated, but seems to have been written in the second half of the 1930s, for at one point Pound complains that the average young poet 'in 1933 or 36' too much resembles the average young poet of 1908.

[9] See Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star-Names and Their Meanings* (New York: G. E. Stechert, 1899), pp. 348–9.

shells, shells in the form of a lozenge or oblique equilateral parallelogram, so a parallelogrammic planet, fish, or mollusc may match that parallelepipedal crustacean. The 'fishes' are presumably Pisces, circling the celestial sphere. And why purple? The seafaring Phoenicians obtained the crimson dye Tyrian purple from molluscs which the Greeks called πορφύρα and the Romans *purpura*: the purple-fish. But if the planet proves to be not purple but maroon, somewhere between a deep crimson and brown, it would be the colour of a chestnut (French *marron*) or a man marooned (Spanish *cimarrón*, fugitive): a black slave escaped from captivity or a man abandoned on an island, a Robinson Crusoe. Even as a boy, said the poet, 'not only the music in the sound' of words, 'but their personal history down the ages entranced me'.[10]

The passage gathers together purple and maroon, emperor and slave, old world and new world, man and animal, soul and body, island man and mainland man and man as such – 'man' without an adjective. The whirling roar of a ῥόμβος or bull-roarer, a musical instrument used in the Greek mysteries, might yet 'call' from man to man and, roaring the poetry of redintegration, reconcile men in Dionysiac unison. (Much earlier in the poem, a bull is sacrificed to Dionysus.) The allusion is characteristic of the time: both Andrew Lang and James Frazer discuss the bull-roarer in their studies of ancient Greek religion.[11] Possibly the poet encountered the rare adjective, *parallelepipedal*, in Thomas Heath's *A History of Greek Mathematics* (1921), giving a similarly ancient aspect to the poem's geometry.[12] But despite the allusion to union, the preposterous figure of that 'balloon' threatens to burst the balloon of brotherhood. The lines satirically reduce revolution to evolution, speculating that some superior crustacean may yet walk the earth (ἐπί + πέδον, the ground) and supplant a failed humanity. On the one hand, because the poem splits *parallelepipedal* into two words, loosening its parts' syntactic relation, the crustacean may even walk upright, paralleling human beings as it goes upon the ground. On the other hand, the crustacean's evolution on the earth may, in paralleling humanity's, prove equally disastrous. But what does it mean for social revolution when, in reading the poem, we spiral these

[10] Joseph Macleod, 'The Professor I Never Was' (1966), manuscript draft, in Papers of Joseph Macleod ('Adam Drinan'), National Library of Scotland, Acc. 10509, folder 38, p. 7.

[11] See Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), pp. 29–44; and James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd edn, part 5, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1912), 1.110, and part 7, *Balder the Beautiful: The Fire-Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1913), 2.228–42.

[12] See Thomas Heath, *A History of Greek Mathematics*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), 1.412–13.

hypotheses? Maybe to do so is merely to revolve in a goldfish bowl, prospering poetically at the expense of Red redintegration. We might instead ask when the indefinite hope of 'Some' will become secure prognosis, geometrically precise.

This is the problem I want to address in this last chapter: modernist poetry's relation to the future, and in particular to a reconciled society. It is a question of how poetry is tensed, reaching from the state of things here and now to a transformed state of things. In 1923 Trotsky urged that, with the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia and 'decades of struggle' ahead in Europe and America, art must be 'realistic, active, vitally collectivist, and filled with a limitless creative faith in the Future'.[13] Stevens's compromised imperatives complicate that faith in the future, even when they frame fabulous inventions. So, too, does passing from 'the heavenly fellowship / Of men that perish' to 'casual flocks of pigeons', from a future projected by 'shall' to the permanent present of 'make'. Ford's materialist heaven is an equally ambivalent blend of anticipation and achievement. In *The Waste Land*, imperatives and prophecies clash with age-old banes and eternal cycles, as part of the broader contradiction of historical moment and permanent condition, and as we have seen that contradiction is shaped by the lineation which makes the work a poem. Verse is tensed between the past, the present, and the future both in its historical connotations and its movement from line to line. From this perspective, my readings have sought to understand some of the ways in which the art of poetry, for modernism, is tensed. That ringing phrase, 'the poem of redintegration', is itself tensed between the present and the future, and between poetry and the world of which poetry forms a part. The phrase may mean a poem about utopia, a rousing forecast of revolutionary success; it may mean a poem which belongs to utopia; and it may mean a utopia which is like a poem. To ring the phrase is to suggest that that is not the poem we are reading and not the world in which we now live.

The long poem in which the phrase appears, Joseph Macleod's *The Ecliptic*, was published in September or October 1930.[14] This was also the year in which the eighty-eight modern constellations were established by the International Astronomical Union.[15] Following a few

[13] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach, trans. Rose Strunsky (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), p. 33.

[14] Macleod's poem was listed as a new book in the *Manchester Guardian*, 11 October 1930, p. 11; and it was advertised in the *Times Literary Supplement* 1499 (23 October 1930): 852.

[15] See Eugène Delporte, *Délimitation scientifique des constellations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).

favourable reviews, *The Ecliptic* rapidly sank to the bottom of the sea. A bare handful of poets and critics have since revisited it.[16] Macleod uses too many adjectives, Pound reflected, and that puts him out of step with his time: 'It slows the pace at which any reader can read him.'[17] Yet Pound knew that this was also an achievement: Macleod insists 'on a real reading of him or none'. We have to circle slowly. Pound wondered whether Macleod's adjectives can really be called excessive, 'if we suppose his purpose is precisely to be out of step with a time that is out of joint'. *The Ecliptic* can seem out of step, or a step behind. It indulges in an obscure vocabulary and learned neologisms, though often without Loy's wit; it disregards the prose tradition in verse, inverting conventional syntax; it frequently rhymes, sometimes in long stretches of pentameter couplets; it incorporates translations and found texts; its references are arcane; and by invoking ancient archetypes it takes up modernism's mythical method. The preface to *The Ecliptic* is dated July 1929 (*E* 10), at which point Macleod was twenty-six. He was eighteen years younger than Pound and fifteen years younger than Eliot, who published the poem at Faber and Faber. (Macleod had first sent *The Ecliptic* to Woolf, hoping the Hogarth Press would take it, but she declined.[18]) Macleod's poem did find some readers. Surveying the field of contemporary English verse in early 1932, Bunting said that *The Ecliptic* had interested him 'more than any new thing since *The Waste Land*'.[19] Macleod liked Bunting's work, too; having been sent *Redimiculum matellarum* (1930), he praised Bunting's 'sense of words'.[20] Like Bunting's *Villon* (1925) and *Attis: Or, Something Missing* (1931), *The Ecliptic* is quite self-consciously the work of an ambitious young poet confronting the triumphs of high modernism. Macleod read the *Enemy* and the *transatlantic review*, and he owned copies of Yeats's *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) and Nancy Cunard's *Parallax* (1925).[21]

[16] Richard Owens's recent edition reprints the whole poem with a short afterword. See Joseph Macleod, *The Ecliptic*, ed. Richard Owens (Chicago: Flood Editions, 2016). There is little criticism on Macleod, but for biographical details and an overview of his career, see James Fountain, 'The Work of Modernist Poet Joseph Macleod ("Adam Drinan") (1903–1984)', PhD diss., Glasgow University, 2010.

[17] Pound, 'Three Poets Demi-Ainés . . . '

[18] Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 11 December 1929, in Ezra Pound Papers (box 32, folder 1332); and Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 20 January 1930, in Ezra Pound Papers Addition (box 11, folder 260).

[19] Basil Bunting, 'English Poetry Today', *Poetry* 39.5 (February 1932): 264–71 (p. 268).

[20] Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 5 May 1930, in Ezra Pound Papers Addition (box 11, folder 260).

[21] Joseph Macleod, 'Biographical Memoir by Christopher Todd' (1937), typescript, in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 84, p. 8; and Joseph Macleod, Catalogue of Macleod's library, in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folders 206–7.

He later recalled his determination 'to be the New Voice of the post-war verse'.[22]

Macleod had a lengthy and varied career. Born in Scotland, he was educated first at Rugby School and then at Balliol College, Oxford. After *The Ecliptic* he wrote another difficult, long poem, *Forays of Centaurs*, which Faber and Faber rejected, though sections appeared in the *Criterion, Poetry*, and *This Quarter*. In 1927 he joined the experimental Cambridge Festival Theatre as an actor, and in 1933 he became its director. He staged some of his own plays, developed an interest in Soviet theatre, and published a novel, *Overture to Cambridge: A Satirical Story* (1936). In 1937 he became Secretary for the Huntingdonshire Divisional Labour Party, and a year later he joined the BBC as an announcer, where he worked for most of the war. During the 1940s he published socialist poetry on Scottish and Cornish themes under the pseudonym Adam Drinan. He came to value and to write poetry which, like Hugh MacDiarmid's, employs Scots, arguing that Scots words are 'quick, economical and compelling'.[23] But MacDiarmid himself thought *The Ecliptic* 'far the best thing he has done'.[24]

The Ecliptic shares its moment with *Ash-Wednesday* and *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930), but also with *Redimiculum matellarum*, Auden's first book, *Poems* (1930), and the Objectivist issue of *Poetry* (February 1931). In some ways, at least, these latter works represent the stirrings of what Miller calls late modernism:

> The cultural products of this period both are and are not 'of the moment'. Precisely in their untimeliness, their lack of symmetry and formal balance, they retain the power to transport their readers and critics 'out of bounds' – to an 'elsewhere' of writing from which the period can be surveyed, from which its legitimacy as a whole might be called into question.[25]

But for all its lexical excess, *The Ecliptic* can seem out of step because it is too symmetrical, too balanced. It is a long poem of sixty-five pages divided into twelve sections, each of which corresponds to a sign of the zodiac. Macleod referred to the divisions themselves as 'signs', rather than sections,

[22] Macleod, 'Biographical Memoir by Christopher Todd', p. 8.
[23] Joseph Macleod, 'Is Scots a Good Language for Poets?', *Burns Chronicle and Club Directory* 25 (1950): 4–8 (p. 7).
[24] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Poetry of Joseph Gordon Macleod', in *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, ed. by Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach, 3 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996–1998), 3.310–14 (p. 314).
[25] Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 13.

parts, cantos, or movements.[26] (That rhomboid planet appears in the final section, 'Pisces, or, the Fishes'.) When Pound mentioned the poem to Zukofsky in November 1930, he said it demonstrated 'the "need" being felt for longer poems built on a plan'.[27] Zukofsky replied that, having seen 'Leo, or, the Lion' in the *Criterion*, he had enjoyed its versification, though he wondered about the success of *The Ecliptic* as a whole.[28] Neither Pound nor Zukofsky wrote his poetry to nearly so tight a plan, and of course neither chose to build a poem on the plan of the zodiac.

In the poem's preface, Macleod explains that he uses the zodiac to chart the passage from birth to death of 'a single consciousness' (*E* 9), and in a draft of the preface he confessed that 'the ambitious scheme' of the poem had 'dismayed' him.[29] Given the absence of anything like a consistent central character, it might be better to say that the poem charts the course of consciousness as such, a phenomenology of modern spirit. The preface acknowledges the difficulty of writing a long poem when 'literary taste has learned and developed an easier, diffuse narrative, the novel' (*E* 7). Macleod liked to consider the broad sweep of literary history. His exuberant survey of modern literature, *Beauty and the Beast* (1927), deals at length with the relation between prose fiction and poetry, especially lyric poetry. These were key concerns for Ford and Pound, too. In the 'diffuse narrative' of a conventional novel the concept of character serves to control, order, and shape the multitudes we each contain. Macleod's long poem looks instead to the zodiac for redintegration: the first and last signs serve as introduction and conclusion, while the middle ten depict the stages of life, from childhood to old age. So Macleod does not use the zodiac to map character types: fastidious Virgos, ambitious Capricorns, and so forth. Nor is a prophecy made early in the poem and then fulfilled later on. Macleod aligns the yearly cycle – summer in Leo, autumn in Scorpio – with the linear progress of a life. He plays freely with the signs' associations; he figures late adolescence, for instance, as a crab crawling sideways, as Cancer. The result might be compared with the equally idiosyncratic system of Yeats's *A Vision*. 'You will get all mixed up if you think of my symbolism as astrological or even astronomical in any literal way', Yeats wrote to

[26] Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 30 January [1931], in Ezra Pound Papers (box 32, folder 1332).
[27] Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky, *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Barry Ahearn (New York: New Directions, 1987), p. 77.
[28] Pound and Zukofsky, *Pound/Zukofsky*, pp. 82–3.
[29] Joseph Macleod, notebook dated 'Chelsea-Witley 1927 – Ridgwick 1929', p. 197, in Miscellaneous Notebooks, Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 190.

a friend in 1926.[30] The heavens offered Yeats 'ways of symbolizing – a mere language', and in particular he noted his 'arbitrary use of the solar & lunar symbols'. Macleod later explained that in *The Ecliptic* he, too, had 'used the constellations in a quite arbitrary way'.[31] But Macleod's astrological schema risks seeming too arbitrary, a premature or superficial redintegration. Surely the signs of the zodiac have little to do with the moments of modern spirit.

A strictly seasonal model for the course of life might have served better, offering a traditional metaphor, whereas an astrological model suggests the power of celestial configurations over earthly events. It suggests cosmic determinism, as well as the occult. The occult was crucial to Yeats, and it had a considerable influence on Pound, H. D., and others,[32] but as a contemporary solution to the problem of shaping a large work, the bare calendric scheme of Williams's *The Descent of Winter* (1928) seems more promising. Williams makes a hybrid diary by arranging poems and prose pieces by date of composition; the contingent and accidental are built into his plan. That in turn leaves the future open. 'One cannot live after a prearranged pattern', Williams explains in the middle of the sequence.[33] *The Descent of Winter* first appeared in Pound's magazine, the *Exile*, and Macleod judged it to be 'very good in parts, and the scheme all right'.[34] In comparison, the choice of the zodiac can seem wilful or preposterous, out of step with the times. When Madge divided his short sequence 'The Hours of the Planets' (1934) into seven sections, each headed by an astrological symbol, he at least rearranged the Solar System and left some planets out, beginning with the Sun, moving through Venus, Mercury, the Moon, Saturn, and Jupiter, and ending with Mars.[35] Yet choosing to move systematically through the zodiac may also, in an oblique way, serve to define the epoch, not least since the zodiac is a system out of joint. Its twelve constellations are threaded by the path of the sun as seen from earth,

[30] W. B. Yeats, letter to Frank Pearce Sturm, 20 January 1926, in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, general ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press [InteLex Electronic Edition], 2002), #4825.

[31] Joseph Macleod, *The Planets*, manuscript drafts, in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 81, p. 6.

[32] For further discussion of modernism, poetry, and the occult, see Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); and Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[33] Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1*, p. 314.

[34] Macleod, letter to Pound, 20 January 1930. Macleod inquired about the possibility of a position working on the *Exile*, so he may have been familiar with the journal and may have read Williams's work while composing *The Ecliptic*, or even beforehand (Macleod, letter to Pound, 11 December 1929).

[35] Charles Madge, *Of Love, Time and Places: Selected Poems* (London: Anvil, 1994), pp. 26–32.

by the ecliptic, which the Greeks called ὁ λοξὸς κύκλος, the oblique circle, because it diverges by a considerable angle from the earth's equator.[36] For Milton, the obliquity of the ecliptic is a sign of the Fall: 'At that tasted Fruit / The Sun, as from *Thyestean* Banquet, turn'd / His course intended'.[37] Traced by the path of the sun month by month, the ecliptic looks like a misalignment in the celestial gears.

Reading the ecliptic, Milton traces a cataclysm in the distant past. Reading the signs of the zodiac, an astrologer prognosticates the future. Reading *The Waste Land* as a sign of its time, one might prophesy the times to come: fear in a handful of dust, death by water, waiting for rain. Reading *The Ecliptic*, we need to consider both planets and 'rhomboid', things and words, as traces and as portents. Reading Macleod's poetry, we need to consider its relation to the recent past, including the poetics of high modernism, in order to understand its relation to the future, especially a revolution or utopia to come. Amongst his collection of press cuttings, almost all of which had some direct personal connection, Macleod kept an article published in the *Morning Post* on 9 November 1917: 'MOB RULE IN PETROGRAD. A LENINIST COUP'.[38] Macleod was fourteen when the Winter Palace fell. 'PEACE, AND LAND FOR THE PEOPLE', reads another headline on the same page, quoting the revolutionaries' proclamation. Though the newspaper was unsurprisingly sceptical ('SOVIET'S INSIDIOUS APPEAL'), Macleod maintained a lifelong interest in the possibility – and in the poetry – of redintegration. In *Why Not the Theatre?* (1935), he compares the Russian Revolution to the French Revolution and the Puritan Commonwealth, and is careful to distinguish the conditions of contemporary England from pre-revolutionary Russia.[39] Nevertheless, he concludes, 'We must set our hand to some tangible instrument, to something that can be created to-day and be utilised and perfected to-morrow.'[40] 'For peace, for bread, for land, for the power of the people', the revolutionaries had urged in 1917. But *The Ecliptic* reaches from the present to the recent and the distant past, not in the end to forecast the future, but to think about how the semiosis of our bad time, and even of our poetry, forestalls a better time. Macleod offers a phenomenology of

[36] See, for instance, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.5.3 (1071a). See, also, Allen, *Star-Names and Their Meanings*, p. 3.
[37] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 10.687–9.
[38] 'Mob Rule in Petrograd', *Morning Post*, 9 November 1917, p. 7, in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 194.
[39] Joseph Macleod, *Why Not the Theatre?* (Cambridge: Taurus, 1935), pp. 12–14.
[40] Macleod, *Why Not the Theatre?*, p. 17.

signs. Out of step with a time that is out of joint, *The Ecliptic* is about the power our signs have over us.

II

Modern writers 'are all literary mirrors or stethoscopes clarifying and reflecting the respiration or wrinkles of the age', Macleod remarked in *Beauty and the Beast*, two years before writing *The Ecliptic*.[41] 'Poets have ceased to be prophets, they have become barometers.' It was a customary complaint. The Roman word for poet, *vates*, meant a seer or prophet, and Eastman called the poet a 'prophet' and a 'restorer' in 1913,[42] but by 1918 Rodker lamented that the poet 'is no longer a prophet': 'The substitution of paroxysm for inspiration is an index of the times.'[43] For Macleod, the only exception was Eliot. Unlike Proust or Joyce, Eliot was 'a prophet for the modern age'; Eliot 'has smashed his barometer and acquired the tongue of angels'.[44] Despite the compliment, Eliot thought *Beauty and the Beast* immature (*L* 3.869–70). (He had only 'glanced at the book', so perhaps he missed Macleod's praise.) Certainly, Macleod's easy critical flourish makes a distinction which his poem thoroughly complicates: the difference between a signifier as description and as prediction, between a present and a future signified. When we look at the stars, see the figure of a ram's horn, and call the constellation Aries, our sign is a barometer: it measures the state of things. When we look at the constellation Aries and cast a horoscope, we have become prophets: the sign tells of the state of things to come.

It is easy to slip between these processes. Chaucer explains that, as the sun enters the various signs of the zodiac, each named for an animal,

> he takith the propirte of suche bestes, or ellis for that the sterres that ben ther fixed ben disposid in signes of bestes or shape like bestes, or elles whan the planetes ben under thilke signes thei causen us by her influence operaciouns and effectes like to the operaciouns of bestes.[45]

In a common move, an iconic relation between animal and constellation dictates the constellation's indexical relation to events. Yet the icon is also

[41] Joseph Macleod, *Beauty and the Beast* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), p. 241.
[42] Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, p. 198.
[43] John Rodker, 'Books', *Little Review* 5.5 (September 1918): 47–50 (p. 48).
[44] Macleod, *Beauty and the Beast*, p. 257.
[45] Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, 1.21, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 668. Macleod refers to an astrolabe late in *The Ecliptic* (*E* 75), and might thereby allude to Chaucer's treatise.

the metaphor of a subject positioned in space, time, and culture. Even as a physical phenomenon, the zodiac is contingent: it appears as it does only because of our particular configuration of earth, sun, and stars. Looking from earth, we have to group stars into constellations and read those constellations as signs. Our signs have a history, a history we have made: 'we with hands aware / Group them' – we group the stars – 'in wisps of Berenice's hair' (*E* 72). The Coma Berenices is an especially good example, for Berenice is an historical figure, Berenice II of Egypt. But whether we associate a constellation with an historical queen or a specific goddess or an archetypal virgin, the particular metaphor we choose affects the indexical relation. Chaucer's Squire calls Aries 'the colerik hoote signe',[46] and no doubt rams may be bilious and irascible, but the Greeks and Romans associated Aries with the ram that carried Phrixus and Helle to Colchis, and for whose golden fleece Jason and the Argonauts went adventuring. In turn, and despite the Old Testament's prohibition on stargazing, Macleod links Aries to the ram which Abraham sacrificed in place of Isaac, his son.[47]

The first section of *The Ecliptic*, 'Aries, or, the Ram', juxtaposes the story of Abraham and Isaac with the miraculous birth of Isaac to Sarah, childless until her ninetieth year; with the difficult rebirth of spring from winter; and with a translation of five lines from a Greek poem on the inevitable withering of spring's bloom: 'Fragrant the Rose is, but it fades in Time' (*E* 16). The Greek poem was traditionally but dubiously attributed to Theocritus, and Macleod found the translation embroidered on an early nineteenth-century needlework sampler.[48] The cross-stitching of these disparate motifs is ambivalent. New life finally arrives and is rescued from premature death, but only so as to be sacrificed to the family and to society at large. Abraham 'catches the ram in a thicket, / Cuts the strings, and the child reels free no longer free' (*E* 15). Saved from the pyre, Isaac is gruffly sent to bed and told to memorise a hymn. The young girl who embroiders the sampler learns to reproduce the mediocre translation of a poem which, all too aptly, condemns youth to swift destruction: 'Such and so withering are our early Joys / Which Time, or Sickness, speedily

[46] Chaucer, *The Squire's Tale*, 51, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 169.

[47] For both the classical and Judaeo-Christian readings of Aries, see Allen, *Star-Names and Their Meanings*, pp. 75–9.

[48] In his note Macleod provides a literal translation of the original, Theocritus 23.28–32, mentions the suspect attribution, and adds that the sampler he saw was owned by John Fothergill, proprietor of the Spreadeagle Hotel in Thame (*E* 76). Fothergill discusses the sampler and Macleod's poem in *An Innkeeper's Diary* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p. 159.

destroys' (*E* 16). At the end of the section Macleod notes that the girl's careful sampler is signed and dated, thereby 'recording the hour when the throstle / Died, and spring was smothered, and spring decayed' (*E* 16).

'Aries' interweaves these various motifs with a series of figurative substitutions. Spring's shrubs, 'Clockwise working like the cogwheels of the stars, / Obediently come to life like Japanese flowers in water' (*E* 11). Plants are like clocks are like stars are like machines are like paper like plants. Reading a similar series, Tuma hears 'a seething, fluid mass of discourses run amok beyond their boundaries'.[49] The substitutions ramify. Like clockwork, an 'obedient' Isaac endeavours to 'engrave the word of the Lord, hymn three-fourteen, on his heart' (*E* 16). Human life seems to be governed by the same implacable necessity that governs the celestial spheres and the natural world: 'She is no autonomous mistress, / Spring is caught in the law' (*E* 11). That is to say, the iconic relation between nature and humanity binds two indexical series. A bud is the index of a blossom and a blossom the index of decay; a birth is the index of a child sacrificed to society and that child the index of an unhappy adult. Fate rules the world, declares Manilius in his *Astronomica*, and by law all things stand certain: 'fata regunt orbem, certa stant omnia lege'.[50] But while on the one hand Macleod subjects human life to nature's law, on the other hand he subjects nature's workings to a semiotic breakdown: 'Wood anemones obedient / Timebewildered search for a sign of the time in vain, / Crushed by the frostweight sink' (*E* 14). Anemones, hedgehogs, gnats, seedlings, and chiffchaffs fail to read their world successfully, out of step with the time: 'An hour-old songthrush taps from his egg an hour too early, / Its pliable bald pink skin, frozen to parchment, cracks.' The effect is a double irony. First, natural processes are read in human terms, becoming as if unnatural. Under the sign of the Ram, the songthrush or throstle is, like the child, a vernal sacrifice. Second, and conversely, the sacrifice of the child, though it seems so natural, is social and historical. Rather than simply binding the two indexical series, the iconic relation keeps them at a distance, emphasising differences.

Macleod extends his series of figurative substitutions late in the section, when the sign of the Ram itself appears. The constellations are 'Like twelve leaves eddying pavane', he writes (*E* 16). 'Night and day the filemot eddy turns: the crimson / Leaf passes, stamped with Upsilon

[49] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 135.

[50] Manilius, *M. Manilii Astronomicon*, ed. A. E. Housman, 5 vols (London: Grant Richards, 1903–1931), 4.3 (book 4, line 14).

majescule.'[51] These lines liken the signs of the zodiac to whirling dead leaves, and in particular they read a majuscule upsilon, a Y, in the pattern of veins on a single leaf. In turn the Greek letter signifies the astrological symbol for Aries, ♈, the icon of a ram's horns. (We know that Macleod knew the symbols for the zodiac's constellations, as well as the astronomical symbols for the planets, since he uses them in his preparatory notes for the poem.[52]) The symbol for Aries appears again when, a moment later, 'the moon fronts the ram, a crescent to a crescent'. Joining the three stars Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Arietis (and maybe 41 Arietis too), the most prominent asterism in Aries traces a single curve, so that together the lunar and astral crescents mark out the Ram's two horns. In this way, we move back and forth through iconic relations between heavenly bodies, a leaf on the ground, an ideograph, and a letter. Poetry's filemot eddy is a whirl of dead letters, of writing as a deathly semiosis.

It makes sense then that majuscule upsilon also invokes the myth of Hyacinth, the youth beloved of Apollo whose spilled blood, when he died, gave birth to the hyacinth flower. Macleod's dead leaf is crimson with blood, and majuscule upsilon is the first letter of Hyacinth's name, Ὑάκινθος. The Greeks and Romans sometimes read the letters of Apollo's cry of woe, 'Αἰ Αἰ', in the patterns on Hyacinth's flower. Theocritus thus calls it the γραπτὰ or 'lettered' hyacinth,[53] and Ovid tells the most famous version of the story in his *Metamorphoses* (10.214–16). In 'Gemini, or, the Twins', during a long account of the semiosis of flowers, Macleod takes up this theme again: 'Ai, ai! The purple iris, once in Greece / Hyacinth-born, laments our broken peace, / The youth shed' (*E* 25). The visual correspondence of stars, leaf, symbol, and letter is thereby extended phonemically. The /aɪ/ of 'Ai, ai!' and of 'Hyacinth' resounds in 'iris' (not to mention 'Isaac'). The classical hyacinth is not the plant which we call by that name, and has variously been identified as an iris, larkspur, blue-bell, or lily. Macleod moves from 'Ai' and 'iris' to the iris or eye with which we read constellations, symbols, letters, irises, hyacinths, and other flowers: 'eyes, as pricked and blurred as these, / See blood upon the cubed fritillaries'. By now, Macleod's signs have become well and truly Saussurian, for a series of Greek and Latin letters arbitrarily signifies that phoneme: αἴ, *ai, y, i*, and *eye*.

[51] The spelling 'majescule' may simply be an error for 'majuscule', the English form of the Latin *maiusculus*, but alternatively it might recall *majesty* (Latin *maiestas*), since earlier in the section we read that 'Spring is caught in the law. Winter abides her king' (*E* 11).

[52] Macleod, notebook dated 'Chelsea-Witley 1927 – Ridgwick 1929', pp. 175, 192, 193, 196.

[53] Theocritus 10.28, in J. M. Edmonds, trans., *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1912), pp. 134–5.

'A particular word [Un terme donné] is like the center of a constellation', Saussure remarks; 'it is the point of convergence of an indefinite number of co-ordinated terms'.[54] Majuscule upsilon offers an early and intricate example of Macleod's patterns of coordination. It is really these semiotic constellations, rather than the astrological signs, which shape his poem. And this means that, shifting between icon and index, phoneme and letter, metaphor and metaphor, myth and myth, and even between ancient and modern, there is no first term.

In particular, we do not begin with the ideograph, and so we cannot point to a leaf or to certain stars as origin or cause. In this sense, Macleod departs from the poetics which Pound inherited from Fenollosa. 'Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols', Fenollosa urges.[55] 'It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature.' Nor does Macleod follow Rimbaud's suggestion, in 'Voyelles' (1871), that phonemes or letters have specific and intrinsic meanings.[56] Rimbaud's vowels and Fenollosa's ideographs are motivated signs, but in *The Ecliptic* there is no stable motivating signified, no sole cause, source, or reason. An astrologer looks to the stars for a reason why; Macleod sets majuscule upsilon, capital Y, and *why* whirling together. Even the titles of the poem's sections are multiple. Juxtaposing two equally contingent terms, the titles bring proper name and common noun, etymon and word, Latin and English into the same spiralling circuit: 'Aries, or, the Ram', 'Scorpio, or, the Scorpion', 'Sagittarius, or, the Archer'. And sometimes these juxtapositions involve semantic slippage, as when we shift from *sagittarius*, the Arrower (*sagitta*, arrow), to *archer*, a bowman (*arcus*, bow); or from singular *libra* to plural *scales*; or from the composite *capricornus* (*caper*, goat + *cornu*, horn) to the simple *goat*.

Poetic thought is like 'a map of the constellations', Macleod once mused:

> One star directs to another star so that the space between comes alive; the shape of the constellation directs to all the constellations which are also the spaces between them, and so direct to other constellations and galaxies not yet named.[57]

[54] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 126; Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1972), p. 174.

[55] Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Huan Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 45.

[56] Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvre-vie*, ed. Alain Borer and Andrée Montègre (Paris: Arléa, 1991), p. 255.

[57] Joseph Macleod, 'Quest for Poetry: Notes on the Nature of Poetic Thought', typescript, in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 48, pp. 54–5. This typescript is undated, but an accompanying rejection slip is dated 22 July 1970.

Every aspect of *The Ecliptic* participates in this ceaseless constellating, from the poem's lexical excess, through its thematic materials, to its prosodic variety. In 'Gemini', for example, Macleod tells the story of Castor and Pollux in the verse-form commonly known as heroic couplets. This seems straightforward: it identifies thematic with prosodic twinning, as James Fountain notes,[58] and that twinning is neatly repeated in the symbol for Gemini itself, ♊. 'Cancer, or, the Crab' represents the apathy and anomie of late adolescence with free verse. In the parable of heterosexual love related in 'Virgo, or, the Virgin', Macleod shifts to half-rhyme couplets, suggesting the incomplete or failed union of the sexes. In 'Aquarius, or, the Water-Carrier', alternately rhymed cinquains (*ababa*) approximate the zigzags of the sign's astrological symbol (♒), and so of ripples or waves in water. But a five-line stanza has other effects: it spills over the constraints of the much more common quatrain, for instance. In 'Pisces' Macleod returns to rhymed pentameter couplets, suggesting not heroic twins but a pair of circling fish who never meet (♓). And in fact couplet rhyme, alternating rhyme, half rhyme, pentameter, and free verse appear in other sections, too. The local effects of particular lines and passages are as important to Macleod's prosody as the meanings we give to verse-forms in general, as for instance when we read Augustan couplets in a twentieth-century poem as the sign of a stale poetics, of a lost prosodic decorum, of an aristocratic verse culture, or of a specific mode of poetic thinking. Between sections and within sections, prosodic forms have no fixed and stable content; they generate meaning in relation to other signs. This is what Macleod means when, in the poem's preface, he objects to 'specific symbolism' and urges instead that his symbols 'play upon one another' (*E* 7). It is less like Fenollosa's theory of the ideograph, and more like Pound's theory of imagism: 'The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs *a, b*, and *x* in algebra.'[59]

Such poetry offers neither traces nor portents in any conventional sense; rather, every object is already both a trace and a portent. Anticipating Derrida's grammatology, Macleod's signs thereby undo the ordinary structure of time, of past, present, and future, of cause and effect.[60] Every portent is a trace, every trace a portent. Each constellated sign 'relates no

[58] Fountain, 'The Work of Modernist Poet Joseph Macleod', p. 119.
[59] Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916), rev. edn (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 84.
[60] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edn (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 67.

less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not'.[61] Eddying signs whisper of what is beyond them, what has never happened and never will, of a presence which could never have been and will never be. Macleod's astrology has less to do with celestial influence than with earthly flux, for only that flux influences or determines. In the centre of the eddy, we speculate about absolute and ideal pasts and futures, from Arcadia to utopia. In 'Gemini' we are but a 'few miles from that Paradisal border, [. . .] eternally removed / From such a country' (*E* 23). In 'Pisces' we herald and we mock rhomboid revolution. Our poetry never achieves those absolutes. Our sign 'is never an event', nor can it securely prognosticate an event, 'if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular'.[62] If we mean, for instance, a time of redintegration. This is because the sign is ideal, repeatable. Whether gleaming or in tears, every eye is, as an *eye*, the same, just as every *eye, ai, y*, and *i* is the same, is an /aɪ/, whether murmured or howled. The word *redintegration*, the cycles of the seasons and the stars, and the linear trajectory of a life are in this sense equivalent: as signs they identify and subsume particulars. Each forecasts the same again.

III

So it is not that *The Ecliptic* simply casts a horoscope for modernity, and it certainly does not prophesy some drastic change, good or bad, for which we should prepare. It shows us how modern spirit is made, its development and its constitution. That is why the parallel epipedal crustacean is 'souled': it has had a soul happen or given to it. The poem's early sections trace the constellation of eyes, whys, and cries in which consciousness is made single – in which we make an *I*, an island subject. Subjects are produced by the coordination of signs. No single sign, least of all the first-person singular pronoun, is adequate to or owned by a particular individual. That pronoun first appears in *The Ecliptic*, in 'Aries', when the young girl at her embroidery appeals to her mother for approval, for the validation of her imitation and so of her self: 'Won't this sampler be nice, Mama, when I've finished it?' (*E* 13). Each subject comes into being through this dialectical separation: the separation of an *I* from an *it* and, in particular, of an *I* from

[61] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 142–3.
[62] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 50.

a *you. The Ecliptic* shows us not an original and singular soul, but one that is constellated within and without.

In 'Cancer', the logic of constellation is reduced to 'the sideways motion of the cretin crab' (*E* 29), and that motion is figured by the arbitrary series of the alphabet: a movement without meaning. Midway through the section, Macleod paints a group portrait, representing the many moods of late adolescence: Agesias, the painter; Barbarieus, the lover; Galônus, the aesthetician; Decanus, the pessimist; Epinondas, the liar; Zeuxias, the fool; Epator, the drunk; Theodorus, the student; and Iphogenês, the mystic. It is tempting to motivate these names. Barbarieus is a barbarian, an outsider in love: 'I am passionately in love with Gito', he says, 'who spurns me for Praxinoê' (*E* 30). Zeuxias is yoked to his former self (ζεῦξις, a yoking): 'What I have always been, I shall remain, a fool' (*E* 31). Epinondas seems cousin to Epimenides, the semi-mythical philosopher to whom the Greeks attributed the paradox of the Cretan liar: 'I have been a liar, now no longer so.' (Epimenides 'must be familiar to anyone who has taken part in undergraduate discussions in or at any age', Macleod later noted.[63]) Perhaps Agesias recalls Hagesias of Syracuse, the subject of Pindar's Sixth Olympian Ode. But then Macleod's Agesias is a painter, not a charioteer, and it was Zeuxis who was the painter, fooled by his rival's naturalism into mistaking a painting for the real thing. (Pliny the Elder tells of the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasia in his *Natural History*.) Moreover, Macleod's Agesias talks of Nero, born some five centuries after Hagesias won his race. More than etymologies and precursors from history and literature, what matters here is the passage through the Greek alphabet in English transliteration: Agesias for alpha, Barbarieus for beta, and so on. The sequence also suggests the system of Bayer designations by which each star of a constellation is assigned a Greek letter. (Macleod's names seem unrelated to the common names of Cancer's stars, however.) Macleod's sequence thus finishes just before it reaches kappa, before it reaches Καρκίνος, the Crab. Moving 'down the Alphabet, aye', the sequence offers the Crab no affirmative or positive name or identity, no happy *I*. The constellated subject exists only as the relation of other terms, which seem such stable identities, though each alone, as subject, has no intrinsic value. 'Cancer' is spirit as absence, the empty centre of eddying signs: 'Each letter is somebody / But the Crab is nobody [. . .] A ganglion of neurotic imitations / Composed of each letter in turn'.

[63] Macleod, 'Quest for Poetry', p. 43.

Consciousness thus crawls sideways from imitation to imitation, unable to go forwards or backwards, to an end or an origin. In this sense, the subject's passing identifications parallel our interpretative pursuits. Even etymons and precursors prove limited, temporary respites. Saussure calls them relative motivations, adduced when the mind 'contrives to introduce a principle of order and regularity into certain parts of the mass of signs'.[64] Like Stevens, Macleod makes poetry out of the accidents of language. Why should the painter have been called Zeuxis, and why should ζεῦξις be the word for yoking? There seems no good reason for zeta to be identified with painting or yoking, for zeta to signify /zd/ or /dz/, or for *z* to signify /z/. In a similar fashion, the group portrait forms no stable pattern as icon or symbol, points to no familiar and final object. It is an acrostic without a governing word. Praxinoa, from the fifteenth idyll of Theocritus, seems out of place with Giton, the lover of Encolpius in the *Satyricon*. Or perhaps 'Gito' is not Petronius' Giton, 'Zeuxias' not Zeuxis the famous fifth-century painter.[65] Macleod's names are themselves awkward imitations or incongruities. Should it not be 'Barbaros' or 'Barbaricus'? We might wonder, too, why it was Iphogenês who 'saw God and died', rather than Theodorus (θεός, god + δῶρον, gift). Even the transliteration involves awkward slippage: the Latin *E* has to serve for both epsilon and eta, Epinondas and Epator. As the absence at the centre of this network of neuroses, the adolescent Crab dreams of a composite girlfriend: 'his female self / Whom he has never seen but composed himself'. Having been composed, he looks to compose a companion, though she to herself will only have been composed. This second self is strung together not by the Greek but by the Latin or the English alphabet: Augustina's breasts, Beatrice's brains, Capucine's arms, Dorothea's motherliness, Evelyn's eyes, Francesca's brow, Gretchen's fragrance, and Helen's understanding. This is precisely the strategy Zeuxis is said to have employed when he set about painting a picture of Helen. Choosing the five most beautiful virgins in Cortona, he produced a composite, an impossible ideal.[66] And while the Crab's sequence stops before it reaches kappa, before he becomes a somebody, the sequence of 'his female self' stops before it reaches *I*,

[64] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 133.

[65] Arnold transliterates Πραξινόα as 'Praxinoe' in his translation of the idyll; see Matthew Arnold, 'Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment', in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, 3.212–31 (p. 216). Giton's name is spelt 'Gito' in Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. J. M. Mitchell, 2nd edn (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1923). Petronius's Trimalchio serves the second course of his feast on a large dish decorated with the twelve signs of the zodiac, each assigned to a particular food (*Satyricon*, 35–6, 39).

[66] See Cicero, *De inventione*, 2.1.1–3.

before she becomes a subject. As a model for social relations this leaves the Crab an alienated and idle daydreamer, one ganglion fantasising about another: 'This he desires, but despises'.

That then is how consciousness is made single, in a thoroughly social process. 'For we are all symptoms, signals, and products of each other', Macleod wrote many years later.[67] Mapping society on language, he also grounds linguistic relations in social relations. In the same year that Macleod wrote *The Ecliptic*, the Russian linguist Valentin Vološinov argued that consciousness 'takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws.'[68] Every self grows as a ganglion, subject to signs' differences and repetitions, and no sole self is responsible for those signs or their constellations: the language is collective.

Since our language forms our divided selves and divides us from others, we sometimes look to other languages for redintegration. At the beginning of 'Taurus, or, the Bull', Achilles has been sent to boarding school on the island of Skyros, disguised as a girl and given the name Pyrrha. Lonely, he or she hums to himself or herself a folksong: 'Goodly bull, come, Hero Dionysus, / To Elaeans shrine, a pure shrine' (*E* 17). Twenty years after writing *The Ecliptic*, Macleod cited the same folksong as an example of archaic art in which poet and people are one. In the society that produces such art, he says, because the matter of poetry is 'the matter of public thought and feeling', a poet 'can use a kind of poetic shorthand. At once his public knows what he means when he uses the word Dionysus, or tells the story.'[69] An integrated community means an integrated sign. When a Greek woman chanted that folksong, she had in mind 'a composite idea: bull-ness, god-head, season, clan-ship, enjoyment, trustability, indicated by the word-name "Dionysus"'.[70] That is precisely what Pyrrha does not understand, for at the end of the section, when she has killed the bull, she exclaims with equal fear and incredulity: 'What are they

[67] Joseph Macleod, notebook 14, dated 'Backend of 1982 and (early, unpromising) 1983', p. 58, in five notebooks for 'Quest for Poetry', in Papers of Joseph Macleod, folder 47.

[68] Valentin Nikolaevič Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 13.

[69] Joseph Macleod, 'Poet and People', in Denys Val Baker, ed., *Little Reviews Anthology, 1949* (London: Methuen, 1949), pp. 116–29 (p. 118).

[70] Macleod, 'Poet and People', p. 116. In a note to the folksong in *The Ecliptic* (*E* 76), Macleod quotes J. M. Edmonds's remark that 'in this very ancient invocation D[ionysus] is still a "hero" and a bull'. See J. M. Edmonds, trans., *Lyra Graeca*, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1922–1927), 3.511, n. 2.

saying? / Pyrrha has slain the goodly Dionysus? / Meaning that bull?' (*E* 21). Though 'Pyrrha' is a Greek name, and though Macleod pieces her story together from ancient materials, she is in this sense an essentially modern figure. After the time of archaic art, poet and people go their separate ways, as do words and names and meanings, and *The Ecliptic* knowingly and necessarily participates in that disintegration.

Having worked for the Cambridge Festival Theatre in the 1930s, Macleod later turned to Soviet theatre for a reconciliation of the artist and the public. 'All periods of vivid and interesting drama reflect a vivid and interesting collective life in the community', he wrote in 1943, 'for the theatre is by nature a communal art'.[71] Similarly, the poetry which Macleod published as Adam Drinan in the 1940s looks to find common ground in a common tongue, marrying a documentary style to a prosody adapted from the Gaelic. But Macleod understood that *The Ecliptic*, in its high-modernist mode, would seem a 'beautiful but rather too beastly erudite poem' and would struggle to find an audience.[72] In the preface he speculates that, 'unhappily', it will find 'few readers' (*E* 7). When Hugh l'Anson Fausset reviewed *The Ecliptic* alongside Auden's *Poems* under the heading 'Poetry and Disintegration', he judged that Macleod's poem fails 'to bridge the gulf between sophistication and the common life and perception of men'.[73] Delmore Schwartz argued that 'no poem is less likely to be read than *The Ecliptic*', for it 'marks a further step in the removal of "the wider public" from serious literature'.[74] In this context, the poem's emphasis on the ecstatic rites of Dionysus recalls Nietzsche's argument, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), that 'the bond between human beings [is] renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac'.[75] For Nietzsche, Dionysus opposes the *principium individuationis* of Apollo, which in excess becomes a debilitating self-consciousness. Macleod's irony is that Pyrrha hums the poem of redintegration to herself, almost as if she were a modernist poet. Her isolation anticipates the fate of *The Ecliptic*.

Having hummed her folksong, Pyrrha thinks of the festival of Thyia at Elis, the second of three Dionysiac motifs interwoven by 'Taurus'. At Elis, three jars were placed overnight within a shrine to Dionysus, and found in the morning to be filled miraculously with wine. 'O Goodly Bull', Pyrrha

[71] Joseph Macleod, *The New Soviet Theatre* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943), p. 10.
[72] Fothergill, *An Innkeeper's Diary*, p. 159.
[73] Hugh l'Anson Fausset, 'Poetry and Disintegration', *Times Literary Supplement* 1520 (19 March 1931): 221.
[74] Delmore Schwartz, 'The Stars of Joseph Gordon Macleod', *Mosaic* 1.2 (Spring 1935): 8–17 (p. 15).
[75] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18.

thinks to herself, 'release your rapture. / Into the winejars like a cistern filling / Liberate your dithyrambic wisdom' (*E* 18). But the ritual imperatives have a different force as solitary musings. The rapture they imagine would only be private, a refuge from the strict disciplines of education and the sniggers of the playground. Rather than gathering celebrants together here and now, dissolving each celebrant's self-consciousness, Pyrrha's imperatives express a solitary longing for a future as yet unachieved: 'Liberate your dithyrambic wisdom / Till myself have life and understanding'. That desire is inseparable from Pyrrha's social alienation, for Pyrrha needs a refuge from her fellow schoolgirls.

When those other girls return from a hockey match to find her at her studies, Pyrrha explains that she has been researching the Athenian festival of the Bouphonia, the ritual slaughter of a bull in honour of Dionysus. This is the section's third Dionysiac motif, which, as Macleod observes in a note, he takes from *The Golden Bough* (*E* 77). Here he follows in Eliot's footsteps, but whereas in *The Waste Land* Frazer's fertility myths perform the serious business of binding ancient and modern, 'Taurus' makes the ancient material alien, at once fascinating and laughable. Frazer begins his account of the Bouphonia this way:

> Barley mixed with wheat, or cakes made of them, were laid upon the bronze altar of Zeus Polieus on the Acropolis. Oxen were driven round the altar, and the ox which went up to the altar and ate the offering on it was sacrificed.[76]

Based on these materials, Pyrrha's impromptu lecture is sometimes quite informal, whether because she is absorbed in the subject or because she seeks to include the other girls, and sometimes it has an affected formality, as if she is trying to impress or to assert her authority. In response, Pyrrha's classmates constantly interrupt her:

> Once every year Zeus Polios's altar is
> Got ready for the harvest, on the Acropolis,
> To win the favour of the God of Crops. They bake
> ——Who do?——Priests, I suppose—a sort of farl or cake
> Of wheat and barley, stuff that only bulls could eat
> ——What bulls?——The sacred bulls——indeed? but if there's wheat
> What are the bulls for? Isn't wheat sacred?
> They're to enable
> Priests to choose oblation for God Vegetable,

[76] Frazer, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, 2.5. Frazer also discusses Pyrrha's folksong (*Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, 1.17).

> Driving them round and round the altar, till one stops
> To eat, which shows he's chosen by the God of Crops:
> Then all the rest are driven away. —A silly scheme! (*E* 19)

Pyrrha's learning figures what Nietzsche calls the 'enormous historical need of dissatisfied modern culture', a need which speaks of 'the loss of myth, the loss of a mythical home'.[77] Though she imaginatively reconstructs the ritual, neither 'exiled Pyrrha' (*E* 18) nor her public knows, when she uses the word 'They', exactly what it means or why, what it means not to have to ask or to suppose or to study. Soon after, the other students mishear the very name of the ritual, Βουφονία (βοῦς, bull + φονεύω, to murder, kill). 'Bou-how much?', one girl asks (*E* 20). 'Βλυφωνία / I think she said', another responds, before other girls suggest 'Βουβωνία' and 'Βουφαλλία'. Each garbled mishearing has its relevance, whether or not deliberate: the sound of bubbling blood or wine (βλύω, to bubble or gush + φωνή, a sound); a swelling in the groins (βουβωνιάω, to suffer from swollen groins); and a bull's phallus, perhaps in particular the figure of an engorged phallus carried in procession at festivals for Dionysus (βοῦς + φαλλός).[78] Later, in 'Capricornus, or, the Goat', a bourgeois husband thinks wistfully of 'how the figwood image' of a phallus 'Nimbly swayed in nights of lustful scrimmage' (*E* 64). The exchange between Pyrrha and the other girls is a comic demonstration of the differences which give signs their value: we understand *bull* because it is not *book* or *ball* or *full*. We understand *procession* because *pro-* is not *re-* and *-cession* not *-gression*. But Macleod's poetry makes these differences socially performed and grounded: each suggestion is an opportunity to interrupt and to taunt. The other girls show no real interest in the Bouphonia or in Pyrrha; their signs slide over the thing itself and the individual herself. (She herself is not herself, being Achilles in disguise.) The antagonisms of social intercourse produce the folksong, the lecture, and the rapid repartee:

> ——Upon the what? Bou-how much?
> ——Βλυφωνία
> I think she said——I said——The Βουβωνία——
> ——No, Βουφαλλία——I said——. (*E* 20)

[77] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p 109.

[78] Pausanias refers to the worship of Διόνυσος Φαλλήν, Phallic Dionysus (10.19.3), and Herodotus compares the Greek and Egyptian phallic processions (2.48–9). In Dionysiac ecstasy, Nietzsche writes, 'we are happily alive, not as individuals, but as the *one* living being, with whose procreative lust we have become one' (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 81).

However much we might speculate about ideal archaic poetics, in *The Ecliptic* there is no language but this our language, now.

After the hapless bull had eaten the farl, Pyrrha explains, a man felled the bull with an axe and fled, another man slit its throat with a knife and fled as well, and so the people blamed the axe and the knife: 'fit offering, deed unfit, / And no one's left to be responsible for it'. (Frazer traces the sequence of blame in comic detail.[79]) The ritual thus seems an allegory for Pyrrha's ostracism, for the sacrifice of one individual to a blameless group of nameless individuals. It is a neat irony that Pyrrha has been sent to a 'sorry school' (*E* 17). Yet 'Taurus' eventually identifies Pyrrha as the bull's irresponsible butcher: 'Would you avenge on Pyrrha? / Was't I that slew? Nay, but the dagger did it' (*E* 21–2). Even Pyrrha, the victim of social aggression, is guilty. The circulation of signs in social intercourse is a circulation of violence and blame; every constellated subject wields a dagger. Just before Pyrrha cuts the bull's dewlap she scornfully dismisses a 'redfaced Akanthis', a shamefaced, blameworthy goldfinch: 'Go serenade dogroses, whose pink petals / Open to pretty songs' (*E* 21). Throughout the section, the strange song of this goldfinch counterpoints the Dionysiac motifs. Pyrrha thus seems guilty for choosing a language of violence and alienation over pure and peaceful birdsong, for choosing difficulty over ease, study over spontaneity, experimental modernism over hackneyed Romanticism.

But Macleod's description of the goldfinch's song is one of his most modernist moments, sounding less like Shelley than Zukofsky:

> Honey jenneting
> hyaline early to graft to zircon
> a filemot
> reedpipe stonepine Akanthis begins
> with a tiffany
> homily easy to learn to listen
> in aphetic
> stonepine goldfinch Akanthis sings. (*E* 18)

In his notes Macleod cautions that these lines 'do not attempt to reproduce the song of a goldfinch' (*E* 76). They 'merely suggest it, and have small syntactical sense'. The lines are not, then, directly imitative or onomatopoeic. Their emphasis on verbal sound suggests the goldfinch song to the extent that we hear such song as sound without sense, or as a foreign

[79] Frazer, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, 2.5. Pausanias describes this ritual at 1.24.4 and 1.28.10.

language. The lines play delicate melodies with consonant and vowel and stress, and they warp conventional syntax. But at the same time the lines constellate connotations, etymons, and allusions: 'filemot' recalls the eddying leaves of 'Aries'; 'zircon' anticipates the hyacinth of 'Gemini', since *hyacinth* is also the name for a reddish-orange variety of zircon; 'tiffany' (from θεοφάνεια) suggests a theophany, the miraculous appearance of a god, but also the silks in which Pyrrha's dagger glints; and following the hymn memorised by Isaac, 'homily' makes the goldfinch song a religious discourse freely addressed to a crowd (ὅμῑλος). But as description of that homily, Macleod's poetry is difficult to learn to listen to. Nietzsche says that in folksong we find 'language straining to its limits *to imitate music*', and that in music mere appearances give way to the essences of things.[80] Dionysiac ecstasy achieves a natural language, though that ecstasy is bought at the cost of alienation: 'the dithyrambic servant of Dionysus can only be understood by his own kind'.[81] Macleod's description of the goldfinch is far from folksong, and the lone goldfinch sings to a lonely girl, not a congregation or a crowd. In 'Taurus', both the goldfinch song and the folksong are the projections of our language, unreconciled. The painter and critic Adrian Stokes, whom Macleod befriended at Rugby and who later befriended Pound in Rapallo, urged that though we consider 'the soul of primitive man to be fired with untutored poetry', in fact 'it is only *we* who could so judge it as we look away from our network of steel'.[82] Andrew Duncan makes a similar point about Macleod's later poetry. Though its idea of the Celtic means 'no private property, no historical change, no social conflict, no limits to individual identity, no gap between myth and the everyday', nevertheless 'it is hard to site this Celtdom in any specific century or country. These are ghost attributes, merely the opposites of features felt as oppressive in modern life'.[83] In *The Ecliptic*, the thought of natural simplicity or archaic community is a symptom, not a cure.

IV

Much later in the poem, at the beginning of 'Scorpio', Macleod pictures a capitalist farmer who sits at his accounts and 'notes in red contented

[80] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 34. [81] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 21.

[82] Adrian Stokes, *Sunrise in the West: A Modern Interpretation of Past and Present* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1926), p. 85.

[83] Andrew Duncan, 'Introduction: The Gaelic-Soviet-Greek Triangle: or, Who Was Joseph Macleod?', in Joseph Macleod, *Cyclic Serial Zeniths from the Flux: Selected Poems*, ed. Andrew Duncan (Hove: Waterloo, 2009), pp. 11–29 (p. 25).

ink / Net profits of his quite impossible serenity' (*E* 52). That red contentment is not, pointedly, Red redintegration. The song of the goldfinch is a honey jenneting, while the farmer's 'graded apples', of no remarkable variety, are 'marketably beautiful'. Both the birdsong and the bookkeeping might be said to constitute 'impossible' serenity, for the adjective suggests both an unexpected, undeserved boon, too good to be true, and a false boon, no serenity at all. Whatever it is worth, the farmer's serenity does not last. If *The Ecliptic* is in any way prophetic, it is because calling capitalism's serenity impossible bursts the balloon of the too prosperous 1920s, of the social and economic structures which produced the crash of late 1929. For Marx, capitalism's cycle of boom and bust was eminently predictable: 'Just as the heavenly bodies always repeat a certain movement, once they have been flung into it, so also does social production, once it has been flung into this movement of alternate expansion and contraction.'[84] The overthrow of capitalism may itself, some thought, be an inevitable product of those movements. Macleod finished writing his poem only a few months before the crash of 1929, in July, and he remarks in his preface that he hopes 'it will have significance for my time' (*E* 9), but nineteenth-century needlework samplers, a transliterated Greek acrostic, and the scheme of the zodiac seem a long way from Wall Street. At least Eliot put Madame Sosostris alongside the City, the financial centre of contemporary London.

There are overtly modern moments in *The Ecliptic*. In 'Capricornus' Macleod satirises a middle-class suburban tea party; in 'Leo' he figures the artist as a wage-labourer; and in 'Cancer' he likens the Crab's claws to machines assembled by mass production. Sometimes these moments look superficial or belated. Tuma says the poem has a 'habit of smuggling in a discourse concerning industrialism via metaphor and simile'[85] – though the poem's incessant substitutions tend to undermine any hierarchy of literal and figurative. There is nothing in *The Ecliptic* so explicitly contemporary in its concerns as Williams's 'A Morning Imagination of Russia' (1928), and perhaps Macleod had that poem in mind when he complained that there was 'too much sensitive journalism (the modern didactic)' in *The Descent of Winter*.[86] He thought the sequence 'too political'. Yet even the Bouphonia is political: the oxen are driven round and round the altar of Zeus Polios, the god of the city, of the people as polis. *The Ecliptic* has

[84] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 786.
[85] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 130. [86] Macleod, letter to Pound, 20 January 1930.

political significance because it traces the constitution of modern spirit as a ganglion individual in a body politic of ganglions. Macleod knows well that despite appearances island man is a phenomenon of capitalist social relations, that the 'structure of the conscious, individual personality is just as social a structure as is the collective type of experience'.[87] So the question remains: having read the signs of our time, can we prophesy a possible serenity? Can we even imagine a possible solution, and is poetry the art with which to imagine it?

First there is the problem of a *we*. Not long before he speculates about that rhomboid planet, Macleod assures us that once we have seen our signs, 'though the separate scintillants decay / The sum of them [. . .] must stay': 'This is the mystery that has been said / Of two or three together gathered' (*E* 75). Stargazers, poets, readers, and political subjects are all figured by this allusion to congregation in Christ: 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20). The being in the midst is the mystery. We gather together the stars, giving them a sum or form, and poets gather and form their signs. A poem gathers together its readers, though an arcane poem like *The Ecliptic* might only gather two or three. A time of revolution would gather together poets, farmers, factory workers, and women and men from every other walk of life, forming a collective which is greater than the sum of its parts. Macleod later argued that revolutionary artists, when they live to the full, are necessarily political revolutionaries,[88] and during the 1930s Macleod became a committed socialist. He would have agreed with Marcuse that the 'fate of art remains linked to that of the revolution', and he believed it 'an internal exigency of art which drives the artist to the streets – to fight for the Commune, for the Bolshevist revolution'.[89] Even as a university student in 1922, Macleod had been a 'sentimental socialist',[90] and in 1934 he assured Schwartz that the revolution was imminent.[91] But *The Ecliptic* is not a revolutionary poem in any straightforward sense, either poetic or political. Like much modernist art, the poetry with which Macleod traces alienation alienates almost all its audience. There is a kind of modernism for which the mystery would vanish

[87] Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 89.
[88] Macleod, 'Poet and People', p. 119.
[89] Herbert Marcuse, 'Art and Revolution' (1972), in *Art and Liberation*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2007), 166–77 (p. 173).
[90] Macleod, 'Biographical Memoir by Christopher Todd', p. 6.
[91] Delmore Schwartz, letter to Joseph Macleod, 4 December 1934, quoted in Fountain, 'The Work of Modernist Poet Joseph Macleod', pp. 284–8 (p. 287).

were more than two or three to learn to listen. At the same time, Macleod's poem has the advantage that it is still alienating, that it has not been glossed to a comfortable sheen by admiration and scholarship. (Reading it is something like what reading *A Draft of XXX Cantos* must once have been like.) Rather than reconciling poetry for a few and a posterity for all, Macleod's figure for the gathering of signs and subjects, 'two or three together gathered', still refracts the antagonisms of his time, constellating each *we* within and without.

In 1929, as today, those antagonisms accompanied a specific and contingent social system, with its own conceptual laws. In 'Libra, or, the Scales', Macleod deals in particular with the concept of private property, with its legal theorisation, and with its consequences for any potential reconciled *we*. 'Libra' is the section which Pound chose to include in *Profile*, and it begins with a man in a first-class railway carriage, Publius Aemilius Hadrianus Graeculus. The name is a variation on that of the Emperor Hadrian, born Publius Aelius Hadrianus and later nicknamed Graeculus ('Greekling') on account of his enthusiasm for Greek culture. Macleod substitutes the gens Aemilia, an ancient and illustrious patrician house, for the gens Aelia, a plebeian house. Perhaps he also taunts his first-class passenger for being a belated emulator, since *Aemilia* is cognate with *aemulor* (to rival or emulate) and since Hadrian himself emulated the Greeks. Working through the implications of the name, the section sets the individual, be he emperor or patrician, against the public – a Publius against the *populus*. Hadrian wore Tyrian purple, and our passenger – we can call him Hadrianus – is probably attired in a Savile Row suit. The first-class carriage in which he sits neatly situates the problem: a private privilege purchased in a public space. The dialectic of *I* and *it* and of *I* and *you* here becomes a matter of political economy. Private property, argues Marx, is 'the perceptible expression of the fact that man becomes *objective* for himself and at the same time becomes to himself a strange and inhuman object'.[92] The subject has its being not in who it is but in what it owns, and what it owns is by definition what no-one else owns: 'In this beloved Athens was a statue of Antinous / Which he possessed, for he could forbid other's access: / Which he owned, for none had a better right than he' (*E* 47). Parodying the logic and the language of Roman law, Macleod plays with its distinctions between *dominium, possessio*, and *detentio*, and with the troubled translation of those terms into English as *ownership, dominion, possession*, and *detention*. Hadrianus owns a collection

[92] Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism' (1844), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979–2004), 3.293–306 (p. 299).

of antiquities, we are told, but if he therefore 'owns the right of possession / And possesses the right of ownership', then 'possession is governed by ownership / And ownership can be possessed: / Which is absurd' (*E* 46–7). The venerable, authoritative theory is swept up and swept away in a whirl of eddying signs. One late Victorian introduction to the topic complained that the theory of possession 'has introduced more confusion into jurisprudence, and been the occasion of calling into the world more cartloads of learned legal and metaphysical treatises, than all the other topics of Roman law put together'.[93] Playing on that confusion, Macleod slips sardonically between the technical and colloquial senses of the legal terms, counterpointed by the seemingly simple verb *to have*, the possessive pronoun *his*, and the preposition *of*:

> Athens he owned: but did he possess it?
> Absent, he had animus: but its governor had corpus.
> Present, he had corpus also: but its governor also had animus.
> The governor, though responsible, did not represent him.
>
> Absent, if he had ownership, he had no possession.
> Did he have ownership, there?
> He was a stranger when he went there:
> The very past had better right than he.
>
> Athens was owned by the past.
> If present he did not own it, neither could he absent:
> The Emperor of the World
> Neither owned nor possessed his favourite city. (*E* 47)

Given such irreverence and irony, it comes as little surprise to learn that in 1925 Macleod graduated from Balliol with a third-class degree in jurisprudence.[94]

Legal theories can look as inevitable as the physical laws of nature, the laws of plants and planets, but in fact they are contingent on social and semiotic systems. In the opening pages of *Law in Daily Life* (1870), a book for students, the German jurist Rudolf von Jhering soberly examines the consequences of travelling on modern public transport in terms of Roman law.[95] Putting Hadrianus in his first-class railway carriage, 'Libra' can

[93] William Alexander Hunter, *Introduction to Roman Law* (London: William Maxwell & Son, 1880), p. 47.

[94] James Fountain, 'Macleod, Joseph Todd Gordon [Adam Drinan] (1903–1984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, October 2009, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/98169.

[95] Rudolf von Jhering, *Law in Daily Life: A Collection of Legal Questions Connected with the Ordinary Events of Everyday Life*, trans. Henry Goudy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), pp. 1–17.

instead look like the flippant work of a clever student at the back of a lecture hall, but its hair-splitting definitions and circular logic take aim at a system which legitimates and perpetuates control over people and things; it attacks a structure of power. It's apt that Libra, the Scales, is the only sign of the zodiac which does not represent a living thing. (It is also the one sign which the Romans contributed to the twelve.[96]) Even emperors are subject to that inhuman system. Hadrianus's 'policy slogan is Pax Romana' (*E* 46), we learn, and 'Inasmuch as he enunciates Pax Romana / He must hold himself slave to Lex Romana' (*E* 47). Inasmuch as he glosses domination as peace, Hadrianus resembles Stanley Baldwin, who frequently likened the British and Roman Empires by extolling a Pax Britannica.[97] In this way, as Tuma argues, 'Libra' uses the ancient world as an ironic lens on the modern, rather like Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919).[98] Pound himself clearly liked 'Libra', but he came to think the emphasis on ownership misplaced. 'Communize the product and quit foozlin re/ ownership of plant', he later wrote to Macleod.[99] But Macleod was interested in the absurdity of all ownership, whether of apples or machines, ideas or words. In reality, he wrote to Pound,

> there isn[']t any question of ownership. One can[']t own anything. Even one's own mind is part-owned or rather part[-]possessed by the people one has met or been taught by. [. . .] It's the right to exclude others; – which is of course allowed by the others. What most people call ownership is just squatting.[100]

To subscribe to the accepted concept of ownership, and so to be reduced to the thing you own, is the condition of spirit under capitalism. The farmer in 'Scorpio' and the husband in 'Capricornus' are the petty emperors of their own petty empires. Even to be 'Emperor of the World' is to be owned and controlled, subject to an *of* and slave to the *lex*, for the law, the logic, and the language of private property are collective. Hadrianus can own

[96] Allen, *Star-Names and Their Meanings*, p. 270.

[97] See, for instance, 'Prime Minister's Tour', *The Times*, 14 May 1929, p. 9; and 'Peace and Character', *The Times*, 21 January 1930, p. 15. For an enthusiastic contemporary account of the idea, see Bo Gabriel de Montgomery, *Pax Britannica* (London: Methuen, 1928).

[98] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 126.

[99] Ezra Pound, letter to Joseph Macleod, undated, in Ezra Pound Papers (box 32, folder 1332). Tuma tentatively dates the letter to 28 March 1936 (*Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 271, n. 8), but it seems to precede Macleod's letter of 23 March, in which he responds: 'It's no good communising the product. The damned owner decides what the product shall be! Why the devil shouldn[']t the User own?' See Joseph Macleod, letter to Ezra Pound, 23 March 1936, in Ezra Pound Papers (box 32, folder 1332).

[100] Macleod, letter to Pound, 23 March 1936.

a city or a polis – 'Athens he owned' – and yet at the same time he knows that, paradoxically, 'They', the people, 'own Athens' (*E* 48). Though everyone owns that *own*, every time we speak the word we legitimate the false concept of exclusive ownership. As we learn late in 'Libra', 'We go on making' our property laws – 'Awkward, worthless, unintelligible' laws – only 'in order to obey them' (*E* 49). In this way our *we* undoes itself.

Genuine serenity or peace would mean a *we* which was more than a group of alienated individuals. This is possible only when for the individual the object is 'a *social* object' and 'he himself for himself a social being'.[101] In what is probably the key passage in *Beauty and the Beast*, Macleod points to the theory of such a collective in the legal and political thought of Otto von Gierke and of his translator, Frederic William Maitland. Gierke opposed the tradition of nineteenth-century jurisprudence based on Roman law and epitomised in the works of Jhering and Friedrich Carl von Savigny. Instead Gierke recovered a Germanic concept of *Genossenschaft*, which Maitland translates as *fellowship*.[102] 'German Fellowship is no fiction', Maitland explains, 'no symbol, no piece of the State's machinery, no collective name for individuals, but a living organism and a real person, with body and members and a will of its own'.[103] Joel Nickels has recently proposed a comparable notion in his study of the multitude in Williams, Stevens, and others. Drawing on the work of Negri, Nickels identifies the *people* as a product of the state, the *masses* as a mere aggregate, and the *multitude* as a 'dynamic and self-organizing creative' power.[104] Gierke and Maitland distinguish this multitude or fellowship from the Roman corporation, an essentially individualistic concept, which underpins much of modern politics and economics.[105] In *Beauty and the Beast*, Macleod calls the Germanic *Gesammtperson* and its *Gesammtwille* 'a semi-mystical truth': such fellowship is the being in the midst, and Macleod directly compares it to poetic form.[106] Rather than contributing to a simple 'sum', 'the forms of a poem besides being themselves are a sort of fraction of the Form of the whole'. Maitland himself suggests this analogy, arguing in his introduction to Gierke's *Political Theories of the Middle Ages* (1881) that the idea of an 'organism which is a whole with a life of its own, but is also a member of

[101] Marx, 'Private Property and Communism', p. 301.
[102] Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, trans. Frederic William Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), p. xxv.
[103] Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, p. xxvi.
[104] Nickels, *The Poetry of the Possible*, p. 9.
[105] Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, pp. xx–xxi, xxviii.
[106] Macleod, *Beauty and the Beast*, p. 18.

a larger and higher organism whose life it shares', may be applied to Gierke's own book and 'to every good book': 'The section has a life of its own, but it also shares the life of the whole treatise.'[107] But since in *The Ecliptic* the being in the midst is an unachieved serenity, and since Macleod's poetry is bound to the social and semiotic systems which, in our bad time, eschew a genuine *we*, its aesthetic form must refuse redintegration, must alienate within and without. Macleod once praised *Cymbeline* in terms which better suit his own poem: 'archaic verse and ultra-modern verse' come together 'in a *mélange* that defies interpretation', if by interpretation we mean criticism which, in seeing the whole, justifies every part.[108] That is why in 'Pisces' the promise of a mystery in the midst of the poem's signs offers, ironically, only another 'sum', a mere aggregate. That is why the poem as a whole makes modern spirit proceed according to the plan of the zodiac, so arbitrary, so inorganic.

The Ecliptic thus sets the problem of a *we* and the problem of poetry, social structure and poetic form, in conjunction. Formally, 'Libra' consists almost wholly of unrhymed quatrains whose lines vary in length from two to nineteen syllables. It replaces metre and rhyme with reason, or a parody of reason, weighing its lines with syntactic parallels and inversions, theses and antitheses, and logical chiasmi. These rhetorical balancing acts match the constellation's scales. For Tuma, the section's form mocks the dualisms of Enlightenment thought and, nevertheless, finds them inescapable.[109] With its modernist prosody and its prosaic lexicon 'Libra' is clearly of its time, but an even better and bitterer demonstration of poetry's complicity in modern politics occurs in 'Gemini', precisely because, formally, it looks so anachronistic. 'Gemini' is a requiem for fellowship or brotherhood, recasting the story of Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux) in a hymn sung by Polydeuces for his dead brother: 'Flow full, Eurôtas river, we hymn Castor dead' (*E* 23).[110] The 'we' who hymn are not the brothers, Castor and Polydeuces. Rather, it is as if Polydeuces' unhappy 'we' generates the thought of another, unsaid, happy *we* – of genuine brotherhood – and at the same time as if in hymning our companion in that happy *we* we murder brotherhood. Macleod's inverse syntax, a seemingly lifeless poetic licence, makes hymning dead Castor a making Castor dead.[111] 'Gemini' offers

[107] Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, p. viii.
[108] Duncan, 'Introduction', in Macleod, *Cyclic Serial Zeniths from the Flux*, p. 21.
[109] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 128.
[110] Theognis has Castor and Polydeuces living by Eurotas, one of the major rivers in the Peloponnese (Theognis 1087–90).
[111] For a discussion of Macleod's syntactic inversions, see Robert Calder, 'Joseph (Gordon) Macleod, *The Ecliptic*, and "Adam Drinan"', *Chapman* 8.4 (1985): 53–6.

a parable about brotherhood lost from the beginning, brotherhood as absolute past.

This is the context in which, still addressing Eurotas, Polydeuces rises to revolution:

> All autocrats must perish, grand or mean.
> Who worst conspires against his king or Queen [*sic*]
> Loves best his land. Those patriot politicians
> Heroes to sublimate their own ambitions,
> Are like their enemies mere meretricians.
> Drown, drown them all. Such gurgles will be good.
> That free may float the rights of brotherhood
> Along, from your not quite Arcadian spring,
> An interracial peace. And flowering
> And pure and fruitening and grand
> For those who can, will and dare understand,
> May adult wholeness rise, and freedom burst,
> Unhindered. (*E* 24)

These lines allude ironically to Theocritus' twenty-second idyll, in which Castor and Polydeuces are hailed, not for drowning kings, queens, and politicians, but for saving men from drowning at sea. Yet what are we to make of the poem's strange conjunction of political terror and heroic couplets? We could begin by arguing that the brotherhood of couplet rhyme equates commoner and queen with mean or common phonemes, while those arbitrary phonemes have themselves nothing in common with social class, whether upper or lower. The /iːn/ is neither icon nor index. That would be a customary reading of the way rhyme yokes difference and identity. Rhyme plays on the good of a brotherhood bought by murder, and it adorns redintegration with the clichéd coupling of spring and flowering. Like Priapus, that facile pastoral harmony blossoms in erection and ejaculation, but only for 'those who can'. The collusion of 'politicians', 'ambitions', and 'meretricians' seems clear enough, and we might add that just as those heroic politicians sublimate their ambitions the heroic couplets rise to triple rhyme – or perhaps that is an ironic deflation. But there is more at work here than a clever demonstration of Augustan wit. As in the best Augustan poetry, and as in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* and 'The Comedian as the Letter C', Macleod's attention to sound extends beyond rhyme at the end of the line. Assonance and alliteration play the collectivity of 'All' against the 'autocrats' who each rule alone (/ɔː/), patriotism against politicians (/p/, /t/), and good against the gurgling of the dying (/g/). Phonemic coupling belittles both the meretricious and

their enemies with 'mere', and gives the bloom to a pure fruit (neither jennetings nor marketable apples). The line 'And pure and fruitening and grand' reaches a premature climax by making a term for aristocracy one of the blessings of brotherhood, a 'grand' culmination at the end not of a pentameter but a tetrameter line. (The line could so easily have been 'And pure and fruitening and grand for those'.) Swept up by a lighter stress on the last than on the first syllable of 'flowering', and swept on in a gush of enjambment, that upstart heroic tetrameter finds another release in the half rhyme of 'grand' with 'can'. It thereby declares that such a revolution would but substitute one limited *we* for another, the grand who can for the grand who own. Or, since this is a poem about signs, the revolution would substitute those who say who can, those who decide, for those whose power is spoken for by others, those whose fates are decided. By the end of the passage we 'understand' not wholeness or freedom, but that this is no brotherhood for all.

Macleod's constellation of verse-form, grief, violence, and sex is preposterous: a politics and a poetry of impotence. The sacrifice of the individual to society and of society to the individual, elaborated throughout *The Ecliptic*, issues here in a politics that blocks the way forward. It comes as no surprise when the section ends with a summary couplet: 'Thus the survivor of the Gemini / Mourns, to explore futile futurity' (*E* 28). First, that survivor is spirit as it enters 'Gemini', having lost its twin even before the section starts, a *geminus* without an *us*. Second, the survivor is spirit as it emerges from 'Gemini' and proceeds to Cancer, Leo, and the subsequent signs of the zodiac. Time past and time future are both contained in time present, and *The Ecliptic* casts a horoscope of the same. In that summary couplet we can pronounce 'Gemini' as Latin, so that ironically only a dead word properly rhymes with 'futurity', or we can pronounce it as English, so that the /aɪ/ of 'survivor', of 'futile', and of Polydeuces' isolated *I* cancels the unison of perfect rhyme. The unison of assonance makes exploration always an act of mourning, and futurity always futile. In the introductory poem to *Beauty and the Beast*, 'Hesperornis', Macleod calls 'the future' the 'hope that achieves what Men call failure, / The past'.[112] But since 'Gemini' ends with *futurity*, and not with *the future*, the result is less a mournful prognostication of future events than a mournful fascination with a redemption which remains forever out of reach.

[112] Macleod, *Beauty and the Beast*, front matter.

Freud might call this a sublimation of the particular by the abstract. It defers a time of brotherhood with our time's eddying whirl of signs. The passage on the rights of brotherhood sublimates political revolution with sexual desire, and pastiche seems to sublimate experiment. Yet Macleod's experimental passages are equally complicit. In crawling sideways, the accomplished free verse of 'Cancer' sublimates the meaningful movement which would relieve that sign's apathy and anomie.[113] The unrhymed, unmetrical quatrains of 'Libra', hair-splitting and circular, are similarly compromised. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), published in the same year as *The Ecliptic*, Freud conceives of sublimation as a function of social cohesion and development, though it necessarily leaves the individual dissatisfied. Macleod's deferral of redintegration means dissatisfaction or impotence for both pastiche and experiment, and for both individual and collective. The husband and father in 'Capricornus' is a bourgeois success, a man who owns all that men should want to own, and in an irruption of repressed desire he smashes the 'imitation furniture' in his home (*E* 65), rapes his daughter, batters his wife to death, sets the house ablaze, and escapes – only to find that it was all a fantasy, that nothing has happened or changed. The furniture magically reforms and the family remains, a prosperous corporation: 'The ancient house of Capricorn & Sons / Stands unassailable in statu quo' (*E* 66).

V

In his 1933 sequence 'Instructions', Madge prophesies that

> After the revolution, all that we have seen
> Flitting as shadows on the flatness of the screen
> Will stand out solid, will walk for all to touch
> For doubters to thrust hands in and cry, yes, it is such.[114]

Madge and Macleod were both published in early issues of Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse*. But while Macleod alludes to congregation in Christ with considerable irony, for Madge the risen Christ figures a possible serenity. In that 'new world', Madge sings, we will 'hear on all lips a new song in the street all day, / Spreading from house to house without wires'. That will be the poem of redintegration. As Steven Connor comments,

[113] Tuma praises the prosody of 'Cancer' in particular (Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 132).
[114] Charles Madge, 'Instructions', *New Verse* 2 (March 1933): 4–7 (p. 6).

'Instructions' is a 'somewhat incautiously specific poem'.[115] But Madge is well aware that his is not the poem of redintegration, or not yet: 'This poem will be you if you will. So let it.'[116] (You are not yet really you; we are not yet really a *we*.) Many years later Macleod argued that, though none of society's evils are cured 'by looking at a surrealist picture or studying an apocalyptic poem', genuine artworks exist 'for an unknown future society'.[117] In *The Ecliptic*, Macleod cannot and will not imagine that new world. *The Ecliptic* knows it is not the poem of redintegration, and makes no promises, gives no instructions. Macleod's poem appeared at a time when capitalism suffered a catastrophe that few had predicted, and when socialism began to forecast with new vigour. Stalin introduced the first five-year plan in 1928 and by July the next year, just as Macleod finished writing *The Ecliptic, The Times* predictably reported that the Soviet plan was beginning to fail; though the scheme was only eight months old, 'there was already a difference between the plan and reality'.[118] Five years earlier, Trotsky had called the 'materialist dialectics of the class struggle' the 'true algebra of revolution': the revolution looks chaotic, but 'it is a counted and measured chaos, whose successive stages are foreseen. The regularity of their succession is anticipated and enclosed in steel-like formulas.'[119] In that letter to Schwartz in 1934, Macleod promised that society was 'in the grip of a planned scheme' leading to imminent revolution,[120] and by 1943 he praised Stalin's second five-year plan for its industrial success and its 'spiritual direction'.[121] But in *The Ecliptic* the plan of the zodiac and, more broadly, the constellating of the poem's signs offer spirit no plan of action.

The Ecliptic lies at an oblique angle to its time, refusing to settle for prophecy or nostalgia, for the experimental or the traditional or their higher union in some harmonious whole, even under the easy rubric of pastiche. It is not a triumphant artistic success. It does not pretend to achieve a happier *we*, to reconcile the subject, to have discovered a serene semiosis, or even to meet modernity with a utopian poetics. Nor does it acquiesce to its time or pretend that the conditions of modernity are inevitable and inescapable. Macleod explains in his preface that, though

[115] Steven Connor, '"A Door Half Open to Surprise": Charles Madge's Imminences', *New Formations* 44 (Autumn 2001): 52–62 (p. 54).
[116] Madge, 'Instructions', p. 6. [117] Macleod, 'Poet and People', p. 122.
[118] 'Soviet Industries', *The Times*, 9 July 1929, p. 15.
[119] Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 96.
[120] Schwartz, letter to Macleod, 4 December 1934, in Fountain, 'The Work of Modernist Poet Joseph Macleod', p. 287.
[121] Macleod, *The New Soviet Theatre*, p. 8.

the life traced by *The Ecliptic* may not achieve redintegration, 'the potentiality subsists into posterity' (*E* 9). For the poem itself, that potentiality is the barest of minima. In an 'impoverished situation', writes Badiou, the poem's 'point of departure is the absence of the event'.[122] Without a revolution, *The Ecliptic* chooses negation. It shows us our families, our friendships, our schools, our trade, our laws, our politics, our arts, our learning, our beliefs, our loves, our selves – and shows us that we go on making them and making them unhappy. The potentiality which really matters exists now, and it lies in seeing our signs for what they are.

Here then is a model for modernism: to remain out of step with a time that is out of joint may be better than falling in step, but better still would be to be in step with a better time. Macleod's poetry works against its bad time, but that is not to live in another time, or even to make its sign. It is to try to live in this time in another way.

[122] Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 31.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Or a model for poetry: to remain out of step with a time that is out of joint is better than falling in step, but better still would be to be in step with a better time. The novel, the cinema, music, and painting find themselves in different situations, determined by their own histories and by their interactions with each other and with poetry. Why then is poetry, for some modernists, both part of what exists, a symptom, complicit even at its most critical, and the beauty which does not exist, a promise, blissful even in its falls or failings? The problem is not with *The Ecliptic* or 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad', or not only. The problem separates poems from poetry, particular from universal, instance from ideal. This dialectic causes difficulties. When Macleod envisions 'the poem of redintegration', his definite article tilts that poem towards the ideal: this is not just any poem, but some singular poem. Then, when we take the word 'poem' figuratively, Macleod brings the idea of poetry in general to bear upon the notion of a reconciled society. No particular poem, least of all *The Ecliptic*, matches that ideal or idea. For this reason, the ideal sometimes seemed oppressive or silly. Ever sceptical, Riding and Graves warn that *poem* is a 'more accurate, less prejudiced term' than *poetry*, 'a vague and sentimental idea in relation to which *poet* is a more vague and sentimental idea still'.[1] The dialectic makes it difficult to reconcile small details in a given poem – a tetrameter line in a pentameter passage – with grand ambitions for poetry and for the world at large: the poem of redintegration, the supreme fiction, the rose in the steel dust. Finally, the dialectic is historical. Poetry shadows each poem, striding behind it as an ideal induced from the works of the past, and rising to meet it as an ideal to which all works aspire. But the reverse is true too: poems linger long after poetry has hurried on, when the idea

[1] Riding and Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, p. 156.

no longer captures all the past's particulars. When the idea has still to assimilate the newest particulars, poetry shuffles to catch up with poems.[2]

This historical dimension may be more or less explicitly political, as may those grand ambitions. In *Literature and Revolution* (1923), Trotsky considers the works of various poets, both those hostile to the Russian Revolution and those committed to it. In the midst of these discussions, he reflects upon the historical logic of the Revolution itself, and he celebrates 'the materialist method, which permits one to gauge one's strength, to foresee changes, and to direct events'.[3] The materialist method, he urges, 'is the greatest fulfillment of the Revolution, and in this lies its highest poetry'. That poetry transcends the poems of its day. Trotsky had precedent for this in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852). Here Marx had distinguished between the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century and the proletarian revolutions of his own time:

> The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition about the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to dull themselves to their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the words went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the words.[4]

Martin Puchner links this passage to the Greek root of our word *poetry* – ποιεῖν, to make – and he argues that in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) 'Marx had already invented a poetry of the future revolution.'[5] But what exactly does Marx mean here by poetry, *Poesie*, and what is its value to him?[6]

Maybe *Poesie* is merely a glancing reference, a vague allusion, less important to Marx's argument than the great opening antithesis of tragedy and farce. Puchner is right to think that Marx does not mean, or not only,

[2] For a recent argument that poetry is an ideal which no actual poem can ever meet, see Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016). Lerner implies that this dichotomy is universal, rather than historically specific.

[3] Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 93.

[4] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852), in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 11.99–197 (p. 106); Karl Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte' (1852), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.11 (Berlin: Dietz, 1985), pp. 96–189 (p. 101).

[5] Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 1.

[6] For a recent discussion of the poetry Marx wrote when young and of its relation to his critique of political economy, see Keston Sutherland, 'Marx's Defence of Poetry', *World Picture* 10 (Spring 2015): www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_10/pdfs/Sutherland_WP_10.pdf.

language in verse or even verbal art. Clearly Marx does not, by the poetry of the future, anticipate *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) or *Duineser Elegien* (1923), nor Baudelaire's or Rilke's revolution in poetics. Marx does not mean *The Aeneid* or *The Iliad* by the poetry of the past, though he does describe the Roman Republic giving the 'gladiators' of the first French Revolution their 'ideals' and their 'art forms'.[7] Tallying the efforts of the Second Republic, he speaks of the 'thunder from the platform, the sheet lightning of the daily press, the entire literature'.[8] With contempt he satirises this bourgeois republic as a 'work of art'.[9] Like *Kunst* and *Literatur*, even *Poesie* can be sharp with irony. For French peasants under Napoleon, Marx notes, 'war was their poetry'.[10] But the *Poesie* of social revolution is neither tragedy nor writing, neither heroism nor art; it straddles and subsumes them all.

Marx uses the figure of poetry because he associates it, here, with a distinction between 'content' (*Inhalt*) and form, the 'words' or phrase (*Phrase*). The trouble with poetry from the past has been that it presents the 'new scene of world history', the revolutionary event, in 'time-honoured disguise' and in 'borrowed language'.[11] This is poetry as false ideal and sham dream, offering dead phrases for living deeds. Its superstition is self-deception. This contradiction of form and content extends to recent events, too. One must separate the 'language' and 'imaginary aspirations' of political parties 'from their real organism and their real interests'; one must distinguish 'their conception of themselves from their reality'.[12] Even the constitution of the new republic allowed the old realities to continue; the social structures governing life remained unchanged: the administration, the judiciary, the military. Or rather, where the constitution changed them, 'the change concerned the table of contents, not the contents; the name, not the subject matter'.[13] The poetry of the present has been no better than that of the past.

The poetry of the future must be different, but it must not mean fine phrases and lofty prognostications *about* the future. The democrats of the republic fell, Marx writes, because they 'lost all understanding of the present in a passive glorification of the future'.[14] Why not cast off poetry

[7] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 104; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.98.
[8] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 108; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.102.
[9] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 183; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.175.
[10] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 192; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.185.
[11] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.104; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.97.
[12] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.128; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.122.
[13] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.114; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.109.
[14] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.107; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.102.

for truth, then, or work towards the future itself, unadorned? One answer would be that the poetry we draw *from* the future ('aus der Zukunft') will configure form and content in another way, no longer deception or disguise. This was a modernist ideal or aspiration: 'form will be one with expression, metaphor with thought'.[15] In that case, though at present the 'apparent harmony of the whole of society' contradicts the actual and 'profound estrangement of its elements',[16] a poetry drawn from the future would, in its reconciliations, figure forth its time of reconciliation. But Marx does not seem to have meant this either. Though it was soon shot down, the social republic had itself, in the first days of the February Revolution, appeared 'as a phrase, as a prophecy'.[17] Here, too, poetry means a present form for a future content; 'here the content goes beyond the words'. But this form is not passive; the first rush of revolution is active, lived. 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive', Wordsworth remembered of another, earlier revolution.[18] And yet poetry provides the figure for this political action because in opposing the present state of things poetry also means promise or promises change. This gives it its force, even as a passing allusion.

Nevertheless, that force seems far removed from techniques of versification, from a logic of the lyric, or even from an aesthetics of necessity. It seems removed yet further from actual poems, from *The Prelude* or 'Les Sept vieillards'. When Ford sat down to write 'On Heaven' in a cottage by the sea on the eve of the Great War, the dialectic of poems and poetry posed an impossible problem. This is another reason to concentrate, sometimes, on single poems and volumes, rather than on the sweep of long careers. Between 1914 and 1930, the poems of Ford, Eliot, Loy, Stevens, and Macleod wrestled with the idea of poetry, an ideal which was so often made to figure revolution or utopia. When *The Waste Land* finds wretched negation in lineation, and when *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* finds guilty pleasure in phonemic repetition, particular poems implicate poetry itself in the far from perfect modern world. The same is true when 'On Heaven' defers happiness to the balance of light and shade in an old master's painting; when certain poems in *Harmonium* register the bliss of an accidence which cannot now happen, which they cannot as poems deliver; and when in *The Ecliptic* a whirl of dead letters forecasts the same

[15] Monro, 'The Future of Poetry', p. 13.
[16] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.109; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.104.
[17] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', II.181; Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire', I.II.174.
[18] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 396 (10.692) (1805 text).

again, rather than a singular redemptive event. This is not so true of contemporary poems by Lawrence or Williams, Sitwell or Pound, though in some moods Yeats worries aloud about poetry's complicity or impotence. Nor is this a criterion for judging modernist poems anew. But it is one of modernism's most significant aesthetic and political moves.

In 1923 Monro wrote that 'Our epoch sprawls, a desert, between an unrealised past and an unimaginable future.'[19] In response to that present, these particular poems do not surrender to their situation with an unremittent miserabilism or nihilist passivity. There is great pleasure in these poems: the cool of the evening in Provence, a moment alone in a garden, rich conceptual complexity, precise technical accomplishment. When the poems nevertheless turn upon themselves and upon poetry, the negation is active. It tells us something about how they understand their world, about how they understand their place in that world, and about that world itself, of which they form a part. For a poem to turn upon itself in this way is to participate in a particular moment in literary history, for the meanings of rhyme or the desire for necessity and significance are contingent: they depend upon inherited theories and values, upon canons of past poetry, and upon contemporary experiments and debates. At the same time, they depend upon the world in which these poems were written and published, which means not just wars and elections, but the furnishings of bourgeois homes, the language of private property, and the daily commute to and from an office. So the idea of poetry, the ideal which prompts us to herald the poetry of the future or the poem of redintegration, is as specific to a historical moment as its active negation. These modernist poems say they had to be no better than they are, in their present. They take upon themselves the contradictions of complicity and bliss.

[19] Monro, 'Notes for a Study of *The Waste Land*', p. 24.

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