

Faculty of English

FRONTIERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Tennyson, Hardy, Hopkins, Eliot

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, January 2018

ABSTRACT

‘The poet’, Eliot wrote, ‘is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist’. This dissertation is an investigation into the ways in which four poets – Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot – imagine what it might mean to labour in verse towards the ‘frontiers of consciousness’.

This is an old question about the value of poetry, about the kinds of understanding, feeling, and participation that become uniquely available as we read (or write) verse. But it is also a question that becomes peculiarly pressing in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. In my introductory chapter, I sketch out some of the philosophical, theological, and aesthetic contexts in which this question about what poetry might do for us becomes particularly acute: each of these four poets, I suggest, invests in verse as a means of sustaining belief in those things that seem excluded, imperilled, or forfeited by what is felt to be a peculiarly modern or (to use a contested term) ‘secularized’ understanding of the world. To write poetry becomes a labour towards enabling or ratifying otherwise untenable experiences of belief.

But while my broader concern is with what is at stake philosophically, theologically, and even aesthetically in this labour towards the frontiers of consciousness, my more particular concern is with the ways in which these poets think in verse about how the poetic organisation of language brings us to momentary consciousness of otherwise unavailable ‘meanings’. For each of these poets, it is as we begin to listen in to the paralinguistic sounds of verse that we become conscious of that which lies beyond the realms of the linguistic imagination. These poets develop figures within their verse in order to theorize the ways in which this peculiarly poetic ‘music’ brings us to consciousness of that which exceeds or transcends the limits of the world in which we think we live. These figures begin as images of the half-seen (glimmering, haunting, dappling, crossing) but become a way of imagining that which we might only half-hear or half-know.

Chapter 2 deals with Tennyson’s figure of glimmering light that signals the presence, activity, or territory of the ‘higher poetic imagination’; *In Memoriam*, I argue, represents the development of this figure into a poetics of the ‘glimpse’, a poetry that repeatedly approaches the horizon of what might be seen or heard. Chapter 3 is concerned with Hardy’s figuring of the ‘hereto’ of verse as a haunted region, his ghostly figures and spectral presences becoming a way of thinking about the strange experiences of listening and encounter that verse affords. Chapter 4 attends to the dappled skins and skies of Hopkins’ verse and the ways in which ‘dapple’ becomes a theoretical framework for thinking about the nature and theological significance of prosodic experience. And Chapter 5 considers the visual and acoustic crossings of Eliot’s verse as a series of attempts to imagine and interrogate the proposition that the poetic organisation of language offers ‘hints and guesses’ of a reality that is both larger and more significant than our own.

PREFACE

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

This dissertation does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes, references, and appendices, but excluding the bibliography, as prescribed by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of English.

This dissertation conforms to the style-sheet of the Modern Humanities Research Association.

For Chris

*These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.*

(Four Quartets)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe much to Michael D. Hurley. My thinking has been profoundly shaped by his instruction and conversation over many years; this dissertation bears many marks of his influence – not least, I hope, in its pursuit of honest answers to questions of ultimate value.

I have benefitted, too, from the rich and extensive body of scholarship on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry and poetics; my more particular debts to individual editors (these are, for various reasons, difficult poets to edit) and critics are acknowledged in my notes and bibliography.

Catherine Phillips, John Lennard, and Anne Stillman have generously answered many obscure and recondite questions. Yui Kajita has been a kind reader and a rigorous proof-reader.

The librarians at the Cambridge University Library, the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, the Archive Centre at King's College, and the Dorset County Museum have provided invaluable assistance. I am particularly grateful to the librarians at the English Faculty Library for their help and forbearance on many occasions.

My greatest debt is to my family: to my parents, Clive and Judith, for their encouragement over many years; and to my husband, Chris, for his love and loyalty. This dissertation is dedicated to him.

This research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK, grant number AH/L503897/1.

NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

For the sake of fluency, I have occasionally altered initial capitals to lower case when quoting small fragments of prose and verse within the main body of the text.

ALFRED TENNYSON

All quotations from Tennyson's poetry are from *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987). Volume and page references are given in text.

<i>Memoir</i>	Hallam Tennyson, <i>Alfred Tennyson: A Memoir</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
<i>Tennyson's Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson</i> , ed. by Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

THOMAS HARDY

All quotations from Hardy's poetry are from *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979). Page numbers are given in text.

<i>Life</i>	Florence Hardy, <i>The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928</i> (London: Macmillan, 1962)
<i>Hardy's Letters</i>	<i>Thomas Hardy: Selected Letters</i> , ed. by Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
<i>Public Voice</i>	<i>The Public Voice of Thomas Hardy: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose</i> , ed. by Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001)

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

All quotations from Hopkins' poetry are – unless otherwise stated – from *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by N. H. MacKenzie and W. H. Gardner, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). Page numbers are given in text.

<i>Correspondence I</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins and Michael F. Suarez, S. J., 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-), I: <i>Correspondence 1852-1881</i> , ed. by R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (2013)
<i>Correspondence II</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins and Michael F. Suarez, S. J., 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-), II: <i>Correspondence 1882-1889</i> , ed. by R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (2013)

<i>Diaries</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins and Michael F. Suarez, S. J., 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-), III: <i>Diaries, Journals, and Notebooks</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins (2015)
<i>Early MSS</i>	<i>The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-Books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile</i> , ed. by Norman H. MacKenzie (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1989)
<i>Essays</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins and Michael F. Suarez, S. J., 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-), IV: <i>Oxford Essays and Notes</i> , ed. by Lesley Higgins (2006)
<i>J&P</i>	<i>The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Humphrey House and Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)
<i>Later MSS</i>	<i>The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile</i> , ed. by Norman H. MacKenzie (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1991)
<i>Sermons</i>	<i>The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins</i> , ed. by Christopher Devlin (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)

T. S. ELIOT

All quotations from Eliot's poetry are – unless otherwise stated – from *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*. Page numbers are given in text.

Quotations from Eliot's letters are given from *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, 7 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2009-). Letters written after 1935 have not yet been published: references to these letters are given from Ricks' notes in *Poems I*.

Quotations from Eliot's uncollected prose are given from *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Ronald Schuchard, 8 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2014-). Volumes 7 (1947-53) and 8 (1954-65) of *The Complete Prose* have not yet been published; as such quotations from the uncollected prose written after 1946 are given from Ricks' notes in *Poems I*.

<i>CP</i>	<i>The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot</i> , ed. by Ronald Schuchard, 8 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2014-)
<i>CPP</i>	<i>Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot</i> (London: Faber and Faber, 1969)
<i>Eliot's Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of T. S. Eliot</i> , ed. by Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, 7 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2009-)
<i>KE</i>	T. S. Eliot, <i>Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley</i> (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)

- On Poetry* T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957)
- Poems I* *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*
- Poems II* *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), II: *Practical Cats and Further Verses*
- SE* T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932)
- Use of Poetry* T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933)

I

INTRODUCTION

There is a further question – which I hand over to you – that of the relation of the ‘belief’ of the poet to the ‘belief’ of the philosopher, theologian or scientist.

(T. S. Eliot to I. A. Richards, 31 October 1928; *Eliot’s Letters*, IV, 305)

In the autumn of 1928, I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot began to turn their attention to the question of poetic ‘belief’. It was not a new subject for Eliot but a ‘tit for tat’ exchange of works in progress with Richards – the early drafts of *Ash-Wednesday* for a near-complete version of a ‘chapter of Belief [sic]’¹ – had revealed the convergence of their intellectual preoccupations; their subsequent exchange became the occasion for some of their most explicit formulations of – and reflections on – this central problem of poetics. The question of poetic ‘belief’ was one for the literary critic. Both Richards and Eliot were concerned with the ways in which the business of reading poetry might require, encourage, or enable us to adopt – however provisionally – certain attitudes towards the world. In 1929, their private ‘notes on Belief’² found a wider audience in the publication of Richards’ *Practical Criticism* which, among other things, addressed the problem of ‘Doctrine in Poetry’,³ and Eliot’s essay on ‘Dante’ which explored the ‘difference [...] between philosophical *belief* and poetic *assent*’ (*SE*, 257). But it was also a question that seemed to need working out in and through what Eliot would later call the ‘music’ of verse (*On Poetry*, 29). Richards, lecturing at Tsing Hua University in 1929–30 on these questions of ‘belief’, confessed to Eliot that some ‘lines of the leopards poem’ (*Ash-Wednesday* II) had been haunting his ear, ‘the feeling of them rather than the words and only the ghost of their movement’.⁴ And Eliot, who had begun his ‘experiment in believing’ having converted to Christianity in 1927, worked through these newly intimate and newly urgent questions in *Ash-Wednesday*, thinking in verse about the ways in which the business of writing poetry might support, sustain, or even ratify such experiences of ‘belief’. As Richards and Eliot continued to discuss this question throughout the early 1930s, ‘belief’ remained in inverted commas, a term both necessary and necessarily suspended as they sought to describe and to account for the strange experiences that become available as we begin to read (or write) verse.

¹ Letter to T. S. Eliot, 1 October 1928, in *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards*, ed. by John Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 47.

² Constable, p. 54.

³ I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929), pp. 271–91.

⁴ Constable, p. 53.

Eliot's 'further question' and his subsequent exchange with Richards is emblematic of the ways in which the poets considered in this dissertation think about what we might call the value of poetry: what poetry is for or, to put it another way, what poetry might do to us. Eliot, as the last of these poets and as their self-conscious beneficiary and critic, offers an account that is at once individual and, in a manner peculiar to him, composite – worked out in and through the crossings and intersections of these earlier accounts. As such, his account offers an emblematic, retrospective, or global view of these four poets: a way of reimagining the significance – both individual and collective – of their four rather different accounts of verse.

These four poets – Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot – investigate this question of poetic value through a more particular inquiry into the experience of poetic 'belief'. They are preoccupied, in various and often incommensurable ways, with questions about how the experience of reading, writing, speaking, or listening to verse might be in some kind of 'relation' to our other commitments. Hopkins, for instance, worried that his poems would 'interfere' with his 'state and vocation' (*Correspondence I*, 186). But he also imagined his verse-practice as somehow continuous with his pedagogical and evangelical commitments as a Jesuit: 'You are my public', he wrote to Robert Bridges in 1877, 'and' – with the impulse of both poet and priest – 'I hope to convert you' (*Correspondence I*, 282). Writing verse might be bound up with patriotic commitments: with the duties of an Englishman (Hopkins: 'A great work [...] is like a great battle won by England'; *Correspondence II*, 813) or, less straightforwardly, with the duties of the laureateship, as it was for Tennyson. As Hardy found, writing verse might also be in some kind of occult relation to our willingness to adopt certain philosophical and metaphysical attitudes: 'Half my time (particularly when I write verse) I believe – in the modern use of the word – not only in things that Bergson does, but in spectres' (*Hardy's Letters*, 297). And Eliot himself, writing his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), found it imperative to state (or perhaps confess) his 'general point of view' as 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'.⁵

But Eliot's 'further question' captures a more particular aspect of this shared preoccupation. This is a concern with the nature of poetic 'belief' in a more constrained sense; a question about how our experience of reading or writing verse might intersect with or be inflected by our ability or willingness to believe in those things that, by virtue of their inaccessibility, are the objects of a more taxing (because less verifiable) kind of 'belief'. Eliot's choice of 'belief' as his key term indicates the extent to which this question is bound up with the possibility that the experiences afforded by verse might be coordinate with the experiences of religious faith. But this sense that poetry might constitute or work towards a commitment to that which is, in some fundamental way, unknowable does not have to be formulated in religious terms. The experience of poetic 'belief' might correspond (somehow) to belief in the immaterial or (moving down the scale of metaphysical commitment) the inapprehensible, or the unimaginable. This somewhat uncertain 'relation' is (as I shall explore further) the cause of

⁵ T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), p. ix.

considerable anxiety and restless inquiry: the claims we might make about poetry's value – its contribution to our understanding of and participation in the world – depend on the ways in which we configure the relation between the experiences of 'belief' afforded by verse and those experiences of 'belief' associated with the commitments of everyday life.

It would be tempting to draw a distinction between those poets who invest in verse as a means of engaging with problems of religious faith (Hopkins and Eliot, say) and those who invest in verse as a means of sustaining other, less metaphysically-committed, kinds of belief (Hardy and Tennyson). But, in practice, an investment in verse as a means of sustaining 'belief' is very often the result of a number of converging priorities. One of Tennyson's main concerns in *In Memoriam* (1850) is to explore the ways in which verse might move us (in both senses of that word) towards embracing those things that we cannot know, or, as he puts it in the 'Prologue', towards 'Believing where we cannot prove' (II, 315). This is framed, in the first instance, as a question about the possibility of sustaining religious faith. And yet the strategies Tennyson uses in *In Memoriam* to move towards such 'faith' (a series of parabolic reaches towards the limit of the visible and audible) are the same strategies he uses to adduce the ways in which the work of the poet is, uniquely, a labour towards – and, at times, beyond – the limits of the imaginable. For Hardy, writing verse does not entail 'belief' of the metaphysical variety but it does enable a kind of assent to those philosophical attitudes that are compelling but not convincing (such as Bergson's notion of the *élan vital*) (*Hardy's Letters*, 300). And this philosophical affordance is continuous with the possibility that verse itself might be, in some sense, haunted – its structural recurrences a means of recovering absent presences as acoustic traces. These two examples illustrate some of the ways in which an investment in verse as a means of sustaining 'belief' in that which is otherwise unknowable might testify to a number of converging imperatives: religious, metaphysical, philosophical, and distinctly literary or imaginative. And they illustrate, too, how the experiences of 'belief' afforded by poetry are tied to the possibility of 'belief' in verse itself – 'belief', that is, that the experiences made available by verse have some meaningful relation to our everyday lives.

This dissertation follows these four poets as they think about the ways in which verse labours to afford apprehensions of that which lies beyond the limits of our mind-bound, body-bound, speech-bound imaginations. To put it in the terms Eliot uses in 'The Music of Poetry' (1942) – and from which I take my title – these four poets are occupied with those 'frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist' (*On Poetry*, 20). Eliot's account of the poet's occupation hints at the ways in which the 'frontiers of consciousness' are coordinate with the frontiers of language: to exceed that which we might know, imagine, or apprehend might be to exceed that which we might put into words. Eliot's account begins to indicate how an inquiry into the ways in which poetry enables peculiarly poetic experiences of 'belief' is necessarily involved in a more particular inquiry into the ways in which verse takes us towards the limits of language itself, towards that frontier-zone where 'words fail' and we enter into the reverberative, resonant realm of

paralinguistic ‘meanings’. And so to answer this ‘further question’ about the nature of poetic ‘belief’ requires us to listen in to that ‘music’ that is (as Richards put it) the ‘feeling’ of words: a ‘music’ that offers its own, unspeakable answers to this question about what poetry might uniquely enable us to ‘believe’.

* * *

Eliot’s ‘further question’ about the nature of poetic ‘belief’ suggests – as I have begun to indicate and will explore further – some strategic lines of inquiry that situate this poetic and philosophical question within a more particular investigation into the linguistic experiences afforded by verse itself. But it is also a question that needs to be situated in a number of philosophical, literary-critical, and historical contexts. Eliot’s question and his subsequent exchange with Richards is a classic rehearsal of an old preoccupation. As Stephen Halliwell has observed, the ancient Greek traditions of verse incorporated a ‘domain of self-conscious poetics [...] a strong impulse to voice evaluative responses to poetry’ that – importantly – predates the formalized poetics of the fifth and fourth centuries:⁶ poetry’s tendency to develop a ‘self-conscious poetics’ out of its own lyrical imperatives and contingencies – rather than through the domestication of philosophical attitudes and anxieties – is a recurrent theme of this dissertation. Halliwell argues that this ‘domain of reflection on, and debate about, the nature and functions of poetry’ is characterized by a ‘recurrent dialectic’ between two paradigms of poetic value that centre on the continuity (or discontinuity) between poetic ‘belief’ (to use Eliot’s term) and our other categories of lived commitment.⁷ The first paradigm, ‘ecstasy’, sees the poetic experience as one ‘in which the mind is “turned aside” from or made to “forget” its ordinary existence’; the second, ‘truth’, is concerned with ‘poetry’s more lasting cognitive and/or ethical value for the beliefs and attitudes of its audiences’.⁸

This anxiety about the continuous or discontinuous ‘relation’ between the ‘belief’ of the poet (or reader of verse) and the ‘belief’ of the philosopher becomes one of the animating preoccupations of the Western tradition of poetics, finding its exemplary iteration in Plato’s decision to expel the poets from the Republic. But it is not just the anxiety of the philosopher. It becomes the professional anxiety of both poet and critic of poetry – a persistent difficulty in determining and then persuasively stating the particular contribution that poetry makes to our ability to understand and live well within the world. Does poetry afford unique kinds of knowledge, enabling us to apprehend or assent to that which is otherwise beyond us? Or does it return us to the known world with a keener sense of its character and significance? To define this concern more sharply – while allowing for the variety of

⁶ Stephen Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4–5.

⁷ Halliwell, p. 4.

⁸ Halliwell, pp. 6–7.

historical, philosophical, theological, and theoretical inflections that it has come to include – this is a question about the kinds of cognitive experience that poetry makes available and the relation of these experiences to our lived beliefs and attitudes.

Eliot's 'further question' is a twentieth-century rehearsal of an ancient preoccupation but it is also a question that, in the last twenty years or so, has become the focus of a more particular inquiry into the ways in which the poetic organisation of language is 'cognitively generative'⁹ or a way of 'thinking'.¹⁰ This inquiry has led critics in a number of directions. One approach has been to take it as a broad question about the 'literariness' of literary language and the knowledge that it affords, touching, at times, on the distinctively poetic: Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004) and Michael Wood's *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (2005) offer two, rather different, examples. Another approach has been to contend that verse should be thought of as a philosophical mode – not as a means of reproducing the methods of scholastic philosophy but, in a richer sense, as a medium intimately involved in and with the pursuit knowledge. Simon Jarvis, thinking of Wordsworth, argues that 'instead of being a sort of thoughtless ornament or reliquary for thinking, verse is itself a kind of cognition, with its own resistances and difficulties'.¹¹ Or, as Michael O'Neill puts it, thinking, again, of Wordsworth: 'poetry is testimony to poetry as a way of knowing inseparable from its own procedures'.¹² Ewan Jones makes a similar argument: 'Coleridge's verse [...] often represented his sole means of thinking in a philosophically significant and original manner'.¹³ Michael D. Hurley has reframed this claim, suggesting that verse 'conjoins aesthetics' not with philosophical thought but with 'metaphysics', becoming a mode not of cognition but of peculiarly poetic 'faith'.¹⁴ A final (and related) iteration of this inquiry has been a number of studies attending to the ways in which the organization of poetic language produces aural apprehensions of meanings that exceed that which we might normally speak of or know. Peter McDonald's study of nineteenth-century rhyme concludes that it is the 'sound of intention'.¹⁵ Seamus Perry describes 'a Tennysonian sort of musicality' that works 'to get "expressed in words" what might more normally elude them'.¹⁶ And Elizabeth K. Helsinger in her account of the intricate intimacies of thinking and listening in nineteenth-century 'song poems' suggests that these lyrics 'demand that we experience for ourselves how thought can be set in motion by the sound, touch, and sight of a poem, taking us beyond what we

⁹ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 4.

¹⁰ James Longenbach, *The Resistance to Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 73.

¹¹ Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 4.

¹² Michael O'Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xviii.

¹³ Ewan James Jones, *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 4.

¹⁴ Michael D. Hurley, *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Poetic Belief* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 2.

¹⁵ Peter McDonald, *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

¹⁶ Seamus Perry, *Alfred Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2005), p. 8.

think we know'.¹⁷ It is to this last line of inquiry that this dissertation is closest in practice. The contention that verse is a mode of 'cognition' is well taken and becomes the point of departure for a more particular attention to the ways in which the experience of poetic language affords experiences of peculiarly poetic knowledge or (with a greater sense of the commitments that might be involved) 'belief'.

* * *

This dissertation takes up Eliot's 'further question' as both an enduring preoccupation within the Western tradition of poetics and as the subject of contemporary critical inquiry. But it is also a question that is shaped by and becomes peculiarly pressing within the historical, philosophical, theological, and cultural contexts (to name only those that pertain most directly to this inquiry) of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Many of those critics who have thought about poetry as a mode of 'cognition' or as a way of 'thinking' have framed their inquiry (as exemplified above)¹⁸ in terms of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century verse:¹⁹ Tennyson, in particular, has become something of a touchstone.²⁰ Various rationales have been given for why questions about the cognitive experiences afforded by verse seem to become especially acute in this period: Wordsworth's 'overpowering influence' that transformed rhyme into a 'self-conscious' feature of subsequent poetry;²¹ the inflection of Victorian conceptions of poetic form by the 'bitter debate over form within and without the Church of England';²² the ways in which aestheticism put a 'for nothing' at the heart of the literary, securing its forms of knowing against 'relevance, and reference' to other kinds of knowledge.²³ Eliot and Richards' exchange suggests a further, more specifically literary reason why the verse of this period is so self-conscious about the status of the cognitive experiences that it affords. Their shared language of poetic 'belief' registers their sense that their poetics are inescapably and essentially shaped by (if not identical with) Coleridge's account of the poetic labour as an endeavour to procure 'that willing suspension of disbelief' that (in a significant coupling) 'constitutes poetic

¹⁷ Helsingør, p. 2. A rather different line of inquiry into the ways in which the poetic organization of language is generative of such paralinguistic meanings is exemplified by Reuven Tsur's *Poetic Rhythm, Structure and Performance: An Empirical Study in Cognitive Poetics* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Two other important studies that take a (very) long nineteenth-century are Angela Leighton's *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Helen Vendler's *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ The question has, of course, been taken in other directions as well: James Longenbach has explored the 'strange ideas' that become available in twenty-first century verse (Longenbach, p. xi); Clive Scott has addressed the 'forbidding problem' of the relation between knowledge and literary language in *The Poetics of French Verse: Studies in Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) (p. 5); and Peter de Bolla has even found himself asking the question, 'what does this painting know?', of a Barnett Newman canvas: *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 31.

²⁰ See, for instance: Hurley's chapter on 'Alfred Tennyson: Word Music', pp. 39–71; Leighton's 'Tennyson's Hum', *The Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 9.4 (2010), 315–29; and Perry's *Alfred Tennyson*.

²¹ McDonald, p. 8.

²² Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 6.

²³ Leighton, *On Form*, p. 35.

faith'.²⁴ Eliot claims that when you 'read poetry [...] you suspend both belief and disbelief' ('Dante'; *SE*, 258) and Richards writes that 'the question of belief or disbelief [...] never arises when we are reading well'.²⁵ Coleridge's terms cannot be suspended, however much they might be abrogated; to formulate a poetics after Coleridge is to find that this question about the relation between poetry and lived experience is unavoidably implicated in questions about what we might (or might not) believe and, most pressingly, about what we might put our 'faith' in – a word that in this context has theological as well as poetic significance.²⁶

This last point touches on the ways in which the potential of this uncertain relation between poetry and lived experience comes into particular focus in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries – the old problem of poetics reimagined or recuperated as a means of engaging with a set of diverse and urgent questions about what we might believe and how such beliefs might be sustained. My claims here are not totalizing: these poets are not brought together in order to exemplify a particular historical or poetic moment – their reasons for investing in verse as a means of engaging with problems of 'belief' are as diverse as their individual histories and metaphysical commitments. And although the historical scope and the particular array of poets considered here necessarily touch on critical debates concerning the development of English poetry, my concern is not primarily with the continuities and discontinuities between Victorian and modernist verse,²⁷ or modernist and non-modernist (or, equally unsatisfactorily, 'Georgian') verse.²⁸ My concern, rather, is with the varied and mutually illuminating ways in which the self-conscious poetics developed by these four poets are shaped in relation to the particular nineteenth- and early twentieth-century configurations of questions about the role and functions of poetry.

Despite the variety of their practice, these poets frequently employ two particular strategies for recovering the uncertain relation between poetry and lived experience as a resource for exploring problems of 'belief'. The first and most commonly adopted strategy (and the one I will spend most time on) finds in the discontinuous relation between poetic 'belief' and other categories of commitment a means of sustaining those 'beliefs' that seem imperilled, excluded, or forfeited by what is felt to be a distinctly modern or (to use a contested term that will require further exploration) 'secularized' understanding of the world: poetry becomes a way of believing the unbelievable. The

²⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by George Watson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1975), p. 169.

²⁵ Richards, p. 277.

²⁶ See Michael Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

²⁷ For three recent accounts of the metrical continuities and discontinuities between Victorian and modernist verse, see: *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011); Joseph Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁸ See, for instance: Donald Davie, *With the Grain: Essays on Thomas Hardy and Modern British Poetry*, ed. by Clive Wilmer (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998); Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

second strategy (less commonly adopted but, as will become evident, constituting an important counter-narrative) seeks to recover the continuity between poetic and non-poetic experiences of ‘belief’ such that the ways in which we read become a means of assuming, confirming, or practising those commitments which, in our ordinary lives, we live by. For Hopkins and (less straightforwardly) for Eliot, this can only be achieved through the development of an incarnational poetics. These two responses to the problem of poetic ‘belief’ represent a further configuration of the ‘recurrent dialectic’ (to use Halliwell’s terms) between ecstatic and truthful paradigms of poetic value.

This question of poetic ‘belief’ becomes particularly pressing within the overlapping contexts of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates surrounding secularization and aesthetics. The last twenty years have seen a major and cross-disciplinary reassessment of the various versions of the ‘secularization thesis’ put forward in the 1960s and 1970s²⁹ – a narrative of the ‘gradual withdrawal of God from the world’ most memorably advanced from a literary-critical perspective by J. Hillis Miller in his seminal work, *The Disappearance of God* (1963).³⁰ More recently, Hugh McLeod, Callum Brown, and Charles Taylor, among others, have adumbrated some of the dissatisfactions of this narrative, drawing attention to the complex history of secularization,³¹ the instability of both ‘religion’ and ‘secularization’ as operative terms,³² and the seemingly paradoxical proliferation of expressions of religious faith in Victorian Britain, even as many groups within society narrated – and invested in – the story of its decline.³³ Recent literary scholarship has explored some of the ways in which this more complicated account of the increasingly secularized conditions of modern life (for there is consensus on this, if nothing else) might inform or be informed by our understanding of the literature of the period. William R. McKelvy has explored the ways in which the ‘religious vocation of literature’ became ‘a politically significant theme in British intellectual life’.³⁴ Charles LaPorte has followed the mid-century relationship between poetics and the ‘higher critical’ hermeneutics of contemporary Biblical scholarship.³⁵ Joshua King has investigated how print publications offered a variety of ways of reimagining the Christian British community in the nineteenth-century.³⁶ And Sara Lyons has traced some of the continuities between Victorian aestheticism and debates concerning the secular.³⁷ Most recently, Anthony Domestico has enriched our understanding of the complex relationship

²⁹ See Hugh McLeod’s survey of secularization scholarship: *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1–12.

³⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 1.

³¹ McLeod, p. 4.

³² See Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), pp. 11–14.

³³ Brown, p. 29.

³⁴ William R. McKelvy, *The English Cult of Literature: Devoted Readers, 1774-1880* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 3.

³⁵ Charles LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

³⁶ Joshua King, *Imagined Spiritual Communities in Britain’s Age of Print* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2015).

³⁷ Sara Lyons, *Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater: Victorian Aestheticism, Doubt and Secularisation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015).

between secularization and British literature by showing some of the ways in which modernist verse was animated by and in conversation with contemporary theological thinking.³⁸

This study is sympathetic to and in dialogue with this evolving critical discussion about processes of secularization in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. But my concern is not so much with writing or complicating these narratives as examining the ways in which these four poets felt themselves to be experiencing – and, consequently, responding to – a process of secularization that seemed to cut them off from certain kinds of ‘belief’. As Lyons observes, despite the difficulties of advancing a straightforward account of religious decline, ‘many prominent Victorian writers and thinkers, both religious and secular, believed that they *were* beholding the inexorable decline of religion’.³⁹ Something of this feeling that modern life was becoming increasingly secularized – or *enclosed*, to use a word that captures the ways in which these felt losses were not only theological but metaphysical, philosophical, and even imaginative – is heard in the conversation of these poets and their confidants. ‘The material world is so uninteresting’, Hardy complained to William Archer, ‘human life is so miserably bounded, circumscribed, cabin’d, cribb’d, confined. I want another domain for the imagination to expatriate in’.⁴⁰ ‘What I want’, Tennyson confessed to William Allingham, troubled by a felt absence and a compelling need, ‘is an assurance of immortality’.⁴¹ Writing to Richards about the possibility of poetic ‘belief’ in 1928, Eliot observed that ‘civilisation has proceeded more in some respects than others [...] we have at present no “beliefs” to correspond to some of our feelings’ (*Letters*, IV, 304). This failure to adjust the range of human feeling to the more circumscribed range of our modern ‘beliefs’ seemed to result in a deep and destabilising conflict between the commitments of modern philosophy, theology, and science on the one hand, and our desires, intuitions, and intentions, on the other: ‘instance’, writes Eliot, ‘the wild passions which distort the rationalism of a B[ertrand] Russell’ (*Letters*, IV, 304).

Charles Taylor’s notion of the ‘immanent frame’ is useful here. Taylor argues that the ‘polemic between belief and unbelief in the last two centuries’ was characterized by an increasingly internalized sense that we inhabit a world in which it has become axiomatic that all thought, feeling, and purpose originates in the realm of private experience.⁴² The result is an experience of the world in which those things that exist outside the realm of private experience seem threatened or even disallowed. Taylor argues that this ‘immanent frame’ tends towards closure, ‘slough[ing] off’ the transcendent, but can also ‘be lived as inherently open to transcendence’; to respond in this latter way is to ‘press towards some recognition of transcendence, or remain in the uncertain border zone opened

³⁸ Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

³⁹ Lyons, p. 12.

⁴⁰ William Archer, *Real Conversations* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), p. 45.

⁴¹ William Allingham’s Diary, ed. by Geoffrey Grigson (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1967), p. 185.

⁴² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 392.

by Romantic forms of art'.⁴³ J. Hillis Miller describes the poet working within the tradition of romanticism as a 'man who goes out into the empty space between man and God and takes the enormous risk of attempting to create in that vacancy a new fabric of connections between man and the divine power'.⁴⁴ But this does not adequately capture the range of reasons why it might seem imperative to occupy this 'uncertain border zone': this is the place in which the artist might labour towards apprehensions of – or experiences of 'belief' in – that which exceeds the bounds of the modern imagination, whether that is the divine and transcendent, or (with less metaphysical commitment) the immaterial and unimagined.

My contention in this dissertation is that these four poets – in instructively heterogeneous ways – are engaged in an attempt to occupy this 'uncertain border zone', investing in verse as a means of exceeding or transcending the bounds of their private worlds and its corresponding commitments. Taylor's and Miller's figures touch on the ways in which these poets figure their own labour towards intimations of the unimaginable as journeys towards horizons, frontiers, and limits. Tennyson, as Ulysses, sets out 'To follow knowledge like a sinking star, | Beyond the utmost bound of human thought' (I, 618); in 'Tithonus', this distant horizon becomes the dwelling-place of a man caught uneasily between the time-bound world of men and the immortality of the gods. For Hardy, the Cornish coasts – littoral in aspect and haunted by ghosts – are the locus of an inquiry into the things that might only be known (or heard) under the conditions of verse. More broadly, the phantasmal becomes emblematic in this period of a number of configurations of this 'uncertain border zone': a figure for the intersections of the material and immaterial, but also the known and the unknown, the mortal and the immortal, and so on. And it becomes a way of thinking about the distinguishing aspects of verse that enable this momentary occupation of the intersection-zones: Hopkins, for instance, writes of 'haunting' rhythms (*Correspondence I*, 317) while Eliot conjures the 'ghost of [...] metre' ('Reflections on *Vers Libre*'; *CP*, I, 514). In Hopkins' verse, the figure of the distant horizon is exchanged for one of skins and surfaces, a boundary that might be stressed and ruptured in order to reveal the hidden God behind. And Eliot, writing in 1948, recognizes in Walter de la Mare's ghost-crossed twilights an exemplary instance of this strain of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century verse-thinking that figures the poetic labour towards the 'frontiers of consciousness' as an attempt to occupy these liminal hours and haunted zones.

This work of resisting or seeking a reprieve from the perceived enclosures of secularization is (as Taylor recognizes) bound up with a newly urgent set of questions about the nature and functions of aesthetic experience. These questions centre on the suspicion (shared by these four poets) that art has somehow become uncoupled from everyday life, and (if it remains uncoupled)⁴⁵ affords experiences that are necessarily discontinuous with the other experiences of our lives. One way of charting the

⁴³ Taylor, pp. 543, 545.

⁴⁴ Miller, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁵ See chapters four and five, on Hopkins and Eliot respectively, for an account of the labour to restore this continuity through the adoption of an incarnational poetics.

cross-currents between nineteenth-century aesthetics and narratives of secularization is to argue for an Arnoldian reinvestment in art as a compensation for the decline of religious experience: poetic ‘belief’ becomes a substitute or consolation for beliefs that have become untenable. Alternatively, art after romanticism might be thought of as a mode which increasingly distances itself from any claim to being in ‘relation’ to other categories of thought, experience, or commitment – an attitude that finds its superlative expression in the domesticated doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*.⁴⁶ Both these attitudes towards aesthetic experience are played with – assumed, interrogated, discarded – in the work of these four poets. But their poetry is characterized not by a settled conviction about poetry’s distinct value, but rather a restlessness – that is both poetically generative and anxiety-inducing – about what, exactly, we might legitimately expect art to do for us.

This anxiety about the conditions of aesthetic experience brings with it a more particular worry about the distinctive conditions of poetic experience. Does poetry offer experiences that other forms of art do not? And, if so, what is it about poetry that means it uniquely enables us to apprehend those things that were otherwise inapprehensible? These questions become particularly pressing for those poets who are also interested in, or practitioners of, other forms of art. Catherine Phillips has drawn attention to the extent of Hopkins’ engagement with the visual arts:⁴⁷ he was also an amateur composer and musical theorist. Hardy earned his living as an architect and then as a novel-writer. Eliot, similarly, supported himself not through his verse but through his editorial work and critical writings. Music, as a non-plastic art, proves the most generative reference-point as these poets work to theorize their poetics. Hopkins borrows ‘counterpoint’ from musical theory to imagine his metrical practice. Psalm, hymn, and folk tunes recur throughout Hardy’s verse as both narrative subject and prosodic influence. Eliot, in his later years, was preoccupied with what he would call the ‘music of poetry’ (*On Poetry*, 29). And Tennyson, while confessing that ‘a great deal of the music means nothing at all to me’,⁴⁸ found in ‘music’ a term with which he could begin to conceptualize the paralinguistic resources of verse. This focus on the peculiar distinctions of verse as a mode of aesthetic experience also brought a corresponding sharpness to contemporary debates about what, exactly, we might mean by ‘poetry’ or (to use a phrase that I will return to throughout this dissertation) the ‘conditions of verse’. Hopkins’ and Eliot’s experiments with rhythm and metre indicate some of the ways in which what had seemed constitutive of the ‘poetic’ (the organization of language according to paralinguistic as well as linguistic patterns) was increasingly contested, such that ‘poetry’ began to compete with other, more generically-fluid concepts such as ‘prose-poem’, ‘prose-rhythm’, and *vers libre*.

⁴⁶ Lyons complicates these two seemingly opposed narratives by tracing out some of the ways in which both were configured as responses to or versions of the secular: pp. 1–12.

⁴⁷ Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Tennyson: *Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 114.

* * *

The question of poetic ‘belief’ is implicated in a much wider set of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about art, religion, and modernity. But while this dissertation is ultimately concerned with what is at stake in the way we define the value and purposes of poetry, it takes a more particular line of inquiry, attending to the ways in which these four poets think in verse about the experiences of apprehension, understanding, or assent that their poetry labours to afford. This narrower focus allows me to concentrate on what are, in the first instance, central problems of poetics, while remaining alert to the ways in which these more particular problems intersect with broader questions about philosophy, theology, and aesthetics.

The ‘frontiers of consciousness’, Eliot suggested, lie at the frontiers of language. Poetry – at least in the accounts considered here – affords strange experiences of otherwise impossible ‘belief’ because it enables us, however briefly, to exceed or transcend the range of our word-bound imaginations. And so my concern in this dissertation is with the self-theorising figures these poets develop within their verse in order to think about the ways in which it labours towards those border-zones where words resonate as music and we might apprehend that which lies beyond the confines of the known world. Whereas previous investigations into the cognitive experiences afforded by verse have sought to establish a philosophy of poetry (Jarvis, Jones), or to listen in to the sound of its thoughts (McDonald, Helsinger, Leighton), this dissertation is concerned with the ways in which poetry theorizes its own cognitive labour. I take my cue from Eliot and Richards: their exchange is haunted by the ‘feeling’ and ‘movement’ of *Ash-Wednesday*, an unvoiced suspicion that poetry – and, in particular, poetry’s music – might offer its own, inimitable answers to the question of its strange knowledge. These self-theorising figures begin as images of the half-seen: glimmering (Tennyson), haunting (Hardy), dappling (Hopkins), crossing (Eliot). But the half-seen becomes – or, more accurately, is anxiously brought into an uncertain, hypothesized correspondence with – the half-heard and the half-spoken. These self-theorising figures become a way of investigating the delicate affordances of verse – the ways in which the entanglements of reading, speaking, and listening to verse are generative of distinctly poetic experiences of cognition.⁴⁹

A final note on my terms: Angela Leighton observes that ‘if we shall need “to ask what forms know or know of”, this might also mean rewriting the terms of such knowledge, and being willing to listen to the strange things that are said’.⁵⁰ ‘Thinking’ has been the term of choice for those wishing to avoid ‘cognition’, implying, as it does, the more quantitative methods of the natural sciences which (as this dissertation will evince) are at odds with the claim that poetry – and, indeed, the single poem – constitutes a unique and inimitable moment of thought. ‘Thinking’ has been configured in a number of

⁴⁹ For the strange intimacies of print and prosody, see Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁵⁰ Leighton, *On Form*, p. 28.

ways in order to express the uneasy relation between poetic experiences of ‘thinking’ and the conceptual and philosophical processes that we more normally understand as ‘thought’: Longenbach gives us ‘the sound of thinking’;⁵¹ Jarvis, ‘musical thinking’;⁵² Vendler, ‘lyric thinking’.⁵³ (The sense that poetry might play to the mind by playing, primarily, to what Hopkins calls the ‘mind’s ear’ is a recurrent theme and one that is developed in this dissertation (*Correspondence I*, 456).) ‘Thinking’ is, in many ways, a very good word, capacious enough to include the active processes of thought during composition, the patterns of cognition revealed by the poem’s surface, and the experiences of thinking that reading might subsequently make available.⁵⁴ But while I use this term from time to time it falls short in two important ways. The first is that it fails to recognize quite how high the stakes are for these poets: they invest in verse not merely as a means of coming to know the world in new ways but as a means of assuming, sustaining, or bolstering commitments that are felt to be both desirable and profoundly necessary. The second is that it does not capture the extent to which these poets’ self-figuring inquiries are animated by a dissatisfaction with the words we have for experiences that are, in their very nature, beyond words. And so, rather than settling on any one term, my practice is to work with the unsettled language of the poets’ tentative and provisional accounts of what we discover as we strain towards and, perhaps, even attain the ‘frontiers of consciousness’ – whether that is an experience of belief, assent, or apprehension, a moment of knowledge, insight, or understanding, an encounter, a heard call, a glimpsed vision, or something else altogether.

⁵¹ Longenbach, p. 73.

⁵² Simon Jarvis, ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody’, *Paragraph*, 28.2 (2005), 57–71.

⁵³ Vendler, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Vendler, p. 6.

II

TENNYSON – GLIMMERING

O young Mariner,
 You from the haven
 Under the sea-cliff,
 You that are watching
 The gray Magician
 With eyes of wonder,
I am Merlin,
And I am dying,
I am Merlin
 Who follow The Gleam.

(‘Merlin and the Gleam’; III, 206-07)

In 1889, Tennyson had arrived in the moment in which he had dwelt imaginatively for much of his life, in the darkening period before death that seems to envision the glimmering of the moment after, the dusky light that seems an image of the coming dawn. Tennyson, ‘as near death as a man could be without dying’ during his severe illness of 1888-89 (*Memoir*, II, 354), increasingly turned his attention towards the far side of the grave and to what he imagined would be the dawn of an unrestrained and bruising criticism of his life and work.¹ With this posthumous vulnerability in view (‘I don’t want to be ripped up like a hog when I’m dead’),² he concentrated on writing a literary history that would speak for him beyond the grave, securing the parameters of biographical revelation, critical interpretation, and editorial intervention. This literary history took the form of ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ on one hand, and, on the other, the copious ‘notes’ which Tennyson with the help of his household assembled as a preliminary to a ‘Life’ that would be ‘final and full enough to preclude the chance of further and unauthentic biographies’ (*Memoir*, I, xii).³ The priority, however, lay not with the biography but with the poem: speaking posthumously through the ‘Preface’ of Hallam Tennyson’s *Memoir*, Tennyson insists that ‘for those who cared to know about his literary history he wrote “Merlin and the Gleam”’ (*Memoir*, I, xii).

Hallam Tennyson – the ‘young Mariner’ burdened with the poet’s dying words – attempted to preserve this priority in his *Memoir*. The ‘Preface’ opens with a staggered quotation of ‘Merlin and the Gleam’, co-opting the poem as a posthumous voice, speaking from beyond the grave to provide an

¹ See Michael Millgate’s account of Tennyson’s concerns about his posthumous reputation in *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 44.

² Quoted in *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 160.

³ See also Millgate’s discussion of ‘our Notes’, pp. 56–57.

authoritative historical and interpretative framework for the biography. As such, Hallam Tennyson reads the poem as a chronology of Tennyson's life given as a series of stanzaic moments, moving from his early identification with Merlin ('that spirit of poetry') through to his old age (*Memoir*, I, xii). With some variation due to its obscure chronology, the few critics who have subsequently attended to the poem have followed Hallam Tennyson in taking its projected posthumousness as a cue to read it as a biographical allegory: Tennyson's 'literary history' becomes literary *history*.⁴

Tennyson's biographers, who might have been expected to make most of this 'attempt at a poetic autobiography', have dismissed the poem as 'so puzzling [...] that no one but its creator has ever been certain of its meaning'.⁵ Among those critics more particularly concerned with Tennyson's poetry and poetics, even the most sensitive and sympathetic readers have tended to ignore his insistence that 'Merlin and the Gleam' should be read as an authoritative 'literary history': Seamus Perry makes no mention of the poem,⁶ Herbert Tucker mentions it once,⁷ W. David Shaw twice,⁸ and Christopher Ricks three times, fleetingly.⁹ The neglect of 'Merlin and the Gleam' (understood as a biographical allegory) is due to the well-established critical consensus that attention to the verbal and aural textures of Tennyson's verse yields the richest insights into his poetic imagination. Seamus Perry, reviewing this critical heritage and setting the agenda for future work, contends that for the 'sympathetic reader' – for the one who *cares to know* – there is nothing so 'peculiarly pressing' as this 'matter of verbalism'.¹⁰ This 'matter' is pressing for the sympathetic reader because this 'verbalism' was Tennyson's commitment to, and faith in, what he called the 'music of words': the rolling, ringing resonance of poetic language that he insisted his listeners needed to 'understand' (*Memoir*, II, 386). And it is peculiarly pressing for the literary critic concerned with the temper of Tennyson's poetic imagination because critical accounts of his 'verbalism' suggest that his thinking occurs in and through this 'music' that is the reverberation of 'words' – a distinctly poetic noise that Angela Leighton has variously described as an 'ultra-linguistic hum' and a sound heard 'on the other side of sense'¹¹ and which Tucker has called 'a music not intelligible, but perceptible and communicable'.¹² Eric Griffiths clarifies the point: 'Tennyson thought *in* melody'.¹³ This emphasis on the immersive, aural quality of Tennyson's poetic thinking leaves little room for a poem that expresses its thoughts

⁴ See: Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 516–17; Alistair W. Thomson, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 246–49; Herbert F. Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 18.

⁵ Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 570. See also: Charles Tennyson, pp. 516–17; Leonée Ormond, *Alfred Tennyson: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 197; John Batchelor, *Tennyson: To Strive, To Seek, To Find* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), pp. 356–58.

⁶ Seamus Perry, *Alfred Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2005).

⁷ Tucker, p. 18.

⁸ W. David Shaw, *Tennyson's Style* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 202, 236.

⁹ Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 36, 126–27, 279.

¹⁰ Perry, p. xv.

¹¹ Angela Leighton, 'Tennyson's Hum', *The Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 9.4 (2010), 315–29 (p. 321); *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 65.

¹² Tucker, p. 30.

¹³ Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 107.

through analogical structures and in words that (to use Whitman's phrase) fall far short of 'finest verbalism'.¹⁴

And yet 'Merlin and the Gleam' has something further to teach us about Tennyson's melodic thinking. The poem figures in miniature a pattern of thought that occurs throughout Tennyson's finest poetry. This pattern of thought is intimately concerned with the nature and experience of melodic thinking but uniquely frames its self-theorising inquiry in linguistic and visual rather than rhythmic and sonic terms. The poem is a 'literary history' in a sense unrecognized by Hallam Tennyson and subsequent criticism, an allegory of the poetic imagination that is concerned not only with the story of a life but with the patterns and accretions of a living language. This is a 'literary history' in which the *literary* takes the emphasis; a 'literary history' that is not so much about the Magician-Poet 'Merlin' as about the 'Gleam' – about a word and its place in the poet's language and thought, a linguistic allegory of what Tennyson called the 'higher poetic imagination' (*Memoir*, II, 366). The 'Gleam' is the only figure that Tennyson offers as a way of understanding his poetics: there is no other self-theorising pattern of thought found in either his poetry or in his prose writings.

Tennyson's 'Gleam' has its origins in the fairy-figure of Nimuë,¹⁵ the lover of Merlin. His reasons for renaming her 'The Gleam' are obscured in a history of misreading, mispronunciation, misspelling, and misunderstanding. And yet, as Gordon S. Haight has shown, Tennyson's renaming of Nimuë makes her stand as a figure for her supposed origins: Nimuë comes from the Welsh *chwifleian*, 'the idea of the glimmering Welsh fairy, – now you see her, now you don't',¹⁶ or, as Tennyson's apparent source, Pughe's Welsh dictionary, puts it, the 'nymph who appears and disappears'.¹⁷ The mythic narrative of Merlin and Nimuë is reimagined as a distinctly linguistic and literary allegory of poetic vision: the 'Gleam' stands as a verbal sign for the 'glimmering' words that are the medium for the poet's encounter with these fleeting, faerie-like forms of vision, knowledge, and enchantment.

The 'Gleam' begins as a mythic figure, but as it moves through the poem it becomes articulate, tracing out the distinctive patterns of the glimmering language that it signifies. The 'Gleam' 'floated' (III, 207), 'glide[d]', 'flitted', 'slided' (III, 208), 'touched', 'flashed', 'flickered and bickered', 'rested' (III, 209), 'glanced', 'hovers', and 'vanishes' (III, 210): its movement becomes a delicate rhythm of glancing contacts and momentary illuminations. It constantly approaches but never meets an end, hovering over 'the border | Of boundless Ocean, | And all but in heaven' (III, 210). And it becomes associated with journeys towards this gleaming horizon that take the form of the arc or the parabola. In each stanza of 'Merlin and the Gleam' the verb-phrase describing the movement of the 'Gleam' ('Then to the melody [...] Flitted The Gleam') is interrupted by a succession of subordinate

¹⁴ 'A Word about Tennyson', in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John D. Jump (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 350.

¹⁵ Otherwise known as Vivien, Niniane, Nineve.

¹⁶ Gordon S. Haight, 'Tennyson's Merlin', *Studies in Philology*, 44.3 (1947), 549–66 (p. 559).

¹⁷ 'Chwibleian': W. Owen Pughe, *A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Denbigh: Thomas Gee, 1832), I, 358.

clauses (III, 208). This parabolic movement articulates a momentary reach into a world that exists outside the main grammar of experience ('Elf of the woodland, | Gnome of the cavern'), coming into glancing contact with the realm of illusion, desire, and the dreaming imagination (III, 208). The 'Gleam' is thus both an allegory for and an instance of the glimmering conditions of poetic language; a figure for poetic thought and the medium of poetic thinking.

In his notes for the *Memoir*, Tennyson describes the 'Gleam' as signifying the 'higher poetic imagination'. In the poem, however, it is an analogue for 'melody': the 'Gleam' moves 'to' and 'with' the sound of an unknown 'melody', fading as it fades, brightening as its strains grow stronger, figuring the movement of its music as a play of light over an enchanted world (III, 208). Representing both the 'higher poetic imagination' and 'melody', the 'Gleam' becomes a linguistic figure for melodic thinking. Light and song are companion forms throughout Tennyson's verse, *Maud* giving, perhaps, the fullest account of their sympathetic progress: 'She is singing in the meadow | And the rivulet at her feet | Ripples on in light and shadow | To the ballad that she sings' (II, 573). But this figure for thought becomes ever more intimate with the act of thinking itself. As the poet ages, the 'Gleam' grows 'broader and brighter' until it is found 'flying onward | Wed to the melody': the 'Gleam' becomes part of this melodic thinking, heard within the Magician-Poet's lyric as a light that 'sang through the world' (III, 210). What at first seemed a representation of melodic thought is discovered as a strain within its song. To pursue the 'Gleam' is to discover that it has become a glimmering language that figures out the forms of its own thinking as images of dazzling light even as it sings its melodious thoughts. This glimmering language holds the visual and the aural together, its words (glimmering, glooming, gleaming, glowing, glittering) making audible a shared memory of an origin in dazzling light (gl-). To write an account of Tennyson's 'Gleam' is finally to arrive at a reassertion of his 'verbalism'.

This chapter attends to that strand of Tennyson's verse-writing that is occupied with and engaged in self-theorising reflection on this labour towards the glimmering horizons of the world in which we live. These are poems that are concerned with how poetry – and, in particular, the aural and prosodic experiences afforded by the 'music of words' – might enable us to transcend the limits of that which is seen and known, and apprehend, if only momentarily, that unseen, unknown world beyond. I begin with Tennyson's early lyric, 'Oh sad *No More!*', a poem that works to find a language for speaking about the unimaginable experience of posthumousness; 'Tears, Idle Tears' then demonstrates how this develops into the language of Tennyson's mature verse. I then turn to 'Ulysses', Tennyson's epic of the journey towards the frontiers of knowledge, and 'Tithonus', his meditation on what it might mean to occupy this uncertain border zone between the known and the unknown, the mortal and the immortal. The chapter concludes with an extended reading of *In Memoriam*, discussing the ways in which the language and imagery of glimmering light becomes a glimpsing poetics, a mode of writing and thinking in verse that labours, repeatedly, towards brief apprehensions of that which lies forever out of reach.

* * *

The origins of Tennyson's glimmering language can be traced in his early lyric, 'Oh sad *No More!*' (written 1826; published 1830). The poem is the first of many attempts to find a way of speaking about the perplexing experience of living towards or living beyond the moment of death and loss. The poem's language evolves out of the insistent, troubled repetition of 'No more!'. The phrase returns again and again throughout Tennyson's verse, paradoxically perpetuating these strange, terminal conditions as he dwells on what it means to live under the shadow of death. As the phrase recurs, Tennyson begins to call out the many meanings and voicings that lodge within it: its various accents of surprise, doubt, prohibition, and grief, and its various senses of diminishment, limitation, disappearance, undoing, and termination. 'No more!' is both the 'psychic fixation'¹⁸ of Tennyson's verse and its recurrent note, a verbal tag that evolves into a lyrical language: 'Then some one said, "We will return no more;" | And all at once they sang [...]' ('The Lotos-Eaters'; I, 470). 'Oh sad *No More!*' is in many ways emblematic of the lyrical project that occupied Tennyson throughout his life: the attempt to find a language for – to find a language *in* – the feeling that life is lived in the shadow of an unspeakable loss. A comparison of 'Oh sad *No More!*' with 'Tears, Idle Tears' (1847) illustrates how this early language became the glimmering language of Tennyson's mature poetry.

Oh sad *No More!* Oh sweet *No More!*
 Oh strange *No More!*
 By a mossed brookbank on a stone
 I smelt a wildweed-flower alone;
 There was a ringing in my ears,
 And both my eyes gushed out with tears.
 Surely all pleasant things had gone before,
 Lowburied fathomdeep beneath with thee, NO MORE!

(I, 175)

The poem reverberates with the memory of Shelley's 'A Lament'. As Ricks has noted, Tennyson's poem remembers and revolves upon the penultimate phrase of Shelley's refrain: 'No more – Oh, never more!' (I, 175 n.). Tennyson also borrows Shelley's triple apostrophe ('Oh, world! oh, life! oh, time!')¹⁹ to frame the lament of his opening lines. But the memory of Shelley runs deeper. The last lines conflate Shelley's drowning at sea with his interment to create an image of submarine burial: 'lowburied fathomdeep beneath with thee'. This is a poem that orientates its grief in terms of Shelley's lyric but also in terms of his death. Tennyson's poem responds to the weird way in which Shelley's lyric (written in 1821) foresees the imminence of his own death (in 1822) and to the disconcerting experience of reading his lyric as a posthumous publication (in 1824). The linguistic

¹⁸ Tucker, p. 13.

¹⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Posthumous Poems, 1824* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991), p. 190.

memory of Tennyson's poem testifies to its intimate involvement with a set of delicate, inarticulate questions about what it means to speak before or after the moment of death.

There is an instructive parallel with Tennyson's response to Byron's death. On hearing the news in 1824, Tennyson famously 'carved on a rock' the words 'Byron is dead' (*Memoir*, I, 4). While Tennyson's response to Shelley's death took longer to become articulate and, when it did, took a more literary form, both responses reveal a fascination with the language that describes the absolute limit, the vanishing-point of death: 'Byron is dead', 'NO MORE!' This fascination finds its characteristically Tennysonian inflection in the desire to dwell within hearing of these words – not in the moment in which articulation and annihilation coincide but in the long moment before or after in which these words continue to reverberate. This is the slow moment of carving or the long moment of after-echo. These moments are explicitly textual, the occasion of inscription or quotation in which spoken words become text and text revives in the spoken words of quotation. This is the language of prophecy or epitaph, words that frame experience as a life lived towards an unknown loss or as an afterlife that looks back to a known grief. The two experiences mirror each other, each tracing out the possibilities of reversal: life before death might very easily continue into or reveal itself to be life after death; the glimmering dusk might become a glimmering dawn. Indeed, as a young man, Tennyson's mind 'ran constantly' on these twin-tracks of 'mournful memories and melancholy forebodings' (*Memoir*, I, 165). These mirrored possibilities lie behind the critical hesitation over whether Tennyson's poetry is '*pending*' and '*penultimate*' (Perry,²⁰ Ricks)²¹ or 'a poetry of aftermath' (Tucker):²² this hesitation registers, I suggest, that dynamic of perpetually possible reversal that animates Tennyson's verse-thinking, the penultimate continually tending towards the posthumous, the posthumous resolving back into the penultimate.

In this early poem Tennyson explores the strange resemblance between the moment before death and the moment after in distinctly linguistic terms. The poem seeks a language that can speak about prophetic melancholy and actual grief, a language in which words might be heard before they are fully formed or as they continue to reverberate – a language which edges up to or evades the moment of articulation and annihilation, gently demurring to fix upon the moment of full closure or disclosure. This language evolves through and revolves upon the repetition of '*No More!*' The ambiguity of the phrase suggests a variety of possible causes for the poet's acute sense of loss. It could simply be that Shelley is '*No More!*' (the final iteration of the phrase 'recasting' it as the name of a drowned 'allegorical figure': Shelley is 'NO MORE').²³ Or, more complexly, the phrase could signify the kinds of loss that Shelley's death (or the wildweed-flower's death) represented for Tennyson: a too-soon terminated youth, the sense that 'all pleasant things' lay in the past, and a conviction that misfortune was both inevitable and ruinous – all things that the morbid life of the Tennyson household

²⁰ Perry, p. 20.

²¹ Ricks, p. 45.

²² Tucker, p. 13.

²³ Perry, p. 51.

in 1826 would have seemed to confirm.²⁴ Alternatively, ‘*No More!*’ could hold together Shelley’s death with the unfinished lyric itself (a wildweed-flower of poetry), articulating the complex, blended grief aroused by a posthumous reading of Shelley’s prophetic lyric. Or ‘*No More!*’ could simply be a derivative emotion, a juvenile attempt to compose a poem around an uneasy youthful nostalgia that remains distinctly Shelleyan, unassimilated into Tennyson’s own experience and emotional vocabulary: this is the reading implicit in his father’s condemnation of the poem as ‘crude’ (*Memoir*, I, 80 n.1). But the poem registers the inadequacy of all these things as an origin for this experience of grief, ‘surely’ convincing us only of the poet’s lack of assurance that any or all of these explanations will do. It is this careful negotiation between the sought-out explanations and the final sense that this grief is inexplicable which justifies Tennyson’s counter-claim that the poem ‘is remarkable for a boy of seventeen’ (*Memoir*, I, 80 n.1).

‘*No More!*’ thus stands as a placeholder for various possible but ultimately inadequate losses: an inscribed memory for an irrecoverable experience, a verbal figure for an inexpressible experience. As the phrase repeats, the perplexity deepens. ‘*No More!*’ remembers the drowned Shelley but it also carries a more distant memory of Milton’s ‘*Lycidas*’ (1637), his lament for a ‘learned Friend, unfortunatly drown’d’: ‘Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more | Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear, | I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude’.²⁵ Milton weaves a poet’s wreath out of laurel, myrtle, and ivy, an elegy out of the compelling need to return ‘yet once more [...] and once more’ to the memory of his dead friend. This elegiac song, this ‘melodious tear’, continues until Milton is able to convert the desire to sing and weep ‘once more’ into an assertion of *Lycidas*’ immortal life: ‘Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more, | For *Lycidas* your sorrow is not dead’.²⁶ And then – in a shift that anticipates Tennyson’s own reversals – Milton imagines the celestial counterpart to his song, a heavenly music heard on the other side of the grave sung by ‘sweet Societies | That sing, and singing in their glory move | And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes’.²⁷ For Milton, the repetitions of elegiac song (whether heavenly or earthly) ‘move’ the lyric and the emotions towards a consolation in which tears and melody cease and life begins afresh. But while Tennyson himself is a poet of those things that happen ‘once more’²⁸ (‘repetition’, as Michael D. Hurley observes, is ‘his dominant trait’),²⁹ this remembered promise comes to nothing. The recurrence of ‘*No More!*’ confounds its literal meaning. Rather than measuring out the slow course of grief, Tennyson’s repetitions maintain the poem in the long moment of melancholia in which ‘*No More!*’ becomes the

²⁴ These were the years of Dr. Tennyson’s breakdown, alcoholism, and increasing use of henbane and laudanum, which Alfred Tennyson later believed to be ‘the worst kind of millstone a man could hang around his own neck’: Martin, pp. 42–44 (p. 42).

²⁵ John Milton: *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by Stella P. Revard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 74.

²⁶ Revard, p. 80.

²⁷ Revard, p. 80.

²⁸ From *In Memoriam*: ‘Dark house, by which once more I stand’ (VII; II, 325), ‘Our voices took a higher range; | Once more we sang’ (XXX; II, 348), ‘Till now the doubtful dusk revealed | The knolls once more’ (XCV; II, 413).

²⁹ Michael D. Hurley, *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Poetic Belief* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 45. This observation has been made repeatedly in studies of Tennyson’s style. See: J. F. A. Pyre, *The Formation of Tennyson’s Style* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1921); Shaw, p. 17; Perry, pp. 21–27.

paradoxical condition of ongoing existence: Mariana's refrain 'He cometh not' is a similarly paradoxical reiteration of the failure to appear (I, 207). Tennyson's lyric cannot sing its way towards knowledge but endlessly revolves upon its unknown grief. He cannot move forward and his tears continue to fall.

Although '*No More!*' does not yield its meanings through repetitions which move towards articulate consolation, Tennyson uses these repetitions to explore the possibility that the aural and prosodic experience of these words might realize or recover the experience of loss that they signify. Every instance of '*No More!*' is italicized or capitalized, its typography signalling that its prosodic expressiveness transcends the range of ordinary speech. Typography directs prosody, calling on the voice for accent and amplification as though the emphatic recitation of this phrase might somehow instantiate or invoke the elusive experience that it signifies. Tennyson's fascination with incantatory language is well-documented:³⁰ as a child, he was in the habit 'on a stormy day of spreading my arms to the wind, and crying out "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind [...]"' (*Memoir*, I, 11). This prosodic performance played on the weird sense that to speak and listen might be to discover that one is speaking of and listening to one's own voice. And it plays on the paradoxical disjunction that such an experience brings about: the 'voice' distanced from the speaking body, the sound of speech preceding the act of speaking, the cry becoming the moment of attention. As an adult, Tennyson could achieve a similar experience of attention to his own uttering self through the recitation of his name: *Tennyson, Tennyson, Tennyson*. This experience was dependent on incantatory language but transcended the possibilities of linguistic expression, a trance-like state that was 'the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words' (*Memoir*, I, 320). The language that Tennyson discovers in 'Oh sad *No More!*' is 'utterly beyond words', a paradoxical language that reaches beyond the limits of speech but which nevertheless finds a strange acoustic memory of *utterance* in this place 'utterly beyond words'. As he reaches 'beyond' words, Tennyson begins to listen in to the silent memories of language that reverberate within his own, failing speech. To put it in Eliot's terms – terms that seem borrowed from Tennyson's own figuring of the limits of language as a distant horizon – this is a poem that works to occupy and, at times, press beyond those 'frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist' ('The Music of Poetry'; *On Poetry*, 20).

This early attentiveness to the 'utterly beyond' becomes the distinctive feature of Tennyson's mature, glimmering language. As '*No More!*' repeats, it accumulates a set of secondary patterns of articulation that evolve into the mature language exemplified by 'Tears, Idle Tears'. The mirror-meanings of '*No More!*' – premature grief, ongoing posthumousness – develop into secondary patterns of doubleness and reversal. Compound adjectives double-up meanings which then combine to form hyphenated or clustered phrases: 'brookbank', 'wildweed-flower', 'lowburied fathomdeep'. The triple

³⁰ See “‘Tennyson, Tennyson, Tennyson’”, in A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 1–13.

repetition of ‘*No More!*’ in the opening lines lends its key consonantal sounds (/m/, /n/) – in reversed and dispersed order – to the third line: ‘By a mossed brookbank on a stone’. The phrase’s distinctive vowel-pattern, in which the first /o/ is flattened and lengthened in its repetition, is repeated twice: first, in ‘mossed brookbank’ and then again in ‘on a stone’. This alternation between higher- and lower-pitched vowels continues in the fourth line: ‘smelt a wildweed’. As the alternating vowels become a sequence, it becomes possible to hear the vowel-pattern in reverse, high-low becoming low-high – a possibility already inherent in the ambiguous stress of ‘*No More!*’ The effect of these ongoing acoustic echoes of ‘*No More!*’ is to produce a sense of slow revolution in which the poem (to borrow from Henry James) seems ‘to pause and slowly pivot’ on its own sounds in a recurrence that borders on actual reversal.³¹ Tennyson’s acoustic patterns trace out the poet’s dream or memory of movement while they sustain the poem in the glimmering, mirrored moment of the perpetual ‘*No More!*’

‘Tears, Idle Tears’ takes up these patterns of doubling and reversal and transforms them into the glimmering language of Tennyson’s mature poetry. The generalized melancholy of ‘*No More!*’ becomes a more particular lament for lost time, for ‘the days that are no more’. Sadness, sweetness, and strangeness remain the conditions of experience:

‘Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair,
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

‘Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

‘Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

‘Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.’

(II, 232-33)

This, too, is a language where words and weeping come together in the ‘melodious tear’ of elegiac song. The ‘tears’ that gushed in 1826 now fall with an idle beauty, but the sense that tears and words

³¹ Henry James, *Views and Reviews* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 171.

might only trace out an unutterable and unknowable grief remains. In both poems, this grief is figured as a youthful melancholy, as a life lived towards loss: Frederick Locker-Lampson recalls Tennyson's insistence that 'Tears, Idle Tears' was not about a real grief but 'was rather the yearning that young people occasionally experience for that which seems to have passed away from them for ever' (*Memoir*, II, 73). And both poems develop their language for 'yearning' through the linguistic memory of other poems. The early poem remembered the laments of Shelley and Milton; 'Tears, Idle Tears', Tennyson said, 'came to [him] on the yellowing autumn-tide at Tintern Abbey, full [...] of its bygone memories' (quoted in II, 232 n.). Douglas Bush suggests that Tintern Abbey was evocative because of its proximity to Hallam's burial place (quoted in II, 232 n.). But the poem also recalls Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', a poem for which Tennyson expressed a 'profound' – though not unqualified – 'admiration' (*Memoir*, II, 70) and which stands as a precedent for what it might mean to find a language for an experience that seems 'full' of meaning yet which cannot quite discover its object: this is what Wordsworth described as 'feelings [...] Of unremembered pleasure'³² and Tennyson called 'the passion of the past, the abiding in the transient' (*Memoir*, I, 253). The fact that both poems become articulate through these linguistic memories of other poems suggests that their attempt to express the unutterable or unimaginable loss is one that becomes peculiarly possible under the conditions of poetic language – an experience, indeed, which might even arise from the experience of reading, listening to, or speaking the language of verse.

These continuities – the concern with that which lies 'beyond' language and thought, the use of literary language to trace out an unknown grief – become the central concerns of Tennyson's mature language. But in 'Tears, Idle Tears' the doublings, repetitions, and reversals of 'Oh sad *No More!*' are loosened and dispersed, put into motion as glancing and parabolic arcs. The opening line of 'Tears, Idle Tears' illustrates how simple, two-part repetition can unfold into a moving series of parabolae. 'Tears, idle' is immediately repeated as 'tears, I' before the line gracefully modulates these opening vowels further through alliteration and rhyme. But 'I know not what they mean' is not the 'perfect' end to the 'line's charmed lyrical circle' that Perry suggests:³³ '-dle' hangs idly between the recurrent 'tears', without an echo. The 'tears' return in the second line and now the idle, unrepeated '-dle' gracefully resolves into the full, carefully weighed alliteration of 'the depth of some divine despair'. 'Tears, idle tears, I' thus opens out into a sweeping arc, unfolding into an uncertainty of sound and meaning before returning in the second line to the opening sounds, the absent '-dle' now resounding in the plangent 'depths of some divine despair'. Repetition is put into motion and resolves into a parabola.

These parabolic patterns are heard throughout the lyric. Each stanza is framed as words from the opening line return at the close of the stanza. Individual lines also take a parabolic shape. 'Rise'

³² William Wordsworth: *The Poems*, ed. by John O. Hayden, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), I, 358.

³³ Perry, p. 24.

traces out the welling-up of tears. These tears ‘gather’ at the full point of the parabola and then the line turns back on itself, discovering an ending that had been implicit from the beginning, calling ‘eyes’ out of ‘rise’. The assonance of ‘Ah, sad and strange’ is woven back into the ‘summer dawns’ to which they are compared. ‘Dear’ runs through the comparison with ‘remembered kisses’ before returning as ‘death’, the vowels lowered with a slight unfinishedness that makes the subsequent ‘And sweet’ a graceful rescue. Indeed, in each instance, the parabola never fully resolves: tears rise and gather but do not fall; the line closes as ‘dawns’ becomes a verb, a new opening; ‘the depths of some divine despair’ resolves the acoustic parabola but introduces a pattern of prosodic and imaginative alternation between high and low that becomes the ‘rise’ of the subsequent line. These unfinished or uneasy parabolae continually generate new patterns of sound and significance, keeping the poem on the move and warily avoiding an end.

Tennyson himself used ‘parabolic’ in rather a different sense. He described his *Idylls* as having ‘an allegorical or perhaps rather a parabolic drift’ (*Memoir*, II, 127), using the term in its rhetorical sense of ‘parable-like’ or to describe ‘a figure of speech expressing a comparison drawn between two things’ (*OED*, ‘parabola’, n. 2), suggesting that his poetry might be read as a looser or more implicit kind of allegory. Matthew Reynolds has explored this sense of Tennyson’s ‘parabolic’ mode in the *Idylls* and *The Princess*, concluding that ‘the method’s virtue is that it draws attention to the way in which different categories of understanding overlap’.³⁴ This study, however, takes its cue from Tennyson’s many images of curving and sweeping lines and uses ‘parabolic’ in its mathematical sense of the curve produced by a moment of intersection. This sense of ‘parabolic’ traces out a trajectory of thought and expression that is intimately concerned with the moment of recognition or meeting but which situates this moment at the midpoint of a parabolic pattern of prosodic articulation.

While Tennyson does not use the term ‘parabolic’ in this latter sense, he does provide a series of images for these arching progressions and the kinds of experience that they make available. In the second stanza, a ship comes into view, the dawn ‘glittering on a sail | That brings our friends up from the underworld’ before it sinks ‘below the verge’ in the red light of evening. Between dawn and dusk, lost friends are glimpsed on the earth’s curved horizon but they are ghostly, summoned from the ‘underworld’ and returning to the world beneath the ‘verge’. In the third stanza, the ‘dark summer dawns’ lighten once more before this ‘glimmering’ light fades into the dark of evening. In the moment of brief light, the song of ‘half-awakened birds’ is half-heard by ‘dying ears’ and the dim ‘casement’ is darkly seen by ‘dying eyes’. Between dawn and dusk, songs and visions come into being and fade away; ghosts are glimpsed at the midpoint of the day’s parabola, suspended between life and death.

It is in this moment, as ‘ears’ become ‘eyes’ – as the parabolae of prosody are realized as ghostly visions – that Tennyson’s glimmering lexicon comes into play. ‘Glittering’ and ‘glimmering’ describe the strange quality of light that falls within this parabolic arc, a light that in its fleeting

³⁴ Matthew Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870: English Poetry in a Time of Nation-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 225-45, 252-73 (p. 227).

brilliance suggests the elusive moment of vision but in its intermittence suggests that this period between dawn and dusk is not the full light of day but rather a continuation of their strange half-light. But ‘glittering’ and ‘glimmering’ as figures for illumination also suggest the kinds of partial knowledge that might become available at the midpoint of the parabola: ghostly experiences of sound and vision that fade as soon as they become knowable. Tennyson’s glittering, glimmering language thus stands as a figure for the parabolic movements of his verse (a sequence of endless journeys between the half-light of dawn and the half-light of dusk, between things half-heard and things half-seen) and as a figure for the experiences of intermittent knowledge that become available under these conditions of verse.

* * *

The death of Arthur Hallam on 15 September 1833 proved the pivotal moment in the development of Tennyson’s glimmering language. Like all Tennysonian journeys, the language that came before death traced out the language that would be needed after death. Tennyson’s early language had been shaped by its need to articulate a premature sense of loss. With the real loss of 1833, the linguistic and prosodic patterns of his early poetry were transformed into a mature language that could articulate this new sense of living beyond loss. Psychologically, socially, and spiritually, the events of 1833 were deeply traumatic for Tennyson. But in poetic terms, 1833 brought about a transformation that was as slight and yet profound as the moment in which the flight towards the horizon touches upon this unimaginable limit, pivots briefly, and then turns again home. Premature grief becomes posthumous grief: their language is the same. And so, because Tennyson had been working out a poetic language for the unutterable, unimaginable experiences surrounding loss for so long, when it came to Hallam’s death in 1833 he found that he was already possessed of an eloquent language for this new grief: 1833–34 were years of unprecedented productivity and accomplishment – ‘Ulysses’, ‘Tithon’, ‘Tiresias’, ‘Morte d’Arthur’, ‘Break, break, break’, and the beginnings of *In Memoriam*.

But although there is continuity between the premature and the posthumous, the moment of death is also a pivot – a turn, a reversal, a discovery, or a revision. For Tennyson, Hallam’s death brought about a sudden crystallisation of the character and significance of his poetic language: as Pyre observes, thinking of the difference between the ‘Œnone’ of 1933 and the revised version of 1942, ‘*the main principle of Tennyson’s progress by means of revision*’ – moving forward by moving back – is ‘*his consistent standardizing of language and verse, while securing with the simpler and more conventional means an augmentation of the very stylistic and metrical effect at which he had originally aimed*’.³⁵ The events of 1833 transformed the linguistic patterns that had clustered around an unknown grief – stillness, reverberation, incantation – into a simpler, more eloquent language that

³⁵ Pyre, p. 86.

now spoke of a real and urgent grief. And just as Hallam's death gave Tennyson a mature language, so it also gave him a self-theorising language for his poetics. Glimmering words occur throughout his pre-1833 poetry: there is the 'gleaming pass' and 'gleaming river' of 'The Lotos-Eaters' all of which is 'girdled with the gleaming world' (I, 470, 469, 476); the 'tearful glimmer of the languid dawn' in 'A Dream of Fair Women' (I, 484); 'Old faces [that] glimmered through the doors' in 'Mariana' (I, 209); 'That over-vaulted grateful gloom' of 'The Palace of Art' (I, 440); and the fruit with the 'gleaming rind' of 'Œnone' (I, 424). These glimmering words trace out the associations that are central to Tennyson's mature glimmering language: tears, dawn, idleness, enchantment, ghostly apparition, the dead, and the horizon of the sea. And yet it is only in the post-1833 poetry that these momentary lights become the atmosphere of light and air that pervades the regions at the limit of the world and in which ethereal and inexpressible encounters become possible. And it is only in the post-1833 poetry that these intermittent gleams become Tennyson's glimmering, self-theorising language for the strange things we might know or experience as we enter into those resonant frontier-zones of verse.

Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, In a Storm' (written 1806; published 1807) offered Tennyson a literary precedent and a model for thinking about how the loss of Hallam transformed his poetic imagination. Tennyson listed 'Peele Castle' among his favourite Wordsworth poems (*Memoir*, I, 151) and there are striking parallels of context and concern between Wordsworth's poem and Tennyson's experiences of 1833. 'Elegiac Stanzas' was written after Wordsworth had lost his brother, John, at sea in 1805; Tennyson lost Hallam, the one who was 'More than my brothers are to me' (IX; II, 328), in 1833, and forever associated his death with the sea and the ship that carried his body home. More particularly, Wordsworth was concerned with how this traumatic bereavement altered his vision of the world and – more speculatively – with how this might translate into an altered aesthetic vision, a new appreciation for the truths and consolations that only the painting or the poem might afford.

Wordsworth imagines this uniquely aesthetic knowledge in terms that anticipate Tennyson's exploration of the 'higher poetic imagination':

Ah! Then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream³⁶

The Poet, for Wordsworth, is the one who dreams; who finds that the conditions of experience afforded by poetic language (rather than those afforded by sleep) might bring us to an awareness of those things that never were – things desired but never realized, things remembered but irrecoverably lost, things known of but never finally known. And Wordsworth figures the 'Poet's dream' as 'the gleam', an unreal light which is the work of the imagination made visible within the world it represents and which is the 'consecration' of both 'sea' and 'land', a sign that they exist within the

³⁶ Hayden, I, p. 640.

dream-worked realm of the poetic imagination. ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ becomes the model for ‘Merlin and the Gleam’, the latter poem imagining what it might mean to pursue Wordsworth’s ‘gleam’ through the realms of the imagination. And ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ establishes a particular association between the gleam and the moment in which the poet begins to understand how his imagination has been transformed by loss: ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ is not only important for the poetic autobiography of 1889 but also for the transformed poetics of 1833-34. Wordsworth’s poem seems to have acted as a confirmation – a consecration, even – of the new figurative and linguistic significance that gleaming took on within Tennyson’s poetic imagination after Hallam’s death. But whereas Wordsworth’s ‘gleam’ falls steadily over the imagined world, for Tennyson the ‘gleam’ is only ever glimpsed at the extreme edge of imaginative experience, a light that ever flits away or a luminous realm that ever disappears over the horizon. The ‘gleam’ is not a figure for the poetic imagination but only for the ‘higher poetic imagination’, a realm of unutterable things that might only be glimpsed or fleetingly apprehended within the imaginative work: the hope rather than the achievement of the poet’s labour.

Before continuing into the gleaming realms of the post-1833 poetry, it is worth briefly observing that Tennyson’s glimmering language is an exclusively poetic language. On the few occasions that Tennyson uses this vocabulary in his letters, it is without any sense of the linguistic or figurative resonance that the words have in his poetry: ‘though I have a gleam of Kant have never turned a page of Hegel’, ‘She had two glimpses of the Exhibition’, ‘she gets out in an occasional gleam’, ‘as far as I can judge from the glimpse I have had of them’ (*Tennyson’s Letters*, III, 78; II, 188; III, 107, 214). Tennyson’s glimmering language is an essentially poetic figure for thought: a figure embedded in, wedded to, the very thinking that it theorizes. For Tennyson, glimmering words could only become eloquent under the conditions of poetic thought, but for those who wanted to describe what it was like to be with Tennyson, his distinctive vocabulary was one way of conjuring his distinctive presence. Thomas Carlyle described Tennyson to Ralph Waldo Emerson as ‘solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom’ (*Tennyson’s Letters*, I, 228), and a few months later, in a letter to Edward Fitzgerald, dubbed him ‘the fiery Son of Gloom’ (*Tennyson’s Letters*, I, 233 n. 4). Agnes Grace Weld produced a collection of reminiscences entitled *Glimpses of Tennyson* (1902). And Hallam Tennyson, who had spent so many years writing and speaking on behalf of his father, used almost every word from his glimmering lexicon in two sentences describing their 1873 holiday to the Italian Lakes:

Through a gorge to our left we caught a *glimpse* of blue Italy with *gleams* of sunlight. As we returned a brilliant sunset *glow* over the Morteratsch Glacier and on the peak of the Roseg (delicate salmon which faded to a ghastly *glimmer*) Glacier.

(*Tennyson’s Letters*, III, 63: italics mine)

‘Ulysses’ is Tennyson’s great poem of the journey towards the gleaming horizon. The parabolic flights of his glimmering language become a dreamed epic, an imaginary voyage towards the luminous limit of the known world in pursuit of those forms of knowledge and experience that might lie beyond. ‘Ulysses’, written in October 1833, was the first major poem composed by Tennyson after the death of Hallam and, according to Tennyson, it was his most personal poem: ‘there is more about myself in *Ulysses*, which was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end [...] than many poems in *In Memoriam*’ (I, 613 n.). Tennyson’s poem was intensely personal because it was an attempt to articulate his sense that his life had become posthumous – that he was now living beyond death and needed a new way of ‘going forward, and braving the struggle of life’ (*Memoir*, I, 196). But loss and the poetic imagination had always been intimately involved for Tennyson. ‘Ulysses’ is a poem of imagined voyages: it is not about ‘going forward’ so much as what it is like to think and speak about moving onwards. There is much of Tennyson in ‘Ulysses’ because its account of grief is also an account of the poetic imagination compelled by loss.

The epic of poetic thought begins in an idle moment. Ulysses, an ‘idle king’ (I, 615), rules over an idle kingdom. There is neither movement in this ‘still’ place nor any hope of progress or production but only ‘barren crags’ and an ‘aged wife’ (I, 615). Most disturbingly for Ulysses, this idle kingdom is a place where full consciousness, knowledge, and recognition are never attained: he rules a ‘savage race, | That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me’ (I, 615). The ‘idle’ moment – which is not so much a state of lassitude or laziness as a state in which action, though desirable, is momentarily suspended – is very often the lyrical moment for Tennyson: the moment in which the mind begins to imagine movement and knowledge and in which the inarticulacy of silence, or tears, or the deep breath of sleep might be transformed into song. In ‘Merlin and the Gleam’, it is the Young Mariner’s wondering ‘watching’ of the Magician that opens into the gleaming flight of the poem. In ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ it is in the languid land that ‘seemèd always afternoon’ that the chorric song is heard (I, 468). In the *Idylls of the King* it is the ‘idyll’ (or as Tennyson would pronounce it, the ‘idle’)³⁷ that frames the many to-ings and fro-ings of the Arthurian court. Even Tennyson’s compositional habits were closely associated with the idle moment: ‘Many a poem of mine has perished altogether because I was too idle to write it down’ (*Tennyson’s Letters*, III, 459). The idle moment is replete with possibility.

The idle moment is the occasion of Ulysses’ imaginative journey. Accumulated experience – all that has been ‘seen and known’ (I, 616) – is converted into a visionary prospect of new experiences of seeing and knowing:

³⁷ Nelson Hilton, ‘Tennyson’s “Tears”: Idle, Idol, Idyl’, *Essays in Criticism*, 35.3 (1985), 223–37 (p. 224).

I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades
 For ever and forever when I move.

(I, 616-17)

The moving, arcing flight through time, thought, and landscape becomes a still, rainbow-like ‘arch’, a luminous parabola shedding light on that which is encompassed by its inner curve. This ‘arch’ frames a glimpse of a gleaming, ‘untravelled’ world. This ‘arch’ is ‘experience’, the metaphor remembering a confused etymology which blends the Latin *arc* (chest or coffer) with *arce* (bow) to give the secondary sense of ‘archive’, a record of experience (*OED* ‘arch’ n.1). But this ‘arch’ is not just the sum of private experience but the boundary-marker of the known world, the Pillars of Hercules that flank the Strait of Gibraltar and beyond which Ulysses must take his men in their quest for the ‘Happy Isles’. Framed by the rainbow, flanked by the Pillars of Hercules, this gleaming ‘untravelled world’ is beyond experience but still within view: gleaming once again signifies the realm of the imagination.

This ‘arch’ and the gleaming region beyond are not fixed points within an imagined world but are rather parts of imaginative experience itself – discovered, apprehended, and lost as the traveller dreams and the reader reads. The bright, ‘untravelled world’ is glimpsed between ‘gleams’ and ‘fades’, the poetic line becoming the still, luminous arch through which one might travel into the realms of the imagination. But this disclosure is only momentary. The arch is also an arcing line: ‘gleams’ brightens to a momentary glimpse of the ‘untravelled world’ before it ‘fades’ to an end. As we move through words and waves, these glimpses come and go, the gleaming realm no longer an end at which we might arrive but only an endlessly vanishing margin that ‘fades | For ever and forever when I move’. Thought never arrives in the gleaming realm of the ‘higher poetic imagination’. All that can be hoped for is an endless pursuit that might bring a brief glimpse or a momentary encounter with that which lies in the gleaming ‘beyond’. This is the impossible dream of Tennyson’s poetics: to dwell in the unknowable and unimaginable – a dream where success is always failure because to transcend that which has been ‘seen and known’ is to find that its territory has been extended and that the unseen and the unknown has slipped further out of reach. (Eliot, too, recognized that this project of self-transcendence must result in a continual and impossible labour towards the frontiers of one’s own world: as he put it in ‘East Coker’, ‘humility is endless’ (188).) And so Matthew Arnold’s famous declaration on these lines holds a deeper truth: ‘it is no blame to their rhythm, which belongs to another order of movement than Homer’s, but it is true that these three lines by themselves take up nearly as much time as the whole book of the *Iliad*.³⁸ The lines move slowly because of their rhythm but also because they belong to ‘another order of movement’ – not real movement or even the thought of movement but rather the movement of thought. And Tennysonian thought looks very idle: it is

³⁸ Matthew Arnold, *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 147.

engaged in an endless pursuit of the gleaming limit of the imagination but that horizon slips endlessly away and thought and language seem becalmed.

The gleaming horizon is endlessly moving. ‘Still’ finds its variant in ‘dull’ (I, 615 n.). Ulysses begins to wonder whether there might be a way not only of pursuing the gleaming horizon but of experiencing some corresponding glimmer of these unknowable, unimaginable, eternal things in his own life. He worries that his current stasis puts such an experience beyond his reach:

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life.

(I, 617)

‘Dull’ brings to an end the reflective play of light and its seductive promise of knowledge. As it returns in a dull echo to the ‘idle’ moment, movement begins to cease. ‘How dull it is to pause’ finds a pause in the comma-marked caesura. ‘To make an end’ finds a heavy end at the close of the line. With this cessation of movement comes a ‘rest’ that has already slipped into a more irrecoverably terminal state of ‘rust’. And yet there are moments of resistance to this impulse to slow and falter. To ‘pause’ and to ‘end’ seem equivalent. But when the pausing comma returns at the end of the line it suggests that this end is not as final as it could have been: it is not a full stop but a ‘pause’, awaiting a return to motion. This faint impulse to resist the idling patterns of decline is felt in the prosodic dilemma raised by the exclamation mark. The lines have been characterized by the falling cadence of the infinitive phrase, a tendency towards prosodic closure that becomes increasingly strong as each qualification extenuates the slow petering-out of sense. The exclamation mark, however, signals that this end should be met with a cry and not a final breath. To voice this exclamation as a cry would be to assert that this voice will not or cannot just ‘breathe’ these lines. But by the time we reach the exclamation mark, our voice has become accustomed to these prosodic patterns of decline and there is no time to change our trajectory. To try and finish with a cry would be to attempt to reverse the existential decline implicit in such a falling cadence as that which H. D. Rawnsley observed in Tennyson’s recitation of his poetry: ‘the whole voice which had been mourning forth the impassioned lament suddenly seemed to fail for very grief, to collapse, to drop and die away in silence.’³⁹ The exclamation mark signals a desire to assert a vigorous, vocal life but it comes too late, an unrealized wish glimpsed – or rather faintly heard in the tremor of the voice – at the line’s last limit, at the point at which life comes to an end. And so the pursuit of these gleaming experiences of the ‘higher poetic imagination’ has become a question of prosody. To ‘shine’ requires more than breath. To experience those unknowable, unimaginable, or eternal things that only poetry might enable us to imagine requires a fuller commitment to vocalization and attention, to the embodied experience of prosody. To enter into this gleaming realm we might need to cry, or sing, or (as in ‘Oh sad *No More!*’) incant. But it might be

³⁹ Page, p. 63.

too late: we may have become too accustomed to the idle breath of ordinary speech to be able to hear or to speak the glimmering language of poetry and enter into the gleaming realm that lies beyond.⁴⁰

Tennyson's poetry is full of gray spirits, figures for the traveller or reader or poet who seeks to participate in the gleaming realm of the 'higher poetic imagination'. Ulysses is a 'gray spirit' who pursues the gleaming horizon. Merlin is the 'gray Magician' who follows 'The Gleam'. Tithonus is the 'gray shadow' who once sought to unite himself with the gleaming Aurora (II, 608). And the prince of *The Princess* (slipping into the 'waking dreams' of narcolepsy or immortal life or the poet's imagination) finds himself a shadowy figure held in the brightness of midday: 'On a sudden in the midst of men and day [...] I seemed to move among a world of ghosts, | And feel myself the shadow of a dream' (II, 197). Tennyson's gray spirits desire to be united to this seductive radiance, to enter into these glimmering conditions of experience. But they never arrive in this glimmering realm or catch 'The Gleam' or find a happy unity with their radiant lover. They haunt the margins of the gleaming world, breathing its atmosphere of light and air but remaining a 'shadow' or 'spirit', a mere breath – a last gasp – and not an embodied life.

These gray spirits are related to those other ghosts and phantoms that haunt much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century verse, occupying that uncertain border between the material and the immaterial. But the spectral, I suggest, becomes emblematic of a number of configurations of the labour to transcend the frontiers of our modern, self-bound worlds of knowledge and experience. The material-immortal distinction becomes emblematic of other configurations of these frontiers (apprehended-inapprehensible, known-unimaginable, believed-unbelievable) because it gives the poet a means of figuring out in verse – as ghosts and phantoms and haunted regions – this more abstract labour of self-transcendence. And the spectral has a certain priority, too, because of the ways in which it converges with the peculiarly nineteenth-century preoccupation with the possibility of religious belief and with practices of occult communication.

But what is so seductive about this gleaming light? What does it promise that seems so attractive, so necessary to these gray spirits? The gleaming realm is the place of the imagination. To 'follow knowledge like a sinking star' and travel over the gleaming horizon is to go 'beyond the utmost bound of human thought' and to encounter the unknowable, unimaginable, or eternal (I, 618). But Tennyson's gray spirits do not seek out the limits of human thought in order to satisfy a metaphysical or philosophical curiosity. They are compelled by a desire to transform their uncertain existence at the limits of the known world into a surer, brighter reality, confirming these apprehensions of a world beyond our own as truth rather than dream. And they are 'yearning in desire' (I, 617): love – and perhaps life – depends on it. For Merlin it is love of his gleaming nymph. For Tithonus, it is love of Aurora and the desire to share in her immortal life. For Ulysses it is both.

⁴⁰ See Owen Boynton's discussion of how Tennyson's punctuation in 'Ulysses' is a 'reminder of the source of Ulysses' thwarted urgency – but also a foreboding reminder of the idle time to which he has already lost so much of his life': 'Tennyson and the Weight of a Pause', *Victorian Poetry*, 53.3 (2015), 229–42 (p. 234).

The desire for personal immortality compels Ulysses to seek out the horizon of the world. It was also the dominant preoccupation of Tennyson's life, driving him to seek out these glimmering encounters with the 'beyond' and discovering, perhaps, 'an assurance of immortality'.⁴¹

Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done
[...]
 my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

(I, 618-19)

By travelling 'beyond the sunset' where light and life are extinguished, Ulysses hopes to enter into eternal life. It is an attempt to find some leeway within the assertion that 'Death closes all' and to postpone the force of that limiting 'until I die'. He hopes to taste the afterlife without having to pass through death. He hopes that the glimmering dusk of life will become the glimmering dawn of eternity, a quiet passage into immortality that renders 'until I die' an afterthought, a boundary that has already been crossed or has ceased to exist. But 'until I die' falls at the close of the sentence, a dark reminder that death does indeed 'close all' and that immortality can only be dreamt of or fleetingly glimpsed within the bounds of mortal human life.

The second desire that drives Ulysses towards the frontiers of the known world is the love of a friend:

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

(I, 619)

By travelling beyond the bounds of human life, Ulysses might not only achieve a personal immortality but might also encounter those who dwell in this afterlife. The gleaming horizon is where he might be reunited with his beloved friend, the 'great Achilles' or, indeed, Arthur Hallam. Once again, what was 'seen and known' is converted into a visionary prospect, a dream of recovering those 'pleasant things' that lie in the past. And yet we feel Ulysses' uncertainty as to how fully this dream might be realized. Whereas that which was 'seen' and that which was 'known' once came together, now this prospect offers only a glimpse of the 'great Achilles', the mutual knowledge that animated their friendship held, irrecoverably, in the past.

Ulysses' desire – Tennyson's desire – is to travel over the gleaming horizon: to gain a clear view of eternity, the assurance of personal immortality, and to be reunited with the loved friend. Carlyle, writing to Aubrey de Vere in 1849, drew on Tennyson's own language to draw a keen

⁴¹ William Allingham's Diary, ed. by Geoffrey Grigson (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1967), p. 185.

caricature of the poet: ‘Tennyson it seems, has returned to Town: a glimpse of him was got, the other day, “walking with large strides into Regent Street,” in a northerly direction; and then went over the horizon, and has not re-emerged since’ (*Tennyson’s Letters*, I, 297 n. 3). To go ‘over the horizon’ and not re-emerge was indeed Tennyson’s most profound desire. And yet it could not be realized. The journey towards the horizon gives only a glimpse of what lies beyond before it must arc back on itself and return home. In *In Memoriam XII*, the dove – an emblem for the imagination that has survived disaster – traces out this parabolic journey. The Tennyson-dove leaves ‘this mortal ark behind’ and flies out to the horizon of the sea, that place always associated with Hallam’s long, posthumous voyage home (II, 331). But the ‘ark’ of the body anticipates the ‘arc’ of the imaginative journey; human thought is bounded by the human body and Tennyson can only hover over this gleaming horizon:

O'er ocean-mirrors rounded large,
 And reach the glow of southern skies,
 And see the sails at distance rise,
 And linger weeping on the marge,

 And saying; ‘Comes he thus, my friend?
 Is this the end of all my care?’
 And circle moaning in the air:
 ‘Is this the end? Is this the end?’

(II, 331)

But it cannot be the end. The dove cannot come to rest at this watery limit and human thought can only touch upon this glowing horizon of the unimaginable and immortal. The flight towards the horizon can only hover or linger at the ‘marge’, offering a momentary glimpse of the world beyond and the lost friend before it must return home.

‘Tithonus’ is an extended meditation on this experience of hovering over the horizon, lingering at the limit of the known world and asking ‘Is this the end? Is this the end?’. ‘Tithon’ – or ‘Tithonus’ as it became when the 1833 draft was revised for publication in the *Cornhill* in 1860 – was described by Tennyson as the ‘pendent’ to ‘Ulysses’ (*Memoir*, I, 459). ‘Pendent’ suggests an oblique, dependent relation, the second poem held in an airy suspension, endlessly pending resolution – a term apposite for a poem that dwells unhappily in the ‘far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn’ (II, 608). And ‘pendent’ suggests the extreme point of a low hanging curve, the place of fanciful and imaginative elaboration. Ulysses’ journey towards the horizon finds at its uttermost reach this strange, mythic poem of unparalleled beauty. He had hoped that just over the western horizon he would get a glimpse of things unknown and eternal: Tithonus, dwelling at the ‘quiet limit of the world’ (II, 607), meditates on the strange – perhaps disappointing – kinds of knowledge and experience that such a glimpse might afford.

‘Tithonus’ is the most luminous of all Tennyson’s poems, lingering for longest in the gleaming regions at the edge of the world. The ‘glimmering thresholds’ (II, 612) of the dawn become a place to dwell, a vast, silent palace of light and air. These ‘gleaming halls of morn’ are filled with mirrored light that is endlessly reflected and refracted. Light is filled with light as the ‘gleaming halls’ are filled with the seductive radiance of Aurora, her ‘old mysterious glimmer’ (II, 609) growing rosy and brighter as her light dawns into day. Her eyes, too, brim and brighten with reflected starlight: ‘Close over us, the silver star, thy guide, | Shines [/Gleams] in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears’ (II, 608 [n.]). Venus, the morning star, shines in the twin-light of dawn; Venus, the evening star, finds her mirror-image in the tears of ‘morn’. As Aurora’s eyes fill with light and tears they ‘brighten slowly close to mine’, light intensifying light as eyes reflect eyes until the brilliant light of Aurora’s eyes out-stars the stars and ‘blind[s] them’ (II, 609). The ‘quiet limit of the world’ – this edge-land, this frontier, of the imagination – is filled with glimmering lights, but they do not promise to illuminate so much as to dazzle, eyes blinded by light and tears. The horizon that had once seemed to offer the prospect of vision now only offers an experience that is like vision, a world saturated with light and filled with eyes but in which everything remains out of focus and without explanation. These dazzling lights begin to capture the paradoxical conditions of experience that Tennyson pursues: to know the unknowable, to imagine the unimaginable, to glimpse eternity while remaining in the mortal body. T. S. Eliot suggested that Tennyson ‘was capable of illumination which he was incapable of understanding’ (*In Memoriam*; SE, 334), but when the dead metaphor of ‘illumination’ is revived by Tennyson in the figure of dancing light, ‘illumination’ is the sign for that which the human mind is ‘incapable of understanding’.

Glimmering light, however, is not the only figure for the kinds of experience that become possible at the ‘quiet limit of the world’. The ‘gleaming halls’ are misty, full of soft air and clouds and rising steam – an atmosphere of vapoury enchantment that recalls the poem of the previous year, ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ (1832). Its ‘far-folded mists’ are the double of the endlessly reflected light, another figure for the strange experiences of vision that become possible at this quiet limit – experiences of vision in which all that comes into view are the endless conditions of vision itself. Occasionally, a ‘soft air’ fans the clouds apart to give a ‘glimpse’ of another world (II, 609). ‘Glimpse’ belongs to the language of gleaming and glimmering but transforms these intermittent lights into a description of the kinds of vision they might make possible: the fleeting experiences of seeing and knowing that only become available in the half-light conditions of Tennyson’s poetics. Tellingly, this ‘glimpse’ is not of a future or eternal reality but is rather a look backwards to earth and youth. To seek out a ‘newer world’ (I, 619) might not be the dream of the adventurer but of the nostalgic, hoping that this distant world is the one left behind: the dwelling-place of that which we once ‘knew’ and the home, perhaps, of an old friend. The dream of Tennyson’s verse is to discover that the life that lies beyond the horizon of human experience might not be so very different to the life that has come before: that one might slip

from the known to the unknown with all the ease of a ship sailing out of sight, eliding the trauma of death in the grace of a pun.

Glimmering lights and veils of mist are figures for the unreal prospect of the horizon, its promise of vision resolving only into the experience of blinding light, its knowledge only the recovery of memory. But gleaming light is also associated with moments of understanding that are derived from acoustic rather than visual experiences, that are apprehended through the work of speaking and listening.

Lo! ever thus thou growest beautiful
In silence, then before thine answer given
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.

Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?
'The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.'

II, 610)

The gleaming limit of the world is ‘quiet’ and ‘ever-silent’ (II, 607, 608). At first this silence seems the gentle peace of an early-morning world but as the poem unfolds this quietness becomes disconcerting. As Aurora grows ‘beautiful’ she moves towards speech, but leaves before giving an answer. The light-filled tears that fall in this brimming silence ‘scare’ Tithonus with their withheld meaning: Aurora seems to know that there will be no reprieve from his ‘immortal age’ (II, 608) but she will not or cannot speak of it. The lines and light trace out a parabola which swells towards expressiveness but which returns to absence and a more profound silence before a word is spoken. Journeys towards the limit of the known world offered the prospect of knowledge but here, at the ‘quiet limit’, there are only withheld and unknown meanings. Tears fall instead of words, a sign for their absence but also a sign for these meanings that are felt but which can never be heard or spoken of. The only things that break the silence of this gleaming world are remembered words that speak of the impossibility of knowing. Tithonus remembers how Aurora whispered ‘I knew not what of wild and sweet’ (II, 612), her meanings both unknowable and inexpressible. And he recalls a ‘saying’ from the dark earth: ‘The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts’. This memory of speech remembers a faint truth – that Tithonus’ gift of immortality cannot be reversed, recalled – only for it to disappear into a memory about the impossibility of remembering, of recalling the things that were once known.

* * *

In Tennyson’s poetry of 1833-34, glimmering lights are embedded figures for the strange experiences of seeing and knowing that lie at the limit of the imagination. To follow the gleam through ‘Ulysses’

and ‘Tithonus’ is to move with Tennyson’s travellers towards the horizon of knowledge; it is also to move towards an understanding of Tennyson’s self-theorising patterns of thought and the ways in which the half-seen stands as an analogue for the half-heard and the half-known. The gleam, however, always moves towards a greater intimacy with that which it describes, the ‘melody’ of poetic thought. Gleaming lights become the glimmering parabolae of a poetry that reaches towards the limit of what might be imagined, spoken of, or known. *In Memoriam* is the culmination of this growing intimacy between the gleam of the self-theorising figure and the melody of poetic thinking: the discovery of the earlier poetry – that the journey towards the gleaming horizon might only achieve the briefest, most glancing contact with the things that lie beyond – becomes a poetic commitment to the glimpse.

A fragment of verse written at the same time as ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Tithonus’ illustrates how Tennyson’s gleaming figure became increasingly intimate with the poetic labour that it sought to describe:

This Nature full of hints and mysteries,
Untrackt conclusions, broken lights and shapes,
This world-reflecting mind, this complex life
Of checks and impulses and counterchecks,
Glimpses and aspirations, warnings, failings

(III, 620)

The glimmering ‘lights’ that twinkled from the rocks in ‘Ulysses’ and which were the cold stars of ‘Tithonus’ are now identified as the abstract ‘broken lights’ of a glimpsed truth. The gray ‘shadows’ that haunted these gleaming regions at the edge of the known world are transformed into the ‘shapes’ of things known of but not understood. The glimmering worlds of these poems become a ‘world-reflecting mind’, their gleaming figures for the experience of thought recovered as the experience of thought itself, the ‘untravelled’ limits of the sea becoming the ‘untrackt conclusions’ of knowledge. And the ‘glimpses’ that were once serendipitous moments of revelation – discovered as the veils of mist drifted apart or as the ship came over the horizon – are now part of the frustrated labour of this ‘complex life’. The ‘glimpse’ becomes something that must be worked towards, a desire for knowledge that is checked at every turn but which continually labours onward, its success uncertain.

These two opposed accounts of how the ‘glimpse’ might be achieved – through serendipity or through strenuous labour – captures the doubt, the wavering between two possible convictions, that lies at the heart of Tennyson’s sense of how poetry might move towards revelation. On the one hand, Tennyson imagines that he might travel over the horizon of life and knowledge through a kind of poetic conjuring that elides the need for labour or movement. A pun might provide a way of crossing over without the need to travel or to endure the trauma of death and ignorance. That which lies beyond might be the mirror-image of that which came before and so to move forward might simply mean

turning back.⁴² On the other hand, Tennyson's poetry is full of the need of 'going forward, and braving the struggle of life' (*Memoir*, I, 196), compelled to 'strive' (a favourite word) towards experiences and knowledge that are not easily sustained.⁴³ Due to the association between the gleam and experiences of seduction, enchantment, or idling, this figure for poetic thought tends to emphasize the serendipity rather than the strenuous labour involved in poetic revelation. But the two opposing accounts belong together and in *In Memoriam* glimpsing becomes the labour and movement of Tennyson's verse.

The 'broken lights' of this fragment become central to the 'Prologue' of *In Memoriam*, composed in 1849:

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be:
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more

(II, 316-317)

In the fragment, 'broken lights' described human knowledge as the experience of intermittent illumination, as an encounter with the scattered shards of a shattered truth. In the 'Prologue', however, these 'broken lights' are the intermittent revelations of God's presence within the world and, more particularly, within human thought and experience. But the other loan-word from Tennyson's luminous lexicon, 'glimpses', is absent from the 'Prologue'. Instead, the frustrated process of labouring towards knowledge that was articulated in the fragment as 'checks and impulses and counterchecks, | Glimpses and aspirations, warnings, failings' becomes the movement of successive *In Memoriam* stanzas. The *In Memoriam* stanza is a parabolic form. Its arched *abba* rhyme scheme (traced out in the arching indentation of the stanza's edge) moves towards a moment of rhyming recognition. At the midpoint of the stanza sensuous 'knowledge' and blinded 'faith' or 'trust' momentarily hold together. As the stanza reaches the midpoint of its arc, it reaches beyond the limit of the knowable and into the realm of provisional, tentative belief. And at this moment of ultimate extension, the ineffable 'thee' is heard, a transcendent presence momentarily audible, fleetingly apprehended at the extreme edge of imaginative experience. Something is glimpsed at the midpoint of the stanza (the audible converted, once again, into the visible) and as it comes to a close there is now a gleaming light, a 'beam' in the darkness. As stanza follows stanza and 'glimpse' follows 'glimpse', this faint light of knowledge might 'grow from more to more'. The *In Memoriam* lyric is thus a series

⁴² See, for instance, Matthew Campbell's discussion of the 'drift' of *In Memoriam* in *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 157–86.

⁴³ See Hurley's account of Tennyson's 'striving', p. 56.

of approaches towards the edge of the knowable, a frustrated progress through ‘check’ to ‘impulse’ and back to ‘countercheck’ that labours towards a succession of glimpses. These lyrics are, as Tennyson puts it in XLVIII, ‘Short swallow-flights of song, that dip | Their wings in tears, and skim away’ (II, 366), parabolic flights that momentarily touch upon the sorrowful subject. Although ‘prospect and horizon’ may be lost – intimacy and understanding beyond the reach of the poetic imagination – these songs might discover a ‘doubtful gleam of solace’ abiding in their inward music, a brief, shadowy likeness of what it is to love and know (XXXVIII; II, 355).

This frustrated labouring towards knowledge is worked out at the level of the lyric as well as the stanza. The lyrics of *In Memoriam* describe ‘different moods’ and were written in ‘many different places’ (*Memoir*, I, 304). They do not give the chronology of Tennyson’s friendship with Hallam or follow the order of composition; indeed, Tennyson claimed that he had not written the lyrics with ‘any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many’ (*Memoir*, I, 304). *In Memoriam* is thus a collection of glimpses, ‘broken lights’ that do not cohere into a greater revelation but which in their brokenness gesture towards an unimaginable and unutterable truth. While *In Memoriam* brings together the self-theorising figure with poetic practice to produce the most self-conscious exploration of the glimpering mode, Tennyson’s other long poems demonstrate a similar conviction that the meanings of verse might be best apprehended through the miscellaneous or episodic sequence: *The Princess* (1847) is subtitled ‘A Medley’ and Tennyson’s Arthurian epic is a series of shorter poems or *Idylls*.

Hallam Tennyson makes explicit the connection between the structure of *In Memoriam* and the glimmering figures of Tennyson’s self-theorising thought:

Faith must give the last word: but the last word is not the whole utterance of the truth: the whole truth is that assurance and doubt must alternate in the moral world in which we at present live, somewhat as night and day alternate in the physical world. The revealing visions come and go; when they come we *feel* that we *know*, but in the intervals we must pass through states in which all is dark, and in which we can only struggle to hold the conviction that

Power is in us in the night
Which makes the darkness and the light
And dwells not in the light alone.

(*Memoir*, I, 304)

For Hallam Tennyson, *In Memoriam* is characterized by its patterns of alternation. Strikingly, he imagines these patterns of alternation in terms of ‘night and day’: the glimmering rhythm of light and shade that figured out the moment of partial knowledge becomes the glimmering rhythm of both earthly and poetic form. This glimmering form makes possible glimpses of ‘revealing visions’ that ‘come and go’. To live or to read is to move through this rhythm of light and dark, labouring towards partial knowledge and experiencing the struggling progress of ‘check and impulse and countercheck’. Hallam Tennyson’s language thus makes explicit the continuity between the glimmering language of

Tennyson's self-theorising thought and the structural patterns of *In Memoriam* – a continuity that was implicit in his father's quiet repurposing of 'glimpse' to describe not only the strange kinds of vision that become possible at the limit of what is known but, more particularly, the kinds of poetic labour involved in this journey towards new forms of knowledge.

The glimpsing form of *In Memoriam* is a way of labouring to utter the 'whole truth' about the experience of faith; a way of both speaking about and instantiating within the reader's embodied experience the alternation between 'assurance and doubt'. (This sense that the labour towards the 'whole truth' might be limited to a series of intermittent and unsustainable apprehensions persists in those subsequent poems that consist as sequential, fragmentary, or composite series. To give a variety of examples: Browning's collection of dramatic monologues, *The Ring and the Book*; Meredith's sonnet sequence, *Modern Love*; Hardy's *Poems of 1912-13*; Eliot's fragmentary composition, *The Waste Land*.) The inexact correspondence between what is felt and what is assented to – between form and faith – is central to any account of the religious position of *In Memoriam*. Kirstie Blair suggests that the poem explores 'the value or otherwise of forms [both poetic and ecclesiastical] in faith';⁴⁴ Charles LaPorte has drawn attention to the way in which Tennyson's increasing engagement with 'higher critical hermeneutics' brought a new focus to the relation between reading practices and the experience of belief in his later verse;⁴⁵ and Aidan Day (taking a long view of Tennyson's corpus) suggests that his long poems find a 'range of stabilisations' between 'the incompatible intellectual economies [Christian, Romantic, Empiricist] that Tennyson worked with'.⁴⁶ But it is Hallam Tennyson's more basic claim that *In Memoriam* creates moments in which 'we *feel* that we *know*' that is pertinent to this discussion of Tennyson's glimpsing poetics. In these glimpse-like moments, the sensuous experience of poetry's language and form corresponds – somehow – to the experience of knowing; a knowing that remains undefined but which seems to secure an experience of assurance, of metaphysical confidence, or of ratified belief.

Tennyson's glimmering language has always been associated with patterns of thinking that tend to become self-reflexive patterns of thought. As the glimmering language becomes a glimpsing poetics, this association between the visual figuring-out of thought and this self-reflexive turn is preserved. Tennyson's long poem becomes (among other things) an investigation into the ways in which it becomes meaningful; an investigation, that is, into the ways in which it communicates this distinctly poetic feeling-of-knowing.

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⁴⁴ Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 167.

⁴⁵ Charles LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 70.

⁴⁶ Aidan Day, *Tennyson's Scepticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 5.

At the heart of Tennyson's self-reflexive inquiry is an exchange between the visual and the aural. The gleam has always been an analogue for melody that moves towards a final marriage of light and song: as Tucker observes, Tennysonian dusk – that glimmering, dreaming period – has a ‘clear sensory and psychic direction, away from sight into sound and feeling’.⁴⁷ This growing intimacy between the gleaming figure for thought and the prosodic structures of verse is realized in the glimpsing poetics of *In Memoriam*. In this glimpsing poetics, the visual and the aural are interchangeable: the glimpse is a way of describing the prosodic patterns of the poem and is thus a way of describing the *sounds* of the poem. The half-seen becomes – in a shift of focus but also in a real, copular sense – the half-spoken and the half-heard. The gleaming light falls across the surface of Tennyson's seas while the ‘deep’ (as Tucker observes) is primarily an acoustic locality in which ‘music [...] is both heard and felt, though hardly understood’.⁴⁸ But Tennyson's surface (as T. S Eliot understood so well, his metaphor touching on Tennyson's own) is ‘intimate with his depths’, the visible intimate with, wedded to, the acoustic (*In Memoriam*; SE, 337). It is this intimacy between the visual glimpse and what we might call the ‘aural glimpse’ that enables Tennyson's inquiry into the experiences of feeling-that-we-know that poetry uniquely affords – the visual becoming a means of figuring-out those experiences of meaning that arise from the ‘music’ or paralinguistic noise of poetically-organized language.

Tennyson's yew-tree lyrics are concerned with the parabolic reach of poetry towards the limits of the imagination and with how the experience of gleaming light associated with this moment of revelation might be or become continuous with an experience of difficult attention:

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,
Who changest not in any gale,
Nor branding summer suns avail
To touch thy thousand years of gloom.

(II, 320)

The first yew-tree poem, lyric II, reimagines the luminous ‘glow’ of Tennyson's earlier verse as the beauty of a tree's ‘bloom’: fluorescence becomes florescence. But here ‘glow’ and ‘bloom’ are not equivalent but rather stages in a growing radiance, the early ‘glow’ opening into the fulsome beauty of ‘bloom’. The gradual illumination of the first line fades back into obscurity as it finds its rhyme in ‘thy thousand years of gloom’, ‘glow’ and ‘bloom’ gathered back into deep darkness. These sonically and semantically related words thus trace out a fleeting moment of illumination: ‘glow-bloom-gloom’. The main sense of the stanza, however, is that there is no glow, no bloom, and that there is no sun – however strong – that is able to kindle the yew's ‘thousand years of gloom’. The minor, parabolic pattern of light and blossom is heard against the unflinching darkness of the yew – *heard* because this brief dream of light is conjured through attention to minor patterns of sound and meaning. Listening

⁴⁷ Tucker, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Tucker, p. 20.

begins to reveal possibilities of illumination – real light and, perhaps, real knowledge – that are otherwise unavailable.

Lyric XXXIX comes as the pendent to II. As with ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Tithonus’, the pendent poem dwells in the ‘golden hour’ of illumination that was only glimpsed in the first:

Old warder of these buried bones,
And answering now my random stroke
With fruitful cloud and living smoke,
Dark yew, that graspest at the stones

And dippest towards the dreamless head,
To thee too comes the golden hour
When flower is feeling after flower;
But Sorrow – fixt upon the dead,

And darkening the graves of men, –
What whispered from her lying lips?
Thy gloom is kindled at the tips,
And passes into gloom again.

(II, 356)

This is the blooming of the yew that was only imagined, only faintly heard of, in the earlier lyric. But the flowers of this yew are dowdy and their beauty is past: there is only the ‘fruitful cloud and living smoke’ of dusty pollen. The ‘bloom’ is neither radiant light nor radiant beauty but is rather the spreading dust of dissemination. And so the ‘golden hour’ – that gleaming moment at the horizon of language and knowledge – has become the occasion of expression. Pollen is released, blown towards the surrounding flowers. It is imagined as a kind of speech, a silent ‘answer’ to the thwacked branches and a rhyming response to the ‘random stroke’. Although this burst of pollen suggests the expressiveness of poetry at the ‘golden’ limit of language, this polleny language is both silent and obscure. It tends towards speech, towards expression and dissemination, but remains inarticulate. There is no success in the ‘feeling after’ that ends in the communication of pollen and, a little later, the production of fruit; there is expression, meanings sent forth on the breath, on the wind, but they find neither fruitful soil nor a listener who might receive and comprehend them. The lyric’s figure for the expressiveness of poetic language is preoccupied with these problems of reception, with the difficulty of understanding these silent, perhaps wilfully opaque, expressions of ‘cloud’ and ‘smoke’.

This polleny language is the language of ‘Sorrow’. Her speech is a barely audible whisper that comes from ‘lying lips’. Her words do not move towards communication and communion but like tears and mists (those other signs for inarticulate meanings) fall unheard on the ‘dark graves of men’. In the final lines of this lyric it is hard to tell whether we are listening to the barely audible voice of ‘Sorrow’ echoing within Tennyson’s speech or his own judgement on the yew and the fleetingness, the failure, of its expression: ‘Thy gloom is kindled at the tips, | And passes into gloom again’. Elsewhere

in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson similarly suggests that the language of grief might only ever attain brief moments of failing expressiveness: his lyrics are ‘brief lays, of Sorrow born’ (II, 365) and ‘private sorrow’s barren song’ (II, 340).

The yew-tree lyrics begin to re-imagine the visual glimpse as an aural glimpse, the lyric as a brief auditory encounter with an inarticulate language. Lyric XIX is Tennyson’s most subtle account of how sorrow might produce a poetry of such difficult verbal expressiveness. Sorrow becomes the salt tide of tears and sea-water:

The Danube to the Severn gave
The darkened heart that beat no more;
They laid him by the pleasant shore,
And in the hearing of the wave.

There twice a day the Severn fills;
The salt sea-water passes by,
And hushes half the babbling Wye,
And makes a silence in the hills.

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,
And hushed my deepest grief of all,
When filled with tears that cannot fall,
I brim with sorrow drowning song.

The tide flows down, the wave again
Is vocal in its wooded walls;
My deeper anguish also falls,
And I can speak a little then.

(II, 338)

Tennyson finds a parallel between the moving waters of the Wye and the motions of his own grief. The lyric came out of Tennyson’s observation that the moment of slack water in the Severn estuary produced a corresponding stillness on the Wye river (II, 338 n.). Just as the waters of the Wye reflect the waters of the Severn, so Tennyson’s own grief finds its reflection in the still, deep moment of slack water on the Wye: the Wye is ‘hushed nor moved along’ and Tennyson’s grief is ‘hushed’ and cannot find relief in tears. At the high water mark of grief there are neither tears nor words but only a brimming silence. The inner rhymes of the stanza move from ‘all’ to ‘filled’ to ‘cannot fall’ tracing out a tide of grief that nearly becomes a ‘fall’ of tears but which the very fullness of grief prevents. Carlyle, thinking of ‘Ulysses’, but with an intuitive sense of the oppressive fullness of tides and tears throughout Tennyson’s verse, confessed that the ‘lines do not make me weep, but there is in me what would fill whole Lachrymatories as I read’ (*Memoir*, I, 214). The waters rise and gather until they seem to touch the edges of a new meaning but it remains unknown and unspoken. The poem turns back on itself, the crisis passing but without the relief of expression. Instead of spilling over at the peak of the parabola – attaining a new expressiveness, a new language of tears and words, and,

perhaps, a new knowledge – the poem only touches on this unrealized possibility, remaining inarticulate.

In this brimming, lyrical moment a ‘sorrow drowning song’ is heard. This is not the language of sorrow because it has its origins in grief but because its words are worked out of the opposition between the need to sing and the need to cry. Sorrow drowns or drowns out song, sadness making words both impossible and inaudible. But this is also a sorrow-drowning song, words that might soothe or suspend grief. ‘Sorrow’ and ‘song’ quietly tug against each other in these ‘drowning’ waters, finding the equilibrium of high water. In this moment, ‘song’ very nearly becomes audible, brimming into being as ‘sorrow-drowning song’ and drowned into silence as ‘sorrow drowning song’, nearly but never articulate. And so the high tide of grief is not the peak of a parabola, a momentary reach into that which lies beyond, so much as a period of equilibrium between that which comes before and that which comes after. In this suspended period, the poem does not reach the full, vocal expressiveness of song but finds only a sustained hush (‘hushes’, ‘hushed’, ‘hushed’), a curiously introverted voice that whispers not in order to communicate but in order to return itself to silence.

This inarticulate (though melodious) ‘hush’ is the sound of, an emblem for, the lyrical conditions under which one might come to a feeling-of-knowing, the whispering silence (like the poet’s tears) suggesting a fullness of incommunicable meaning. This ‘hush’ offers something like an auditory glimpse, a brief reach towards the realm of spoken meanings without ever becoming vocal. Tennyson’s verse is full of such inarticulate sounds, of ‘muffled’ (*The Princess*; II, 280), ‘murmured’ (*Morte d’Arthur*; II, 15), and ‘dumb’ speech (*The Holy Grail*; III, 473). He finds in ‘half-’ a favourite way of sustaining sounds and meanings between audibility and inaudibility, the known and the unknown, the breathy prefix itself a hushing and muffling of sense: ‘half-whisper’d’ (*Œnone*, I, 430), ‘half-muffled’ (*The Princess*; II, 256), ‘half-invisible’ (*The Vision of Sin*; II, 158). And when someone begins to listen in Tennyson’s verse they often only faintly ‘hear’, catching sounds but not meanings: ‘she spake so slow he hardly heard her speak’ (*Geraint and Enid*; III, 367), ‘he heard but fragments of her later words’ (*Marriage of Geraint*; III, 328), ‘she heard, | Heard and heard not him’ (*Enoch Arden*; II, 631). Tellingly, in a ‘Dream of Fair Women’, this ‘hush’ – this language of inarticulate sound – is adjacent to the language of gleaming lights: ‘Ranges of glimmering vaults with iron gates, | And hushed seraglios’ (I, 482). The words are synonymous, ‘hushed’ and ‘glimmering’ interchangeable descriptions for the conditions under which the hero might ‘strive’ (but only ‘strive’) to ‘speak’. That the aural and the visual are finally descriptions for the conditions under which one might find a difficult sort of speaking and listening indicates the bent of Tennyson’s self-theorising thought: his glimmering language is ultimately concerned with the strange experiences of nearly speaking, faintly hearing, and indistinctly apprehending that might become uniquely possible under the conditions of poetic language.

As the waters of the Wye begin to ebb and the ‘tide flows down’, the hush is stirred and the waters begin to move, becoming ‘vocal in its wooded walls’. Tennyson’s high tide of grief similarly begins to remit and his ‘deeper anguish [...] falls’, his words returning so that he can ‘speak a little’. Tears and words fall together in the moment after the high tide of grief, the poem finding a new expressiveness as it withdraws from the gleaming limit of imaginative vision, from the point at which one might gaze too intently into the realm of the lost and irrecoverable. But the poet does not sing now. He can only ‘speak a little’. The lyric that became an inarticulate ‘hush’, brimming with the feeling-of-knowing, now finds a few, hesitant words that would, perhaps, try to say what once was known but which come too late, their meanings unheard in the silent wake of the lyric.

* * *

The figurative accounts of the poetic glimpse offered by the lyrics of *In Memoriam* are striking in their variousness. They range through both visual and aural imagery, from the glow of blossom and the dissemination of pollen (XXXIX) to tears (XIX), muffled bells and mists (XXVIII), lit windows (X), and the curved horizons of the sea (XII). Moreover, each lyric offers a slightly different account of the exact moment in which this obscure revelation of meaning or feeling-of-knowing occurs (at the silent peak of the parabola, in the moment just after, or suspended in the equilibrium of rhyme) and the exact difficulty it poses for comprehension (inarticulacy, tearfulness, inaudibility). These various accounts do not supersede each other nor do they add up to a more comprehensive or articulate account of the glimpsing poetics of *In Memoriam*. Rather, they should be thought of as a series of glimpses, brief attempts to imagine the strange experiences of listening and speaking – or, more accurately, of half-hearing and half-uttering – that become possible through the glimpsing prosody of Tennyson’s long poem.

But while Tennyson never settles on a single figure to theorize the poetics of *In Memoriam*, his long lyric XCV makes a rare return to the glimmering dusks and dawns of his earlier poetry in order to think about how these strange prosodic experiences might become strange experiences of knowledge, intimacy, and communion. XCV begins to suggest what might be at stake for Tennyson in maintaining the glimpsing patterns of *In Memoriam*. The poem begins in the ‘silvery haze of the summer dawn’ (II, 411) as a wakeful night draws to an end and the speaker’s companions withdraw to the house, leaving him all alone. This idling moment before dawn is suffused with the glancing light and diaphanous atmosphere that characterizes the Tennysonian idyll. The early stanzas bring together Tennyson’s many images for the intermediate time. The ‘white kine glimmered’ (II, 412), reviving the gleaming language that has only occasionally been heard in *In Memoriam*. The bats ‘wheeled or lit the filmy shapes’ (II, 412), tracing out curving flights that resemble the voyages of birds and travellers towards the horizon. And the trees that ‘laid their dark arms about the field’ (II, 412) are of the same

genus as the gloomy yew trees whose branches enclose moments of briefly kindling or blooming light, just as these trees encircle the glimmering kine. Bats, cows, and trees are also figures for the parabolic flight of the lyric's narrative form which frames a moment of brilliant light between two visions of a coming dawn.

While glimmering light signals that Tennyson's thoughts are turning towards eternity (towards the Isles of the Blessed or the underworld below the verge), this is particularly true (as Eric Griffiths observes) when it is the light of a morning which one has seen in alone: 'immortality resembles insomnia [...] Eternal life, it might seem, will only prolong this staying up all night, seeing in the dawn, without a party to pass the time, or anybody to see it in with.'⁴⁹ Tithonus remains alone when everyone else has gone to sleep in the 'grassy barrows of the happier dead' (II, 612), unable to sleep in the perpetual glare of Aurora's dawn. In the glimmering, insomniac idyll of XCV, desire and the imagination begin to stir:

and I was all alone,

A hunger seized my heart; I read
Of that glad year which once had been,
In those fallen leaves which kept their green,
The noble letters of the dead:

(II, 412)

In other lyrics, Tennyson imagines the midpoint of the parabolic stanza (or lyric) as the place where one might see gleaming lights or hear hushed voices, but here it is where one might begin to read. In 'This Nature full of hints and mysteries', Tennyson imagined the flight towards the glimpsed knowledge of the horizon as an 'impulse'; here, it is a 'hunger' to discover the lost and hidden meanings of a text. As this 'hunger' drives the stanza towards its midpoint, the 'fallen leaves' become legible as the 'letters of the dead', their meanings coming into view. But there is only an inexact correspondence between the experience of reading that is imagined and the actual experience of reading this text. While the poet reads 'letters' and finds (it seems) a clear meaning, we read the poem. The leaves become legible to us through a quiet pattern of verbal association, 'fallen' punned into 'dead', the foliate 'leaves' becoming the papery folios of collected 'letters'. The reader of the poem experiences a kind of reading – tracing out the linguistic patterns of a text – but one which does not result in a communication of what these poetic 'letters' mean. As such, the lyric offers an experience of legibility that is a shadowy resemblance of the poet's experience of reading, the letters seen but their meanings unknown.

The lyric continues to describe something that resembles this difficult, leafy language that has no sound and no literal form:

⁴⁹ Griffiths, pp. 136–37.

And strangely on the silence broke
 The silent-speaking words, and strange
 Was love's dumb cry defying change
 To test his worth; and strangely spoke

The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
 On doubts that drive the coward back,
 And keen through wordy snares to track
 Suggestion to her inmost cell.

(II, 412)

The silence seems to break as the stanza arcs towards speech. And yet all that is heard at this innermost point are ‘silent-speaking words’, the silence disturbed by silence. ‘Silent-speaking’ then varies into a ‘dumb cry’, becoming louder and more defiant, yet remaining silent. This ‘silence’ does not break in order to become vocal but rather breaks into further silence, breaking the voice of these ‘silent-speaking words’ and hushing them back into quietness.⁵⁰ As the stanza’s parabola arches towards its close, another kind of speech is discovered. But now what ‘strangely spoke’ is ‘the faith, the vigour, bold to dwell | On doubts that drive the coward back’: this is not the audible meaning of spoken words but perseverance’s silent signalling of intent – another defiant but dumb language. As in ‘The Danube to the Severn gave’, the midpoint of the stanza and the high tide of grief are full of unutterable meanings; as the lyric turns back on itself and the grief subsides a new language is discovered that can begin to express its meanings, if only ‘a little’ and almost or totally inaudibly. And just as Tennyson found in the sustained ‘hush’ a figure for and a prosodic enactment of the peculiarly poetic experiences of speaking and listening, so the ‘silent-speaking’ language of this lyric never articulates its meaning but mutters only of the strangeness of its own speech: ‘strangely’, ‘strange’, ‘strangely’. There is a parallel here with the curious self-commentary of Tennyson’s ‘I hear a voice that’s speaking in the wind’.

But now Tennyson begins to think about the significance of these things that are felt but not known, palpable within the strange hush of this language that listens to itself. To read or to listen, to journey through the parabolic rhythms of the poem, through its ‘checks’ and ‘counterchecks’, is to move ‘through wordy snares to track | Suggestion to her inmost cell’. These ‘snares’ belong to the sibilant language of a ‘strangely’ silent speech. The ‘snares’ of this inarticulate language – its subtle, sinuous ‘music of words’ – might lead to or imprison ‘suggestion’. ‘Suggestion’ cannot quite escape from the silent-speaking sibilance to become fully articulate: its meanings are held within the ‘hush’ of the poem’s aural textures. And yet to read might be to encounter these acoustically-entangled meanings as vital and intimate experiences of knowledge:

So word by word, and line by line,
 The dead man touched me from the past,

⁵⁰ See Griffiths on the ‘broken voice’ of this lyric, p. 167.

And all at once it seemed at last
 The living soul was flashed on mine,

 And mine in his was wound, and whirled
 About the empyreal heights of thought,
 And came on that which is, and caught
 The deep pulsations of the world,

(II, 413)

The midpoint of the lyric was where the poet hoped to ‘touch’ – to reach towards, to come into glancing contact with – the things that lie beyond the horizon of the imagination. The midpoint of the lyric is where the poet might ‘touch the Happy Isles’ (I, 619) and where a ‘touch’ might set ablaze the gloom of the yews (XXXIX) or the eastern horizon (XXX). But here, at the midpoint of the lyric, the poet’s labour towards the horizon (‘word by word, and line by line’) is met with the reciprocal touch of the dead Hallam: for a moment, there is contact between the known and the unknown, the mortal and the immortal, as the intention to ‘touch’ is realized in the warm contact of responsive ‘touch’.⁵¹ This contact is also imagined in terms of light: the poet’s desire to reach towards the horizon and catch the ‘gleam’ or ‘glimpse’ finds in this lyric a reciprocal flash of revelation, the ‘living soul’ vividly present, branded, even, upon the imagination. Human thought momentarily reaches beyond the horizon of human life and knowledge and attains the ‘empyrean heights of thought’, touching the realm of divine or eternal knowledge. Eliot recognized the Tennysonian ‘flash’ as a sign for that moment of self-transcendence and otherworldly knowledge: writing to F. C. Happold in 1948, he confessed, ‘I have had a few flashes during my life, though there must be many people whose experience has taken them farther. Tennyson, for instance, knew more about certain types of experience than I do’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 985). For a flash-like moment, the poet is no longer reaching towards revelation or remembering what once was known but gazes into the vivid present of ‘that which is’. This is the dream of Tennyson’s glimpsing poetics: that the labour towards the limit of what might be spoken of or known might not simply gain a fleeting sight of the unimaginable beyond, but that it might come into contact with it – momentarily united with the immortal, momentarily assured of that ‘conviction’ that faith has struggled to sustain, and momentarily intimate with those who have been loved and lost.

But soon the lyric pivots, turning away from the bright vision of its midpoint and, arcing back, finds that this moment of light and knowledge has been ‘cancelled, stricken through’ (II, 413). The lyric’s progress towards the gleaming horizon begins to run backwards. The ‘wordy snares’ that held ‘suggestion’ and which enabled the transformation of a feeling-of-knowing into a deeper but still inarticulate experience of knowledge now return as ‘vague words’ (II, 413). The transformative vision of Hallam is now only a ‘memory’ that ‘speech’ and ‘intellect’ can no longer reach or recover (II, 413). The glimmering morning world that had been the context for this flash of vision now returns with its imagery of ‘knolls’, glimmering ‘white kine’, and ‘trees’ with dark, enclosing arms. The moment of

⁵¹ See Leighton on ‘Touching Forms: Tennyson and Aestheticism’ in *On Form*, pp. 56–73.

vision comes to an end, the imaginative arc towards encounter and illumination and understanding enclosed within its glimmering twilight. And so the poem comes to an end: the twin lights of East and West mix ‘like life and death’ and the glimmering dawn broadens into ‘boundless day’ (II, 414).

* * *

Tennyson insisted that ‘Crossing the Bar’, written during his severe illness of 1888-89, should stand as the final poem in any edition of his verse (*Memoir*, II, 367), a final iteration of the themes and figures that had preoccupied his poetry and a final attempt to imagine the unseen, unutterable, and unknowable things that lie beyond the horizon of life and knowledge. The poem dwells in that characteristically Tennysonian moment, caught in the half-light between sunset and darkness, between life and death, suspended in the replete silence of the tide’s fullness and meditating on the horizon of the sea. But as a final iteration of Tennyson’s glimmering poetics, ‘Crossing the Bar’ presents a curiously misjudged account of the kinds of understanding and experience that his poetry might afford. In this still, pendent moment Tennyson hears (or thinks he hears) ‘one clear call for me!’ (III, 253). This is a ‘call’ onward, towards the horizon which he imagines crossing over, entering into the realms of the immortal and finally encountering the ‘Divine and Unseen’ that lies in this eternal beyond (*Memoir*, II, 367). But this call sounds a false note: when Tennyson’s poetry reaches the limit of life and language only inarticulate words become audible, their meanings felt but not known within the difficult music of verse. The Tennysonian moment is not the place of action but of careful listening: Tennyson’s verse can imagine but cannot guarantee a safe passage into eternity and immortality. And this discrepancy between the vocal affirmations of ‘Crossing the Bar’ and the assurances that verse might actually afford is felt in that final word ‘hope’ (III, 254): this is not faith that trusts where it cannot see, but only the tentative wish that there might be such a thing as eternal life.

‘The Silent Voices’, written on Tennyson’s actual deathbed in 1892, gives a more faithful account of his glimmering poetics, an account that is less hopeful and so truer to the experiences of belief that his verse affords:

When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
Brings the Dreams about my bed,
Call me not so often back,
Silent Voices of the dead,
Toward the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone!
Call me rather, silent voices,
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me
On, and always on!

Like ‘Crossing the Bar’, the poem dwells on the half-lit threshold between life and death. But whereas in the earlier poem Tennyson heard ‘one clear call’, now he hears – or rather imagines hearing – only the ‘Silent Voices’. Hallam Tennyson recalls that the poem was written as Tennyson was ‘suffering from a liver attack, and hearing perpetual ghostly voices’ (*Memoir*, II, 244). The voices in his head speak the strange, hushed language of his verse; palpable within the ‘dumb Hour’ of the lyrical moment, their meanings are inaudible and yet profoundly felt as the mind is attentive to the surrounding hush. The ‘ghostly voices’ seem to call Tennyson ‘back’ but they might also be persuaded to call him ‘forward’. Their meanings remain a silent suggestion held within the musical ‘hush’ of verse. Their silent equivocation keeps the poet in that paradoxical moment that seems to drift towards an end that will never finally be attained – a journey ‘on, and always on’ that looks very much like stasis. It is telling that in this last effort to imagine the strange, melodious meaningfulness of his verse, Tennyson returns once more to that ‘glimmering’ light, that visual analogue for prosodic experiences that are too subtle or too near the limit of language to be easily spoken of. ‘Glimmering’ describes the obscure speech of these ‘silent voices’, the murmuring, muttering sound of inaudible meanings. It describes the journey’s end, the starry knowledge that lies forever out of reach, glimpsed but never apprehended. And it describes the poet’s own progress: he might never make an end, but he might continue to move forward, ‘glimmering up’ and onwards through the realms of verse towards knowledge and immortality, the gray magician catching, perhaps, something of the glimmer as he moves – the sign, the consecration of his labour towards intimacy with his beloved ‘gleam’.

In an apposite ending, ‘Crossing the Bar’ and ‘The Silent Voices’ were both performed as anthems at Tennyson’s funeral, the poet’s own words sung by voices he would never hear, human voices echoing in the silence beyond the grave. These two anthems sounded once more the strange interval between the hope and the achievement of Tennyson’s glimmering poetics: the hope that poetry might grant entry into the gleaming realms of the imagination – into that peculiarly poetic realm of immortality and knowledge – and the subtler but less assured achievement of a poetry that only fleetingly glimpses and faintly hears the unimaginable things that lie in the utter ‘beyond’. And so we are left with the music of verse, those voice-like sounds that indistinctly sing of things we cannot know; a music that affords that peculiarly Tennysonian feeling-of-knowing, assuring us that faith might be ratified and progress made even as the ‘whole truth’ on which such intimations depend remains, forever, just out of sight.

III

HARDY – HAUNTING

Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost;
Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?

(‘After a Journey’, 1914; 349)

‘Hereto’ is the place where ghosts dwell, the place or moment in which spectral presences become visible. It is where one might come in order to ‘view’ a ghost, recovering lost forms of communion as phantasmal or envisioned encounters. It is where one might come to ‘interview’ a ghost, as the earlier draft puts it (349 n.), practising forms of communication that hover on the edge of possibility, speaking across ‘the years’ and listening to unheard voices. And it is the place where one might come to be seduced by spectral presences, led on by the whims of a ‘voiceless ghost’.

This ‘hereto’ is ‘Pentargan Bay’, the Cornish scene of Hardy’s courtship of Emma Gifford (1870-74), that ‘place in the West’ to which Hardy returns in his dreams (‘A Dream or No’; 348) and in the years following Emma’s death: ‘On March 6 [1913] – almost to a day, forty-three years after his first journey to Cornwall – he started for St. Juliet, putting up at Boscastle, and visiting Pentargan Bay and Beeny Cliff, on which he had not once set foot in the long interval’ (*Life*, 361). It is where Hardy imagines returning after his death – ‘If ever ghosts revisit old scenes I am sure mine will haunt S. Juliet’ (*Hardy’s Letters*, 278) – and where he imagines he might find the ghost of the young Emma haunting the streams and woods and cliffs of her early home. This ‘hereto’ holds the memory of the charmed encounter of 1870 that would determine the pattern of his life and become its belated interpretation in the years after Emma’s death: ‘much of my life claims the spot as its key’ (348).

These returns to ‘olden haunts’ (349) – these ‘revisitings’ as Florence (or the ghost-writing Hardy) would call them in the *Life*¹ – are Hardy’s journeys of 1913-14 back to the physical ‘hereto’ of the Cornish landscape (*Life*, 361). But these ‘revisitings’ are also the many poems written by Hardy in the months after Emma’s death: the *Poems of 1912-13* with their ‘coastward bound’ imaginings of the phantom Emma and the haunted places of the west (348), and the collection in which the sequence appears, *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), with its broader themes of haunting, recurrence, memory, and the untimeliness of human thought. Hardy’s ‘hereto’ is also a poetic place, the writer-speaker of ‘After a Journey’ positioning himself within the unfolding elegiac sequence of *Poems of 1912-13*. The composition of additional poems, and the reading and speaking of those already written, become a

¹ For an account of the composition of the *Life* see: Michael Millgate, ‘Thomas Hardy’ and ‘Florence Hardy’, in *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 110-38, 139-74.

means of imaginatively re-entering ‘olden haunts’ (349) and of discovering that the dead might haunt the present, returning upon the poet-reader as ‘lost revisiting manifestations’ (‘In Front of the Landscape’; 304).

This understanding of the elegiac sequence as the place to which one might come to meet with a ‘voiceless ghost’ testifies to the influence of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* on *Poems of 1912-13*.² Hardy associated Tennyson’s poetry with his early courtship of Emma and ‘reading Tennyson in the grounds of the rectory’ (*Life*, 78-79), and subsequently associated *In Memoriam* with the double loss of his friend Horace Henry Moule at Cambridge in 1873 and of Emma herself in 1914.³ But *In Memoriam* also offered Hardy a model in which a poetics concerned with those things on the cusp of perception – fading lights, ‘silent-speaking words’,⁴ the glimpsed visions of sequenced lyrics – could be a means of coming to know ‘what there is flitting here to see’, the spectral presence of a ‘voiceless ghost’ (349). Reading and annotating one of the last lyrics of *In Memoriam*, ‘By night we linger’d on the lawn’, Hardy’s attention is drawn to Tennyson’s description of the inarticulate suggestiveness of poetic language. He marks out those lines that describe how tracing out or tracking down the meanings that haunt the ‘wordy snares’ of language might be a means of recovering the dead as ghostly presence or silent speech: ‘So word by word and line by line, | The dead man touch’d me from the past, | And all at once it seem’d at last | The living soul was flash’d on mine.’⁵

‘Hereto’ positions the poet within the elegiac sequence. More particularly, ‘hereto’ marks the poet’s arrival at the beginning of the poem, the moment in which he submits himself to the conditions of verse and to the particular thematic, linguistic, and prosodic constraints of ‘After a Journey’. To arrive ‘hereto’ is to enter into a peculiarly poetic mode of experience in the hope that the conditions of verse might also be the conditions in which the ‘voiceless ghost’ will become visible – materialising, perhaps, within the world of sensuous things or as an envisioned presence within the mind. In a letter to Caleb Saleeby, Hardy claims that verse – and particularly the experience of writing verse – is conducive to belief in phantasmal, psychic, or psychological phenomena:

Half my time (particularly when I write verse) I believe – in the modern use of the word – not only in things that Bergson does, but in spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, haunted places, &c., &c. But then, I do not believe in these in the old sense of belief any more for that [...]

(*Hardy’s Letters*, 297)

Hardy’s concern is not the possibility of believing in ghosts *per se* but the possibility of assenting to the philosophy of Henri Bergson and his theory of the ‘*élan vital*’ or ‘spiritual force’ (*Hardy’s Letters*,

² See also Helen Small, ‘Hardy’s Tennyson’, in Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry, *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 356-374.

³ See Dennis Taylor, ‘Hardy’s Copy of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*’, *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, 13.1 (1997), 43–63.

⁴ *In Memoriam*; II, 412.

⁵ Taylor, ‘Hardy’s Copy of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*’, p. 59.

300). Saleeby had written to Hardy in 1914 to ask whether he was correct in observing the similarity of his philosophical position in *The Dynasts* (published 1904-08) to that of Bergson in *Creative Evolution* (published 1907; translated 1911). As Hardy thinks through this question, he begins to exchange the abstract ‘things’ of Bergsonian philosophy for the familiar phenomena of his poetry: ‘spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions’. Hardy’s ‘spectres’ become a figure for the kinds of experience, thought, and belief that can only be sustained ‘half [the] time’ and only under certain conditions – conditions which are most fully realized in the processes of writing and reading verse.

In a note of 1886, Hardy imagined ‘rendering as visible essences, spectres, etc., the abstract thoughts of the analytic school’, glossing this idea in a programmatic statement for the future of literature: ‘Abstract realisms to be in the form of Spirits, Spectral figures, etc.’ (*Life*, 177). In the *Life* Hardy claims that this ambition to figure abstract thoughts as ghosts was realized ‘not in the novel, but through the much more appropriate medium of poetry’, primarily in ‘the supernatural framework of *The Dynasts*’ but also in the ‘smaller poems’ (*Life*, 177). Such an allegorical or dramatic sense of thoughts-as-ghosts certainly characterizes *The Dynasts* with its ‘Phantom Intelligences’ that speak as the ‘Spirit of the Years’, the ‘Spirit of the Pities’, the ‘Shade of the Earth’, and so on.⁶ But in the ‘smaller poems’ that constitute the poetry of 1912 onwards – and on which this chapter focuses – these ghostly figures do not communicate their thoughts so readily. Hardy’s phantoms ‘of his own figuring’ (‘The Phantom Horsewoman’; 354) – his ghostly figures for the patterns of his own thought – are ‘voiceless’ or barely audible, heard across vast distances. They are at the edge of visibility, ‘flitting’ and ‘thin’ (349). And their ghostly presence within the sensuous world tends towards transforming the ‘old material realities’ into ‘shadowy accessories’, erasing the distinction between sensuous and imaginative forms of apprehension (*Life*, 177). As such, these elusive ghostly figures for thought are implicated in an exploration of the difficulties of apprehending meaning. They are the means by which Hardy explores not only the kinds of thought that might be sustained in poetry but also the tentative experiences of apprehension and assent that it makes available: experiences of ‘belief’ that haunt the interval between ‘I believe’ and ‘I do not believe’, between the ‘use’ of words and the ‘sense’ of experience, and between ‘modern’ philosophy and the ‘old’ faith.

An account of Hardy’s ‘beliefs’ is beyond the scope of this study, but it is necessary to say a few words about how the development of his theological and philosophical convictions informed and were informed by his writing, first as a novelist and then as a poet. To do so is to recover a sense of what was at stake for Hardy – philosophically, metaphysically, and theologically – in developing a poetry that cultivated tentative experiences of ‘belief’. The most distinctive aspect of Hardy’s thought was his belief in ‘an indifferent or unconscious force at the back of things’ that in his prose he most often called the ‘Unconscious’ or ‘Immanent Will’ (*Life*, 335, 337) but which he found many other names for in *The Dynasts* and the shorter verse; this has led to accusations both of ‘monistic

⁶ Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama*, The New Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 17.

materialism'⁷ and 'magnificent spiritualism'.⁸ This belief in an impersonal 'force' expressed itself in a variety of philosophical sympathies that moved with the currents of contemporary philosophical and scientific thought: 'His view is shown, in fact, to approximate to Spinoza's – and later Einstein's [and, we should add, Bergson's] – that neither Chance nor Purpose governs the universe, but Necessity' (*Life*, 337).⁹

Just as Hardy's theological and philosophical thought constantly found new and more contemporary terms in which to express itself, individual poems kept up-to-date with his thinking, coordinate with the concerns of that year or month. In the *Life*, the observation that the poem, 'New Year's Eve', was published in January 1907 is followed by some 'notes on kindred subjects' from the 'same month', including a dramatic address to the 'Sense-sealed [...] unweeting' God of his poem (278): 'O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify! Till it can, let us magnify good works' (*Life*, 332). And yet (as I will explore in more detail shortly) Hardy's poetry has its origins in the themes, tales, and tones of his novels: a new iteration of the imaginative attitude that was already well-established prior to his career-change of 1897. As such, Hardy's poetic thinking is more often out of step with his distinctly contemporary thinking on religious and philosophical matters: his verse dwells in an imaginative world that has already receded behind an accretion of new and peculiarly modern ideas. Hardy's poetry is thus in striking sympathy with his reflections on Christian architecture: poetry, like the church building, is indispensable because it is a means of sustaining antiquated beliefs, preserving that 'memorial or associative' sense that he thought so necessary in creating a sense of belonging, whether to a local community or, perhaps, to one's own past ('Memories of Church Restoration', 1906; *Public Voice*, 252). Hardy's poetry does not simply cultivate tentative experiences of 'belief' in particular doctrines or philosophies but rather becomes the occasion for a more complex experience of assent – sustaining belief, perhaps, in those things that once seemed permanent but are no more.

The hauntedness of Hardy's poetry has been treated by some of his finest critics. For J. Hillis Miller, Hardy's ghosts are the guardians of the dead, 'expressions of the visionary possession by the brooding poet of all the events and feelings of the past'.¹⁰ For James Richardson, Hardy's ghosts are a sign for the 'past' which – taking the place of a supreme being – 'gives us meaning and identity, its persistence is our persistence, our immortality'.¹¹ And for Dennis Taylor, Hardy's ghosts are a figure for the poet's 'visionary experience' not of the past but of the grotesque and 'pitiful ineffectualness' of

⁷ Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 40. See also: Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 54.

⁸ James Richardson, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Necessity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 120.

⁹ This 'view' was itself subject to change, the chanciness of life coming into particular focus in his novels and verse. 'The more we know of the laws & nature of the Universe', he wrote to Edward Clodd in 1902, 'the more ghastly a business we perceive it all to be – & the non-necessity of it': *Hardy's Letters*, p. 145.

¹⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 245. See 'Literature as Safeguarding of the Dead', pp. 237-70.

¹¹ Richardson, p. 111.

the universe.¹² Tim Armstrong's *Haunted Hardy: Poetry, History, Memory* (2000) is the most extended treatment of Hardy's ghosts, arguing that these hauntings are also hauntologies, ghostly figures for structures of thought and experience. For Armstrong, Hardy's ghosts are a 'biographical and historical phenomenon', a means of figuring in and figuring out in poetry 'the trauma of *becoming-historical* which is central to nineteenth-century conceptions of the human'.¹³ As such, Hardy's ghosts become a sign for the 'pattern of belated recognition' that characterizes the poet's late work – the processes of self-theorization that uncover the hidden patterns of his life and bring him to a new assertion of his identity as a poet.¹⁴

This study builds on this earlier work by suggesting that Hardy's ghosts are also a means of theorizing his own poetry. Ghosts, spectres, phantoms, voices: this is the language of a poetics figured out – both thought through and rendered – in verse. Matthew Campbell has argued that Hardy's 'ghostly rhythms' are a means of striving to bring the dead back to life within the ghostly materiality of verse.¹⁵ This chapter argues that Hardy's revisitings of the haunted 'hereto' of poetry constitute a significantly broader inquiry into the nature of the imaginative experiences that become available under the conditions of verse. When Hardy arrives in the 'hereto' of the poem he comes to 'view a voiceless ghost', but behind this willing participation in the visionary experiences of verse is a more urgent desire – heard only in the draft – to 'interview' this ghost: to listen carefully to the rhythms, patterns, inflections, and meanings of its silent speech and to ask what it knew or might still know about how it came to dwell in these haunted regions of verse.

* * *

In 1897, Hardy began to prepare his first collection of poetry, *Wessex Poems*. Published in 1898, the volume stood as a public 'hereto', a declaration that his years as a professional novelist were over and that he was now committed to pursuing a career as a poet. This turn towards writing poetry was accompanied by an intensified preoccupation with what it might mean to 'view a [...] ghost'. In 1892, Hardy had serialized *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament*; in 1897 he was working on the extensive revisions that would turn it into his final novel, *The Well-Beloved* (1897).¹⁶ The novel is concerned with Pierston's ghostly love-interest – an ideal woman embodied through three generations of women – and with the psychological conditions under which such a fantasy becomes

¹² Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Poetry, 1860-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 106. See pp. 106-108.

¹³ Tim Armstrong, *Haunted Hardy: Poetry, History, Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 1, 2.

¹⁴ Armstrong, pp. 28, 43.

¹⁵ Matthew Campbell, *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 220. See also: pp. 210-38.

¹⁶ See Patricia Ingham's discussion of the relative claims of *Jude the Obscure* and *The Well-Beloved* as Hardy's final novel: Thomas Hardy, *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved; & The Well-Beloved*, ed. by Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 1997), p. xvii.

possible. Hardy claimed that the story exemplified ‘the theory of the transmigration of the ideal beloved one, who only exists in the lover, from material woman to material woman’ (*Life*, 286), an idea he described as ‘Platonic’ but which owed much to his reading of Shelley’s *Epipsychedion*: ‘In many mortal forms I rashly sought | The shadow of that idol of my thought’.¹⁷

But while Hardy presents *The Well-Beloved* as exemplifying a ‘theory’, it is also an attempt to understand his own creative temperament as a ‘Visionary Artist’ (*Hardy’s Letters*, 114). The ‘Visionary Artist’, possessed by ghostly figures, tends towards the poetic. Pierston chases the ‘Platonic Idea’ of his beloved because he (like Hardy) is drawn by ‘its charm and its poetry’ (*Life*, 286). Bergson’s ‘ingenious fancy’ of the *élan vital* suggests that he is an ‘imaginative & poetical writer’ rather than ‘a reasoner’ (*Hardy’s Letters*, 297). And in 1897, Hardy himself – drawn to those ‘things’, figures, and fantasies that hover between the sensuous and the imaginative, haunted by the memory of Shelley’s shadow-chasing poet, and working on revisions that would take *The Well-Beloved* as ‘close to natural life and as near to poetry’ as possible – prepared to abandon his career as a professional novelist for the uncertain life of a poet.¹⁸ The one who sees ghosts, it seems, might turn into – or turn out to be – a poet. This association between being ‘cut out by nature for a ghost-seer’ (as Hardy would describe himself to William Archer)¹⁹ and writing verse also suggests that the poet’s professional existence is a kind of ghostly after-life, a career that is secondary and supplemental, a belated means of theorising one’s own life and creativity.²⁰ As Hardy put it in an 1897 addition to *The Well-Beloved*, speaking in the person of Pierston months before his public declaration of his arrival at the ‘hereto’ of poetry: ‘His life seemed no longer a professional man’s experience, but a ghost-story.’²¹

‘The Souls of the Slain’ (1899) is Hardy’s earliest poetic inquiry into the sensuous and psychological conditions that prove generative for the ‘Visionary Artist’, into the relation between seeing ‘sprites’ or ‘souls’ (93) and submitting to distinctively poetic modes of experience. The poem begins with a description of the conditions under which the speaker enters into vision:

The thick lids of Night closed upon me
Alone at the Bill
Of the Isle by the Race –
Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face –
And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
To brood and be still.

¹⁷ See Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved*, p. 339 n.

¹⁸ See Holly Corfield Carr’s account of *The Well-Beloved* as a novel that ‘occupies a space of overlap, positioned both at the turn of the century and the turn of Hardy’s writing career, while simultaneously reproducing these turning points within the material of the work, as Hardy’s prose folds lines of poetry into both epigraph and the body of the novel’: ‘Composite Ghosts: A “Doubleeyed” Reading of Thomas Hardy’s “The Well-Beloved”’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.1 (2017), 1–20 (p. 2).

¹⁹ William Archer, *Real Conversations* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), p. 37.

²⁰ See Armstrong, pp. 27–28. In practice, Hardy had been writing verse all of his adult life – a significant proportion of the poems published after 1898 had, in fact, been written in the 1860s: Hynes, p. 132.

²¹ Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved*, p. 325.

(92)

Nightfall comes like the heavy fall of a ‘thick’ lid over the world – as Hardy put it in an earlier draft (92 n.) – leaving the speaker ‘alone’ and the sensuous world beyond apprehension. But the fall of ‘the thick lids of Night’ also suggests a retreat into the mind, the eyes closing in order to better engage the imagination. The resulting lack of sensation is felt not as absence but as stifled presence. ‘Darkness and silence’ are not vacancies but presences that become palpable. ‘Night’ and ‘spirit’ close on the speaker with claustrophobic closeness: ‘Night closed upon me [...] the spirit was on me’. These conditions compel the speaker ‘to brood and be still’. This is the language of quelling and constraint: there are still faint indications that participation in the sensuous world is possible (the speaker might settle active thinking into mere brooding and movement into stillness) but these traces are reduced to their most minimal expression. The fall of lids and darkness transforms the sensuous world into a distant place of potential experiences, remembered but unrealized within the mind compelled by the imagination.

In the second stanza, the speaker’s sense of withheld sensation is carried over into the physical world:

No wind fanned the flats of the ocean,
 Or promontory sides,
 Or the ooze by the strand,
 Or the bent-bearded slope of the land,
 Whose base took its rest amid everlong motion
 Of criss-crossing tides.

(92)

Here, in the natural world, there are no mutually animating interactions and barely any movement. There is ‘no wind’ to ruffle ‘the flats of the ocean’ or to disturb the cliffs, hilltops, or tidal waters. Individual parts of the scene move indiscernibly. The ‘ooze’ by the strand carries the memory of the slow creep of water but it is grammatically stilled, a noun rather than a verb. ‘Whose base took its rest’ suggests the slow, geological movement of the Jurassic coast, but the primary meaning is of settled immovability. Even the ceaseless ‘criss-crossing’ of the tides succumbs to the tedium of the scene, wearied into the illusion of stillness through its ‘everlong motion’.

Under these conditions of stillness and silence, the possibilities for sensuous experience are remembered only in the secondary and supplemental meanings of words, in the ghostly inflections of language. While the poem emphasizes the absence of a wind that would make the ocean articulate, fanning it into motion and sound, the sound-patterns of these stanzas begin to articulate a quietly recurrent sound. The poem states that ‘no wind fanned the flats of the ocean’ but the phrasing generates a gentle sequence of alternation between /n/ and /f/ sounds: *no wind fanned* the flats of the ocean. This is a sound pattern of subtle agitation, of fricative and stop, of fanning and responsive ebb –

the ocean becoming articulate in the poem's patterns of language. Similarly, the repeated 'Or' draws attention to the quiet repetition and gradual expansion of the lines. Sounds repeat and multiply, extending the length of each subsequent line (the /s/ sounds of the second line multiplied in the third, the plosives of the third – /b/, /d/ – in the fourth); the almost imperceptible motion of the tidal waters is discovered in the poem's patterns of recurrence and flooding expansion. The distant, inapprehensible sensations of the sensuous world register as an acoustic trace within the linguistic structures of the poem.

This sonic trace becomes increasingly audible in the third stanza:

Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing
 A whirr, as of wings
 Waved by mighty-vanned flies,
 Or by night-moths of measureless size,
 And in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing
 Of corporal things.

(93)

The 'criss-crossing tides' of the second stanza become the sonic motive for the third, lending their sibilance to 'Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing'. Having established this sonic continuity, the third stanza begins to rework a phrase from the second: 'No wind fanned the flats of the ocean'. The sounds of 'wind fanned' are echoed in 'waved by mighty-vanned', the fricative agitation of the second stanza remembered in the cross-stanza rhyme of 'fanned' / 'vanned'. As the sonic trace becomes increasingly audible, it begins to conjure things into being that were absent from the sensuous world but which become present in the secondary inflections of language. 'Waved' slips in an idea of the waves that were absent from the second stanza, which were not fanned into being by the wind. 'Vanned' plays on the dialectical association between words for winds and wings ('fan' and its southern variant, 'van') to transform the still, un-'fanned' air into the giant, wind-stirring wings of 'mighty-vanned flies'. Out of the acoustic patterns of the poem's linguistic structure comes a vision of a 'dim-discerned train', a vision of things that hover between the sensuous and the imaginative, 'sprites without mould, | Frameless souls none might touch or might hold' (93). Poetic language remembers the embodied experiences of apprehension – of touching and holding – that the sensuous world offered. The memory persists as a trace within the structures of poetic language and, as the poem is read aloud, this trace becomes audible, recalling these lost experiences of sensuous encounter. But the world that is recalled has become spectral, existing only in the immaterials of language and memory, a ghostly landscape filled with strange and phantasmal presences.

The poem's narrative provides a model for how this acoustic trace brings spectral presences into being. The acoustic trace in the poem's language resembles the 'nearing' sound of a 'whirr', an increasingly audible pattern of sound that becomes the context for ghostly vision. This 'whirr' is a linguistic memory of the sensuous possibilities of the world but it is also the sound of the poem itself

and its patterned language. Repetitions and rhymes extend the moment of verbalization into reverberation, a ‘whirr’ that is the resonance of poetic language, carrying the sound of its words but without their meaning. This ‘whirr’ is the means by which the experience of listening to the poem’s language is converted into the experience of phantasmal vision, the ‘whirr’ of rhyme and repetition transformed into the ‘whirr’ of ghostly wings. The ‘whirr’ is a superlative instance of what Jane Thomas describes as Hardy’s exemplification of ‘the artist/poet’s aesthetic desire to push beyond the recognisable limits of language in order to “bring forth a new presence in the world,” and in the word’²² – to discover at the resonant limit of language the possibilities for visionary encounter. And Hardy’s ‘whirr’ carries a memory of Tennyson’s poetics of inarticulate sound or what Angela Leighton describes as Tennyson’s ‘hum’. This ‘sweetly continuous, ultra-linguistic hum’ is a distinctly poetic sound that resonates ‘outside articulate speech’ and to which the poet turns his ear, listening in to the murmur of his own verse and hearing its haunting story of unreal and envisioned presences, a story ‘which may be at cross purposes with the plot, but which runs its own melodious course [...] telling of sadness and strangeness beyond any mere local interest.’²³ (Elizabeth K. Helsingher, with an ear for the spoken-ness of Hardy and Browning’s poetry, offers an alternative description for this linguistic noise: ‘the less- and more-than-linguistic sounds [that] come instead from speech’.)²⁴ For Hardy and Tennyson (and, as we shall see, for Eliot), to be a ‘Visionary Artist’ is to conjure the paranormal through the paralinguistic, to envision ghosts by listening to the inarticulate sounds of poetry’s own language.

Hardy’s fascination with sounds that are the dying reverberation of language, presence, or speech is matched by his fascination with lights and lit forms that are the glow of a dying or departed life. The ghostly ‘whirr’ of Hardy’s poetry that hovers between audibility and inaudibility conjures correspondingly ghostly visions that glimmer between visibility and invisibility. Armstrong has noted that the word ‘sheen’ is ‘often used to mark the traces of a life in his work’, as when Emma ‘shed her life’s sheen’ at St. Juliot (*‘A Dream or No’*; 348).²⁵ But this vivid light, the radiance of the woman, is only a memory in Hardy’s poetry. As the woman finds a ghostly afterlife, so this lost light persists as a spectral afterglow – the time of brilliant light, ‘when you were all aglow’, giving way to the faint luminosity of the ‘thin ghost’, her ‘rose-flush coming and going’ (*‘After a Journey’*; 349). Faint resonance conjures faint radiance.

I use the word ‘conjures’ advisedly. This aural-visual exchange that occurs at the limit of the sensible world is something of a mystery. Each poet attempts to evade or resolve this mystery by postulating or approximating a distant, unapprehended state in which the aural and the visual are identical: Tennyson imagines a conjugal union between ‘Gleam’ and ‘Melody’; Hardy and Eliot

²² Jane Thomas, *Thomas Hardy and Desire: Conceptions of the Self* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 166.

²³ Angela Leighton, ‘Tennyson’s Hum’, *The Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 9.4 (2010), 315–29 (321, 315, 324).

²⁴ Elizabeth K. Helsingher, *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 30.

²⁵ Armstrong, p. 136.

imagine the ghostly voice as emanating from a ghostly body; and Hopkins finds in the markedness of the page an emblem or icon for the meeting of the marked voice and the marked world. But these are only half-answers, poetic dreams that seek to explain the strange experiences that occur as we begin to listen to the resonant language of verse. And because these intimacies between the visual and the aural can only be hypothesized, the mystery remains and remains anxiety-inducing: these poets are invested in the possibility – a possibility which seems barely sustainable – that attention to that which is on the cusp of audibility is the precondition for apprehensions of the unimaginable or what we might call (remembering the aural-visual exchange) ‘poetic vision’.

This language of fading lights, of sheens and glows, is accompanied by a darker language of things that have no light or life of their own but which ‘loom’, becoming darkly visible against a darker background. Like the fading lights, these looming things are associated with ghostly afterlives. In ‘Self-Unconscious’, it is an undying, threatening presence: ‘A thing was there | That loomed with immortal mien’ (332). In ‘At the Word “Farewell”’, the radiant light of domestic life is shadowed by the darker presences of a ghostly future: ‘The candles alight in the room | For my parting meal | Made all things withoutdoors loom | Strange, ghostly, unreal’ (432). And in a letter to Florence Henniker, Hardy suggests that ‘The Looming of the Real’ would be an ‘almost better’ title for their co-authored story, ‘The Spectre of the Real’ (*Hardy’s Letters*, 90). The things that ‘loom’ in Hardy’s poetry are not familiar ghosts but the ghost-like things of Fate and ‘the Real’. The looming presence of these newly disclosed realities makes them appear like the fading ghosts of Hardy’s poetic vision, but they tell only of the enclosures of the modern, materialist world to which the poet belongs and in which there cannot be any hope of ghostly encounter. Such a fascination with dull and fading lights suggests Hardy’s debt to Tennyson and his ‘Gleam’. More particularly, it suggests his inheritance from Wordsworth (via Tennyson) of a poetics in which the experience of poetic knowledge is conceived in terms of ‘the light that never was’. Hardy uses Wordsworth’s phrase unchanged to commend William Barnes’ poetry: ‘The incidents [...] are those of everyday cottage life, tinged throughout with that “light that never was”, which the emotional art of the lyricist can project upon the commonest things’ (‘The Rev. William Barnes, B. D.’, 1886; *Public Voice*, 70). But for Hardy himself, the ‘poet’s dream’ of unreal light is darker and less decided. It is a dream of a light that was and is no more, a dream of luminous presences that are not quite believed in, and a dream of things as yet unknown, that ‘loom’ darkly, signalling only the belatedness and unreality of the ‘poet’s dream’.

To listen to these sounds that resonate at the very edge of audibility, and so to enter into the uncertain light of poetic dream, requires a difficult kind of listening. Hardy describes this delicate ‘whirr’ as a sound that is ‘in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing | Of corporal things’ (93). He gently teases his corporal reader. Are these sounds ‘well-nigh beyond hearing’ – well out of reach, too subtle for us to hear, beyond apprehension? Or are they nearly – but not quite – beyond us, at the very limit of human hearing? His poetics become spectral, calling into question the reality of the delicate kinds of listening on which these ghostly encounters seem to depend. Perhaps the ghostly

'whirr' of poetry is nothing more than an auditory hallucination, a fantasy of the evocative power of poetic language. But at the moment at which Hardy nearly gives an account of his poetics – of the kinds of listening that it requires and the experiences of apprehension that it offers – he turns our attention back to the quiet equivocations of poetic language, to the ghostly possibilities that dwell in that place 'well-nigh beyond hearing'. In a move that is characteristic of his poetry and prose, he avoids an explicit formulation of his poetics, choosing instead to sustain the brooding moment of poetry and 'belief', continuing to listen to the reverberations of its inarticulate language and waiting on the phantoms that it breeds. His poetics rests on words that gesture towards that which is unknown but which close down the possibility of further investigation, the 'somehow' and 'elsewhere' ('Beeny Cliff'; 351) that sustain this difficult – perhaps illusory – poetry of ghostly vision: 'But I thought once more: "Nay, I'll not unvision | A shape which, somehow, there may be"' ('The Shadow on the Stone'; 530).²⁶

* * *

As the spirits disappear from view the poet-speaker becomes aware once more of the faint sound of the sea that was the prompt for what Dennis Taylor called the poem's 'ocean-led brooding':²⁷ 'the whirr of their wayfaring thinned | And surceased on the sky, and but left in the gloaming | Sea-mutterings and me' (96). Some of the spirits have rushed 'homeward' (93); others have 'plunged, | to the fathomless regions' of the ocean (95). The 'whirr' of their wings emerged from the faint sound of the ocean and now that 'whirr' returns to the ocean, submerged beneath the waves, inarticulate sound heard only in the darkly evocative 'sea-mutterings'. Throughout Hardy's poetry the sea is imagined as the place of submerged song, a repository for the inarticulate sounds that might conjure memories, visions, or phantoms. In 'The Convergence of the Twain', the submerged wreck of the Titanic produces a distinctly lyrical music that is at once the sound of the sea and the memory of 'human vanity': 'Steel chambers, late the pyres | Of her salamandrine fires, | Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres' (306). In 'The Voice of Things', the unceasing sound of the sea speaks silently of things lost, forgotten, or forfeited by the aged poet: 'Once I heard the waves huzza at Lammas-tide; | But they supplicate now – like a congregation there | Who murmur the Confession – I outside, | Prayer denied' (428). In 'When I set out for Lyonesse', the 'rime was on the spray', the seas tossing up mist and foam but also, perhaps, speaking mutely of the 'rhyme' that would later be written (312). And in 'A Singer Asleep', the sound of the sea is explicitly the memory of poetic speech, the two great poets of the sea – Sappho buried beneath the waves and Swinburne buried above them – meeting as

²⁶ See Yui Kajita's account of the delicate kinds of listening that occur in and are demanded by Hardy's poetry: "'Something Tapped': Haunting Echoes in Thomas Hardy and Walter de la Mare' (forthcoming).

²⁷ Taylor, *Hardy's Poetry, 1860-1928*, p. 12.

‘phantom’ and ‘lone shine’ at the edge of the ‘heaving hydrosphere’, called up by the trace of Sapphic-Swinburnean song heard in the ‘dull subterrene reverberations’ of the waves (324).

The connection between the sound of the sea and the phantoms of memory is partly the result of Hardy’s association of the Cornish cliffs with his courtship of Emma: she is the ‘ghost-girl-rider’ who ‘In his rapt thought | On that shagged and shaly | Atlantic spot, | And as when first eyed | Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide’ (*The Phantom Horsewoman*; 354). To arrive at the ‘hereto’ of Pentargan Bay is to hear the song of the woman accompanied by the sound of the sea: to arrive ‘hereto’ in the ‘rapt thought’ of the poem is to discover that the rhyming music of song and sea has become the rhyming music of the poem itself (‘sings to the swing of the tide’), a poetic reverberation that recalls the phantom song and the phantom singer. To put it in Eliot’s terms, the song of the poem arises out of the crossed voices of song and sea, a third voice that has a peculiarly insubstantial existence, waiting to be embodied in an audible reading. To speak in the ‘hereto’ of poetry might mean that we also have to begin to ‘hear’ in a new way, turning an ear to the sound of our own speaking and to its secondary and supplemental sounds in order to hear the ghostly voices and lost songs that it calls up.²⁸

But the sound of the sea is also a figure for patterns of poetic influence, for the ghostly voices of other poets that abide in the ‘hereto’ of the present poem. In ‘A Singer Asleep’, the submerged song of Sappho calls the ghost of Swinburne down to the water’s brim, the spectral ‘music-mother’ speaking to confirm that the ‘burning line’ of her poetry now lies hidden in the song of Swinburne (324). ‘A Singer Asleep’, however, was written after Swinburne’s death in 1909. The poem closes as the sun sets on his cliff-top grave in Bonchurch: ‘I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines | Upon the capes and chines’ (325). A ‘chine’ is ‘a deep and narrow ravine cut [...] by a stream descending steeply into the sea’ – and, particularly, into the seas surrounding the Isle of Wight and the Hampshire coast (*OED*, ‘chine’, 2.b.). These ‘chines’ are the means by which the waters run from Swinburne’s cliff-top grave and join the ‘everlasting strains’ of the sea – that repository of remembered song, that inarticulate music that sounds at the edge of the poem and haunts the ear of Hardy, the living poet who (in this somewhat anomalous fantasy of poetic influence) positions himself as Swinburne’s heir.

This figure for poetic influence as submarine song is one that Hardy seems to have inherited from Tennyson who imagined Shelley’s influence on his early poetry in terms of his drowning at sea. In Tennyson’s ‘A Lament’, Shelley’s drowned body is imagined as the submarine cause of the inarticulate sounds which only the poet can hear and which become the prompt for his poem: ‘There was a ringing in my ears, | And both my eyes gushed out with tears. | Surely all pleasant things had gone before, | Lowburied fathomdeep beneath with thee, NO MORE!’ (I, 175). (Behind this there is fainter memory of ‘Lycidas’ and the friend unfortunately drowned.) But the image of the poet

²⁸ This pun (here / hear) is also important to Shelley’s poetics of invocation and creativity, as Ross Wilson has observed: ‘Poetry as Reanimation in Shelley’, in *The Meaning of ‘Life’ in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Ross Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 125–45 (p. 142).

submerged beneath the waves, suspended between life and death, is one that seems to have originated with Shelley himself or, more precisely, in Edward Trelawny's account of Shelley's eerily prophetic fascination with drowning and its meanings in the months before he died²⁹. Hardy would have read in his copy of Trelawny's *Records of Shelley*²⁹ the poet's partially vocalized desire to join the uttering, crying dead and drowned who had become part of the innocent, inarticulate music of the sensuous world:

The river flows by like Time, and all the sounds of Nature harmonize; they soothe: it is only the human animal that is discordant with Nature and that disturbs me. [...] The Pythian priestesses uttered their oracles from below – now they are muttered from above. Listen to the solemn music in the pine-tops – don't you hear the mournful murmurings of the sea? Sometimes they rave and roar, shriek and howl, like a rabble of priests. In a tempest, when a ship sinks, they catch the despairing wailing of wretched men.³⁰

Hardy would also have been able to read Trelawny's bathetic account of that moment in which Shelley's desire to be immersed in the oceanic music of the world – in which all is in harmony and discordant man is no more – was nearly realized as the poet, unable to swim, 'lay stretched out on the bottom [of the Arno] like a conger eel, not making the least effort or struggle to save himself'.³¹

The utterings, mutterings, and mournful murmurings heard by Shelley become the song of the drowned poet, a 'fathomdeep' music heard once more by the young Tennyson and which becomes the persistent, inarticulate sound of his own verse, a 'murmur' such as the 'drowning seaman hears' ('The Lover's Tale'; I, 353). These muttering, murmuring waters become the 'sea-mutterings' of Hardy's poem, a peripheral, inarticulate music that is the accompaniment to – the enabling context of – his own verse-thinking. But, listening more closely, this submarine murmur reveals itself to be something stranger again: the sound of the drowning seaman's own pulse, booming indistinctly, like a sound from another world, in his own ears³² – the uncanny sound, perhaps, of our own cerebral life, our thoughts returning to us as otherworldly and inarticulate music.

For Tennyson, the 'murmur' of poetry (the sound of its language and the music of its imagined worlds) is associated with the drowning conditions of experience, the moments caught between life and death, recall and oblivion. The murmuring sea represents the limit of human language and experience, the horizon to which one might travel to meet with the ghosts of the drowned. This is the 'verge' where one might see the ghostly ship 'that brings our friends up from the underworld' ('Tears, Idle Tears'; II, 233) or the 'marge' where one might linger, weeping for the lost friend and saying, 'Comes he thus, my friend?' (*In Memoriam XII*; II, 331). And the edge of the sea is the place where one might practise difficult forms of communion with the dead and drowned – inarticulate

²⁹ Michael Millgate, 'Thomas Hardy's Library at Max Gate: Catalogue of an Attempted Reconstruction', p. 260 <<http://hardy.library.utoronto.ca>> [accessed 5 January 2018].

³⁰ Edward John Trelawny, *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 68–69.

³¹ Trelawny, p. 61.

³² See Leighton's account of the submarine 'murmur' of 'The Lover's Tale' in *Tennyson's Hum*, pp. 324–25.

invocations and near-impossible listening. Hardy is alert to the evocative power of Tennyson's murmuring sea. Reading *In Memoriam* XCII, he marks out the moment in which Tennyson imagines reversing the process of invocation, returning the speaking phantom to the remembering, murmuring sounds from which it came: 'I might but say, I hear a wind | Of memory murmuring the past'.³³ And Hardy himself repeatedly goes down to the edge of the murmuring Cornish sea to practise the difficult forms of invocation, attention, and communion that are only possible when one is speaking the language of poetry: 'Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost'.

But Tennyson's attentiveness to the sea-song murmur of poetry risks following the lethal trajectory of Shelley's fascination with underwater song. As Angela Leighton observes, Tennyson's murmuring sea might also be the place where the poet himself is drowned, overwhelmed by the inarticulate evocations of his own song, becoming a listener submerged beneath the waves:

[...] these drowning places, of cavern and stream, of rumours, moans and melodies, are places where 'the inward ear' has learned to listen. Tennyson takes the ear as far as it might go, and now hints that it might drown in a sea of noise.³⁴

Hardy's 'sea-mutterings' speak darkly of Tennyson's murmuring seas. They recall in their own music the Tennysonian fantasy of the reanimating, recalling power of poetic language and, behind it, the Shelleyan fantasy that poetry might not only reanimate but might also redeem, restoring the poet to the innocent harmony of the world. But these 'sea-mutterings' also warn of the dangerous seductiveness of these fantasies. Hardy is ever aware that to listen too immersively is to risk becoming a phantom, overwhelmed by fluent waters and dwelling permanently in the haunted 'hereto' of poetry. In these spectral regions of the imagination, where secondary and supplemental lives are sustained by the returns of poetic language, the 'thin ghost' and the frail, bereft poet cannot be easily distinguished (349). To be a poet might be to discover that one is already a ghost. In the *Life*, Hardy wrote of the melancholy pleasure of imagining oneself as a ghost among ghosts when paying a morning call: 'dying [...] before one is out of the flesh [...] putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their views of surrounding things [...] regarding the scene as if I were a spectre not solid enough to influence my environment' (*Life*, 209-10). In 'Wessex Heights', the lingering, returning poet is the only one who dwells in those places 'where men have never cared to haunt', becoming a ghost even as he seeks to lay to rest the ghosts of his own past (320). On his deathbed in 1928, in the 'middle of one night', Hardy asked 'his wife to read aloud to him "The Listeners", by Walter de la Mare' (*Life*, 445). To contemplate his own death was to imagine becoming a phantom listener but it was also to realize the persistent ghostliness of his life as a poet: even before death he had joined that 'host of phantom listeners [...] listening in the quiet of the moonlight | To that voice from the world of men'.³⁵

³³ Taylor, 'Hardy's Copy of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', p. 59.

³⁴ Leighton, p. 325.

³⁵ *The Collected Poems of Walter de La Mare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 84.

* * *

But in 1914, as he was working on *Satires of Circumstance*, Hardy was not yet willing to submit to his fate as a phantom listener or drowned poet. The collection begins with ‘In Front of the Landscape’, a careful setting-out of his intention to set out into these muttering, musical waters of poetry. His design is to enter the ‘hereto’ of poetry in order to ‘interview’ its voiceless ghost but without drowning in its surging, sounding waters: ‘Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions, | Dolorous and dear, | Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters | Stretching around’ (303).

Of all the poems in *Satires of Circumstance*, ‘Under the Waterfall’ attends most closely to this underwater music, exploring how memories might come to persist in its recurrent sounds and how this might offer tentative experiences of apprehension. The poem tells the story of a lovers’ picnic and the loss of a chalice beneath a waterfall, or, as Emma described it, ‘a sparkling little brook [...] in which we once lost a tiny picnic-tumbler’.³⁶ The poem stands as a companion-piece to a small sketch made by Hardy at Boscastle Harbour on 19 August 1870, entitled ‘searching for the glass’.³⁷ The sketch focuses on Emma, her white dress glowing against the dark, cross-hatched vegetation as she reaches into a small rivulet at the side of the page. But the poem, written over forty years later, focuses not on the woman but the waterfall – the peripheral, inarticulate sound through which the incident returns as memory.

The ‘picnic-tumbler’, transformed into a ‘chalice’ (317), is the focus for this investigation into the experience of remembering. It is a symbol for the sacraments of everyday life, for its forms of perfect participation: the sensuous immediacy of the brilliant summer’s day, the undisturbed communion of the lovers. It is a symbol for immediate experience and complete knowledge. The chalice in this poem, however, is out of reach, lodged deep in the plunge-pool and ‘past recall’ of searching hands (336). It is veiled and inaccessible beneath the water, a hidden symbol for forms of sensuous participation and loving communion that are no more. But ‘past recall’ also puns on the vocabulary of memory. It begins to suggest that the chalice has slipped beyond imaginative recall, irrecoverable in thought or recovered only as the ghost of a memory, something known of but irretrievably lost. This pun presents a puzzle. If the chalice is ‘past recall’ of both hands and mind, why is it repeatedly recalled in the poem, spoken of as something that might be known or as something that might be knowable or known of? These shadowy senses of ‘recall’ raise the possibility that the knowing of the hands might be different to the knowing of the mind and that the things we might encounter in the sensuous world might be different to those things spoken about or heard of under the conditions of verse.

³⁶ Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 71.

³⁷ Alan Hurst, *Hardy: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: Kaye & Ward, 1980), p. 166.

Hardy offers two explanations for how the speaker is able to ‘recall’ the presence of the chalice beneath the waterfall. The first explanation, given at the very beginning of the poem, is that the sweet sting of cold water against the arms recalls the memory of a similar sensation: ‘Whenever I plunge my arm, like this, | In a basin of water, I never miss | The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day’ (335). ‘Like this’ is the moment in which bodily sensation is reproduced, the rhyming conditions of experience reproducing that ‘sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day’, making present once more the memory that ‘I never miss’. The second explanation, implicit throughout the poem, is that the sound of the waterfall endlessly and inarticulately speaks of the chalice beneath its waters. ‘Like this’ is the imaginative sensation or linguistic gesture of the poetic ‘hereto’, an experience that resembles sensuous encounter but which is afforded not by the material world but by the more uncertain materiality of language. Such a poetic ‘this’ conjures something equally ghostly, a memory that ‘I never miss’ yet which can only be recalled by invoking the very sign of its lostness (‘this / miss’), a ‘sense’ of a ‘fugitive day’ that is as hesitant as it is fleeting. Hardy is offering two models for how we might come to know something, two definitions of what it is to apprehend. The first takes the literal sense of apprehension and suggests that the experience of knowing originates in the hands – in the sting of cold water against the arm. The second takes the more figurative sense of apprehension and suggests that the chalice becomes knowable through what Hardy (taking notes on J. A. Symonds’ *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*) would gloss as ‘an act of mental intuition whereby the nature of the object is imaginatively grasped’.³⁸ Hands once reached into the world of palpable objects; now, ears – and, by extension, the mind – listen in to a world of faint sounds. The sweet, sharp apprehension of the hands has faded into memory and is recalled only as the ghost of sensation in the distant, dim apprehensions of the listening mind.

The waterfall’s sound is altered at the moment in which the chalice slips out of the hands and into the plunge-pool:

By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above

(337)

The shape of the chalice beneath the waterfall adds a new inflection to the complex noise of the cataract. But the waterfall’s sound is more properly thought of as song, as aesthetically organized sound: it is a ‘rhyme of love’ that is ‘sung’. For those who know how to listen, or for those who remember the moment in which this new inflection was added, the song of the waterfall endlessly testifies to the chalice beneath its waters. While the chalice held in the hand was a symbol for perfect participation and complete knowledge, the chalice heard in the waterfall is only known of, maintained

³⁸ Thomas Hardy, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Lennart A. Björk, 2 vols (London: Basingstoke, 1985), II, 35.

in a condition of endless knowableness. It is not ‘past recall’ because it is still within hearing, still faintly present within the sensuous world; and yet it is not available to ‘recall’ because it is deep underwater, beyond the grasp of the hands. The drowned chalice is sustained between recall and oblivion, hovering as a nearly inaudible, nearly unknowable presence at the edge of the sensuous world and in the waterfall’s recurrent music. Attention to the waterfall’s song discovers a new and more tentative grammar of apprehension, ‘to know’ giving way to the phantom forms of potential, imaginary, or ghostly knowledge (the knowable, the known of) that haunt the song of the waterfall. Indeed, as Dennis Taylor has observed, Hardy’s vocabulary for ‘knowing’ is itself made up of the archaic and obsolete – *weeting, wareful, forethinking, unknowing* – words that find a ghostly afterlife in Hardy’s poetry of phantasmal knowledge.³⁹

The *sostenuto* music of the waterfall, its song of endless knowableness, accounts for some of the oddity of ‘Under the Waterfall’. As a recalling of a past incident it is curiously repetitive. The simple story of the search for the chalice is told four times: at the beginning of the poem (‘Whenever I plunge my arm, like this | In a basin of water’), as a question in the second stanza (‘And why does plunging your arm in a bowl | Full of spring water bring throbs to your soul?’), again in the third stanza (‘we stooped and plumbèd the little abyss with long bared arms’), and finally and emphatically a few lines later (‘And, as said, if I thrust my arm below | Cold water’) (336). The poem does not unfold a narrative but evolves a recurrent music out of a few key words. These words give the themes of the narrative (bare arms, cold water, plunging, basin, bowl) but are repeated and dispersed to become the musical themes of Hardy’s lyrical poem. The sound of this poem is very much like the song of the waterfall: a recurrent music endlessly inflected by the chalice submerged within it.

The connection between the song of the waterfall and the sound of the poem is established in the first dimeter quatrain:

Hence the only prime
And real love-rhyme
That I know by heart,
And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl of a little valley fall

(335-36)

‘Love-rhyme’ could pass as ‘love-song’ were it not for the fact that ‘love-rhyme’ *rhymes* (‘prime’ / ‘love-rhyme’). ‘Love-rhyme’ describes both the waterfall and the poem, their shared structures of resonant, recurrent, rhyming sound. ‘Prime’, rhyming with ‘rhyme’, quietly reinforces the importance of rhyming structures to both waterfall and poem. It can mean perfectly achieved or adequate, but it also holds an older, musical meaning of the ‘lower of two notes forming an interval’ or as ‘the interval

³⁹ Dennis Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 274–75.

between the same two notes formed by an unison' (*OED*, 'prime', *n.2*, 4.b., 4.d.): 'prime', like 'rhyme', describes a sonic resonance that creates identity between sounds.

'Rhyme', understood as resonance, as single sounds diffused into the complex music of song or poem, describes the chalice-inflected music of the waterfall but also the distinctive patterns of 'Under the Waterfall'. For example, the deeply inset dimeter quatrain is initially associated with the sustained significance of the waterfall's song: 'Hence the only prime | And real love-rhyme | That I know by heart, | And that leaves no smart'. But this association is then broken apart. The vocabulary is reused in the long lines of the second verse-paragraph ('And why gives this the only prime | Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?') while the dimeter quatrain stanza-form is reused a few lines later to continue the narrative rather than describe the waterfall's significance ('Is a drinking glass: | For, down that pass | My lover and I | Walked under a sky') (336). The initial coincidence between stanza-form and content is opened up, its parts diffused into the recurrent sounds of the poem's language and prosody. These diffuse rhymes can also be heard in the background couplet-music of the poem. Paired lines hold together in a distinctive moment of rhyming sound: 'The purl of a runlet that never ceases | In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces' (336). But these rhymes are then situated within longer phrases of modulated sound, dispersing the distinctive sound of the rhyming pair into an extended sequence of vowel modulation: 'ceases' / 'peaces' / 'speaks' / 'peaks'; 'green' / 'scene' / 'wine' / 'dine'; 'lours' / 'ours' / 'love' / 'above'. Individual sounds become diffuse, recurring as the slightest inflection of voice, just as the chalice continually adds the subtlest alteration to the waterfall's song. The 'love-rhyme' of waterfall and poem thus constitute a kind of rhyme with each other, their shared song of recurrent sound producing a resonance in which the music of the waterfall is inseparable from the music of Hardy's lyric; 'Under the Waterfall' becomes the 'prime' expression of the waterfall's deeper song. To listen inwards to the murmur of poetic language might also be to hear the murmured song of those things that are 'past recall' – those past moments of communion in which the world was fully apprehended by hands and mind, but which now only abide as memories, like hidden chalices, within the linguistic imagination.

There is, as Dennis Taylor suggests, one further rhyme for 'Under the Waterfall'.⁴⁰ Its stanzaic patterning remembers the visual and metrical form of Henry Vaughan's poem, 'The Water-fall' (1655) which Hardy would have read in his copy of *Sacred Songs and Pious Ejaculations* (1897).⁴¹ Both poems use deeply inset dimeter quatrains to suggest the appearance and perhaps the sound of the narrow passages of the waterfall. Both poems also exploit the conceit that the poem's sense might seem to flow down the page, constrained and inflected by the width of its passage, in imitation of the waterfall – and also, in Hardy's case, in imitation of 'The Water-fall'. But Vaughan's influence runs deeper. His waterfall – both falling waters and fluent words – sings of the real knowledge submerged beneath its musical waters: 'What sublime truths, and wholesome themes, | Lodge in thy mystical,

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology*, p. 254.

⁴¹ Millgate, 'Max Gate Library', p. 264.

deep streams'.⁴² In Vaughan, Hardy discovers an earlier model of underwater music, a model concerned not with poetic inheritance, with the influence of one voice upon another, but with the particular meanings that might lodge within the music of an individual lyric. The difference is that for Vaughan this current traces out the course of a life and the 'sublime truths' that will, in due course, be revealed by the Spirit. For Hardy this underwater music is sustained in a moment of endless recurrence, offering a peculiarly modern experience of apprehension that is neither 'wholesome' nor 'sublime' but which hovers at the edge of knowledge and audibility – at the very limit of those things that the 'auditory imagination' (to use Eliot's phrase)⁴³ might be able to apprehend – offering up only spectral encounters and half-present memories.

* * *

Hardy's haunted water music is a self-theorising song. Its music of words and waters recalls the ghosts that lie beneath – 'frameless souls', drowned poets, lost chalices – spectral figures whose inarticulate voices are heard deep within the recurrence of song, murmuring of the 'things' that the listener might only dream of knowing. Hardy's ghosts are, I suggest, primarily theoretical figures, a means of imagining in verse the fleeting experiences of knowing, sensing, and communicating that become available when one begins to listen in the 'hereto' of poetry. His ghosts are important as a figure for imaginative experience even when their status as 'real' phenomena is in question.

Responding to William Archer's inquiry in 1901 as to whether he had ever seen a ghost, Hardy claimed that he had never seen even 'the ghost of a ghost' and found 'no evidence' to support a belief in the supernatural.⁴⁴ But despite this disbelief in the reality of ghosts, Hardy's reply is remarkable for its repeated assertion that he would like to see one: 'I seriously assure you [...] when I was a younger man, I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost – an authentic, indubitable spectre.'⁴⁵ For Hardy, the sight of a real ghost would not confirm the existence of the supernatural but only the tendencies of his own poetic imagination: 'My nerves vibrate very readily; people say I am almost morbidly imaginative; my will to believe is perfect. If ever ghost wanted to manifest himself, I am the very man he should apply to.'⁴⁶ Even the appearance of these authentic, indubitable spectres as 'real' phenomena within the sensuous world seems dependent on the poet's imagination, his willingness to believe in the phantasmal things of poetry extending to a willingness to believe in 'real' ghosts. Indeed, when Florence Hardy was finally able to report that Hardy had seen a

⁴² Henry Vaughan, *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alan Rudrum (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 307.

⁴³ 'Matthew Arnold'; *Use of Poetry*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Archer, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Archer, p. 37.

⁴⁶ Archer, p. 37.

ghost on Christmas Eve 1919 – of his grandfather in Stinsford Churchyard – her letter hints that this encounter was merely the ‘real’ manifestation of the ‘puzzled phantom’ of Hardy’s poem of Christmas Eve 1899, ‘A Christmas Ghost-Story’ (90): ‘the ghost went into the church, &, being full of curiosity, T. followed, to see who this strange man in 18th century dress might be – & found – no-one. That is quite true – a real Christmas ghost-story.’⁴⁷

It is Hardy’s disbelief in ghosts as ‘real’ phenomena that makes them such a useful figure for theorizing his own poetry. In his own words, the phantasmal offered Hardy ‘another domain for the imagination to expatriate in’.⁴⁸ Friedrich Kittler has suggested that the ‘immaterials’ of nineteenth-century scientific thought enabled the dismantling of the human soul until it became ‘merely the nervous system, and the nervous system [...] so many facilitations’ with the result that the ‘soul’ took on inverted commas, a scientific untruth.⁴⁹ Samuel Hynes in his landmark study of Hardy’s poetry famously claimed that it was Hardy’s ‘rationalism that maimed his imagination and divided his mind’, with the result that ‘the spiritual, the intuitive, the mystical’ were excluded from his category of ‘knowledge’.⁵⁰ But Kittler’s narrative continues: expelled from the body and subject to disbelief, the disembodied ‘soul’ – the ghost – can be recovered as sign or metaphor. This metaphorization of the ‘soul’ enabled the late Victorian imagination to conceive of the disembodied spirit as a real presence, as a representation of the entirety of being, and so opened the door to ghostly presences and mysterious voices.⁵¹ The ghostly sign might return as a ghost, hovering on the edge of the material world or, more properly, hovering on the edge of the materialist’s world. The unbelieving poet might begin to recuperate these previously excluded experiences of ‘knowing’ as something that he might now ‘believe’ in, if only ‘in the modern use of the word’. Hence Hardy’s dismissal of accusations of ‘scepticism, materialism’: ⁵² the category of things he believes in extends, if only ever so slightly, beyond the dimensions of the material world. This recovered ghost of the late Victorian imagination resembles the ‘Fancy’ that is not quite ‘Belief’ described by Hardy in his published letter to Arnaldo Cervesato:

I do not think that there will be any permanent revival of the old transcendental ideals, but that there may gradually be developed an Idealism of Fancy; that is an idealism in which Fancy is no longer tricked out and made to masquerade as Belief, but is frankly and honestly accepted as an imaginative solace in the lack of any substantial solace to be found in life.

(‘[On Modern Idealism]’, 1901; *Public Voice*, 210)

⁴⁷ Letter to Sydney Cockerell, [27 December 1919]; *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, ed. by Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 165.

⁴⁸ Archer, p. 45.

⁴⁹ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 29.

⁵⁰ Hynes, p. 40.

⁵¹ John M. Picker argues for an alternative narrative of demystification in which the scientific and technological developments of the Victorian period transformed the ‘mysteries of hearing and sound’ – sublime *experiences* – into an ‘object or thing, a sonic commodity’: *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵² Archer, p. 37.

This unbelieved ‘Fancy’ that dwells not in the transcendental realm but in the regions at the edge of the material world, in the haunted places of the imagination, is the ghost that also haunts Hardy’s poetry. This ‘phantom of his own figuring’ returns unsought, a theoretical figure that becomes ‘warm, real, and keen’, transformed into the ghost of Emma who flaunts herself before the crazed and careworn poet (*‘The Phantom Horsewoman’*; 353-54). The one who writes ghost-ridden poetry might turn into a ‘ghost-seer’.

This seems to be what happened on Christmas Eve 1919, the ghost of the poem returning as the ghost of Hardy’s grandfather. But it is also a potential outcome whenever Hardy uses the ghost as a means of theorising his own experience. It is striking how often the phrase ‘as’ or ‘like a ghost’ recurs to describe the activity of the poet in the lyrical moment: ‘I wandered to a crude coast | Like a ghost’ (*‘The Discovery’*; 332), ‘I rose and went as a ghost goes’ (*‘Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune’*; 431), ‘I ought to have gone as a ghost’ (*‘He Revisits His First School’*; 511). ‘As’, and, to a lesser extent, ‘like’, belong to Hardy’s vocabulary of ‘somehow’ and ‘elsewhere’, his lexicon of closed mysteries. ‘As’, meaning *in the manner of*, is the grammar of a spectral poetics in which the phantom stands as a sign for the experiences of revisiting that occur in the ‘hereto’ of poetry. But ‘as’, meaning *in the person of*, traces out the ghost of a ghost, a spectre that materializes as the poet travels into the places of the poetic imagination. More than that, ‘as’ suggests that if the poet dwells in these regions of haunted song for too long and listens too intently to the ghostly inflections of its music, he might discover that he himself has become one of its haunters: ‘I travel as a phantom now’ (458).

But there are spirits of stone as well as of water. The ghost of Hardy’s ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ (1906) is an ‘aesthetic phantom’ that dwells in the stonework of Gothic architecture:

It is easy to show that the essence and soul of an architectural monument does not lie in the particular blocks of stone or timber that compose it, but in the mere forms to which those materials have been shaped. [...] Those limestones or sandstones have passed into its form; yet it is an idea independent of them – an aesthetic phantom without solidity, which might just as suitably have chosen millions of other stones from the quarry whereon to display its beauties.

(Public Voice, 250)

This ‘aesthetic phantom’ – like the ghosts of Hardy’s poetry – is a figure on the cusp of apprehension. It is a theoretical figure, a linguistic trope, for imagining the sensuous conditions of architecture, but it is also a spectral figure, a flitting presence that is called into being as Hardy broods upon the aesthetic conditions of the ‘architectural monument’. Moreover, this spectral figure of the imagination is itself caught between the material and the immaterial, between that which can be touched and that which can only be known of. It is immaterial, an ‘aesthetic phantom without solidity’ – an ‘idea’ or ‘soul’ that has slipped the confines of the material body – and yet it tends towards the material, seeking out a stone in which to ‘display its beauties’. It is like the ‘gaunt and difficult’ personality that permeated ‘The Shreckhorn’ and which seemed both the spirit of the mountain and that of Leslie Stephen who

made the first ascent in 1861, leading Hardy to speculate whether the ghost of the mountaineer would seek to pass into its stony form after his death ('[Recollections of Leslie Stephen]', 1906; *Public Voice*, 264-65): 'Will he, in old love, hitherward escape, | And the eternal essence of his mind | Enter this silent adamantine shape, | And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows [...]?' (322). In a letter of 1899, Hardy finds a sequence of metaphors for these 'creatures of the imagination' that dwell frailly and uncertainly at the very edge of material existence and animate life, discovered within the sensuous world but almost beyond apprehension: 'winds, mists, gossamer-webs, and fallen autumn leaves' ('A Christmas Ghost Story', 1899; *Public Voice*, 158). Hardy's 'aesthetic phantom' is not, as Tom Paulin suggested, 'the uniqueness of Shape [...] platonic and impersonal' which 'transcends oblivion'.⁵³ Rather, Hardy's phantom of the stones, like all his ghosts, dwells in that strange, frail borderland of the aesthetic, in the haunted places of the West, hovering between sensuous apprehension and imaginative experience – a ghost that hovers on the margins of the known world, pining for lost intimacies soul and body, knowledge and experience, lover and beloved.

It is through the 'mere forms' of the art-object, rather than the materials that compose it, that the 'aesthetic phantom' becomes knowable. In one sense, the 'aesthetic phantom' is identical to the 'insubstantial superficies' of art – the patterns, designs, or structures that make the material object a work of art. As such, the 'aesthetic phantom' is something that abides in the material form, its embodied 'soul'. But as Hardy continues to contemplate the art-object, the 'aesthetic phantom' begins to emerge from the stonework, no longer mere form but an imagined spectre, conjured through the 'insubstantial superficies' of aesthetic design but 'independent' of them. The 'mere forms' of carved stone or composed lyric might belatedly reveal themselves to be the dwelling-place of phantoms or even the means of calling them into existence. It is this sense of the hauntedness of poetic form – of the evocative power of the paralinguistic elements of verse – that is the persistent feature of Hardy's poetics.

* * *

Poems of 1912-13 constitutes Hardy's most extended investigation into the ways in which these phantoms lodge within the paralinguistic structures of verse. 'The Haunter', speaking in the voice of the 'voiceless ghost', begins by asking how the poet might come to know that it continually haunts his imaginative wanderings:

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
How shall I let him know
That whither his fancy sets him wandering

⁵³ Paulin, pp. 118, 117.

I, too, alertly go? –
 Hover and hover a few feet from him
 Just as I used to do,
 But cannot answer the words he lifts me –
 Only listen thereto!

(345)

This ghost is a phantom listener, without voice and without ‘answer’. And yet, here, in the poem, its silent speech begins to mutely call on our attention, the poem’s words tracing out the patterns of a voice on the page and in the mind – a textual voice that calls on the reader to call it into being as an imagined voice or as ventriloquized speech. But even in these dream-like places of the imagination or poetic speech this ghost is still unheard:

Yes, I companion him to places
 Only dreamers know,
 Where the shy hares print long paces,
 Where the night rooks go;
 Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
 Close as his shade can do,
 Always lacking the power to call to him,
 Near as I reach thereto!

(345-46)

The creatures that haunt these dream-like regions only come ‘near’ to being known. The shy hares that once, in the draft, showed ‘their faces’ now only ‘print long paces’, unseen presences known only by their text-like tracks. The ‘haunter’, though ‘close’, now, to the poet, still lacks the ‘power to call to him’, still speaking the silent language of poetry, its exclamations held as ‘unvoiced possibilities’ within the printed text.⁵⁴ Indeed, the ‘hereto’ of the poem only approximates those unattainable conditions of the hypothesized ‘thereto’ in which the poet and the phantom might enter into real, intimate communication.

‘The Voice’ follows ‘The Haunter’ and obliquely answers it. Now, the poet himself speaks, imagining or faintly hearing the ‘call’ of his ‘haunter’, the ‘woman much missed’:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
 Saying that now you are not as you were
 When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
 But as at first, when our day was fair.

(346)

‘How’ is acutely expressive, ‘how you call to me’ articulating the exquisite pain of hearing the dead woman’s call and the enchanting, bewitching power of her speech. But ‘how’ also belongs to Hardy’s

⁵⁴ Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 231.

lexicon of closed mysteries, a word that evasively marks out the unknown process whereby the dead woman speaks once more. The answer to this ‘how’ – this question as to how a voiceless ghost might become audible – is quietly suggested by that first, repeated phrase: ‘how you call to me, call to me’. This heard ‘call’ remembers the unheard, impossible ‘call’ of the ‘haunter’. But her silent voice – and, with it, the awareness of her ghostly presence – is not carried as sound in these dream-places of the imagination but in the prints and traces of the poem. ‘Call to me, call to me’ and its later rhyme, ‘all to me’, remembers the rhyming patterns of ‘The Haunter’: ‘all to him’ / ‘call to him’. Even as the woman and the poet speak of the impossibility of communion between the living and the dead, the poem itself listens in to the other poem, hearing the ghostly cadences of the phantom’s silent speech, and answering its rhymes.

In *Poems of 1912-13* poetry listens to itself. Armstrong has observed some of the intertextual traces and presences of the collection but what has not yet been adequately appreciated is how Hardy’s practice of intertextual listening is the means by which these presences are conjured out of its internal resonances.⁵⁵ Poems echo and repeat seemingly incidental inflections, listening for the ghosts that lodge in poetic language and calling them into being. ‘After a Journey’ listens to ‘A Dream or No’, discovering in its affirmation of imaginative ‘fancy’ a way of travelling into the real, haunted places of the West: ‘Yes. I have had dreams of that place in the West’ (348) / ‘Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last’ (349). But ‘Where the picnic was’ listens in to this exchange and, many poems later, returns to these Western cliffs only to find that the phantom woman with the ‘gray eyes’ (349) is no longer there: ‘Yes, I am here [...] – But two have wandered far | From this grassy rise | Into urban roar | Where no picnics are, | And one – has shut her eyes | For evermore’ (357-58). To arrive ‘hereto’ might not be to listen out for the call of a voiceless ghost but to listen in for the ghost of a sound that haunts the patterns of poetic speech. To arrive ‘hereto’ is not to listen to the speech of the living but to listen quietly to the ‘roomy silence’ that is the poem or elegiac sequence, the dwelling-place of the ‘Souls of old’ (‘His Visitor’; 347).

The patterns of the woman’s voice and the poem’s language momentarily coincide in ‘how you call to me, call to me’. The woman’s voice is only known of, invoked by the poet’s speech, its tone, meaning, and duration unheard. As the line unfolds, rhyme and repetition extend the ‘call’ into ‘call to me, call to me’, a textual pattern of recurrent sound that is coterminous with the woman’s unheard call: the woman’s inaudible voice is traced out in the patterns of language. ‘Call to me, call to me’ is a collocational figure, formed through the coincidence of smaller, structural patterns of rhyme, metre, and verbal repetition within it. This collocational figure is poetry at its most poetic. Hopkins, in his essay on ‘Poetic Diction’ (1865), sought to describe the ‘structure of verse’ – the paralinguistic patterns that give language the ‘character of poetry’ – in terms of ‘marked parallelism’ (*Essays*, 120). This distinctly poetic patterning consists ‘in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of syllables, in metre, the recurrence of a certain sequence of rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance, and in rhyme’

⁵⁵ Armstrong, pp. 144–48.

(*Essays*, 120). In Hardy's collocational patterning, these individual sequences (of rhyme, metre, verbal repetition) repeatedly coincide. The words that fall within this collocational patterning are heard under the most fully realized conditions of poetic language: it is speech at its most poetic. In the opening line of 'The Voice', this moment of superlative poetic speech is also the moment at which the woman's call is heard. The collocational pattern that is the distinctive accent of poetry's own language is now also the sound of the ghostly woman's imagined voice.

After this moment of coincidence the poetic figure for voice and the imagined sound of the woman's voice begin to diverge, recurring independently of each other but carrying a memory of their initial association. The second and third lines shift the focus from the sound of the woman's call to a gloss of its content: 'saying that now you are not as you were | When you had changed from the one who was all to me.' The collocational figure returns, the patterns of syntax, metre, and rhyme that composed 'how you call to me, call to me' now combining to give 'the one who was all to me'. As this pattern recurs it remembers its initial association with the woman's voice. Her call is no longer the subject of attention and the lines only work to explicate her meaning, but as this structural pattern repeats it endlessly recalls the 'call' with which it was once intimate. But what exactly does this pattern represent? Is it the sound of her voice, or the meaning of her call, or the memory of its sound, or the real presence of the woman, or the hallucination of her presence – or does the pattern represent none of these, merely telling a story about its own re-callings? And how does this representation work? Is the connection between pattern and 'voice' a fantasy of the evocative power of poetic language, or does it come from the linguistic structures through which we encounter the world, or does it lie in an ontological reality in which poetic pattern really is voice – or is it none of these, merely the result of a coincidence which impressed on pattern an arbitrary association with voice?

This poetic figure for ghostly voice becomes the context of Hardy's cautious investigation into the phantoms that lodge in the patterns of poetic language:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

(346)

After establishing the association between the woman's voice and the collocational figure in the opening lines, Hardy's attention to patterns of sound gains a new analytic acuity in the second stanza. In the first stanza, the collocational figure occurs at the end of the first and third lines. In the second stanza, the collocational figure occurs in the same positions, but now the poet begins to demand that the pattern prove its ability to represent, invoke, or actually be the woman's voice. 'Can it be you that I hear?' at first sounds like a statement of simple disbelief – is that really Emma's voice? But, remembering the questions the first stanza raised, it soon sounds like a more cunning question – can it be *you* that I hear? (Or am I hearing something else? An auditory hallucination, perhaps, or merely the sound of the poem's own language?) And so an experiment begins: 'Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then.' 'Let me view you, then' is the third recurrence of the collocational phrase and draws the four-times repeated 'you' of the preceding lines into the emphatic rhyme, 'view you'. Hardy suggests that if this pattern is indeed a trace of her voice she should appear through its repetition: the 'you' that is audible within this printed 'call' should become visible as a real presence; the long prints of the absent creature should lead to the moonlit face of the shy hare. 'Yes, as I knew you then' once again reproduces the collocational figure and its increasingly audible internal call to 'you' to become present. It makes further time for the woman to appear, perpetuating the pattern in which she once seemed present. But now this sense of her presence is fading, felt only as a memory of once intimate knowledge, a remembered pronoun. Her voice is now only traceable within the patterns of the poem's own language.

The experiment of the second stanza is inconclusive, bringing no definite answer to the question of how the woman might be present within the text but only a gentle waning of the conviction that she is. The third stanza attempts a new experiment with this pattern: 'Or is it only the breeze [...]?' 'You' is exchanged for 'it', calling and hearing for the meaningless sound of the 'breeze'. This is an experiment in proving the converse, that this collocational pattern can represent missed-ness as much as presence. Its recurrence now only conjures 'listlessness' and 'wan wistlessness'. The woman is emphatically absent or, as the earlier drafts put it, 'consigned to existlessness' (346 n.). The collocational pattern now only carries a memory of the dead woman or perhaps nothing at all: for Hardy, the two are identical, the sound of his own poetic speech only reminding him that the woman is forever absent, her voice 'heard no more again far or near'.

'The Voice' is an investigation into the mystery of 'how' the patterns of poetic language might conjure ghostly voices and spectral presences. But all Hardy discovers is that to inquire too closely and listen too intently is to find that the delicate coincidences that sustained this fantasy have

begun to diverge and that the ghosts that once haunted these meeting-places of poetry and the imagination have dissolved into thin air. Dennis Taylor has observed this gradual dissolution of coincidences in Hardy's poetry: 'the patterns language assumes are momentary, they grow out of a one time configuration of mind and reality, they grow old, they bind us for a while in their obsolescing frames'.⁵⁶ 'Mind and reality' are configured in those moments in which the patterns of the linguistic imagination fleetingly coincide with the patterns of real experience, taking their meaning – their life and voice – from these encounters. But after this 'one time configuration' language and reality begin to diverge. Poetry, cut off from the source of its life and voice, becomes an obsolescing language, endlessly recalling the moment of configuration but as a silent voice remembering a past encounter with the dead: the mutual impression of 'mind and reality' survives as inscription, in the silent language of carved stone or printed text.⁵⁷ The inscription remains a 'frame' for experience but one which can only take its meaning from the past moment of living speech, conjuring only memories, ghosts, and lost intimacies. Eric Griffiths has similarly suggested that Hardy's poems should be read as dead texts, as silent voices that only speak of the forfeited and the forgone: 'the printed voice of his poetry allows for the kind of contemplated wistfulness with regard to the implausibility of what he still desires [...] and which defeats his powers of expression.'⁵⁸ For Taylor, Griffiths, and Hardy himself in these stanzas from 'The Voice', to read his poetry is to find oneself compelled to practice an outdated 'belief' in immaterial realities, bound to patterns of thought that have lost the assurance of their 'old sense' and are a self-consciously 'modern' accommodation to the fading constraints of tradition, habit, and form. To read poetry might be to be compelled to believe in the ghost that one knows does not exist or, in a less absolute way, in that which one once believed in through force of habit rather than conviction.

But 'The Voice' does not end with silence, 'existlessness', or disbelief. Taylor's and Griffiths' fine accounts of Hardy's poetics fail to take into account his willingness to turn his back on systematic inquiry and to preserve instead the delicate, mysterious conditions of poetic belief. The final stanza of 'The Voice' leaves these questions about language, sound, and ghostly presence unanswered:

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves about me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

The anxious investigations of the first three stanzas are abandoned for a hopeless and lonely perseverance, the poet moving on in a new, leaner stanza-form. He is still listening but his attention is now turned not to the woman's call or the colloquial figure but to the bleak autumnal sounds around him. The wind – the sound of nothingness, emphatically not the woman's voice – extends its

⁵⁶ Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody: With a Metrical Appendix of Hardy's Stanza Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 121.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Hardy's Metres*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ Griffiths, p. 220.

long vowels into a long line, breaking the pattern of the previous stanzas and asserting the ongoingness (a favourite tense for Hardy) of its own unknowing sound. And yet the ‘leaves around me falling’ quietly re-sound the woman’s ‘call’ as an internal rhyme, eventually falling into an unforeseen, unasked-for recurrence of the collocational figure and an invocation of ‘the woman calling’. Previously, the association between the patterns of language and the presence of the woman had seemed dependent on the poet or reader who remembered their initial configuration and continued the work of recalling these associated meanings. But now, after attention has lapsed and belief has faltered, the poem remembers the phantoms that lodged in its patterns of language, calling up the ghostly woman through the recurrence of its inarticulate, peripheral sounds. The ‘fallen autumn leaves’ speak once more of that creature of the imagination, that ghost, who returns to find a fragile existence on the edges of sensuous experience.

* * *

Hardy’s sense of the hauntedness of poetic form, of the ghosts that might inhabit its acoustic structures, owes much to his reading of Shelley. He was the drowned poet who gave Hardy his murmuring, remembering waters as a model for lyrical knowing. But he also gave Hardy a model in which poetry’s recalling, reanimating power was figured as an encounter with a returning ghost. The appeal of Shelley for Hardy was partly the ghostliness of his life and work. It was also the appeal of Walter de la Mare. His name conveyed, for Hardy, ‘those delightful sensations of moonlight & forests & haunted houses which I myself seem to have visited’ – so much so, that writing to de la Mare for the first time on 1 November 1918, Hardy claimed an earlier, eerie meeting in the spectral regions of his verse: ‘Believe me, yours truly, (& not a stranger, though we have never met except at the ghostly places aforesaid)’ (*Hardy’s Letters*, 328).

Asked by the *Fortnightly Review* in 1887 which ‘one passage in all poetry [...] seems finest’, Hardy’s response was telling: ‘I have very often felt (but not always) that one of the most beautiful of English lyrics is Shelley’s “Lament”, “O world, O life, O time”’ (*Fine Passages in Verse and Prose*; *Public Voice*, 72). His choice was that lyric which had also haunted Tennyson and which took its power from its eerie foreknowledge of the nearness of the poet’s death – a poem that superlatively instanced Hardy’s later claim that the experience of writing verse is peculiarly conducive to ‘intuitions, omens, dreams’. As late as 1924, Hardy was still happily engrossed in the ‘spectral details’ of Mary Shelley’s account of the events of July 1822 (*Hardy’s Letters*, 391) in which haunting intuitions of misfortune were accompanied by ‘visions’ and ghostly apparitions in the days before Shelley’s death.⁵⁹ But Hardy was also concerned with Shelley’s ghostly afterlife. As Mark Ford has

⁵⁹ Letter to Maria Gisborne, 15 August 1822. *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), I, 244–51 (p. 245).

observed, Hardy framed the ‘narrative of his moment of literary election’ in terms of that ‘faint penumbra’ of people and places associated with Shelley.⁶⁰ From 1892 he ‘heartily’ associated himself with the Shelley Memorial Fund (*Public Voice*, 120) and later with the Keats-Shelley Memorial Fund (*Public Voice*, 254-55). More whimsically, Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker in 1897 to say that he had been thinking who he would like ‘to meet in the Elysian fields’ and had decided that he ‘would choose Shelley, not only for his unearthly, weird, wild appearance & genius, but for his genuineness’. For Hardy, the otherworldly aura of Shelley’s life seemed to guarantee his return as a ghost of the underworld. J. M. Barrie, speaking shortly after Hardy’s death, speculated that his ‘first words in the Elysian fields were, “Which is Shelley?”’⁶¹

But perhaps the most profound influence Shelley had on Hardy’s poetry of the returning ghost was his sense that there are phantoms that dwell in the material world and which might suddenly return as weird and untimely experiences of knowing. This was most eloquently articulated by Shelley in his letter to Peacock, 20 April 1818, which Hardy would have been able to read in his copy of *Essays and Letters; by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Ernest Rhys (1886):⁶²

The curse of this life is, that whatever is once known, can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot, which before you inhabit it, is as indifferent to you as any other spot upon earth, and when, persuaded by some necessity, you think to leave it, you leave it not; it clings to you – and with memories of things, which, in your experience of them, gave no such promise, revenges your desertion.⁶³

At first, ‘whatever is known’ seems to be the mind’s knowledge of its material environs, the ‘spot’ in which it dwells. But gradually what is ‘known’ slips from the mind to the form it inhabits: the knowledge of the mind becomes the incipient knowing of the material structures of experience. This knowing originates in the moment in which mind and reality coincide but persists in the patterns of material form. When the mind becomes inattentive and leaves the spot, the silent, secret knowing of the world is suddenly disclosed, its knowledge clinging to the unthinking mind and its ‘memories’ returning unbidden. ‘Whatever is known’ by the mind is the result of embodied thought, the intersection of the mind with the sensuous structures of experience. This moment of encounter confers on the material world a trace of memory that sustains knowledge between recall and oblivion. ‘Whatever is known’ continues to be knowable because the sensuous world continues to bear a memory of the meeting, preserving in the divergence of mind and matter a memory of what it means for the two to intersect – a disembodied memory of embodied thought, a ghostly knowing that is the memory of an intimate, human knowledge. This is what happens in ‘Under the Waterfall’ and ‘The Voice’, the structural patterns of verse picking up and perpetuating an inflection, a memory of a past

⁶⁰ Thomas Hardy: *Half a Londoner* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 29–32.

⁶¹ ‘Barrie Reviews Hardy’, *The Literary Digest* (February 2, 1929), 22, quoted in Phyllis Bartlett, ‘Hardy’s Shelley’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 4 (1955), 15–29 (p. 15).

⁶² Millgate, ‘Max Gate Library’, p. 234.

⁶³ *Essays and Letters; by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: Walter Scott, 1887), pp. 218–19.

encounter, and summoning a ghost out of these structural patterns. And this is why Hardy so often leaves his own inquiries into the poetics of song and voice unanswered: to turn away is to allow the perpetual knowing of material form to become reanimate as a returning ghost.

This ghost comes to revenge the ‘desertion’ of the poet. To recover the experience of knowledge under the conditions of verse comes with a penalty and a heavy sense of rebuke. Knowledge was once the intimate meeting of the mind and the sensuous world, the experience of embodied thought. But, as Shelley observed, ‘time flows on’ and the sensuous world changes, the patterns that endlessly recall the moment of knowledge can only speak of a reality that is no more: ‘what has been seems yet to be, but barren and stripped of life’.⁶⁴ And so when the mind and this changed world meet at the end of the poem there is no perfect communion but only the unease of a new distance between things that were once intimate. The memory is recovered but without the intimacy of mind and sensuous world, lover and beloved, that made it desirable. The returning ghost of the poem – who is both the lost beloved and the revisiting poet – speaks only of the belatedness of the poet’s love and the untimeliness of poetic knowledge:

Some of [the *Poems of 1912-13*] I rather shrink from printing – those I wrote just after Emma died, when I looked back at her as she had originally been, & when I felt miserable lest I had not treated her considerably in her latter life. However I shall publish them as the only amends I can make, if it were so.

(Letter to Florence Henniker, 17 July 1914; *Hardy's Letters*, 284)

* * *

In ‘The Shadow on the Stone’ (begun 1913; finished 1916), Hardy returns once more to the shadowy ‘hereto’ of poetry, the haunted place where the inarticulate articulations of poetic language might call into being a ‘voiceless ghost’. As Hardy walks through the shady garden, his attention is arrested by the ‘Druid stone | That broods in the garden white and lone’, recognising in it, perhaps, a ghostly emblem for the poet and the kinds of recurrent, remembering thought that become compelling in the shadow-lands of verse.

I went by the Druid stone
 That broods in the garden white and lone,
 And I stopped and looked at the shifting shadows
 That at some moments fall thereon
 From the tree hard by with a rhythmic swing,
 And they shaped in my imagining

⁶⁴ Rhys, p. 219.

To the shade that a well-known head and shoulders
Threw there when she was gardening.

I thought her behind my back,
Yea, her I long had learned to lack,
And I said: 'I am sure you are standing behind me,
Though how do you get into this old track?'
And there was no sound but the fall of a leaf
As a sad response; and to keep down grief
I would not turn my head to discover
That there was nothing in my belief.

Yet I wanted to look and see
That nobody stood at the back of me;
But I thought once more: 'Nay, I'll not unvision
A shape which, somehow, there may be.'
So I went on softly from the glade,
And left her behind me throwing her shade,
As she were indeed an apparition –
My head unturned lest my dream should fade.

(530)

The 'shifting shadows' falling across the face of the Druid stone begin to compel a distinctly poetic form of attention to the sounds of the poem's own language. In the opening line, paired words measure and ponder the movement from one idea to the next, the transitions marked and delayed: 'white and lone', 'stopped and looked'. The fall of the 'shifting shadows' in the third line disrupts this slow and simple syntax. The 'lone' speaker and stone are overtaken by the sudden, uncertain numerousness of 'shifting shadows'; simple expression is put into rushed animation and once clearly demarcated relations now register only as grammatical traces within the compression. The iambs and stressed monosyllables of the opening lines shift into syncopation: the long-vowelled rhymes of 'stone' and 'lone' give way to crammed syllables and thick fricatives. These 'shifting shadows' articulate a transition towards a linguistic texture that requires closer attention. And they mark out a moment of coincidence between reality and poetic language: intransitively shifting (if such a thing is possible) across the surface of the stone, they also register their own 'shifting' of the poem's structural patterns.

The 'shifting shadows' of this brooding place begin to draw attention to the ways in which the patterns of language and the reality it describes might meet in the moment of the poem's prosodic performance. These shadows become the origin of a collocational figure. The disruptive sounds and syncopation of the 'shifting shadows' are picked up and repeated in 'rhythmic swing'. This repeated collocation of structural patterns becomes associated with the fall of shadows in the garden. The 'shifting shadows' describe a real phenomenon but are also a moment in which poetry listens to itself, self-reflexively commenting on the shifts within the poem's own language. Similarly, this 'rhythmic swing' describes both the curving fall of the shadows across the stone and the poem's simultaneous

shift into a syncopated rhythm: the ‘rhythmic swing’ is indeed a rhythmic swing. As this collocational figure recurs on the page it remembers the fall of light and shade across the white face of the Druid stone. The shadows that fall in the ‘hereto’ of poetry belong both to the sensuous world of the poet’s garden and to the linguistic patterns of his poem.

After this moment of coincidence in ‘rhythmic swing’, the shadows and the collocational figure begin to diverge. The ‘rhythmic swing’ is heard twice more in ‘imagining’ and ‘gardening’. But now the ‘rhythmic swing’ of the poem’s language no longer quite coincides with the fall of shade in the garden. The shadows are remembered at the beginning of each line (‘To the shade [...] Threw there’) but the ‘rhythmic swing’ is heard at the end of each line. The linguistic pattern shifts away from the noun that held shadows and words together in a moment of simultaneous movement (‘swing’), and finds instead an activity of its own, a noun that is like a verb (‘my imagining’) and then a true verb (‘gardening’). And ‘imagining’ and ‘gardening’ do not refer to the shadows themselves but only their associated phenomena, to the moment of imaginative recall and to the incidental details of the memory itself.

Hardy’s poetry lies in this divergence between the moment of sensuous encounter and the printed patterns of the poem. As shadows and language begin to slip apart, ‘imagining’ becomes possible, the beginnings of ghostly vision. The ‘shadows’ that once held mind and reality together in a moment of perfect coincidence persist as the shadow of a shadow, as a ‘shade’. This ‘shade’ is a linguistic memory of the real shadows. And this linguistic memory begins to conjure the shade of the dead, first as memory (‘the shade that a well-known head and shoulders | Threw there’), and then as an imagined or – slightly differently – as a dreamt vision (‘And left her behind me throwing her shade’). It is this non-coincidence between the poet’s knowledge and the persistent knowing of the poem’s ‘mere forms’ of language that constitutes Hardy’s haunted poetics. The poet discovers a trace of knowledge that lies outside his own mind, traced out in the patterns of his linguistic creation. This disembodied textual knowledge is uncanny and untimely, returning upon the poet with a weird sense of lost familiarity, as an avenging ghost or in the eerie foreknowledge of ‘intuitions, omens, dreams’. It is this non-coincidence that makes the ‘hereto’ of Hardy’s poetry a haunted place.

Hardy’s haunted poetry is an instance of what Eric Griffiths claims characterizes ‘much of the greatest English poetry of the nineteenth century’: the ‘phantom understanding’ that dwells ‘in the hollow of an ambiguity between the contexts of writing and speech’, in the divergence between the prosodic potential of the printed text and the constraints of an audible reading.⁶⁵ The difference, however, is that for Hardy the acts of writing and speaking are both imagined as irretrievably past, the printed text an inscribed record of lost encounters and the spoken poem but an inarticulate echo of a lost voice – ‘a voice still so hollow | That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago’ (‘After a Journey’; 349). To read Hardy’s poetry is to be reminded that its painful non-coincidence has its

⁶⁵ Griffiths, p. 24.

origins in a meeting of ‘forty years ago’ and cannot be ameliorated in the present negotiations of a new audible reading. Poetry might afford momentary, consoling apprehensions of atonement but – because of the sharp discontinuity between the closed materialisms of Hardy’s modernity and the unbelieved immaterialism of his poetic worlds – these poetic apprehensions cannot be sustained beyond the close of the poem. Poetry cannot make amends for the failures of past love.

There remains the question of how exactly the recurrent knowing of poetic form interacts with the present knowledge of the moment of writing or reading to produce this experience of haunted knowledge or ghostly knowing. This is a question about the relation between poetic pattern and human consciousness. The poetic pattern could be the poet’s unconscious perception of the continual fall of the shadows, still registering in the mind but forgotten as it turns his thoughts to the woman. If this is the case, then the recurrence of the poetic pattern against the unfolding narrative of conscious thinking causes the mind to discover the origins of its own thoughts, the knowing behind its knowledge. Or perhaps this poetic patterning is more like the patina of ‘humane’ association conferred on the material world by the people who inhabit it, lending an illusion of ‘knowing’ – of intimacy with human life and thought – to the unknowing patterns of its unconscious forms.⁶⁶ If this is the case, then poetry’s knowing is a sensuous memory of human knowledge: the knowledge that was once shared at the moment of mutual impression is processed differently, the human mind remembering but the poem preserving what is ‘known’ as a sensuous trace, an inflection of its patterned language. Finally, the poetic pattern could be the trace of another mind, its patterns taking their shape from the speech of the ‘woman much missed’, the mute page becoming the place of spectral encounter, a means of entering into ghostly conversation with a real but ‘voiceless’ ghost.

Hardy himself wonders about how this place between the knowing of poetry and the knowledge of the human mind becomes the dwelling place of ghosts, asking ‘How did you get into this old track?’ Tracks, in Hardy’s poetry (and lanes, paths, and roads) are the dwelling place of ghosts. In ‘Beyond the Last Lamp’, the lane near Tooting Common is haunted by miserable, pacing lovers: ‘To me, when nights are weird and wet, | Without those comrades there at tryst | Creeping slowly, creeping sadly, | That lone lane does not exist’ (315). ‘At Castle Boterel’, the track is the place where Hardy sees a vision of himself and Emma: ‘I look behind at the fading byway, | And see on its slope, now glistening wet, | Distinctly yet || Myself and a girlish form’ (351). And in ‘Before Knowledge’, Hardy imagines the track not as the place where a ghost might dwell after death, but where one might encounter the ghost of a life that is not yet known: ‘When I walked roseless tracks and wide, | Ere dawned your date for meeting me, | O why did you not cry Halloo | Across the stretch between’ (445). In ‘The Shadow on the Stone’, the ‘track’ is the path beside the Druid Stone at Max Gate, the woman seemingly really present within the sensuous environs of the garden. But this ‘old track’ might also be a familiar habit of thought, the woman present not as a real phenomenon but as a

⁶⁶ See Hardy’s discussion of the ‘sentiment of association’ that abides in the materials of a church building in ‘Memories of Church Restoration’: *Public Voice*, p. 251.

many-times-recalled memory. Even as Hardy seems to inquire into the mystery of ‘how’ this woman has appeared before him, he hesitates as to whether she is a ghost or merely an imagined vision, the ghost of a ghost.

The garden path and the habitual pattern of thought are the result of repeated revisiting; the grassy track tells of many walks through the garden, the mind’s familiar sense of remembering growing stronger with each recall of a particular memory. The tracks of the garden and the mind are a record of feet or thoughts, an inscription on the earth or in the structures of the mind that endlessly bears witness to lost experience. And so it is in the track that knowledge might be reanimated as phantom or as memory. This touches on the strange relationship between knowing and knowledge. The grassy borders of the path are a different thing to the amble in the garden. The experience of remembering is different from the experience that is remembered. The track – the inscribed record of things once known – is the negative shape of knowledge. It is a means of recall that is very different to the thing it recalls, just as the waterfall’s music is different to the chalice and the sound of the sea is different to the ghostly vision.

If poetry is inscription – if it happens ‘in this old track’ – then to read is *to track*, to follow the patterns of the poem and to discover, perhaps, what it knows of ghosts, of unrecalled memories, and absent presences. The ‘hereto’ of the poem is marked with tracks, with patterned words, records of encounters and voices that are no more, and the prints of an elusive hare. The poem is the place ‘wherein I have tracked you’ but the act of tracking only calls up what is lacking: the shape of a distant, untouchable woman, ‘scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you’ (349). To read poetry, to *scan* (or, as Hardy marked in his copy of *In Memoriam*, ‘thro’ wordy snares to track | Suggestion’) is to seek out – to enter into and, less satisfactorily, to labour towards – these difficult, elusive experiences of knowing. The poem does not promise a particular kind of knowledge – neither memories nor phantoms – but offers only the experience of knowing something, somehow. But there is always the shadowy sense that there might be nothing there – no tracks, not even these negative traces of knowledge and presence. The poet fears awakening from his vision to a sudden awareness that all that is lost but still desired lies beyond even these most tentative experiences of recall, ‘Locked in that Universe trackless, distant’ (early draft of ‘In Vision I Roamed’; 10 n.).

Hardy’s tracks offer some delicate suggestions about the nature and significance of the apprehensions that attention to the paralinguistic sounds of verse might uniquely afford, but the question itself receives no answer:

And I said: ‘I am sure you are standing behind me,
Though how do you get into this old track?’
And there was no sound but the fall of a leaf
As a sad response; and to keep down grief
I would not turn my head to discover
That there was nothing in my belief.

(530)

The question seems unanswerable. The poem is mute about its operations, the imagined or envisioned woman silent about the mode or meaning of her return. But there is an answer of sorts: a ‘sad response’ that is the ‘fall of a leaf’. The ‘leaf’ falls in the same stanzaic position as the ‘rhythmic swing’, remembering the pattern that sustained the ghostly fall of the ‘shadows’ and recalled the ‘shade’ of the woman. The falling leaf silently articulates the poetic truth of this vision, speaking mutely of the poem’s inscribed patterns, the linguistic tracks that mean the woman can never become ‘unknown’. It recalls those ‘fallen autumn leaves’ that were once a poetic sign for the ghostly ‘creatures of the imagination’ and the hauntedness of the material world. And it remembers the ‘leaves around me falling’ of ‘The Voice’ that recalled ‘the woman calling’. As the poem speaks mutely about the things it still knows, Hardy once more refuses to inquire further into the nature of his poetic vision. His ‘belief’ in these immaterial things – in the return of his beloved, vengeful ghost – is once more caught on the cusp of disbelief, sustained only by this refusal to look and see that there is ‘nothing’ to it. This is not so much a willing suspension of the categories of belief and unbelief (as Eliot and Richards would later put it) as an unwillingness to acknowledge the discontinuity between the conditions of verse and the conditions of ordinary, bereft life and so forfeit those consoling apprehensions that poetry so precariously sustains.

And yet there is not quite ‘nothing’ to his belief. In his willingness to speak even of the slightest, most failing kind of ‘belief’ the poet discovers a ghostly echo, a faint rhyming likeness, of that remembering, recalling ‘leaf’ – that most fleeting ghost of a ghost, but a ghost nevertheless. And so Hardy leaves the haunted ‘hereto’ of his poem, leaving the garden to its own shadowy knowing:

So I went on softly from the glade,
And left her behind me throwing her shade,
As she were indeed an apparition –
My head unturned lest my dream should fade.

(530)

The poet moves on softly, his head ‘unturned’ and the questions left unanswered. But his dream persists, unfaded. In the garden at Max Gate or in the shadow-lands of the imagination, the ‘light that never was’ – that unreal sheen and shadow of a ghostly life – falls quietly across the face of the Druid stone.

IV

HOPKINS – DAPPING

Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,
Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep
Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky.

(‘Ashboughs’), 1885; 185)

Nothing, for Hopkins, is so suggestive of ‘Poetry’ as the blown and breaking canopy of the tree. The ash seems to touch the heights of heaven, its slender branches melling the May sky into moving constellations of ‘blue and snowwhite’ caught in the darker ‘fringe and fray | Of greenery’ (185). Similar trees occur throughout Hopkins’ work, their canopies a dazzling display of broken light. The ‘Binsey Poplars’ catch ‘leaves’ and ‘leaping sun’ in their ‘airy cages’ (78). An elm weaves light and leaves into ‘shivelights and shadowtackle’ (‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire’; 105). A ‘hornbeam fretty’ paints its ‘rafts and rafts of flake leaves light’ like ‘stars’ or ‘angels’ in the still air (‘Epithalamion’; 198). And in a journal entry of 1874, Hopkins recalls looking at ‘some delicate flying shafted ashes – there was one especially of single sonnet-like inscape – between which the sun sent straight bright slenderish panes of silver sunbeams down the slant towards the eye’ (*Diarie*s, 603). Such trees sigh ‘Poetry’ to the mind (and, in the last case, suggest the more particular ‘sonnet’) because their breaking canopies are a superlative figure for dappled pattern, the figure through which Hopkins imagines the labour and achievement of his poetics.

Hopkins’ dappled patterns begin as an abstract ‘Pied Beauty’, a principle of visual contrast that has its linguistic origins in the black-white coat of the magpie. As ‘Pied Beauty’ is embodied within the sensuous, temporal forms of the world and the poem, this two-fold principle is spun out into the kaleidoscopic variation of a world of ‘dappled things’: black-white becomes any instance of ‘couple-colour’ (69). There is the ‘dapple-eared lily’ (79), the ‘dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon’ (69), the ‘drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple’ (77), the ‘dappled-with-damson west’ (53), the ‘dappled die-away | Cheek’ (84), and the primroses that shall ‘new-dapple next year’ (193). But ‘dapple-’ is also the mark of delicate relation, a means of articulating non-visual patterns of significance or sound or sequence. Dapping begins as the alternation of ‘light and shade’ (*Correspondence I*, 200) but its principle of contrast extends to tempo (‘swift, slow’), taste (‘sweet, sour’), type (‘gear and tackle and trim’), texture (‘plotted and pieced’), and textual marking (‘stipple’) (69-70). It also includes those contrasts implicit in the recognition of sheer singularity (‘counter, original, spare, strange’) (70). As the category of ‘dappled things’ broadens to include things other than the visual, it begins to describe not only the patterned forms of the world but also the experience of embodied participation in these patterns. The contrastive patterns of tempo, taste, and vision become a prosodic experience of contrast,

the voice discovering this ‘pied’ principle within the stress, strain, and sound-patterning of its own utterance (‘swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim’) (70). The visual figure for the world’s patterning becomes a way of imagining the aural and oral experiences of verse: the glorious dapple of the ash becomes a barely heard voice that sighs ‘Poetry’.

The dappled tree is a figure for the complex form of the poem and for the experiences of embodied participation that it might occasion. This poetry-like tree also reaches towards ‘the steep | Heaven’ (185), its dapple not only a figure for patterned form and prosodic experience but a means of labouring towards those things that the experience of reading poetry – and, in particular, the experience of reading poetry *aloud* – might uniquely afford. The sighing tree names the object of its aspiration: ‘Poetry’ is the ideal condition of knowledge and experience towards which verse labours. Tennyson would have called it the ‘higher poetic imagination’. To attend to dappling as the activity rather than the condition of Hopkins’ verse is to discover what Joshua King aptly terms its ‘intention’,¹ its straining and groping towards ways of knowing and being that are, as yet, unapprehended. The ash’s boughs ‘break’ against the blue of ‘heaven most high’ in a vital performance of its identity as *Fraxinus excelsior* (185). ‘Break’ recalls those other moments in Hopkins’ verse in which sensuous form bursts, ruptures, or explodes into a sudden, energetic communication of essential being or (to use Hopkins’ own term) ‘instress’. This breaking moment of ‘instress’ is at once the expression of the ash’s ash-likeness and an expression of its ‘Poetry’-likeness: Hopkins’ dappled poetry simultaneously labours towards a truer encounter with the world and towards a prosody that ‘gives back to poetry its true soul and self’ (letter to Everard Hopkins, 5-8 November 1885; *Correspondence II*, 748).

The energetic intention behind Hopkins’ dappled poetics reaches beyond an elaboration of the theories of vision, knowledge, and participation that are signified by his term ‘instress’ and its pendent term ‘inscape’. His poetry ‘gropes for, grasps at’ the ‘Ground of being, and granite of it: past all | Grasp God’, reaching towards an apprehension of the world in which a knowledge of God is intimate with – even incarnate in – the labour of the hands (‘Deutschland’, 62). In this late figuring of his dappled poetics, Hopkins’ ashboughs momentarily touch heaven, earth and sky drawn close within the long, finger-like branches of the canopy: ‘you can lift your hand | Skywards: rich, rich it laps | Round the four fingergaps’ (‘The Blessed Virgin’; 95). The breaking canopy that was a figure for ‘instress’ is also a figure for the incarnation, the ‘May’-month moment – Mary’s moment – in which the heavenly is grasped and held within the earthly (185). But ‘old earth’s groping towards the steep | Heaven whom she childs us by’ (185) suggests that while this incarnation begins with the conception of the Christ-child in Mary’s womb it comes to include ‘us’, the reader of verse: we, too, are childed as the tree reaches towards heaven in the May-month and the poem strains towards ‘instress’, our bodies becoming ‘New Nazareths’ in which we might ‘yet conceive | Him’ (95). Hopkins’ poetry labours

¹ Joshua King, ‘Hopkins’ Affective Rhythm: Grace and Intention in Tension’, *Victorian Poetry*, 45.3 (2007), 209–37 (p. 210).

towards communicating an embodied knowledge of Christ, a conception of the divine that is as physical as it is cognitive, apprehended within the strains and stresses of the uttering body.

Dappling, as I have begun to suggest, is a visual figure for the formal patterns and experiences of apprehension that Hopkins associates with ‘Poetry’. But Hopkins (unlike Tennyson or Hardy) was committed to theorising his own work in prose as well as in verse. His letters, essays, and notes offer a constellation of theoretical concepts for understanding his verse-practice: most notably, ‘inscape’ and its cousin-term, ‘instress’; Sprung Rhythm and the term it ‘scarcely allows’, ‘counterpoint’ (*Correspondence I*, 415); and ‘parallelism’ and its two varieties, ‘chromatic’ and ‘marked’ (*Poetic Diction*; *Essays*, 120). These terms have been the focus of many of the most important accounts of Hopkins’ poetics. W. A. M. Peters,² James Finn Cotter,³ and J. Hillis Miller⁴ have followed Hopkins’ assertion that ‘inscape’ is the ‘very soul of art’ (*Correspondence II*, 793) and have made the term central to their accounts of the relation between Hopkins’ language and his understanding of reality, his Christology, or his sense of self in relation to the hidden self of God. More recently, Dennis Sobolev has made ‘inscape’ the key term in his phenomenological account of the ‘configuration of meanings in [Hopkins’] poems, as well as within the philosophical and experiential world of his writings’.⁵ As Sobolev observes, a striking feature of scholarly investigation into ‘inscape’ (and its related term, ‘instress’) is the clustering of differing and often incompatible definitions.⁶ The same is true for studies of Hopkins’ rhythmical innovations which take ‘Sprung Rhythm’ as their key term but find ‘instress’ a necessary concept in accounting for its broader poetic and metaphysical significance. This lack of consensus is perhaps best illustrated by Edward Stephenson’s ‘What Sprung Rhythm Really Is’ (1987)⁷ and Michael Hurley’s rejoinder, ‘What Sprung Rhythm Really is NOT’ (2006).⁸ The resulting variety of interpretation is indicated by three notable studies of Hopkins’ prosodic innovations: Paul Kiparsky’s generative metrist account of ‘Sprung Rhythm’ (1989),⁹ Joshua King’s theologically-minded study of ‘affective rhythm’ and ‘instress’ (2007), and James I. Wimsatt’s exploration of *Hopkins’s Poetics of Speech Sound* through his prose writings (2006). ‘Parallelism’ has been of less importance in accounts of Hopkins’ own verse but Roman Jakobson’s championing of

² W. A. M Peters, S. J., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay towards the Understanding of His Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

³ James Finn Cotter, *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

⁴ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 270–359.

⁵ Dennis Sobolev, *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), p. 1.

⁶ Sobolev, pp. 27–43.

⁷ Edward Stephenson, *What Sprung Rhythm Really Is* (Ontario: The International Hopkins Association, 1987).

⁸ Michael D. Hurley, ‘What Sprung Rhythm Really Is NOT’, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 33.3 (2006), 71–94.

⁹ Kiparsky, Paul, ‘Sprung Rhythm’, in *Phonetics and Phonology*, ed. by Stephen R. Anderson and Patricia A. Keating (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989–93), I: *Rhythm and Metre*, ed. by Paul Kiparsky and Gilbert Youmans (1989), pp. 305–40.

Hopkins' 'Poetic Diction' has secured the place of 'parallelism' in the scholarly lexicon for poetry and poetics.¹⁰

But I use the word 'constellation' advisedly. It is Benjamin's and Adorno's term, but it is one that is sympathetic to, even implicit in, Hopkins' own thought: the starry sky, or 'starness', is (as we shall see) a favourite figure for the manifestation of eternal truth as a cluster of intermittent apprehensions. 'Inscape', 'Sprung Rhythm', and 'parallelism' are not totalizing accounts of Hopkins' verse-practice but rather a group of related concepts that are alert to the adjacent terms ('instress', 'counterpoint', and so on) that they might depend upon, imply, or exclude. These theoretical concepts describe different aspects of Hopkins' verse-practice and, more subtly, provide different descriptions of the same phenomena. And each of these terms, as I have indicated above, produces a corresponding constellation of critical definitions. This clustering of related concepts is a consistent feature – even the animating principle – of Hopkins' self-theorising thought, and is related to his sense that poetry itself consists in 'parallelism', the irreducible variety of likeness and unlikeness. Writing to Robert Bridges in 1879, Hopkins found that he needed the triad of 'design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape"' to articulate what he 'above all aim[ed] at in poetry': a cluster of concepts that could not be reduced to a single idea but only to 'design, pattern, or inscape' (*Correspondence I*, 334). And this letter reveals that the constellation of concepts through which Hopkins thought about the intention of his verse included less explicitly theoretical notions such as 'design' and 'pattern'. Miller's intricate inquiry into Hopkins' 'vision of nature' sought to establish the continuity between the 'rhyming' patterns of his visual imagination (its 'specificity of colour and texture, sharpness of pattern, tenseness of inner structure, energy of being') and the 'relation of rhyme in poetry and music'.¹¹ Helen Vendler has argued that 'doubleness and piedness' is both a visual concern for Hopkins and a way of thinking about the organisation of verse-form.¹² And Catherine Phillips has argued for the importance of these less explicitly theoretical patterns of thought, arguing that the 'emphasis upon inscape as the defining essence of a thing has underestimated the importance in Hopkins' concept of the artistic value of pattern'.¹³ Most recently, Martin Dubois has compellingly argued that Hopkins' 'theological and spiritual awareness' in his verse is not so much part of a comprehensive, theoretical framework as 'inductive and conjectural', a series or constellation of attempts to figure out belief in and through moments of private religious – and, we should add, sensuous – experience.¹⁴

¹⁰ Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987). See 'Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet', pp. 145–179.

¹¹ Miller, p. 290.

¹² Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 11.

¹³ Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 35.

¹⁴ Martin Dubois, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Poetry of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 10.

Dappling is part of this constellation of concepts and figures. This study recovers a neglected pattern of thought and offers it as a further, complementary way of thinking about Hopkins' poetics – a self-theorising figure that illuminates new aspects of his verse-practice and begins to clarify some of its adjacent, more explicitly theoretical terms. There are, however, some distinctive claims to be made for dappling that suggest it has a unique priority among the figures through which Hopkins works to imagine his poetic practice. Firstly, unlike 'instress', 'Sprung Rhythm', and 'parallelism', dappling is the way Hopkins explores the phenomenology of 'Poetry' when he is thinking in verse: dappling offers a uniquely *poetic* account of Hopkins' poetics. Secondly, dappling describes the experience of eye and ear (or, as Hopkins draws the distinction, 'eyes' and 'mind'), a theoretical figure that is intimate with both artistic and prosodic concerns. Unlike the theoretical terms of Hopkins' prose, dappling offers an account of the poetic imagination which recognizes the continuity between the visual and the auditory that is the life of Hopkins' verse. This project represents an expansion of Meredith Martin's account of Hopkins' practice of metrical marking. Martin argues that Hopkins' metrical marking is not only an aural/oral phenomenon but 'a crucial part of [Hopkins'] conception of the visual world' and, as such, seeks to restore the particular and distinct 'elaborated significance' of Hopkins' 'material' marks and 'graphic stresses'.¹⁵ This chapter seeks to establish the importance of the adjacency of the visual and the prosodic in the broader context of Hopkins' figuring of his own prosodic practice but takes issue with Martin's claim that these visual figurings might develop independent patterns of meaning. Hopkins' visual world, I suggest, is a way of imagining the prosodic realities of verse and, more generally, a way of figuring an experience of embodied life that is conceived in primarily prosodic terms – as stress and strain, pitch and pressure. Thirdly, Hopkins' 'dappled things' consists as a constellation of adjacent, contrasting, and interdependent patterns (stippling, shoaling, plotting, piecing, freckling, marking, stressing): dappling, it seems, might also begin to theorize Hopkins' distinctive habit of thinking through constellations of related concepts. Dappling situates these clustered ideas within the broader context of a poetic vision of the world in which human life is essentially the experience of broken lights and intermittent apprehensions – an experience, that is, of *dapple*.

* * *

Dappling has its origins in Hopkins' visual imagination (in 'all my eyes see, wandering on the world') but becomes a figure for patterns of prosodic experience and cognition (those things that are 'a milk to the mind'). 'A Vision of the Mermaids' (1862) is a poem of the 'mazèd eyes' (8), concerned with the lights, colours, and optical illusions of a visibly dappled world. Although it is an early poem (written when Hopkins was just seventeen), this 'Vision' remarkably anticipates Hopkins' mature sense of the

¹⁵ Meredith Martin, 'The Stigma of Meter' in *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 48-78 (pp. 49, 54, 55).

world, a ‘vision’ articulated through the non-visual language of strain, stress, shoaling, breaking, and wrecking. ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’ provides an extended visual account of the dappled patterns that are central to Hopkins’ mature thought and, in particular, ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’. The coloured world of Hopkins’ early ‘Vision of the Mermaids’ is not so much the scene of faery encounter as an image for the conditions of verse – for the experience of entering into poetic ‘vision’, in all the sensuous, semantic uncertainty of that word.

The poem begins under the sign of a dappled sky:

Plum-purple was the west; but spikes of light
 Spear’d open lustrous gashes, crimson-white;
 (Where the eye fix’d, fled the encrimsoning spot,
 And gathering, floated where the gaze was not;)
 And thro’ their parting lids there came and went
 Keen glimpses of the inner firmament:
 Fair beds they seem’d of water-lily flakes
 Clustering entrancingly in beryl lakes:
 Anon, across their swimming splendour strook,
 An intense line of throbbing blood-light shook
 A quivering pennon; then, for eye too keen,
 Ebb’d back beneath its snowy lids, unseen.

(8)

The sky is richly and variously coloured but this is not the gentle blotting of colour on colour, of purple clouds dabbled against an evening sky. Rather, the dappled skyscape is imagined as a ruptured surface, light piercing the sky and opening it into a wounded pattern of light and dark, flesh and blood: a record of violent distress. This brilliant, piercing light dazzles the vision. Colours are reversed, translated, and transposed into new chromatic patterns. The white-on-crimson of the evening sky becomes the crimson-on-white of the wounded body; the gashes themselves are an optical illusion, an impossible vision of ‘crimson-white’. Dappling is visual pattern but it is also the consequence of vision. To turn and ‘gaze’ on the ‘encrimsoning spot’ is to lose sight of its paradoxical ‘crimson-white’, the sky returned to dapple as the glaring redness floats off into the peripheral vision and the ‘lids’ of the gash part to give a glimpse of its pure, water-lily-white interior. Those strange ‘parting lids’ of the sky hold together what is seen with vision itself, the act of looking (opening the eyes) becoming the dappling of the sky (opening into red and white). The dappled sky is the sign for a world in which to gaze is to participate in its dappling, its labour of piercing, breaking, clustering, opening, parting, and so on. As this broken sky casts its ‘crimson-white’ light into the world, red and white blend into a ‘rosy’ colour that tints all that lies beneath: ‘the west had grown an orb’d rose’, ‘the zenith melted to a rose of air | The waves were rosy-lipped’, ‘rosy-budded fire’, ‘an isle of roses’ (8), ‘rosy weed’ (9), ‘rosy-pale’, ‘rosy foam’, ‘rosy floating cloud’ (10), ‘rosy isles’ (11). ‘Rosy’ becomes the mark of dappled vision, a reminder that this world is construed as the beholder gazes on sensuous form.

Under the sign of the dappled sky live many dapple-bodied creatures. The blues and pinks of the mermaids' crests shade from pale translucence to each colour's 'intensest hue', as though 'some sapphire molten-blue | Were vein'd and streak'd with dusk-deep lazuli, | Or tender pinks with bloody Tyrian dye' (9). Darker tones under a pale skin produce a streaky, dappled surface of delicate lines and tones that anticipates the 'skeined stained véined variety' of the world in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' (98). Similarly, the translucent body of the 'glassy-clear Aeolis' (a sea-slug fringed with 'growths of myriad feelers') gains a pinkish hue from the redder veins under its skin, 'crystalline | To shew the crimson streams that inward shine, | Which, lightening o'er the body rosy-pale, | Like shiver'd rubies dance or sheen of sapphire hail' (9-10). And, just as the sky was both 'blood'-red and 'beryl'-blue, so the mermaids' bodies are both pink and blue while the sea-slugs resemble 'rubies' and 'sapphire[s]'. These chromatic continuities suggest that the bodies of the sea creatures are envisioned in terms of the dappled body of the sky. But whereas the body of the sky became dappled through its wounding, these sea-creatures appear dappled because of their translucence, crimson and blue veins showing through 'glassy-clear' flesh. Perhaps these smaller bodies are instances of the sky's wounded body, their dappled nature partially visible beneath the skin but awaiting the fuller revelation that comes with the breaking of the flesh and the spilling of blood. Or perhaps their dappled natures become visible in this gentler way because of that original, violent act of illumination that cast a rosy light into the world and created the conditions for dappled vision. The dappled bodies of this early poem (wounded, bloodied, broken) anticipate the sacramental significance of dappling in Hopkins' mature verse.

But 'A Vision of the Mermaids' also anticipates the ways in which the colourful dappling of the early verse will develop into the energetic dappling of the later verse. The mermaids first become visible as a gentle clustering movement on the surface of the sea:

I was ware
 Of something drifting thro' delighted air,
 – An isle of roses, – and another near; –
 And more, on each hand, thicken, and appear
 In shoals of bloom; as in unpeopled skies,
 Save by two stars, more crowding lights arise,
 And planets bud where'er we turn our mazèd eyes.
 I gazed unhinder'd: Mermaids six or seven,
 Ris'n from the deeps to gaze on sun and heaven,
 Cluster'd in troops

(8-9)

Hopkins' dashed parentheses delicately articulate the drift of rosy isles towards each other, broad gaps closing into close commas as 'more, on each hand, thicken' into 'shoals'. The emphasis here is on the contraction or clustering of many bodies into a single, dense mass. In a note of 1863, Hopkins observed that 'shoal' (characteristically shoaled with other etymologically- and phonetically-related words: 'school', 'schola', 'shell') was the Teuton word meaning assemblage, collection' (*Diaries*,

127). These ‘troops’ of mermaids are like the starry sky: individual stars seem to call out those nearby until the sky is full of ‘crowding lights’, heavenly bodies clustering into constellations. There is a further, more implicit image: these shoaling bodies are like blooms that ‘bud’ in clusters. And these separate images – blossoms, mermaids, stars – are themselves compressed into a single, dense impression of ‘something drifting’: the mermaids are ‘shoals of bloom’, the stars live in ‘unpeopled skies’, and the ‘planets bud’. This tendency of bodies to gather into nodes of density, brightness, or vitality is imagined both as a gentle ‘drifting’ and an active ‘crowding’. The poem is full of images of radiance, a visual figure for the attractive force that each isle or star or bud exerts on those bodies around it. The ‘cluster’d’ mermaids are ‘halo’d by light’, their bodies ‘fringed’ with a spine that is itself ‘spurr’d and ray’d’ like the sun ‘with spiked quills’ and around their waists is ‘spread’ a ‘silver skirt’ such as is ‘shed’ (in a fall of droplets like a fall of light) ‘around the Water-Nymphs in fretted falls’ (9). Some mermaids are more exotically ‘wreath’d’ with the Glaucus or Aeolis, the bodies of these little creatures further ‘fring[ed]’ with feelers and fingers (9). As the mermaids frolic in the waves they shake out ‘a wheel of watery light | Flickering with sunny spokes’ and ‘rainbow arcs’ (10). Each body is surrounded by radiance, extending beyond itself as rays or spokes or fringes, lines of force describing the energetic relations of this patterned world.

The pen-and-ink drawing that accompanies the poem confirms that Hopkins’ concern is primarily with what might be termed the patterned field of the world. Like so many of his drawings, this illustration does not have a focal point but is rather a patterned surface, waves, ripples, clouds, and mermaids articulating a visual rhythm of clustered and repeated marks: as Phillips notes, Hopkins ‘rigorously patterns the different shapes of all he includes [...] This tends to flatten the perspective [...] but it also adds great energy to his drawings’.¹⁶ We follow the mermaids’ gaze to find that there is no sun, no central point of illumination or revelation, but only a distended sky, darkly dappled with light and clouds. ‘Vision’, for Hopkins, is an encounter with the patterned field of the world and its scattered luminous bodies. Tennyson had imagined knowledge under the conditions of the sensuous world and poetic language as an experience of ‘broken lights’ (II, 316). Hopkins reimagines this conventional metaphor of light-as-knowledge in more literal terms: ‘vision’ is the experience of a dappled world.

Dappling is both the mottling of skin and the motion of bodies. But dappling is not only a pattern which describes the world but also the tendency that might bring it to an end. As these radiant, attractive bodies cluster together they form dangerously energetic masses:

all the wrecks in showers
 Crowd down upon a stream, and, jostling thick
 With bubbles bugle-eyed, struggle and stick
 On tangled shoals that bar the brook

(10)

¹⁶ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*, p. 34.

Gathered and fallen buds, clustered and clinging ‘foam’, the ‘driving vermeil-rain’ – these clustering bodies become ‘wrecks’, destroyed by their own vigorous ingathering. These ‘wrecks’ continue to ‘crowd’, the massive body of debris ‘jostling’ with other massive and chaotic bodies, the ‘bubbles bugle-eyed’ and the ‘tangled shoals’ of sand and flotsam. Dapping – the energetic clustering of bodies – risks self-destruction, wrecking itself through the very iteration of its dappled principle: Hopkins’ language of ‘crowd[s]’, ‘showers’, ‘shoals’, and tangled waters becomes a narrative of ‘wreck’; more particularly, this language becomes the basis for Hopkins’ later vision of destruction in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’.

Hopkins’ preoccupation with wrecking (ships, bodies, and intentions coming to ‘wreck’ under the strain of living in the world) has its origins in this dappled vision. Even in Hopkins’ later verse when wrecking takes on a new, moral dimension, it is still conceived in terms of the destructive pressure of stressy bodies. There are stories and histories of maritime disaster (‘The Nightingale’, ‘Deutschland’, ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’). And there are poems that desire the ‘haven’ where there is no risk of ‘wreck’: ‘And I have asked to be | Where no storms come, | Where the green swell is in the havens dumb, | And out of the swing of the sea’ (‘Heaven-Haven’; 19). But even the ‘unimperill’d haven’ might be the place where ‘hope [...] is wreck’d’ (‘The Lover’s Stars’; 127). Poems and good intentions face ‘wreck’, too, ruined by the difficulties of labour, the failures of the mind, and the weakness of the will: ‘Our ruins of wrecked past purpose’ (‘Patience, hard thing’; 102) are the ‘ruins and wrecks’ of ‘beginnings of things, ever so many’ (*Correspondence II*, 730) – the works (such as Hopkins’ ‘book on Dorian Measure’) that ‘may easily wreck (by external difficulties, examinations and other ones) or founder (of its own)’ (*Correspondence II*, 842). Finally, the bodies of the faithful come to ‘wreck’, martyred by a world that does not care for the body in which Christ lives: the burnt body of St. Lawrence in ‘The Escorial’; the crushed and unborn child of ‘(Margaret Clitheroe)’; and Hopkins’ own body, ruined by ill health, unhappiness, and the hard life of a Jesuit – ‘The wreck of me that remains [...] is studying Aeschylus’ (*Correspondence II*, 905). Wrecking is the result of living in a world where to have a body is to experience the strain and stress and pressing-in of all things until one is crushed both physically and spiritually. But ‘wreck’ increasingly becomes the consequence of living in a morally dappled world, the pied forces of compromise, corruption, and tainted conscience bringing to ‘wreck’ all expressions of virtue or Christ-likeness. In such a morally dappled world, the iteration of worldly pattern in and against the soul results in spiritual ‘wreck’. In ‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’, the ‘wreck’ and ‘shipwrack’ (61) of the physical body become the ‘reck’ of moral judgement and the ‘rack’ of a conscience stricken by its moral failure (98).

Hopkins’ ‘Vision’ is a colourful figuring of a truth that is felt but not yet known, its visible dapple anticipating a later vision of the world in which bodies, souls, words, and apprehensions of truth and grace are imagined as points of stress moving within an energetic field, moments of life and light and meaning glimpsed within the agonising darkness of the world. As Miller observes, Hopkins’ visual patterns correspond to an energetic field in which ‘each node is a tiny whorl of power turning in

on itself, but bound by lines of force to other nodes which exist around it'.¹⁷ Or, as Hopkins put it in his 1880 retreat notes 'on *Principium sive Fundamentum*': 'A self will then consist of a centre *and* a surrounding area or circumference, a point of reference *and* a belonging field' (*Sermons*, 127). This shift in Hopkins' dappled vision from the visual (the 'eyes') to the non-visual (the 'mind': the energetic, stressy, auditory, or prosodic) occurs within the individual poem and across the corpus as a whole. Hopkins' revision of 'The Habit of Perfection' illustrates the visual-non-visual exchange that is characteristic of his poetic thought, and, composed months before his reception into the Catholic Church on 21 October 1866, marks the transition from the colourful vision of his early verse to the explicitly 'pied' vision of his mature poetry. There are three extant copies of the poem: an autograph fair-copy entitled 'The Habit of Perfection' and subtitled 'The Novice', dated January 1866; a revised autograph entitled 'The Habit of Perfection', speculatively dated 1867 or early 1868; and a third autograph of a poem entitled 'The Kind Betrothal', speculatively dated 1870/71. The 1867/68 text, printed in Bridges' *Poems* (1918), has become the best known, but as Norman MacKenzie argues – and as I will suggest here – it is the 1870/71 text that represents the final development of Hopkins' thought.¹⁸

The third stanza of the poem undergoes the most significant revision. It is concerned with the 'field of sight' (*Early MSS*, 218) that is both the visible world and vision itself – a world construed through the act of beholding. Above all, the stanza is concerned with the relation between the two, with how the phenomenal world shapes the experience of vision. This concern has its origins in a desire to establish the exact relationship between a world which presents itself in primarily *visual* terms and the experience of vision that seems best understood in *textural* or *energetic* terms. At first, Hopkins imagines the 'field' of the world as explicitly visual ('The coloured shows wh. else you mark') but thinks of its effect on the 'field' of vision as an experience of distress ('Tangle and break the field of sight') (*Early MSS*, 218). This seems a *non sequitur* and so in the second draft Hopkins imagines both the 'field' of the world and the 'field' of vision in terms of textural distress ('This ruck and reel which you remark | Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight'): a moving, stressy world produces a moving, stressed kind of vision (*Early MSS*, 218). But 'sight' must have its origins in the visual: beholder and world come together in the act of looking – of 'mark[ing]' or 'remark[ing]'. In the final version of this stanza, Hopkins finds a word that holds together a memory of 'coloured shows' with the sense that it was the feeling of contrast that was most important: 'These pied shows they make their mark, | Tease, charge, and coil the simple sight' (*Early MSS*, 219). 'Pied' (and, more broadly, Hopkins' language of 'dappled things') holds together the visual with the non-visual, the coloured surfaces of the world with its animating principle of contrast. As the sensuous world is reimagined as a 'pied' form, vision is also reimagined in terms that suggest the energetic clustering of the dappled field ('tease, charge, and coil'). Most strikingly, this shift towards an explicitly pied or dappled vision introduces a subtler sense of the beholder's encounter with the world: 'mark' is no longer the act of

¹⁷ Miller, p. 291.

¹⁸ See *Early MSS*, p. 219 n.

looking, but the ‘pièd’ world’s iteration of its contrastive principle as a dappled surface and its patterning of vision itself, its marking of the ‘field of sight’. Hopkins’ vision of the world becomes explicitly ‘pièd’: it becomes increasingly invested in questions about what it means to participate in the world – questions about the nature of vision, its continuity with other kinds of sensuous and imaginative experience, and the ways in which our habits of looking (and reading) might mark us, transforming our embodied experience and standing as a sign for our aesthetic and spiritual commitments.

* * *

In 1866-68, the ‘pièd shows’ of the world ‘tease[d]’ the sight, distressing it into the ‘skéined’ variety of dappled vision and tempting the aspiring Catholic with this sensuous, seductive vision of the world. By 1877, the contemplation of ‘Pied Beauty’ had become a devotional practice, a means of recognizing the dazzling particularity of the world and turning that recognition into worship. What had changed for Hopkins in the nine or so years between ‘The Habit of Perfection’ and ‘Pied Beauty’? In some respects, very little. From 1862 onwards, Hopkins’ poetry exhibits some of the concerns that would later characterize his dappled vision of the world – in particular, a concern with patterns of contrastive relation imagined in terms of blotted and mottled surfaces but which were already beginning to signal the invisible presence of an energetic or stressy field. The change was rather in Hopkins’ growing concern with the kinds of knowledge and experience that such a dappled vision might afford – with what it might mean to live under a dappled sky and, relatedly, with what it might mean to read under the sign of ‘Pied Beauty’. His conversion to Catholicism in 1866 played some part in this deepening of an aesthetic appreciation for colour and texture into a concern with the metaphysics of human-divine encounter, although, as the ‘The Habit of Perfection’ attests, this more theologically-minded verse initially rejected any continuity between the ‘feel-of-primrose hands’ and the tender spirit’s apprehensions of grace (32). But it was Hopkins’ poetic account of his agonized confession of Christ, ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ (1875-76), that established these dappled patterns as a figure for human knowledge and experience at its most desperate and profound and as a figure for the labour and achievement of his new, idiosyncratic prosody, ‘Sprung Rhythm’.

Like the early poems, ‘Deutschland’ is written under the sign of a dappled sky: the West is ‘dappled-with-damson’ (53) and the heavens appear ‘jay-blue’ like ‘pied and peeled May’ (60). The constellation of patterns associated with dappling in the early verse becomes the energetic, dangerous dappling of a world of storm and stress. Patterns of textural distress become the patterns of the world’s destructive energy. There are violent rotations and spiralling currents: ‘whirled out’ (52), ‘whirlwind-swivellèd’ (55), ‘whorl and [...] wheel’ (56), ‘swirling and hawling’ (57). There are sudden contractions and propulsions: ‘hurl’ (52), ‘hurtle of hell’ (52), ‘hurling and horrible’ (56), ‘hard-

hurled' (62), 'burl' (56), 'wind's burly' (60). Gathering and teasing-out: 'combs to the fall' (52), 'combs of a smother of sand' (56). Wringing and beating: 'beat of endragonèd seas' (60), 'lash with the best or worst' (54). And plying and working of its fabric-like surface: 'folded rueful a day' (56), 'laced with fire of stress' (52). Under such conditions, individual elements are driven into clusters: 'The goal was a shoal' (55), 'the throng that catches' (59), 'chivalry's throng's lord' (63). The world becomes a marked and legible surface: 'Mark, the mark' (58), 'lettering of the lamb's fleece' (58), 'scroll-leaved flowers' (58), 'trenched with tears, carved with cares' (56). And understanding becomes a matter of reading and counting, piecing words and numbers into legible series: 'wings that spell' (52), 'tell men with women' (55), 'they could tell him for hours' (56). 'Deutschland' is a poem about what it means to live in a dappled world, about the turmoil of life and death, the tendency of things to come to wreck, the inscription of meaning within experience, and the labour of reading, marking, and learning.

Animating this dappled vision (dappling not simply the visible form of the world but the occasion for poetic vision itself) is a newfound sense of the sacramental significance of dappling. The dappled sky in 'A Vision of the Mermaids' was 'spear'd', bloodied, and broken. But it is only in 'Deutschland' that Hopkins looks to the 'dappled-with-damson west' and finds in its dappling the sign and presence of Christ, 'wafting him out of it' (53). The gashed skyscape becomes the 'Lovescape crucified' (59), the speared wounds the 'cipher of suffering Christ' (58). And just as the dappling of the sky was reproduced on the bodies of the sea-creatures in 'A Vision', so Christ's dappled 'Lovescape' is reproduced on the bodies of those who choose (or are chosen) to live under this sign – creatures whose dappled bodies testify to their redemption by Christ's broken body and who share in his sufferings, his death reproduced in their martyrdom: 'he scores it in scarlet himself on his own bespoken, | Before-time-taken, dearest prized and priced' (58). The dappled body (of sky or man or creature) becomes a figure for incarnation, sacrifice, suffering, and redemption. The achievement of 'Deutschland' is a sacramental poetics in which these metaphysical realities can be apprehended in the dappled, sensuous forms of verse. Poetic form becomes an index or icon of Christ, the act of reading a means of encounter and participation (in Christ's body and in the spiritual community of the church), and this new prosody a means, perhaps, of redeeming the verse which, in 1868, Hopkins had believed to be 'not belonging' to his 'profession' as a Jesuit (*Correspondence I*, 317).

Bridges' advice on reading the 'great dragon folded in the gate' that is 'Deutschland' was to 'circumvent him and attack him later in the rear'; familiarity with Hopkins' later work, he implies, makes this poem more accessible, its themes, diction, and prosody less forbidding.¹⁹ But Bridges touches on a more vital truth of Hopkins' corpus: the later work is a coming-to-terms-with, a teasing-out-of the thick, chaotic poetics of 'Deutschland', an attempt to come to a more precisely articulated sense of what this dappled vision of world and poem might mean. The remainder of this study adopts Bridges' tactical, indirect approach, working to explicate Hopkins' poetics through the 1877 sonnets

¹⁹ *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Robert Bridges (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), p. 106.

that tease out the significance of individual patterns and the two apocalyptic sonnets that re-envision the central concerns of ‘Deutschland’ (‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’, ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire’). As such, a theoretically-minded reading of ‘Deutschland’ is implicit throughout this study. A more detailed account of ‘Deutschland’ lies beyond its scope but would exemplify rather than extend its argument: to read Hopkins’ late poetry is to discover Hopkins’ own, self-theorising reading of ‘Deutschland’.

Wimsatt has rightly argued that our scholarly consciousness of how Hopkins imagined his own verse practice is impoverished by a failure to recognize the ‘full range and value of the poet’s prose writings’ and has sought to rectify this omission in *Hopkins’ Poetics of Speech Sound*.²⁰ This chapter argues for the need for a complementary emphasis on Hopkins’ verse not merely as an instantiation of his poetic theory but as one of the most complexly-wrought acts of poetic self-theorising that exists among nineteenth-century poetic corpora – a poetic figuring of an idiosyncratic poetics that must claim an equal (if not greater) importance to the self-theorising thought of Hopkins’ letters, journals, Oxford essays, and (those more neglected works) his sermons, spiritual writings, and lecture notes.

* * *

Dappling is the emblematic pattern of ‘Deutschland’ and of Hopkins’ self-theorising verse-thinking. ‘Starriness’ is its cousin form, chief among the constellation of patterns through which Hopkins imagines the dappled field of world and poem. The ‘pied’ sky of ‘May’ finds its rhyme in the starriness of the ‘Milky Way’ (60); the ‘dappled-with-damson west’ is illuminated by ‘lovely asunder | Starlight’ (53). To consider the starriness of Hopkins’ mature verse is to tease out one of the primary strains of thought in ‘Deutschland’: a pattern that is a distinctive mark of Hopkins’ visual world, a figure through which he thinks about the experience of reading poetry, and the means by which he domesticates the notions of ‘parallelism’ and ‘instress’ within the language of verse.

The companion poem of ‘Pied Beauty’ is ‘The Starlight Night’ (1877), its dappling transposed into starriness.

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
 O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
 The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
 Down in dim woods, the diamond delves! the elves’-eyes!
 The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
 Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!

²⁰ James I. Wimsatt, *Hopkins’s Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. vii.

Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare! –
Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.

Buy then! bid then! – What? – Prayer, patience, alms, vows.
Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!
These are indeed the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mothers and all his hallows.

(66-67)

Starriness, for Hopkins, begins as a vivid pattern of bright spots pointing and punctuating the dark ground of the sky: night is a ‘lantern | Pointed with piercèd lights, and breaks of rays | Discover’d everywhere’ (138). Starriness also structures or ‘points’ the skyscape, marking out a network of brilliant spots, radiant lines, and delicate intervals: a ‘slip of comet’ bridges the ‘slender difference of two stars’ (147) and in the ‘yellow galaxy’ of the starry sky ‘there is no parting or bare interstice | Where the stint compass of a skylark’s wings | Would not put out some tiny golden centre’ (138). In this poem, the stars mark out a geographical and political order that gathers ‘fire-folk’ into ‘boroughs’ and ‘circle-citadels’. But although the stars are fixed points, Hopkins imagines their gradual coming-out as a kind of clustering, a ‘golden’ or ‘starry press’ that seems to ‘press and stare’ (139). Individual ‘fire-folk’ are gathered into ‘boroughs’ and then ‘citadels’, pressing together into ever greater communities of light. This starscape overarches the poem and human life – ‘look, look up’! – starlight filtering down into a magical sublunary world that catches something of its spangled brilliance: dark woods lit with ‘elves’-eyes’ and ‘flake-doves’.

But starriness does not only describe the visible ‘scapes’ of the world (*‘Notes on Greek Philosophy’*; *Essays*, 316) but also the energetic relations between bodies, words, and thoughts. ‘Starriness’ is the word Hopkins reaches for when he wants to describe the experience of reading verse. ‘The artificial part of poetry’, Hopkins claimed, ‘reduces itself to the principle of parallelism’ (*‘Poetic Diction’*; *Essays*, 120). Or, as he put it in an earlier essay: poetry is animated by ‘the apprehension of the presence of more than one thing [...] the enforcement of likeness and unlikeness, the establishment of relation’ (*‘On the signs of health and decay’*; *Essays*, 107-08). Poetry consists as a constellation, a plurality of comparative and contrastive relations: it is an essentially dappled form. Tellingly, Hopkins describes the two different kinds of parallelism in terms of visual pattern: there is ‘chromatic’ parallelism (*‘gradual’* transitions between elements) and ‘marked parallelism’ (*‘abrupt’* or *‘intervallary’* repetition of elements) (*Essays*, 108). Only ‘marked parallelism’ is ‘concerned with the structure of verse’ (*Essays*, 120). ‘Marked parallelism’ is something like dappled pattern, a composition of stark contrasts; indeed, Hopkins’ description of ‘comparison’ as the ‘deliberate beauty’ of artistic composition suggests that ‘marked parallelism’ might be glossed as ‘Pied Beauty’ (*Essays*, 107).

But in his notes on ‘Poetry and Verse’, Hopkins reaches for the language of starriness rather than the language of dappling or piedness: the effect of the intermittent repetitions that constitute marked parallelism (‘alliteration and rhyme’, for instance) is to give verse ‘more brilliancy, starriness, quain, margaretting’ (*J&P*, 290). (Another constellation of words, this time describing the star-stung field: ‘quain’ – Hopkins’ own invention – is associated with the angularity of the starry network;²¹ ‘margaretting’ describes the starriness of the meadow, long grass spotted with the white flowers of the ‘Margaret’ or ox-eye daisy.) ‘Starriness’ thus describes the quality of an artistic form that consists as a broken sequence, composed of discrete rather than continuous elements. And this suggests another way of reading the ‘The Starlight Night’. The poem can be read as a single scene but it can also be read as a series of discrete images for ‘starriness’. The figure of the dark ground spotted with brilliant lights repeats throughout the poem: woods spangled with eyes, lawns dabbled with dew, trees flashing with silver under-leaves, doves floating through the night. The octave which first appeared as a description of ‘starlight’ filtering into an evening world now appears as a sequence of exclamatory iterations of that original ‘starriness’. Our experience of reading and recognition becomes starry, pieced out into repeated figures and abrupt intervals.

Starriness thus describes a constellation of phenomena: the patterned scapes of the world, the distinctive appearance of its individual parts, and the experience of participating in it as beholder or reader. Sometimes Hopkins changes stars for primroses, and a brief detour into his writing on these little flowers illustrates the continuity between ‘starriness’ and Hopkins’ notions of ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’. Flower-spangled fields occur throughout Hopkins’ work, a reiteration of the starry skies and dappled canopies above: the ‘shallow folds of the wood’ are ‘dabbled with a colouring growth [...] pieced with primroses’, the ‘meadows’ are ‘pierced with flowers’ (136). Starriness is also the quality of the individual primrose, each flower starry-eyed with the deep yellow of ‘central primrose’ (136). These first two senses of ‘starriness’ (the patterned field, the brilliance of the individual flower) constitute what Hopkins would call the ‘inscape’ of the primrose, the sensuous qualities that identify it as a repeated type or species (this is the definition of ‘inscape’ favoured by Miller)²² and as a uniquely marked or moving body (the definition favoured by Cotter, among others).²³ Peters (in what remains the best definition) puts it thus, holding both the general and particular aspects of ‘inscape’ together: ‘inscape’ is the ‘unified complex of those sensible qualities of the object of perception that strike us [and here he anticipates the relation between ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’] as inseparably belonging to and most typical of it’.²⁴

But Hopkins is also concerned with a third type of ‘starriness’ that is the experience of the beholder, of looking at and recognising the starry inscape of the primrose:

²¹ ‘Cassiopeia on end with her bright quains pointing to the right’: 9 July 1868; *Diaries*, p. 439.

²² Miller, pp. 290–91.

²³ Cotter, pp. 3, 143.

²⁴ Peters, S. J., p. 1.

Take a few primroses in a glass and the instress of – brilliancy, a sort of starriness: I have not the right word – so simple a flower gives is remarkable. It is, I think, due to the strong swell given by the deeper yellow middle.

(1871; *Diaries*, 507)

‘Starriness’ now is neither the distinctiveness of the individual form nor the corporate identity of the species but ‘instress’, the energetic life that lies beneath these starry shows. Behind the visible starriness of ‘inscape’ is the energetic starriness of ‘instress’. As ever in Hopkins’ verse, spots of brightness correspond to nodes of energy, each bright primrose a centre of primrosy life – or, as Miller puts it, the ‘inscape’ corresponding to the ‘inner energy or activity’ that is ‘instress’.²⁵ But this ‘instress’ of starriness does not remain hidden beneath the patterned surface but swells, is given out, and becomes ‘remarkable’. King observes that ‘instress’ is a private term with fluid meanings but that its two primary senses describe the hidden energetic life of the object of perception and its communication to the one who looks at it: the semantic latitude of ‘instress’ becomes a ‘stem of stress’ that keeps the beholder and beheld in ‘communicative tension’.²⁶ ‘Starriness’ thus becomes a way of thinking about how participation in the sensuous world might open into a truer, more embodied knowledge of its energetic being.

Returning to ‘The Starlight Night’, the ‘starriness’ of woods, lawns, trees, and farmyard is, at first, hidden. It is only through the working or distressing of the sensuous world and poetic language that this ‘starriness’ is disclosed and communicated: that is to say, *instressed*. Only by mining into the material and alliterative resources of ‘down in dim woods’ does the ‘diamond’ come to the surface, a brilliant emerging from the dark ground. Only through the phonetic labouring of ‘delves’ do the ‘elves’-eyes’ appear, glinting brightly in the night. And only by mixing the base materials of ‘grey’ and ‘cold’ can the alchemist conjure the silvery flash of ‘quickgold’. The labour that brings this starriness to the surface becomes increasingly violent. The wind beats the trees into a revelation of their starry under-leaves; a ‘farmyard scare’ disturbs the flock of doves into the scattered whiteness of ‘flake-doves sent floating forth’. The distressing of the world through industry and violence results in ‘instress’, a communication of hidden ‘starriness’. This starry ‘instress’ is imagined as sudden fire or ‘flare’. Hopkins uses a constellation of fiery /fl-/ words (‘flame’, ‘fire’, ‘flare’) to describe the moment in which bodies break into a sudden expression of their energetic life or, as he puts it in ‘As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame’, the moment in which a ‘mortal thing [...] Deals out that being indoors each one dwells’ (90). As Aidan Nichols observes, the association between fire and instress can be traced back to Hopkins’ reading of Heraclitus and his notion of the ‘fire everliving’ that is the ‘chief clue to the character of the cosmos’.²⁷ But the association between Hopkins’ fiery language and instress has its origins in his notes on Parmenides (1867-68). His notes describe Parmenides’ ‘feeling for instress’ or what Hopkins glosses as the ‘flush and foredrawn’ – the

²⁵ Miller, p. 289.

²⁶ King, p. 211.

²⁷ Aidan Nichols, *Hopkins: Theologian’s Poet* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Sapientia Press, 2006), p. 156.

'unextended', unrevealed being of things (*Essays*, 311, 313). The language of 'flush and foredrawn' anticipates the later extension of these words into 'fire' and 'flame', a lexical drawing-out that corresponds to the drawing-out of a hidden energetic life that is the communication of 'instress'. This is the peculiar distinction of Hopkins' flash-like revelations. For Tennyson and Eliot the 'flash' of inspiration comes from a distant source, from the realms of transcendental vision. But for Hopkins – whose commitment to the doctrine of the incarnation is strenuously and urgently instantiated in his poetics – 'instress' is held 'flush' within the body, an incarnate truth that is only revealed as the body breaks and the 'instress' flares out, becoming the beholder's experience of apprehending the inner life of things.

Labour, the distressing and breaking of the world, becomes a means of seeking out this experience of 'instress'. But labour cannot guarantee revelation: the miner and the alchemist only prospect, labouring in the hope of a brilliant reward; the wind and the fox only incidentally or accidentally disturb tree and flock into scattered whiteness. And so Hopkins hesitates (as Tennyson did) as to whether the experience of revelation, of starry instress, is a 'purchase' or a 'prize', the reward of labour or an unforeseen – a conjured – gift: can we 'buy' it or only 'bid' for it? The sonnet form has taught us to expect that the sestet will introduce a new way of looking at the subject: the poem turns through its volta to consider the kinds of labour that we, as beholder and reader, might need to practise in order to win this starry instress. Hopkins suggests a kind of labour that through attention and petition seeks out the uncertain reward: 'prayer, patience, alms, vows'. As the sestet continues, it becomes clear that the labour imagined in terms of religious piety is, in fact, a labour of looking.

At first, the sestet seems to continue in the same ecstatic vein as the octave: 'Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs! | Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!' But there is one key difference between octave and sestet: 'look' is now shadowed by its sonic and orthographic counterpart, 'like'. The octave could be read as a single starlit scene or as a series of discrete instances of – likenesses for – the 'starlight night' itself. 'Like' was implicit in this second reading, implicit in the intervals between images ('Look at the stars! *Like* bright boroughs, *like* down in dim woods the diamond delves, *like* elves'-eyes...'). In the sestet, however, 'like' has become explicit, a sign for relations that exist not in the material world but in the patterns of perception and recognition. And here 'like' does not fall in the interval between starry images but replaces 'is' within the single image, coming between noun and descriptive phrase and breaking continuous being into intermittent relations of likeness: the 'May-mess' of flurried blossom is only 'like' that which is found on 'orchard boughs'; 'March-bloom' is only 'like' the dusty yellow that covers the bark of the willow. 'Like' opens up intervals within grammar and within our perception of the sensuous world. Looking becomes the labour of discovering or creating relations of likeness: the work of reimagining the world as a constellation of 'things' and intervals, a broken (or dappled) surface through which we might glimpse the hidden life behind.

Throughout Hopkins' verse, this hidden life is imagined as 'withindoors', 'behind' (62), or 'under' (53) the sensuous forms of the world: the patterned scapes of the world testify to the invisible, animating energy of 'instress'. In the final lines of 'The Starlight Night', Hopkins turns his attention to that which is 'withindoors'. The sensuous world of stars, trees, doves, lawns, blossoms, and blooms becomes 'the barn', a hollow, containing form. Inside are 'the shocks'. These gathered bundles of grain suggest the energetic nodes of the dappled field, the force-field of 'instress' that lies beneath the starry inscaping of the world. But they also anticipate the moment in which this gathered energy will be communicated to the beholder in the 'shock' of stress and recognition. 'Shocks' (like 'instress') holds together the inner energy of the beheld with the communication of that energy to the beholder.

But although 'barn' and 'shocks' describe the relation between sensuous scapes and inner energy, the image does not yet communicate what is at stake for Hopkins in this understanding of the world. And so Hopkins begins to apply his own practice of looking to this image, prising open gaps and intervals. The 'barn' becomes a 'piece-bright paling', explicitly associated with the intermittent brilliance of the world's starriness. And, just as 'starriness' was imagined as an intervallary pattern, so the solid walls of the barn are broken into the intermittent pattern of fence or lattice. Now, through the intervals between palings and stars we glimpse 'the spouse | Christ' and his attendant constellation of saints, 'his mother and all his hallows'. Christ is the hidden life beneath the world, the energetic 'instress' that holds together its sensuous forms and which might be communicated to the beholder. Hopkins' references to 'May-mess' (the beauty of Mary's month) and 'March-bloom' (the feast of the annunciation) suggest that Christ's enclosure within the world should be thought of in terms of the incarnation: Christ conceived and hidden in Mary's womb, awaiting the time of his bursting forth, his revelation in and of the world. An alternative reading of this penultimate line (present in three manuscript copies of the poem) confirms the incarnational imagery: 'This pale and parclose hides the spouse | Christ' (*Later MSS*, 97-99). 'Parclose' is the railing through which the Host – the incarnate Christ – can be glimpsed on the altar, awaiting the moment in which Christ's life is communicated to the beholder, experienced within the body of the participant.

To 'look' for Hopkins is to attend to the breaks, intervals, and intermittences of sensuous form, the dappling or 'lovely-asunder | Starlight' of the world ('Deutschland'; 53). Such a practice of looking becomes an act of piety akin to 'prayer, patience, alms, vows' because it seeks to recognize the presence of the incarnate Christ within the world, 'wafting him out of it'. More than that, our practice of looking might labour towards participation in Christ's hidden life in all the redemptive significance of such participation. And such a participation might involve (to anticipate Hopkins' later verse) the breaking of our own bodies and the discovery that redemption comes in the 'heart-broke' moment (57). As Hans Urs von Balthasar has observed:

The impatience of this breaking through to the uniquely true glory determines Hopkins' whole ethos; here lies the unity of his personality as poet and religious, that unity of which he was

most sharply conscious when it finally broke him, for neither his poet friends nor his brothers in religion had any eyes for it.²⁸

To look rightly at the world – to *read* rightly – involves both breaking and being broken. And it is the act of faith that might receive the unforeseen gift of ‘instress’. The nun who ‘*Read* the unshapeable shock night | And knew the who and the why’ (61: italics mine) (the nun who gazed through the piece-bright paling of the night-world and saw the divine shocks housed within) was the one who discovered a sudden vital and redemptive unity between beholder and beheld, between creature and Christ, even as her own body was broken in the ‘heart-break’ of wreck (57).

* * *

Looking, for Hopkins, is continuous with reading. His lecture notes on ‘Rhythm and other structural parts of Rhetoric – Verse’ (speculatively dated 1873-74) indicate the continuity between his visual imagination (with what it means to *look*) and his prosodic theory (with what it means to *read*):

We may think of words as heavy bodies [...] Now every visible palpable body has a centre of gravity round which it is in balance and a centre of illumination or *highspot* or *quickspot* up to which it is lighted and down from which it is shaded. The centre of gravity is like the accent of stress, the *highspot* like the accent of pitch [...] English is of this kind, the accent of stress strong

(J&P, 269)

Language is imagined in terms that recall the visual and energetic dappling of Hopkins’ verse. ‘Words’ are ‘centre[s] of illumination’ that resemble the stars in the sky or the flowers in the meadow. ‘Words’ are also ‘heavy bodies’ or ‘centre[s] of gravity’ that resemble nodes of stress or points of centripetal force. Language becomes a dappled field as words are put into prosodic relation: the vivid dapple of light and shade corresponds to ‘pitch’, the energetic dapple of bodies and gravity corresponds to ‘stress’. In Hopkins’ earlier ‘notes on Greek philosophy’ (1868) he had speculated that this dappled effect might be to do with the distribution of meaning in language rather than the patterns of prosodic realization: ‘every word may be considered as the contraction or coinciding-point of its definitions’ (*Essays*, 306). But the two are not exclusive. Hopkins’ figuring of the individual word-body as a gathering-in of stress and as a constellation of definitions are two different aspects of his sense that language is essentially a dappled form, a series of constellations. As Martin observes, the clustering of meaning and the gathering of stress finds its figure in the visual markedness of the page, the diacritics signalling that this is a language that plays to both eye and ear and contains within itself

²⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. by Joseph Fessio, S. J. and John Riches, 7 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), III: *Studies in Theological Lay Styles*, p. 357.

a plurality of seen, heard, and spoken meanings: Hopkins ‘affirms and acknowledges that each word [...] contains its own multiples. The accent mark “makes much” of these dimensions’.²⁹

Both world and poem are imagined as dappled forms. Hopkins’ sense of the world’s dapple – or rather starriness – in ‘The Starlight Night’ led him to advocate a practice of looking that sought to mark the interval, the gaps and breaks in the starry field through which we might encounter an instress of its ‘starriness’. Hopkins’ prosodic theory, I suggest, also rests on this recognition that sensuous life is essentially dappled, an experience of ‘likeness and unlikeness’, of comparison, contrast, and communicative tension. As such, his prosodic practice labours towards a kind of reading that marks the interval, attentive to those moments between words and accents in which we might discover an ‘instress’ of verse itself. Among other things, this suggests an account of ‘Sprung Rhythm’ that does not attempt to say what it is but rather what Hopkins was trying to achieve through it.

Writing to Dixon in 1879, Hopkins sought to clarify what exactly he meant by ‘Sprung Rhythm’. The clarification reveals what was at stake for Hopkins in realising the ‘echo of a new rhythm’ that had so long haunted his ear (*Correspondence I*, 317):

I shd. add that the word Sprung which I use for this rhythm means something like abrupt and applies by rights only where one stress follows another running, without syllable between.

(*Correspondence I*, 346)

‘Abrupt’ recalls Hopkins’ essay of 1863-64, ‘On the signs of health and decay’: ‘The division then is of *abrupt* and gradual, of parallelistic and continuous, of intervallary and chromatic [...] humour is chromatic, wit *abrupt*, intervallary’ (*Essays*, 108-09: italics mine). ‘Abrupt’, ‘parallelistic’, ‘intervallary’: Hopkins uses this constellation of words to describe artistic compositions that are organized according to a principle of contrast or comparison, or which (to borrow from an adjacent constellation of words and concepts) might be thought of as ‘dappled’ or ‘pied’. Sprung Rhythm is a means of making verse-rhythm a sequence of abruptions, a way of marking the intervals of poetry. These ‘intervals’ are not the periods of gradation, slack, or shade that Hopkins sometimes imagines exist between ‘words’ and ‘bodies’: he is insistent that in a Sprung Rhythm stress follows stress ‘without syllable between’. Rather, these ‘intervals’ are a moment of contrast in which two consecutive stresses are distinguished from one another.

This becomes apparent in the autograph copies of the 1877 sonnets where Sprung Rhythms are indicated with great colons, a pair of dark emphatic spots that sit just above and just below the line of text. Hopkins’ great colons have been almost entirely neglected in Hopkins scholarship³⁰ but these marks, though apparently insignificant, clarify an important aspect of Hopkins’ prosodic thinking –

²⁹ Martin, p. 66.

³⁰ Only Catherine Phillips has commented on Hopkins’ great colon, noting that they ‘signify a stress on the syllables either side of the colon; a sprung opening’: *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. by Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 307.

and, in particular, of his thinking about Sprung Rhythm. In the curtal-sestet of ‘Pied Beauty’, great colons appear between consecutive stresses and before the ‘sprung head’ of a line that opens with a stress (*Correspondence I*, 425):

: All things counter, original, spáre, : strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swíft, : slów; sweet, sóur; adázzle, dím;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is pást : change:
 Práise : him.

(Later MSS, 126)

Writing to Bridges in 1877, Hopkins explained that while ‘Deutschland’ was in Sprung Rhythm its rhythms were marked ‘with accents, not great colons, which I had not then thought of’ (*Correspondence I*, 277). Having introduced the mark in 1877, Hopkins continued to use it in his autographs until 1880. In annotations and fair-copies destined for friends, however, he avoided the great colon, substituting accents in some places and leaving consecutive stresses unmarked in others: he hesitated, it seems, to impose this unusual diacritical mark on his reader.³¹ The great colon is the only one of Hopkins’ diacritical marks that falls in the space between words.³² As MacKenzie observes, all of Hopkins’ other stress marks are carefully ‘aimed [...] at the (first) vowel in the accented syllable’ (‘Introduction’; *Later MSS*, 18); even the ‘twirls’ and ‘loops’ that signify relations of stress (a contrapuntal inversion of two syllables tied together ‘into the time of one’) aim their hooks or points at the accented syllables.³³ The great colon, however, does not mark out the event of stress but rather the abruption between stresses, the moment in which one stress is distinguished from another. The great colon does not signal stress or prosodic markedness but rather the moment of recognition that is central to and which animates any instance of Sprung Rhythm.

In rhythmic terms there is no actual ‘interval’ between stresses: the word is only apposite because it belongs to a verbal constellation that describes the phenomenon of stark contrast. But when Hopkins marks out his Sprung Rhythms on the page, he imagines their inner moment of abruption as a spatial interval: the white gap *between* words occupied by the dark spots of the great colon. For Hopkins, the interval – imagined as a physical break or as a moment in which likeness or contrast is recognized – is the place of ‘instress’. In his notes on ‘Rhetoric’, Hopkins imagined prosodic stress in terms of energetic dapple. When he visualizes prosodic stress on the page, it is striking that he opts for

³¹ Compare, for instance, Hopkins’ draft of ‘Brothers’ with the fair-copy he sent to Dixon (*Later MSS*, pp. 208–09).

³² In the Stonyhurst MS of ‘Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea’, he briefly experimented with placing the stress accents after the stressed syllable but soon reverted – in this draft and all subsequent MSS – to his standard practice of placing diacritical marks above the line of text: *Early MSS*, p. 211.

³³ ‘Author’s Preface’ in Bridges, p. 5.

a diacritical mark that is an instance of his most common dappled pattern: spots on a contrasting background. The great colon thus stands as a sign for what happens in that moment of abruptness or interval that is central to a Sprung Rhythm: dappled verse-rhythm breaks into an instress of its own dappled nature.

This reading of Hopkins' great colon is confirmed by the wider, more securely established context of Hopkins' dappled thought. In 'The Starlight Night', exclamation marks stand as a visible sign (!) for the intervals between starry images, the gaps in the 'piece-bright paling' through which 'shocks' or an instress of 'starriness' might be communicated to the beholder. These exclamation marks are also a prosodic prompt for the voice to mark these intervals with intensifications of pitch or stress, discovering these 'shocks' within the rhythms of the uttering body. And this reading of the great colon as a sign for the instress of Sprung Rhythm supports Hopkins' claim that 'Sprung Rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self' (*Correspondence II*, 748). Sprung Rhythm does not simply increase the intensity, quantity, or proximity of stress in verse but rather labours towards an 'abrupt', 'intervallary', or 'parallelistic' experience of rhythm, distressing the spoken, sensuous form of poetry so that it might break into a communication of its instress or *poetry-ness*. As Hopkins put it in a letter to his brother, using language that recalls the fire and flash of 'instress': Sprung Rhythm 'purges [verse] to an emphasis [...] brighter, livelier, more lustrous' (*Correspondence II*, 748).

* * *

Hopkins' poems of the 1870s are concerned with the dappled field of the world and poem, and with the kinds of knowledge and experience that become available as we look or read under these conditions. But in the apocalyptic sonnets of the 1880s – 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' (1885) and 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' (1888) – Hopkins begins to imagine a world where the 'dapple is at an end', where the 'skéined stained véined' textures of sensuous life have been spun off on to 'two spools' ('Sibyl's Leaves'; 98). These sonnets stand as a final reckoning or judgement on Hopkins' dappled poetry, an account of its animating poetics and the moral and spiritual realities to which it bears witness. This poetic reckoning necessarily involves a further, more sober account of what it means to read and what might be at stake for us as readers. And so, at the very end of Hopkins' dappled vision stand two final figures for 'Poetry': a 'dragonish' tree (98) and an arching 'elm' (105), their breaking canopies figuring out against the darkening sky a sign for what it means to read poetry and for what it means to live and act as moral, mortal beings in a world that is essentially and irredeemably pied.

'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' opens with a vision of 'evening' that seems an image of apocalyptic 'night':

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, | vaulty, voluminous, ... stupendous
 Evening strains to be tíme's vást, | womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night.
 Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, | her wild hollow hoarlight hung to the height
 Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars, | stárs principal, overbend us,
 Fíre-féaturing heaven. For earth | her being has unbound; her dapple is at end, as-
 tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; | self ín self steepèd and páshed – quíte
 Disremembering, dísmémbering | áll now. Heart, you round me right
 With: Óur évening is over us; óur night | whélms, whélms, ánd will end us.
 Only the beakleaved boughs dragonish | damask the tool-smooth bleak light; black,
 Ever so black on it. Óur tale, O óur oracle! | Lét life, wáned, ah lét life wind
 Off hér once skéined stained véined variety | upon, áll on twó spools; párt, pen, páck
 Now her áll in twó flocks, twó folds – black, white; | right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
 But thése two; wáre of a wórld where bút these | twó tell, each off the óther; of a rack
 Where, selfwrunq, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, | thóughts agaínst thoughts ín groans
 grínd.

(97-98)

As evening ‘strains’ towards night (a darker sky and an apocalyptic end), the dappled patterns of earth’s day and man’s mortal life are brought to a close. In an inversion of the Edenic sonnet of 1877 where ‘Pied Beauty’ was increased and multiplied into a world of ‘dappled things’, ‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’ imagines the decrease and reduction of this sensuous variety until it becomes a single, stark contrast: ‘black, white’. Adjectives (those marks of the world’s sensuous variegation) become contrastive pairs held in the tension of rhyme: ‘earnest’ (its suffix indicating being or possession) holds together with ‘earthless’ (its suffix indicating not-being and dispossession); the ‘hornlight’ of the sun holds together with the ‘hoarlight’ of the moon; birth, life, and death hold together in the uniformity and all-encompassing rhyme of ‘womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night’. There is a tendency for these ‘equal’ relations that preserve a principle of difference to appear ‘attuneable’, rhymed-out into identity, evened-out into the grey of a faded evening world. A few lines later, however, the significance of these contrastive pairs becomes evident. The colourful, variegated texture of world and poem is being spun off on to two spools; the lovely ‘dapple’ of the world is disclosing its pied nature.

As earth’s day comes to an end the stars come out: ‘her earliest stars, earlstars, | stárs principal, overbend us, | Fíre-féaturing heaven’. This starry sky, like Hopkins’ other starscapes, is a sign for an earthly beauty that consists as a constellation of luminous and heavy bodies, as a dappled field of light and dark, stress and slack; the stars are a sign for the lovely, waning ‘dapple’ of earth. Stars were once associated with the benign meetings of heaven and earth: the ‘starry, starry shire’ sent St. Dorothea heavenly lilies and quinces (36), the ‘Bethlehem star’ led Hopkins to ‘the sight of Him Who freed me’ (‘Moonless darkness stands between’; 170), and the ‘starlight eyes’ of heaven bore witness to the ‘murder of Margaret Clitheroe’ (182). More particularly, starriness was a sign for the incarnation, Christ hidden beneath the ‘piece-bright paling’ and the ‘lovely asunder | Starlight’. But these ‘fire-féaturing’ stars are the sign of a new antagonism between heaven and earth, a sign of the

coming judgement in which the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the earth laid bare. The starriness of the world becomes the sign of her own destruction. Her ‘dapple’ becomes her undoing.

Dappling has always tended towards wreck: bodies press together into energetic clusters, mermaids, blossoms, and boughs crowding together until all the tangled ‘wrecks’ of Spring are carried away on a stream of debris. Hopkins’ language of apocalypse in ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’ – straying, swarming, thronging – recalls the self-destructive energy of dappled pattern. The dappled things of this world gather into ‘throng’. As bodies press closer and closer together, their individual distinctiveness begins to break down, boundaries overwhelmed by the intensity of energetic identification. Eventually even the individual ‘self’ collapses inwards, crushed by its own ‘self’. All that is left is the crush of bodies and the emptiness of the world, or (to put this final contrast in visual terms) ‘black’ and ‘white’. ‘Dapple’ brings itself to an end, destroyed by the iteration of its own dappled principle. The starry skies are a reminder that while judgement comes from ‘heaven’, earth moves unrelentingly towards her own apocalypse.

As dappling gains a new, moral dimension as a sign for the world’s corruption, the ‘Poetry’-tree becomes ‘dragonish’: prosodic practice is implicated in – tainted or transformed by – this altered vision of the sensuous world. The dappled canopy was once a figure for the gentle meetings of heaven and earth, its ‘hung-heavenward boughs’ (*On the Portrait*; 197) the home of a heaven-sent ‘Peace’ (85). The ‘Poetry’-tree was a figure for an incarnational vision of the world (heaven hid behind earth’s frail skin) and for an incarnational poetics (prosodic intermittence giving an ‘instress’ of vital but inapprehensible meaning). But ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’ grows out of Hopkins’ earlier sonnet-sketch, ‘The times are nightfall’ (185). This was a vision of a ‘world undone’, a place of ‘wreck’ and ‘distress’ stalked by ‘dragons’ and ‘sin’. In this world, man does not grow like the ‘hung-heavenward’ tree but falls, becoming ‘doomed dragon food’ (*Andromeda*; 84). And so the tree of ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’ is not like the ash, a dappled sign for the happy mingling of heaven and earth, but rather a child of the devil-filled tree of Eden, a dappled sign for the ‘havoc-pock[ing]’ that came with ‘corruption [...] the world’s first woe’ (*On the Portrait*; 197). Hopkins’ pied vision has its linguistic origins in the particoloured magpie, but its metaphysical origins lie with that agent of man’s corruption, the ‘white snake square-pied with black’ (1868; *Diaries*, 449). The tree becomes a sign for how our reading practices are shaped by – and testify to – the corruption of the world.

The tree’s dark boughs interleave and spread across the ‘bleak light’ of the sky, marking out a dappled pattern of dark and light. Hopkins often imagines the iteration of worldly pattern as a form of marking, a scoring and stippling of the skins and surfaces of the world into legibility. Here, the sky is ‘tool-smooth’, a prepared, unmarked surface: the boughs are ‘beak-leaved’, furnished with aggressive, bony mandibles to mark and tool this surface into pattern. These boughs ‘damask’ the sky so that it resembles a woven cloth printed with decorative figures (a fitting image for a world imagined as a text that is ‘unbound’ and wound off ‘on two spools’). But to ‘damask’ is also to ‘deface or destroy by

stamping or marking with lines and figures', the printer's method of wrecking surplus or seditious books and making waste paper of them (*OED*, 'damask', v. 5). The marking boughs are a form of over-writing, the world imagined as a text bearing an engraved or printed sign that marks it out for destruction and renders it illegible. Once again, the iteration of the world's dapple brings about its own destruction. This is obliteration by iteration.

The dappled skies and scapes of this world are thus imagined as an almost illegible text that tells only of its own corruption. To read becomes the labour of picking out meaningful patterns within the literal 'pie' of the printed page (*OED*, 'pie' n. 4: printer's term meaning 'broken type'): reading becomes *spelling*. To read (as the title suggests) is like the labour of gathering 'spelt' from the threshed leavings of grain (beating once again revealing an enduring truth: 'That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear ('(Carrion Comfort'); 100); it is like piecing together meaning from tea-'leaves', finding an 'oracle' in the fortune-teller's teacup. But to spell is also to spell out loud, invoking the word that has been hidden in the pied text. To read aloud is to bring together the phonemes that make up this description of the 'dragonish tree' ('**B**eak leaved boughs [...] tool- [...] **b**leak light [...]'). To read this line aloud is to discover that its phonemes (like Sybilline leaves) spell out '**black**', apocalyptic blackness felt in the intermittent utterings of the voice and the broken sounds in the ear before the written oracle reveals the future as '[...] black | Ever so black'. To spell is to come to an intimate and immediate knowledge of the dark meanings that are concealed behind the pie of world and text. To spell is to discover the inner life – the 'instress' – that spells itself out in world and text. Man and skylark, both prisoners to mortality, still sometimes sing out their true natures through the paling of their 'bone-house', scattering momentary impressions of their intense life into the world as 'sweetest, sweetest spells' ('The Caged Skylark'; 70-71). Indeed, each 'mortal thing [...] deals out that being indoors each one dwells', sending forth and scattering its hidden life as 'Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells' ('As kingfishers catch fire'; 90). To spell is to experience instress. The energetic life of the world is scattered like broken songs or disembodied 'Selves' into the dappled world; to spell aloud is to gather these 'Selves' together and so to recover the original instress within one's own uttering, embodied self.³⁴ Instress was once a vital encounter with the hidden life of the world and poem but in 'Sibyl's Leaves' it has become an 'oracle' of blackness, a sign that tells only of the world's corruption and the poem's illegibility.

To read under the sign of a 'havoc-pocked' sky is to receive an instress that offers neither redemption nor knowledge but only a foretaste of the coming judgement: it testifies not to incarnation but to alienation. More particularly, to read – or, rather, to *spell* – under the sign of this 'havoc-pocked' sky is to discover that this instress is only the 'bitter' taste of one's own self ('I wake and feel the fell of dark'; 101). The inwards turn of instress in 'Sibyl's Leaves' is, I suggest, due to Hopkins' sense that the havoc-pocking of world and poem extends to the mind itself. 'Sibyl's Leaves' stands as a poetic gloss of Hopkins' claim that the 'artificial part of poetry [...] reduces itself to the principle of

³⁴ See Joshua King's account of utterance and instress, pp. 209-37.

parallelism' ('Poetic Diction'; *Essays*, 120). The sestet imagines a world in which the dappled variety of the world is reduced to a final piedness: 'twó flocks, twó folds'. This twofoldedness cannot be reduced further: these 'twó tell, each off the other', each element continually made known ('told') through the energetic strain of opposition or (to use Hopkins' own term) 'continuous parallelism' (*Essays*, 120). And so, as Hopkins works to describe the 'end' of the dappled world, these patterns of twofoldedness continually reproduce themselves, doubling and twinning in an ongoing 'telling' of their irreducible duality: 'twó flocks' doubles up with 'twó folds' before unfolding into two more instances of binary pattern, 'black, white; I right, wrong', the rhyme across the caesura establishing a further double relation between tonal and moral categories. This 'continuous parallelism' produces a correspondingly twofold pattern of thought: 'reckon but, reck but'. Thinking becomes the double labour of reckoning (counting) and recking (adjudicating), each process of thought differently alert to the variety of things and relations in the world. The parallelism of world and poetic language is thus reproduced in the mind as attention is strained across perceived oppositions. As Hopkins put it in 'Poetic Diction': 'marked parallelism in structure whether of elaboration or of emphasis begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense. And moreover parallelism in expression tends to beget or passes into parallelism in thought' (*Essays*, 121).

Parallelism of thought becomes 'thóughts agáinst thoughts', the agony of a mind that is strung between opposed desires and the agony of a conscience that recognizes within itself this strain and stress and so feels itself condemned. This agony of thought is discovered as 'thóughts agáinst thoughts ín groans grínd'. The strain of thought is heard in the agony – the 'groans' – of the voice: more particularly, the strain of thought is felt in the frustrations and negotiations of prosodic performance. Accentual stress would normally fall on 'thoughts' and 'groans' but Hopkins' diacritical marks indicate that stress should primarily fall on the prepositions – on the relations between 'thoughts' rather than on the 'thoughts' themselves ('agaínst [...] ín [...] grínd'). Such a marking of the words runs counter to what King calls their 'aural fiber' with the result that any audible reading of the line must either disregard Hopkins' marked prosodic intention or grate against the 'speaker's opposed intentions'.³⁵ In 'The times are nightfall', the solution to the corruption of the world was to attend to the 'world within', bringing to an end the piedness of 'dragons' and 'sin' by making 'your will [...] law in that small commonweal' (186). But now Hopkins' prosodic marking means that neither intention can be made the single 'will' by which the reader is governed. Instead, Hopkins' prosody leads the reader into expressing their essential piedness, telling of their moral and prosodic failures, compromises, and corruptions. And because this expression of self is spoken, it becomes an internalized instress, a recognition of one's own piedness discovered in the agonies of the uttering body.

To put it in slightly different terms, the poetic interval that was once the place of instress (of lovely, transcendent revelation) is now only the place of stress and strain. The intervals between words

³⁵ King, p. 232.

and bodies were once the gaps in the paling of the world through which the inner fire of divine instress might flame out. But now these intervals are only the place of sustained prosodic stress, of an agonising tension between opposed intentions. These intervals do not tell of a lovely reality beyond but only of the frustrations and failures of mind, body, and will. The paling of world and poem, its intervallary surface, is no longer a ‘parclose’ through which we might glimpse Christ but only a cage ‘against’ which we might dash ourselves, learning of nothing but our own corruption. We come to resemble the ‘caged bear’ of Hopkins’ ‘Meditation on Hell’ (1881). Every attempt to give prosodic form to the poem brings only a deeper instress of our own failures and a foretaste of the hellish eternity that awaits: ‘Against these acts of its own the lost spirit dashes itself like a caged bear and is in prison, violently instresses them and burns, stares into them and is the deeper darkened’ (*Sermons*, 138).

* * *

Hopkins thinks through constellations of adjacent words and figures; he also thinks through paired and contrasting poems. ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’ was a re-envisioning of ‘Deutschland’, an attempt to articulate how the dappled forces of the world drive towards its apocalyptic undoing. ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection’ is another look at ‘Deutschland’, an attempt to understand how God works individual redemption – a ‘lovely-felicitous Providence’ – through the chaos and ‘hurtle’ of a foundering world (‘Deutschland’; 61, 52). ‘Heraclitean Fire’ thus stands in pied relation to ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’, reimagining its vision of a world in which the ‘dapple is at an end’ and, more particularly, rethinking how poetry itself – and, in this case, the sonnet form – might enable us to experience and apprehend the meaning of such an end.

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
 Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in marches.
 Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,
 Shivelights and shadowtackle ín long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.
 Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare
 Of yestertempest’s creases; in pool and rutpeel parches
 Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crúst, dust; stáñches, stárches
 Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there
 Foótfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature’s bonfire burns on.
 But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
 Mán, how fást his fíredint, | his mark on mind, is gone!
 Bóth are in an ünfáthomable, áll is in an enórmous dárk
 Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone
 Sheer off, disséveral, a stár, | death blots black out; nor mark
 Is ány of him at áll so stárk
 But vastness blurs and time | beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
 A héart’s-clarion! Awáy grief’s gásping, | joyless days, dejection.

Across my foundering deck shone
 A beacon, an eternal beam. I Flesh fade, and mortal trash
 Fall to the resíduary worm; I world's wildfire, leave but ash:
 In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
 I am all at once what Christ is, I since he was what I am, and
 Thís Jack, jóke, poor pótsherd, I patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
 Is immortal diamond.³⁶

The poem begins with a ‘Cloud-puffball’. This is the billowing cloud that has inflated to a white fullness and which will joyously chase through the cloud-filled skies in the opening two lines of the sonnet. But it is also a cloud-like fungus like those Hopkins saw on 3 June 1866 in the ‘meadows yellow with buttercups and under-reddened with sorrel and containing white of ox-eyes and puffballs’ (*Diararies*, 364). The fungus is enlarged and white, awaiting the rupture of its peridium and the sudden discharge of its powdery spores. As the cloudy body of the puffball tears, so does the distinction between cloud and mushroom, the puffball opening into dusty clouds that join the ‘torn tufts’ and ‘tossed pillows’ of the opening line. The bursting ‘cloud-puffball’ stands as a sign – vanishing on expression – for the poem’s concern with patterned fields (the puffballs and ox-eyes – or ‘margarets’ – marking out another starry pattern on the meadow) and with distressed textures (torn bodies, scattered spores). But the puffball is also a figure for the form of Hopkins’ longest and most experimental sonnet, for the slow-motion rupturing and release of the sonnet’s form into and beyond the moment of death and the final communication of spores or words that is the beginning of an imperishable life.

But, for now, the ‘cloud-puffball’ is one cloud in a breezy, cloud-textured sky. Clouds join stars and flowers within the constellation of small, bright objects that are a figure for the dappled field of the world. In his journal entry of 2-3 June 1866, Hopkins draws on the cluster of words associated with visual pattern and prosodic intermittence to describe a rainy cloudscape:

broken into mackerel [...] smaller fleecy *spots* wh. in the moonlight *spotted* the silvered the sky [...] two *parallel* spines [...] their oblique *flake* or thread better *marked*, above them on a *ground* [...] a drift of *spotty* tufts or drops

(*Diararies*, 364: italics mine)

The abstract conception of the dappled field (whether visual or prosodic) is realized as – embodied in – the changeful beauty of the sky. In this poem, scattered clouds ‘flaunt forth’, billowing gaily in the wind and making a display of their gaudy loveliness. ‘Flaunt forth’ also remembers those other verbs that signalled the sudden revelation of luminous beauty or pattern, the instress that is held as ‘flush’ and ‘foredrawn’, released as ‘flare’, ‘flame’, or ‘fire’: like Hopkins’ other skies, this cloudscape is a sign for an incarnational vision of the world in which to look at its patterned skins and surfaces is to

³⁶ This text is based on the Gardner and Mackenzie edition: *Poems*, pp. 105-06. I have, however, re-inserted the stress accents (but not the slurs), capitalized ‘Built’, and removed the caesura in the sixth line as per the autograph MS: *Later MSS*, pp. 330-31.

encounter the hidden life within. But these clouds are also a figure for the energetic dappling of the world, the tendency for bodies to cluster and crowd. They are gregarious, chevying into congregations on the ‘air- | built thoroughfare’ and thronging together into ‘gay-gangs’ (words, too, clustering into compounds). In ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’ swarming and thronging was the wrecking of the world; here, however, it is only the sign of its impermanence, the ‘pied beauty’ of mortal life repeatedly manifested in the changing scapes of the natural world.

A cloudscape begins the poem but the octave introduces a constellation of other scapes – lightscape, windscape, mudscape – each taking roughly two lines and each a new iteration of the world’s ‘dapple’. The first of these is the light-filled canopy of an ‘elm’. It casts dark leaves against the overcast sky, re-dapping the ‘roughcast’ clouds and ‘dazzling whitewash’ with the darker ‘fringe and fray’ of its canopy (‘(Ashboughs)’; 185). It also seems to cast its slender shadows (its ‘shadowtackle’) against the rough, whitewashed surface of a wall, splintering its brilliant white into ‘shivelights’. Perhaps these ‘shivelights and shadowtackle’ which ‘in long lashes lace, lance, and pair’ are also the leafy canopy itself, its ‘dapple’ ever-changing as branches interweave and young shoots spring forth or ‘lance’ with fresh growth. And perhaps these ‘shivelights and shadowtackle’ are also the reverse image of the leafy canopy, its constellation of broken lights that move and collide, blossom, lance, or bud into new spots of brilliance. The elm is the last of Hopkins’ trees. The dappled canopy was once a sign for the meeting of heaven and earth, their joyful intimacy (as in ‘(Ashboughs)’) or their hellish alienation (as in ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’). But now it is only a sign for Heraclitean flux, for the transience of all distinct impressions – of sky, wall, branches, and light – within the ever-changing cosmos that finds its figure in the dappled canopy. The next scape is a windscape: a boisterous wind gathers its energy and releases it in the shocks of roping, wrestling, and beating. As the wind disturbs the air it also distresses and levels the surface of the earth, beating it ‘bare | Of yestertempest’s creases’, and, perhaps, leaving a new set of wind-blown marks. Finally there is the mudscape of ‘squandering ooze’, mud stiffening into a cast of the many feet that have marked and trodden its ‘foottretted’ surface. The ground is rutted and fretted, and as the mud dries it becomes ‘rutpeel’, peeling away at the edges and curling up in the hot sun. These patterned scapes testify to the world’s flux, to the passage and passing of clouds, branches, textures, and feet.

Man’s patterning of this world is unique. Clouds toss and elms arch but only man marks, his ‘manmarks’ a sign of his labour to leave an impression on the world. These marks, however, do not endure: ‘how fāst his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!’ Man’s ‘firedint’ is his impression of himself upon the world, either through industry (toiling with fire and anvil, beating, branding, or indenting matter) or though the sudden revelation of his being, the flash and flare of instress. Man’s impression on the world might also be his ‘mark on mind’, his contribution to human understanding or simply the persistence of his memory. These marks might appear ‘fāst’ at first, but however secure, enduring, or indelible they seem, they are, in fact, only ‘fāst [...] gone’. The smallness and brevity of man’s life mean that there is no ‘mark’ so ‘stark’, so visible or unyielding in its form, that ‘vastness’

cannot blur it into non-existence, nor ‘time’ beat ‘level’ into an unmarked smoothness. But the ‘pity and indig | nation!’ is more than just the obliteration of the marks of man’s labour and legacy: the tragedy is that man himself does not endure. Man’s presence in the world is imagined as a kind of starriness. Man is nature’s ‘clearest-selvèd spark’, the creature with the most individuated and self-conscious inner being. And his presence in the world (his ‘manshape’) is imagined as the clustered, ‘disseveral’ brightness of a constellation. Starriness, as in Hopkins’ earlier poetry, is associated with instress – with the inner, energetic life of the world and with the communication of this life to the beholder. But in this poem, man’s starriness is blotted out by death. It is the physical death of man but also the erasure of his instressed presence within the world, the death of self and soul: all is ‘in an enormous dark | Drowned’. All that remains is man’s muddy ‘manmarks’. These marks are not the achievement of human labour or the impression of man’s inner life but only the incidental traces of his presence, footprints in the mud, his being in the world returned to dust: ‘wé dream we are rooted in earth – Dust! | Flesh falls within sight of us’ (*Deutschland*; 55).

Marking, however, is more than the physical labour of living and working in the world. Marking is also the cognitive and prosodic labour of reading verse: looking, noticing, hearing, understanding, and emphasising with the voice. The two senses of mark are related. The visible ‘mark’ is a character, sign, or trace, an inscribed meaning that becomes legible through the corresponding activity of ‘marking’. Hopkins’ imaginative world is stippled and scored and plotted, its markedness resembling the work of pen or stylus, a labour more directly associated with the inscription of linguistic meanings. And ‘marked’ is also the word Hopkins uses for poetic parallelism, its visual sense of conspicuous pattern describing the intervallary textures of verse. In his prose and verse writings, Hopkins moves quickly between the sense of ‘mark’ as legible sign and ‘mark’ as exhortation to attend to inscribed or spoken meanings. In his sermon of 5 October 1879, he observes that Christ’s miracles were a ‘mark that God had sent him’ before immediately admonishing his congregation to ‘mark the wisdom and subtlety of what he did’ (*Sermons*, 28). In ‘Deutschland’, these two senses of ‘mark’ are even more compressed: ‘Mark, the mark is of man’s make’ (58). Semantic adjacency becomes prosodic proximity, the voice navigating the dense repetition of words as the mind navigates the changing inflections of sense. Hopkins’ careful juxtaposition of these different senses of ‘mark’ creates a moment of instress in which the constellation of meanings, experiences, and practices associated with ‘marking’ is drawn into an intense moment of embodied, prosodic ‘markedness’. And this moment of repetition in sermon and poem corresponds to Hopkins’ broader poetic ambition: to explore the adjacency and perhaps the continuity of different kinds of marking – the labour of living in the world and the prosodic labour of reading verse – in order to come to a more profound sense of what it means to live in a marked world, dwelling under the sign of a pied sky or (to put it in terms of Hopkins’ later verse) under the sign of the wounded body of the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected Christ. In this achieved identity between the marked text and the marked world, the experiences and apprehensions afforded by verse can bear witness to our real beliefs, to our metaphysical and spiritual

commitments. Without this identity (as Tennyson and Hardy knew) the aesthetic conditions of verse become a means of evading or suspending our commitments and, as such, can only afford temporary ‘beliefs’ and illusory consolations.

And so man’s failure to leave an enduring ‘mark’ in ‘Heraclitean Fire’ is not only a failure to leave an impression on the world, but also a failure to read rightly. In the autograph faircopy of ‘Heraclitean Fire’ there are twenty-seven stress-accents, a constellation of small slashes marking the surface of the text (*Later MSS*; 330-31). Of these twenty-seven marks, fourteen fall in lines nine to sixteen, the meditation on man’s inability to leave an enduring mark on the world: four of these marks come at the end of the octave in the lines reflecting on the ‘manmarks’ left in the drying mud (‘crúst, dust, stáncches, stárches [...] Foótfretted’). Three further marks come at the close of the poem in the naming of unremarkable man (‘Thís Jack, jóke, poor pótsherd’). Diacritical marks become most necessary when man’s ability to make his mark is most in question. These diacritical marks are a sign for the failures of prosodic performance. Martin argues that Hopkins’ diacritical marks are a sign for the failure of readers to recite poetry in the same way and hence their collective failure to realize the ideal of a shared and vital linguistic culture: ‘the material form of metrical marking was proof, in itself, that all ears do not hear alike, nor do all voices emphasize in the right way, despite convention’.³⁷ But diacritical marks are also a sign for the individual’s failure and the failings of poetic language: the poet’s failure to fully communicate the intended patterns of stress in poetic language and the reader’s failure to recognize and correctly voice these intended patterns. Just as the dappled sky testified to the unresolved plurality of opposed intentions, so the marking of the text testifies to a corresponding prosodic failure: man’s inability to adequately realize the intended pattern of stress and, consequently, to adequately embody the intended meaning.

But Hopkins’ marks are more than a mark of failure as Martin claims. In his letter to Bridges in 1883, Hopkins laments the need for the ‘always offensive’ diacritical marks yet insists that they are necessary: ‘Still there must be some’ (*Correspondence II*, 621). The marks are not merely a sign of failure but a means of labouring towards a correct prosodic marking of the words: ‘I [...] only mark where the reader is likely to mistake’ (*Correspondence II*, 621). Hopkins’ intention is pedagogical. His poetry assumes initial failure, an inability to ‘look’ rightly at the world or to read and recite verse correctly. His poetry labours towards a practice of looking and reading that is imagined as a correct ‘marking’ of the world in the many-dimensioned sense of that word: a labour that works towards recognising (‘marking’) the intermittent (‘marked’) textures of the world and so discovers the sudden flare of instress (‘markedness’). Writing to his brother in 1885, Hopkins insists that his verse must not ‘be recited only. True poetry must be studied’ (*Correspondence II*, 748). Hopkins’ diacritics are not merely a sign for our inevitable failure to successfully negotiate between competing or ambiguous prosodic demands. Rather, they are an attempt to guide our reading towards a more adequate realisation of the prosodic intention. At the point at which man’s ability to ‘mark’ is most in question,

³⁷ Martin, p. 52.

Hopkins is most determined to teach us how to read or ‘mark’ correctly. At stake is the hope of an enduring life. Man’s failure to leave a mark was the sign of his transience, his mortality. By learning how to ‘mark’ correctly (in all the many sense of that word: to inscribe, look, read, voice, understand; to recognize the marks of Christ in the world, the marks of his sacrifice, and the corresponding marks on the bodies of the redeemed) we might realize the hope of an enduring life. To attend rightly to the ‘uttermost mark’ of the suffering and risen Christ might be to find an ‘ark | For the listener’, a means of passing though the chaotic waters (the swirl and slogger of the dappled world or the stress and strain of the marked text) and into the quiet redemption beyond (‘Deutschland’; 62).

* * *

To mark correctly, for Hopkins, is above all to mark the interval: to attend to the breaks and gaps in the sensuous surface of the world and poem through which an instress of life and meaning might flare out. Marking is a question of how we look at the visual world (its starriness) and of how we read the patterns of verse (its stress). But marking is also a question of broken and wounded bodies: a question, that is, of form. ‘Heraclitean Fire’ is the last and most complex of Hopkins’ caudated sonnets of the 1880s. The Petrarchan sonnet might be thought of as a poem with one break, its volta the one opportunity for revelation or revision. (‘Volta’, of course, means ‘turn’ and not ‘break’ but Hopkins imagines the point of instress as both interval and – in the case of ‘Sprung Rhythm’ – abrupton.) ‘Heraclitean Fire’, however, is a sonnet that is characterized by its breaking or rupturing. Like the ‘cloud-puffball’, it haemorrhages into additional lines, voltas, codas, and half-lines. The poem is an exercise in the breaking of form, an attempt to make and mark the poetic interval in order to arrive at a more profound sense of and participation in – to arrive, that is, at an *instress* of – the life that lies beneath the broken surface of the world.

To understand what Hopkins achieves through the breaking of the Petrarchan form, it is necessary to establish the exact form of ‘Heraclitean Fire’. Hopkins twice described it as a ‘sonnet with two codas’, once in a note on the autograph faircopy (*Later MSS*, 330) and once in a letter to Bridges (18-19 August 1888; *Correspondence II*, 947). This description has caused considerable confusion, with critics continually refusing to take Hopkins at his (emphatic) word. In ‘Sibyl’s Leaves’, Hopkins had experimented with ‘tacking’ on additional lengths through parataxis, internal rhyme, and eight-stress lines in order to produce what was, at that point, his ‘longest sonnet’ (*Correspondence II*, 841-42). Hopkins’ first caudated sonnet, ‘Harry Ploughman’ (1887), was extended by a similar means, through the interpolation of half-lines or ‘burden lines’ (*Correspondence II*, 896). In the same year, Hopkins began his second caudated sonnet, ‘Tom’s Garland’. This time, anxious that his previous sonnet was not properly caudated, he wrote to Bridges to ask ‘how correctly to make codas to sonnets; with the most approved order of rhymes and so on’ (2 November 1887;

Correspondence II, 903). Bridges' reply confirmed that codas 'are formed on an invariable plan and that Milton's sonnet gives an example' (6 November 1887; *Correspondence II*, 904): Milton's caudated sonnet, 'On the New Forcers of Conscience' (abbaabbacdcd...), is extended by two codas of a half-line followed by a couplet (...(c)ff(f)gg). 'Tom's Garland' followed this 'invariable plan' (abbaabbacdcd(d)ee(e)ff), each coda of half-line and couplet carefully identified with a marginal brace in the draft (*Later MSS*, 319). 'Heraclitean Fire', judged according to this Miltonic 'plan' does not have 'two codas': its rhyme scheme runs abbaabbacdcd(d)cc(c)ee(e)ff(f). Mariani and MacKenzie thus dismiss Hopkins' 'two codas' with a '[sic]',³⁸ while Preminger and Brogan, and Martin Dubois claim that the sonnet actually has 'three codas',³⁹ and Wimsatt insists that it is 'thrice caudated'.⁴⁰ Vendler proposes a solution, arguing that the original Petrarchan sestet has gained 'four "extra" rhyming lines' (...cdcdcd(d)cc(c)...) and 'has then appended a "coda" of six more lines' (...ee(e)ff(f)): ⁴¹ this makes more sense of Hopkins' claim as the final six lines can be read as two inverted Miltonic codas.

These accounts, however, ignore the interrelation of thematic and formal shifts, the vital exchange between the world of Hopkins' visual imagination and the experience of reading the poem. The shifts in subject follow – imperfectly but consistently – the turns of the Petrarchan form. The Petrarchan octave explores the transience of all marked and dappled patterns, running over into the beginning of a 'Foótfretted' ninth line. The sestet, wrong-footed by this fretting and fraying of the octave, introduces its volta mid-line: 'Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on'. The Petrarchan sestet (lines nine to fifteen) presents Hopkins' first vision of the end: man's marks do not endure and life ends in a bleak, unmarked oblivion. Thus far, 'Heraclitean Fire' follows the conventional divisions, turns, and rhyming patterns of the Petrarchan sonnet, even as it presses slightly at these boundaries, gaining an extra-metrical half-line and running over at the end of octave and sestet into the first half of the following line (abbaabbacdcd(d)c). Line sixteen introduces the second volta of the sonnet: 'Enough! the Resurrection'. This, I suggest, represents the beginning of a second sestet that is based on the Petrarchan model but includes extra-metrical half-lines (cc(c)ee(e)ff(f)). (In Hopkins' caudated sonnets, half-lines are always considered extra-metrical: in 'Harry Ploughman' the 'burden-lines' are such as might be 'recited by a chorus' (*Correspondence II*, 896).) This second sestet represents a new vision of the end, an apocalypse where man is not destroyed but purified in fire and proved immortal. As such, 'Heraclitean Fire' should be read as Petrarchan sonnet with two sestets, the second of which emerges from, and stands as a reprise, to the first. It is this sense of the 'coda' as a bringing-to-an-end of sensuous form – but retaining a memory of its more technical, Miltonic sense – that 'Heraclitean Fire' might correctly be said to have two codas'. It presents two different endings –

³⁸ Paul L. Mariani, *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 281; *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by N. H. MacKenzie and W. H. Gardner, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 293.

³⁹ Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 177; Dubois, p. 33.

⁴⁰ Wimsatt, p. 146.

⁴¹ Vendler, p. 34.

two distinct visions of man's fate – and this is enabled by practices of extension and extrametrical interpolation that have been borrowed from Hopkins' earlier experiments with Miltonic codas and looser forms of caudation.

'Heraclitean Fire' is an exercise in breaking poetic form, in making and marking the interval. The first volta, though a 'turn' or 'break' in the technical sense, was still part of the conventional structure of the Petrarchan sonnet and it offered only a vision of a dying world. But the second volta breaks the conventional Petrarchan form, distressing and breaking the linear and rhyming constraints of the poem. This volta is the moment in which sensuous form is broken, its dying, dappled patterns opening into unforeseen and vital patterns of extension. This shift of attention from the sensuous, transient form of poem and world to the transcendent life that lies behind is captured in Hopkins' rhymes. The first coda or sestet draws to a close with three rhymes that describe the passing of life and beauty: 'burns on', 'is gone', 'that shone'. But out of these dying rhymes come the richer, more fully embodied rhymes of the 'Resurrection' ('days, dejection', '-dering deck shone'). This is instress, the drawing out of an enduring inner life that lay hidden beneath the dappled skin of the world. Man's life once 'shone' with the faint light of a fading starscape. Now, as the body breaks and the world comes to an end, there is a 'flash' (that sign of instress) and man's inner life breaks out as the eternal fire, the everlasting life of 'immortal diamond'.

'Flash' once simply described the shock of recognition as the inner life of instress was communicated to the beholder as an experience of instress. But this 'flash' of instress is a borrowed or given light, man's dying starriness transformed into brilliant fire as it catches the 'eternal beam' of Christ's life. For Hopkins, redemption has always come through the breaking or (to use the imagery of his earlier poetry) the dappling of the body. Christ's body was marked for our salvation; the bodies of the 'bespoke' are 'scored' with the sign of their redemption ('Deutschland'; 58). The breaking of the body (and those other bodies, the text and the sensuous things of the world) is the means by which we participate in Christ's life. And this is, ultimately, what is at stake for Hopkins in his poetic labour towards instress. The hidden 'fire' that is discovered in the gaps (the breaks, intervals, intermittences, contrasts, and abruptions) of the broken, intervallary surface of the world is not only a revelation of Christ's incarnate life but the means by which we are identified with him. He, too, was a broken body and so the experience of embodied brokenness among the 'bespoke' (whether the wrecking of the martyr's body or, more particularly, the experience of intermittent utterance and apprehension that Hopkins' poetry affords when read correctly) reveals their participation in his incarnate life, both his sufferings and his eternal glory. As the reader confesses that 'he was what I am, and', the recognition of the rhyming of broken bodies calls out the rhyme of a shared and transcendent life: 'This Jack, jóke, poor pótsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, | Is immortal diamond'.

The poem comes to a close with a final parallelism that presents in its purest form the intuition, the hidden truth, that animates Hopkins' dappled poetics. In the 'Parmenides' notes, Hopkins

observes that the ‘truth in thought is Being, stress, and each word is one way of acknowledging Being and each sentence by its copula is (or its equivalent) the utterance or assertion of it’ (*Essays*, 315). The practice of marking the interval (of keeping ‘immortal diamond’ and ‘immortal diamond’ apart, despite their apparent identity) is a labour towards discovering the instress of life or ‘Being’ itself. And this vital ‘is’ does not simply signal the presence of this all-sustaining, transcendental life but works to create identity between ‘Being’ and the ‘utterance [...] of it’, between bodies and words, between the life of Christ and the reader of verse. To read rightly – to mark the intervals of verse with voice, eyes, ears, and mind – is to discover Christ’s presence in the world and, more importantly, to give witness to and to tell of one’s redemptive participation in the life of the marked body of Christ.

V

ELIOT – CROSSING

But to apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint –
 No occupation either, but something given
 And taken, in a lifetime's death in love

('The Dry Salvages'; 199-200)

Eliot often found himself in the middle way – between St Louis and New England, between America and Britain, between the bank and his writing desk, between women, between wars. He was, he thought, somewhat ‘higher than the mob’ yet somewhat ‘lower than the man of inspiration [...] the men of genius of the past who have believed something’ (‘A Note on Poetry and Belief’, 1927; *CP*, III, 20). Not quite a ‘saint’ then, and yet his occupation as a poet – his preoccupation, even – was with this very work of apprehending the ‘point of intersection of the timeless | With time’. Eliot was aware of the mystical and contemplative practices directed towards apprehending the ‘timeless moment’ (defined, by Warner Allen, as ‘a glimpse of pure self-consciousness and as it were an instant of eternity’)¹ but in his reading of the *Divine Comedy* he discovered a peculiarly poetic version of this labour towards a sensuous apprehension of ‘the various states and stages of blessedness’ (‘Dante’, 1929; *SE*, 265). This poetic labour towards the ‘point of intersection’ began, as Eliot himself did, in the middle way: ‘*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*’ (*SE*, 241). And so to be in the middle way, to occupy the between-spaces of the world (and, as we shall see, the between-spaces of the poem), became for Eliot a way of working to apprehend that other ‘point of intersection’ that is the meeting of two worlds – a moment of brief contact between the time-bound world of modernity and the timeless world of the beautiful, the numinous, or the divine.

Figures of intersection occur throughout Eliot’s work. The second part of ‘Little Gidding’, in particular, is concerned with the ‘intersection time’, imagining it as that ‘uncertain hour before the morning’ in which ‘two worlds become much like each other’ and in which we might find ourselves in strange communion with ‘a familiar compound ghost’ (203-04). The language of ‘intersection’ finds its cousin-term – its verbal form, its corresponding practice – in ‘crossing’: ‘In every moment of time you live where two worlds cross, | In every moment you live at a point of intersection’ (*The Rock*,

¹ Quoted in *Poems I*, p. 985. Ricks notes that Allen’s *The Timeless Moment* is initialled by Eliot in the Faber catalogue.

1934).² This collocation of ‘two worlds’ and ‘intersection’ echoes Edwyn Hoskyns’ translation of Karl Barth: ‘two worlds meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown [...] the point on the line of intersection at which the relation becomes observable and observed is Jesus’.³ The ‘cross’ is silently present, too, within this collocation: the moment of visibility for Barth is, ultimately, the ‘Cross of Christ’.⁴ The ‘point of intersection’ is thus also imagined as a ‘dreamcrossed twilight’, a ‘place of solitude where three dreams cross’ (*Ash-Wednesday* VI; 96), and a ‘twilight kingdom’ (*The Hollow Men*; 82). There are other figures, too, for the ‘point of intersection’: the staircase, Prufrock’s habitual site of hesitation, of being in two minds; the waste, dry land ‘ringed by the flat horizon’ (*The Waste Land*; 69); the path ‘between’ the violets (*Ash-Wednesday* IV; 92); the moment of ‘Passion and Sacrifice’ ‘transecting, bisecting the world of time’ (*Choruses from ‘The Rock’* VII; 169). Eliot’s essays give us the ‘frontiers of consciousness’ (‘The Music of Poetry’, 1942; *On Poetry*, 30) and the border-zone through which ‘in poetry you can, now and then, penetrate into another country [...] before your passport has been issued or your ticket taken’ (‘The Social Function of Poetry’, 1945; *On Poetry*, 24). But ‘crossing’ is the figure this chapter takes up, the figure through which Eliot thinks both about his compositional practice and about that brief moment in which ‘two worlds cross’, figuring out a skance relation between the *technē* of his occupation as a poet and the metaphysical apprehensions that are the occupation of the ‘saint’.

There is one other poem in which Eliot uses the language of ‘intersection’, a late work that resonates with a strange, composite memory of *Ash-Wednesday* VI, ‘Little Gidding’ II, *The Rock*, and Barth’s commentary, and which recognizes, I suggest, the ways in which his own poetic project was in oblique contact— at a ‘point of intersection’— with a broader poetic project, exemplified, for Eliot, by Walter de la Mare:

when the lawn
Is pressed by unseen feet, and ghosts return
Gently at twilight, gently go at dawn,
The sad intangible who grieve and yearn;

When the familiar scene is suddenly strange
Or the well known is what we have yet to learn,
And two worlds meet, and intersect, and change

(‘To Walter de la Mare’, 1948; 217)

Eliot ‘did not know him intimately’ and these verses, written for de la Mare’s seventy-fifth birthday, work hard to signal Eliot’s acquaintance with his contemporary’s literary oeuvre (quoted in *Poems I*, 1059): there are gestures to ‘The Listeners’, ‘The Ghost’, and ‘The Ghost Chase’, to the anthology

² T. S. Eliot, *The Rock* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 52.

³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 29. There is also, perhaps, a memory of Matthew Arnold’s ‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse’ – ‘Wandering between two worlds, one dead, | The other powerless to be born’: *Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Miriam Allott and Robert H. Super (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 161.

⁴ Barth, p. 150. Ricks notes that Eliot had a particular interest in this epistle: *Poems I*, p. 985.

Desert Islands (1930), and, more broadly, to the nursery-world of lit lamps and bedtime stories. But Eliot's poem, in its best moments, is conscious not only of its particular burden of tribute but of the ways in which de la Mare's ghost-crossed verse is emblematic of a strain of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry in which the realms of failing light become a figure for the labour to occupy that threshold zone between the material and the immaterial or transcendent.⁵ There are memories here of the glimmering Tennysonian idyll and, in particular, of *In Memoriam* XCV, 'By night we linger'd on the lawn'; there are echoes, too, of the 'clammy' lawns and shade-ridden gardens of Hardy's verse ('At the Word "Farewell"'; 432). There are also memories of the intimacy between the half-seen and the half-heard in these twilight territories, the ways in which the labour towards the unknown is so often a labour of careful listening: the 'unseen feet' of de la Mare's ghosts bring us, at the close of the poem, to consciousness of that 'delicate, invisible web' that is the 'inexplicable mystery of sound' (218). These 'unseen feet' remember, too, the persistent ghostliness of the corresponding poetics, its 'haunting' rhythms (*Correspondence I*, 317) and ghost-ridden 'tracks'. Eliot was not uncritical of this particular strain of nineteenth-century verse that had become a contemporary but not straightforwardly 'modernist' mode: he was, he told Ezra Pound, 'blind to the merits of [...] Thomas Hardy' (*Eliot's Letters*, II, 557) and, when presented by de la Mare with a sonnet dedicated to 'T. S. Eliot', his marginal corrections show his impatience with what Sackton describes as its 'romantic diction'.⁶ And yet by framing its 'twilight' hour in the terms he had used to imagine his own labour towards the 'point of intersection', Eliot signals the convergence of his own poetic project with – and its occasional indebtedness to – that strain of verse-thinking exemplified by de la Mare: Eliot, like Tennyson, Hardy, and Hopkins, invests in verse as a means of keeping open that border-zone in which 'two worlds' might 'meet, and intersect, and change'.

The dilemma that animates the work of these four poets is whether we can sustain belief in that which transcends the 'ringed' and sterile world of modernity. 'Crossing', for Eliot, becomes a way of thinking through – and sustaining – this dilemma. To 'cross' is to meet, pass, or intersect. The 'crossed' space is that interval or in-between zone where things move laterally 'across' each other: that 'place of solitude where three dreams cross' (*Ash-Wednesday VI*; 96), that lunatic moment in which 'old nocturnal smells [...] cross and cross across her brain' ('Rhapsody on a Windy Night'; 19). But to 'cross' is also to pass over borders, to move between worlds: Harry, we are told, 'has crossed the frontier | Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning' (*The Family Reunion*; CPP, 342), and in *The Hollow Men* 'Those who have crossed | With direct eyes to death's other Kingdom | Remember us' (81). To 'cross' is to pass through or briefly dwell in the barren interval, but it might also be to travel beyond the 'frontier' of the known, transcending the world in which we live. These two rather different senses of 'to cross' sketch out the dilemma that animates Eliot's poetic thinking:

⁵ See also Peter Davidson's account of the literary and poetic 'territories of the dusk' in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries: *The Last of the Light: About Twilight* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), p. 32. See, in particular, his chapter on 'English Melancholy', pp. 65-128.

⁶ *The T. S. Eliot Collection of the University of Texas at Austin*, ed. by Alexander Sackton (Austin: Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, 1975), p. 261.

does poetry lead us into apprehensions of the immaterial and transcendent or does it only confirm the boundedness of that which is ‘well known’, our material existence? Eliot’s ambition was, as he put it in 1933, ‘to get *beyond poetry*’, its verbal form becoming a means of transcending the world of words (quoted in *Poems I*, 894). ‘Beyond’ is one of the most important prepositions in Eliot’s verse, the coinciding point of the hopeful labour towards this distant world and the anxious recognition that it might be, necessarily, out of reach. This is the philosophical, metaphysical, and ultimately theological dilemma that animates Eliot’s verse.

One final ‘point of intersection’ indicates how this dilemma was, for Eliot, intimate with, implicated in, the ‘odd’ – and peculiarly poetic – ‘occupation of making patterns with words’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 887). ‘The music of a word’, Eliot wrote in 1942, ‘is [...] at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts’ (‘The Music of Poetry’; *On Poetry*, 32-33). Not only did Eliot conceive of verse in terms of its crossed acoustics, but he developed compositional habits that resulted in further ‘crossings’ of words, sounds, and texts. In a 1917 review of ‘Verse Pleasant and Unpleasant’, Eliot wrote: ‘Verse stands in constant need of what Samuel Butler calls a cross. The serious writer of verse must be prepared to cross himself with the best verse of other languages and the best prose of all languages’ (*CP*, I, 679). As Anne Stillman has noted, Eliot claimed that his own verse arose out of such a ‘cross’, finding a beginning, once again, in the ‘middle way’:.⁷ ‘the form in which I began to write in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama’ (*CP*, III, 518). Such textual crossings were the means by which Eliot developed his distinctly allusive and elusive voice, both in his poetry and in his critical prose. This practice of drawing texts into obliquely illuminating relations was also the means by which he transformed loose lines and fragmentary poems into his characteristically composite verse: ‘That’s one way in which my mind does seem to have worked throughout the years poetically – doing things separately and then seeing the possibility of focusing them together, altering them, and making a kind of whole of them’.⁸ Eliot’s revisionary practice should also be thought of as another form of such compositional crossing – his revisions not so much a series of adjustments towards a final and singular text but rather constitutive of an ever-growing body of subtly-varying attempts to envision a shared subject, an as-yet-unapprehended ‘whole’.⁹

⁷ Anne Stillman, ‘Pruferock and Other Observations’, in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 41–54 (p. 48).

⁸ Quoted in B. C. Southam, *A Student’s Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 134.

⁹ As Stillman observes, ‘for Eliot, a life’s work, one poem, or any one poem, consists of self-revisions and hauntings’: ‘T. S. Eliot’, in *Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Beckett*, ed. by Adrian Poole, *Great Shakespeareans*, XII (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 57–104 (p. 98). For an account of the revisions Eliot made after publication, see Christopher Ricks, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot*, Panizzi Lectures (London: British Library and Faber & Faber, 2003).

This sense that the ‘music’ of verse is constituted by its crossed acoustics (each word becoming musical at its ‘point of intersection’, the poet finding his distinctive voice in the crossed voices of his literary predecessors) is behind Eliot’s habitual use of ‘pattern’ as a synonym for the ‘form’ of verse. ‘Every poem has its own embryological pattern’, he insisted.¹⁰ By extension, every group of poems, every corpus, has a familial resemblance, its own characteristic pattern: Eliot saw Pound’s partial success as a translator of the *Divine Comedy* as an indication of his failure to ‘understand the whole pattern’ of Dante (*Eliot’s Letters*, V, 183); there was also, he observed, a ‘pattern in Shakespeare’s carpet’ (‘Dante’; *SE*, 245). But despite this echo of the Jamesian figure for obscure meanings and hidden intentions, Eliot’s sense of the ‘pattern’ of poetic form is more particularly concerned with the poetic organisation of words according to ‘musical pattern[s] of sound [...] and secondary meanings’ (‘The Music of Verse’; *On Poetry*, 33). It is in the ‘intersection’ of these linguistic and ‘musical’ patterns (in that ‘delicate, invisible web’ of sound) that the individual word communicates not only its meaning but its ‘music’, that meaning-bearing resonance that arises from the word’s relation to its paralinguistic context. Eliot is preoccupied with the criss-crossing and patterning of poetic form because it is through this linguistic work of ‘intersection’ that verse affords a momentary apprehension – a faint audition – of that which exceeds the world of the linguistic imagination: ‘Only by the form, the pattern, | Can words or music reach | The stillness’ (‘Burnt Norton’; 183). This is what Eliot, in his 1933 essay on ‘Matthew Arnold’ would call the ‘auditory imagination’, that ‘feeling’ for the paralinguistic music of verse that penetrates ‘far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling [...] sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end’ (*Use of Poetry*, 119). As Eliot and de la Mare knew, it is as we listen in to the ‘whispered incantation’ – the ‘unheard music’ (‘Burnt Norton’; 179) – of verse that we might enter into the twilight garden and discover the ‘phantoms of the mind’ that range freely there (‘To Walter de la Mare’; 218).

This chapter examines a series of poems that constitute Eliot’s most extended meditation on the nature of his poetic project: ‘La Figlia Che Piange’, the ‘water-dripping song’ from *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, ‘Marina’, and *Four Quartets*. Vendler observes that a ‘poet meditating on a given topic often thinks serially through the topic by reframing it in poem after poem’.¹¹ this is particularly true for Eliot who develops his verse through a series of highly self-conscious returns to the images of his early work with the result (as I. A. Richards observed) that his ‘poetry of the past seems [...] to be contained in the present’.¹² As Eliot himself put it, writing on Valéry but with a thought for his own compositional habits: ‘I regard repetitions and contradictions in a man’s writing as valuable clues to the development of his thought [...] An unconscious repetition may be evidence of

¹⁰ Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry, with an Introduction by T. S. Eliot*, trans. by Denise Folliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. xxi.

¹¹ Helen Vendler, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 6.

¹² *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards*, ed. by John Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 96.

one's firmest convictions, or of one's most abiding interests'.¹³ Each of the poems in this series represents an attempt to re-imagine what it might mean 'to apprehend | The point of intersection'; an attempt, that is, to think about how the poetic organisation of language enables this peculiarly poetic labour towards the limits of the known or the knowable, and to think about what exactly we might discover when we get there. While these poems primarily represent Eliot's attempt to figure out in verse his own poetic practice, his imagery registers the indebtedness of these self-theorising poems to that strain of post-Romantic verse-thinking that Eliot heard in de la Mare's poetry: these are poems in which the peculiarly poetic moment, the 'point of intersection', is figured as a haunted garden – the 'ghosts' of de la Mare's 'familiar scene' becoming, in *Four Quartets*, the 'guests' of Burnt Norton's 'rose-garden' (179-80).

* * *

The final poem in *Pruferock and Other Observations* (1917), 'La Figlia Che Piange', is Eliot's first garden-poem, the first of the poems in which Eliot works to imagine what it might mean to 'apprehend | The point of intersection'. Denis Donoghue has observed that 'many of Eliot's readers evidently think "La Figlia che Piange" a slight poem'.¹⁴ He lists Southam, Ricks, Leavis, Empson, Blackmur, Richards, Tate, and Brooks among those who have paid little or no attention to the poem. The poem is also absent from Hugh Kenner's landmark study, *The Invisible Poet* (1960), and, more recently, Barry Spurr's '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion*' (2010), Craig Raine's *T. S. Eliot* (2006), and both the 1994 and the 2017 *Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*. But this chapter argues that 'La Figlia' is significant not just as a 'beautiful poem' but as a foundational work in the development of Eliot's self-theorising poetic thought.¹⁵

'La Figlia' becomes the touchstone of Eliot's later verse, its garden imagery of stairs, flowers, eyes, and sunlight becoming emblematic of this particular strain of his poetic thinking; the reference to 'autumn weather' in an early typescript of 'Little Gidding' was intended, Eliot explained to John Hayward, to 'throw back to *Figlia che piange*' (quoted in *Poems I*, 1018), signalling the continuities between this late poem of the 'intersection time' and that early poem of the sunlit garden.

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair –
 Lean on a garden urn –
 Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair –
 Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise –
 Fling them to the ground and turn

¹³ Valéry, p. ix.

¹⁴ Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 60.

¹⁵ Donoghue, p. 60.

With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

(28)

The first indication that this is a poem about the ‘point of intersection’ is that it begins on the ‘highest pavement of the stair’. Throughout Eliot’s verse, staircases and steps are the site of hesitation. Prufrock is most troubled by ‘indecisions’ and ‘revisions’ when he is standing on the steps leading up to a front door: ‘there will be time | To wonder “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?” | Time to turn back and descend the stair’ (*‘Love Song’*; 6); Thomas Becket is found ‘hesitating at the angles of stairs’ (*Murder in the Cathedral*; CPP, 254); the ‘devil of the stairs’ confounds both thought and vision with its ‘deceitful face of hope and of despair’ (*Ash-Wednesday* III; 91); and ‘distraction’ is likened to ‘stops and steps of the mind over the third stair’ (*Ash-Wednesday* III; 91). The staircase, like the ‘dreamcrossed twilight’, is a sign for that moment in which the mind – caught between two worlds of possible experience – becomes conscious of the new kinds of thinking that become available in this moment of hesitation, at this point of ‘intersection’. As Leonard Unger observes, the staircase is the occasion for a self-conscious ‘posture of awareness’.¹⁶

After this first instruction to ‘Stand on the highest pavement of the stair’, the poem moves through a series of imperatives, verbs stacking in the left-hand margin in a vertical notation of the intended choreography: ‘Stand [...] Lean [...] Weave [...] Clasp [...] Fling [...] But weave’. The poem is cinematic in its feel for gesture and composition, the scene unfolding as a succession of still moments, frame by frame, line by line. ‘Time’, in ‘Love Song’, was something that could be parcelled out as a series of discrete events – ‘Time for you and time for me [...] Before the taking of a toast and tea’ – a

¹⁶ Leonard Unger, *T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 163-70 (p. 165).

human measure for the thinning-out of life: ‘I [...] Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, | I have measured out my life with coffee spoons’ (6). In ‘La Figlia’ time also unfolds as a series of speech-conjured moments, the imperatives calling into being a world whose dimensions are coordinate with those of the human imagination.

Into this speech-bounded world comes a shaft of light that gloriously entangles itself with the girl’s luxuriant hair and, for a brief moment, the imperatives begin to linger and stall: ‘Weave, weave, the sunlight in your hair’. The words that had once seemed to mark out the passage of time and the dimensions of the scene now only express a desire to dwell a little longer in the lovely moment: one can tell the girl to ‘stand’ and to ‘lean’ but to tell her to weave sunlight in her hair is to move away from efficacious speech and towards the language of wonder. And so the initial assumption, inscribed as a sequence of imperatives, that the world is configured to the dimensions of the human imagination – and, correspondingly, that knowledge and experience are circumscribed by the range and power of our speech – begins to give way. As ‘weave’ repeats, becoming ‘weave, weave’ – and ‘weave, weave, weave’, in an earlier draft (*Poems II*, 336) – the poem discovers a moment encountered within the marked and measured passage of directed time but existing independently of it. This is the ‘point of intersection of the timeless | With time’ or what, in ‘The Dry Salvages’ and with memories of ‘La Figlia’, Eliot would call ‘the moment in and out of time, | The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight’ (200). To linger on ‘weave’ – to repeat words, to be distracted, to lose oneself in light – is to dwell in and on that moment of ‘intersection’ in which the measured ‘time’ of human experience comes into brief contact with the timelessness of the beyond.

But what, exactly, do we apprehend in this lingering moment? What is the timeless reality of which we become suddenly conscious? In ‘La Figlia’, this ‘point of intersection’ is imagined as an encounter with the beautiful, a moment in which one might gaze on the luminous loveliness of sunlit hair. But this is not simply a vision of a beautiful girl or even the memory of one: Eliot was often asked about the experience behind the poem but he was always careful to dismiss the suggestion that it had been inspired ‘by an incident, the sight of a deserted girl’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 450). Rather, the poem was inspired by an artwork which Eliot had once been told about but had never seen, having spent a fruitless afternoon searching for it in an Italian museum. Not only had he never seen the original ‘Weeping Girl’, but he variously described the unseen artwork as ‘a stone stele of Egyptian origin’, a ‘statue’, and ‘an Italian painting’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 451). John Hayward also detected ‘faint reminiscences’ of Rossetti’s *Blessed Damozel* who, with luxuriant hair and armfuls of flowers, was also the subject of both a painting and a poem (quoted in *Poems I*, 451). On other occasions, Eliot insisted that there was nothing behind the poem: it was, as Hayward put it, a poem about ‘speculation and regret’, about the experience of not finding the artwork which had, though unseen, become compelling (quoted in *Poems I*, 451). Similarly, in Eliot’s 1909 poem, ‘On a Portrait’, the painting which had inspired it – Manet’s *La Dame au Perroquet* – is gradually reduced from an art-object to merely the idea of one: ‘Not like a tranquil goddess carved of stone | But evanescent [...] An

immaterial fancy of one's own' (232). And so the beautiful and timeless thing that we apprehend in 'La Figlia' is the idea – the 'immaterial fancy' – of an unknown and inapprehensible art-object. In 'La Figlia' – and in other poems Eliot comes to other conclusions – it is at the 'point of intersection' that we come to consciousness of unrealized and unrealizable aesthetic possibilities. In 'Burnt Norton', Eliot similarly imagines the 'point of intersection' as the dwelling-place of an unapprehended art-object: 'Only by the form, the pattern, | Can words or music reach | The stillness, as a Chinese jar still | Moves perpetually in its stillness' ('Burnt Norton'; 183). In both cases, poetic language is not in itself the object of aesthetic appreciation but only a means of labouring towards a distant and unreachable realm of aesthetic experience.¹⁷

This brief moment in which we glimpse an inapprehensible beauty is coordinate with the moment in which language begins to repeat. As 'weave' repeats it ceases to command and instead expresses a desire to continue dwelling in this lovely moment. But 'weave, weave' also becomes an acoustic icon for this appreciative, lingering looking. To repeat the word is to dwell on the sensuous experiences that it affords, to enjoy the way its impulsive beginning falls off into a long and vibrant whirr, the whirr becoming an exquisite revving as the word recurs. To occupy the 'point of intersection' is to glimpse a distant beauty but it is also to begin listening in to the paralinguistic sounds of verse. Once again, it is as we reach that uncertain border between the sensible and the supersensible that we discover a new correspondence between the acoustic and the visual, the faintly heard becoming coordinate with – perhaps even the precondition for – a glimpse of the invisible and unknown.

After this moment of sunlit vision, the speaker continues on which his succession of imperatives: 'Clasp your flowers [...] Fling them to the ground'. But the illusion of efficacious speech is not easily resumed: 'Weave, weave' returns in the final line, the vision in the garden continuing to compel and transforming speech into a resonant language of amazed gesture. And so in the second stanza the imperatives become a series of intentions expressed in a historical and conditional tense, its language at a double remove from the dream of efficacious speech: 'So I would have had him leave, | So I would have had her stand and grieve'. Words do not bring the girl and the garden into being and words no longer stand as an acoustic icon for an apprehension of inapprehensible beauty. But 'weave, weave' finds a faint after-echo in 'leave [...] grieve'; the sunlit 'moment in and out of time' has passed but it continues to compel the imagination, sustained as an acoustic memory in the reverberations of a language that it has permanently altered. As the poem moves on from the sunlit moment in the garden, the speaker's memory of what it was like to be in that moment becomes as distant to him as the girl herself: he sees himself now as another man who was – if only momentarily – a figure in the painted scene, an inhabitant of that garden where 'two worlds meet, and intersect, and change'.

¹⁷ The epigraph, however, hints at the ways in which the aesthetic might be continuous with or converted into the otherworldly – the quotation from the *Aeneid*, '*O quam te memorem virgo*', continues 'for thy face is not mortal nor has thy voice a human ring; O goddess surely!': quoted in *Poems I*, p. 452.

* * *

In ‘La Figlia’, Eliot imagined the ‘point of intersection’ as the moment in which we might apprehend an inapprehensible beauty or speculate about the nature of an unknown and unknowable art-object. The ‘water-dripping song’ from *The Waste Land* (1922) is another of Eliot’s early attempts to think in verse about how poetry might bring us to consciousness of that which lies beyond the human dimension of knowledge and experience. In this poem, however, the ‘point of intersection’ is not a garden but a desert. In Eliot’s verse the garden and the desert are both in-between places but represent two opposed accounts of what we might discover at the ‘point of intersection’. The garden (remembering Eden) is associated with apprehensions of the beautiful or (as we shall see in the later verse) the divine. In the desert there are no such revelations but only the dissatisfaction of sense and spirit: ‘a place of disaffection [...] deprivation [...] destitution [...] Desiccation [...] Inoperancy of the world of spirit’ (‘Burnt Norton’; 182). And so while ‘La Figlia’ offered visions of a real but unapprehended beauty, the ‘water-dripping song’ offers only hallucination, illusion, and mirage.

Writing to Ford Madox Ford in 1923, Eliot claimed that there were only ‘about thirty good lines in *The Waste Land* [...] The rest is ephemeral’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, II, 188): these lines, he later clarified, were ‘the twenty-nine lines of the water-dripping song in the last part’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, II, 240). Not only did he think these lines from ‘What the Thunder said’ were the best he had written but (as Stephen Spender recalled) he also described the process of composition as ‘almost automatic writing’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 686); these were also the lines that Eliot had in mind when he likened the process of poetic composition to ‘communion with the Divine’.¹⁸ The ‘water-dripping song’ was associated, for Eliot, with a brief encounter with an otherworldly power, a poem arising in that moment in which the world of human thought seemed at a ‘point of intersection’ with a world of meaning beyond it.

In the poem, this ‘point of intersection’ is explored through the ways in which the repetitions of poetic language (already associated in ‘La Figlia’ with the ‘point of intersection’) begin to conjure hallucinations of water over a dry and wasted land, calling into unreal being the rains that remain the perpetual possibility of a dark horizon: ‘the limp leaves | Waited for rain, while the black clouds | Gathered far distant, over Himavant’ (70). Words are organized into criss-crossing patterns of twofold repetition:

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains

¹⁸ W. F. Trotter, *Pascal’s Pensées* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1931), p. x. This connection was confirmed by Valerie Eliot in 1971: see *Poems I*, p. 686.

Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
 There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain
 There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
 From doors of mudcracked houses

(68)

The word at the end of one line repeats at the beginning of the next: ‘rock | Rock’, ‘road | The road’, ‘the mountains | Which are mountains’, ‘without water | If there were water’. Alongside this sequence of paired words there are other, more local patterns that are similarly twofold in structure. There is the repetition and reversal of chiasmus: ‘no water but only rock | Rock and no water’. There are parallel phrases with minor modulations: ‘stop and drink [...] stop and think’, ‘There is not even silence in the mountains [...] There is not even solitude in the mountains’. And there are rhymes and echoes that resound the exact repetitions as more approximate acoustic pairs: ‘rock [...] road’, ‘spit [...] sit’, ‘mountains [...] rain’. These twofold patterns create a criss-crossed verse-texture in which there are many points of intersection: the line-break between repeated words, the turn at the midpoint of the chiasmus, the consonance of rhyme. Crossing is often generative for Eliot, giving him the starting point for writing verse and the means of developing a distinctively allusive voice. But at first this criss-crossed verse seems barren: there is ‘no water’. And yet even as the absence of real water becomes a preoccupation, these repetitions conjure ‘water’ as a recurrent sound within the poem: ‘no water [...] no water [...] without water [...] If there were water [...] If there were only water’. The beginnings of a mirage are here, ‘water’ conjured over dry land.

‘Rock’ and ‘water’ are twinned words, occurring in close proximity throughout *The Waste Land*. In the first stanza of the ‘water-dripping song’, ‘rock’ was the sign of drought, a word that conjured only ‘water’, the absent presence of a thirsty land. But as the song takes up the refrain, ‘If there were water’, for a third time (continuing on with the dream of a desert land) we find that now there is ‘no rock’. The song begins to entertain the possibility that if there were no ‘rock’ or if it existed only in the dream-realm of ‘If there were’ then, perhaps, there might be ‘water’:

If there were water
 And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 And water
 A spring

A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada
 And dry grass singing
 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
 But there is no water

(68-69)

For a moment there is ‘rock | And also water’. Water begins to flow, no longer the echoing sound of absent ‘water’ but a fresh current that grows fuller and deeper, first a ‘spring’ and then a ‘pool among the rock’. For a moment, the repetitions of the ‘water-dripping song’ seem to have brought the rains, conjuring fresh water out of the recurrences of poetic language: this is not the deceptive song of ‘cicada’ or ‘dry grass’ but the ‘sound of water over a rock’. But just as these audible-but-invisible waters seem to have become a real presence within the landscape, the old, conditional refrain returns, reminding us that we are dealing with the realm of the unreal and that this water is only a mirage or, more accurately, an auditory hallucination: ‘If there were the sound of water only’. The refrain reminds us that this reach into the realm of the unreal or the perpetually possible is achieved through the repetitions of poetic language and, as such, that the ‘water’ we hear there is not the sound of real water but only the fluent ‘music’ of verse.

The criss-crossings of verse do not afford apprehensions of the perpetually possible (the ‘damp gust | Bringing rain’) but only the ‘sound of water’ – an auditory illusion that is nothing more than the paralinguistic ‘music’ of verse (70). To listen in to the criss-crossings of poetry is, in this account, to learn of nothing more than the barrenness of the waste land and the desolation of the word-bound modern imagination. But just as the ‘sound of water’ is about to be dismissed as a word-conjured hallucination, a hermit thrush is discovered singing in the pine trees, singing what Eliot identifies in his ‘Notes on *The Waste Land*’ as its distinctive ‘water-dripping song’ (76): ‘Drip drop drip drop drip drop drop drop’. Even though the ‘water-dripping song’ is not the sound of real water, the presence of the singing thrush keeps open the possibility that what we hear when we listen in to the recurrent music of verse might correspond to something that is more than just the ‘thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season’ – something that is real and distinct and which sings to us of possibilities that lie beyond the horizons of our dry, small world (*‘Gerontion’*; 33). The thrush’s song is more than what Seamus Perry describes as a ‘dark joke’ (although the earlier sounds of water were, indeed, something rather sinister):¹⁹ the thrush does not sing in ‘error’ but (like Hardy’s darkling thrush) sings of ‘Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew | And I was unaware’ (150). The desert (the waste land, the bounded world of modernity) carries, after all, a memory of Eden and that other world of immaterial and transcendent possibility: ‘The desert in the garden and the garden in the desert | Of drouth, spitting

¹⁹ Seamus Perry, *The Connell Guide to T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land* (London: Connell Guides, 2014), p. 100.

from the mouth the withered apple-seed' (*Ash-Wednesday* V; 95). In 'Burnt Norton', the thrush sings once more, its song a sign for, a gesture towards, a reality that we have forfeited or which we have not yet known, calling in 'response to | The unheard music in the shrubbery' and calling us to follow these 'other echoes' into the 'rose-garden', our 'first world' (179).

The criss-crossed texture of this poem can conjure the illusory 'sound of water' but it can also bring to our attention the 'water-dripping song' of the hermit thrush. As such, this passage is another iteration of that dilemma that is at the centre of Eliot's poetic thinking: the recognition that there are two possible outcomes of a 'cross'. The first is the creation of a crossed interval, an in-between place that is necessarily empty, the place only of mirage and hallucination. The second is the creation of a new thing, a third term or a distinct voice that, despite its acoustic debts and borrowed inflections, sings with its own peculiar accent. This second outcome is a triangulation, the two points of the 'cross' extended to a third point. Eliot himself thinks in these terms: writing to Richards in 1929, he suggested that the best way to 'get into this belief matter' is to 'plot it out so as to work from different approaches, and so hope to get some sort of triangulation by it' (*Eliot's Letters*, IV, 399). Ricks offers another example of the triangulations of Eliot's intellectual processes:

In 1922 Eliot needed to compare English and American poetry. This involved him in comparing the English language as it was in the two countries; and this in turn meant invoking a third term, French, in order to get purchase on the other two.²⁰

The most important triangulations of Eliot's poetic practice are the crossings through which he generated his distinctively allusive poetic voice. In his later years, however, the possibility of verse-drama became the focus of his triangulating thought. The distinctive voice of verse-drama, he argued, is the product of a cross, arising as the author gives 'some bit of himself' to his character and as that character draws out 'latent potentialities of [the author's] own being': to write verse-drama, he claimed, was to write in the 'third voice' ('The Three Voices of Poetry', 1953; *On Poetry*, 94).

Anne Stillman has written of the importance of the 'third term' for Eliot, his habitual extension of a 'binary into a trinity'.²¹ The binary and the trinity offer two models of the 'point of intersection'. In the binary, the two terms meet and cross in the interval, in the 'dreamcrossed twilight' of the between-place. In the trinity, the two terms intersect in the third term, finding a new kind of meeting as they extend themselves into a new dimension, the point of the triangle both 'intensifying the collision and eluding it'.²² And this observation indicates what is at stake for Eliot in his practice of turning two points into three: it is to re-imagine the 'point of intersection' not as the place of disaffection in which we learn only of our peculiarly modern poverty, but as a place at the 'frontiers of consciousness' in which the world of human knowledge extends itself towards a world of knowledge beyond it. To put it another way, to work towards such triangulations is to keep open the possibility

²⁰ Christopher Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber, 1988), p. 204.

²¹ Stillman, 'T. S. Eliot', p. 61.

²² Stillman, 'T. S. Eliot', p. 61.

that the cognitive experiences afforded by the criss-crossings of verse are not immaterial fancies but, like the song of the hermit thrush, are hints and gestures towards a reality that transcends the ‘self-bound verbal space’ of modernity.²³

Eliot finds a figure for this ‘third term’ in the stanza immediately following the water-dripping song:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle

(69)

In his ‘Notes’, Eliot comments that these lines were prompted by Shackleton’s account of crossing South Georgia and how, at the ‘extremity of their strength’, his party were under ‘the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted’ (76). But there is also an echo of Christ’s resurrection appearance (on the third day) to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. The third man – like the ‘third term’ and the ‘third voice’ – is a figure for that which exceeds comprehension, disrupting our empirical accounts of the world’s dimensions and our unbelieving assumptions about what happens to dead men.²⁴ And yet Eliot hesitates as to the nature of this strange knowledge. By crossing his own memory of Shackleton’s account with the scriptural narrative, he keeps two options in play: the ‘third man’ might be a ‘delusion’ but he might also be (as Shackleton himself thought) a manifestation of ‘Providence’, the felt presence of the incarnate Christ.²⁵

* * *

This is the hesitation, the dilemma, that is the persistent feature of Eliot’s poetic thinking: does the criss-crossed form of verse afford knowledge of things that are already knowable (because they are already part of the ‘familiar scene’ of our world, because we might be able to imagine them) or of things that are unknowable (because they exist beyond the ‘frontiers of consciousness’, in the realm of the immaterial or transcendent)? To put it another way, as poetry labours to occupy the ‘point of intersection’ or what Taylor calls the ‘uncertain border zone’, does it enable us to range beyond the confines of the ‘immanent frame’ or does it only reaffirm our sense of the boundedness of modern

²³ Perry, p. 101.

²⁴ Shackleton actually records that it had seemed to him ‘that we were four, not three’: *South: The Story of Shackleton’s Last Expedition, 1914-1917* (London: Robson, 1999), p. 211.

²⁵ Shackleton, p. 211.

life?²⁶ At stake in this dilemma is the possibility of apprehending – and so assenting to, participating in – a world that exceeds or transcends the material, secular world in which we think we live.

In Eliot's doctoral dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (completed 1916; published 1964), this dilemma is manifest as a concern with the relation between the mind-bound world of subjective experience and the material world beyond:

The point of view (or finite centre) has for its object one consistent world [...] the life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them.

(*KE*, 147-48)

The 'life of the soul' is a labour to move from the individual 'point of view' to a more objective, more complete vision of the world. This labour is the work of drawing other 'viewpoints' into adjacency, crossing these subjective worlds of experience against each other in the hope of attaining 'one consistent world', whether that is a shared realm of subjective experience or an unmediated perception of the material world. Eric Griffiths observes that Eliot's holism means that this plurality of divergent 'points of view' seems to point to a 'distant, stipulated state of intellectual harmony' but that the logical impossibility of such a state of 'philosophical concord' results in metaphysical 'scepticism'.²⁷ Similarly, John Kwan-Terry argues that the 'unified whole' towards which the individual soul labours is 'not "real" but ever remains a desire, a faith, an act of mind'.²⁸ The 'fragments' that are our isolated and incommensurable worlds of experience seem to point towards an unknown centre, an unapprehended and transcendent reality, but there seems, at this early stage in Eliot's thinking, no possibility that the soul's work of 'unifying' or shoring up these pieces might result in a vision of 'one consistent world'. At this point, the criss-cross work of the soul and the poet seems only to return us to a more acute consciousness of the familiar and untranscended world of the mind.

And yet, this passage from *Knowledge and Experience* anticipates the importance of the 'third term' for Eliot, the 'two [...] discordant viewpoints' converging and generating a third – a 'higher' – viewpoint that eludes and transmutes them: a convergence that tends towards a more impersonal, more objective vision of the world. The third term is, as I have been suggesting, a sign or token for that other world which, though unrealized, is realer and larger than our own; the thrush of *The Waste Land* sings in the third voice, its song not a momentary audition of transcendence but a gesture towards a world of possibility that lies beyond the horizon of our world. And so the presence of the third term

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 545, 542.

²⁷ Eric Griffiths, 'Writing and Speaking: The Work of Eliot, Yeats and Pound' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge, 1980), p. 135.

²⁸ John Kwan-Terry, 'Ash-Wednesday: A Poetry of Verification', in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by A. David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 132–41 (p. 141).

throughout Eliot's early work – even in this early philosophical inquiry – indicates that metaphysical scepticism is not what Eliot aims at in the criss-crossings of his thinking. Rather, as he brings fragments and voices and viewpoints into adjacency he is involved in a labour towards an apprehension of a transcendent world – even if it remains unachieved, a ‘dream’ or a ‘distant, stipulated state’.

This ‘painful task’ of piecing together the fragments of an atomized world becomes the work of Eliot’s distinctively composite verse, bringing together disparate voices, lines, lyrics, and texts and ‘making a kind of whole of them’. But the anxiety persists: does this work of composition afford – or labour to afford – intimations of transcendence or does it only lead us further into the mind-bound world of modernity? This anxiety, this dilemma, became a particular preoccupation in the late 1920s and early 1930s – a metaphysical predicament that was the enabling context of Eliot’s conversion to Christianity in 1927 and which came into clearer focus as a consequence. As Eliot observed in his introductory essay to *Revelation* (1937) (thinking, in part, of his own experience), ‘the conversion to Christianity is apt to be due [...] to a latent dissatisfaction with all secular philosophy’: ‘conversion’, for Eliot, begins not with a commitment to a particular creed but with a coming to consciousness of and an act of resistance to the enclosures of secularization.²⁹ As such, to convert is not to find oneself released from this dilemma but rather to feel its predicament more acutely, the act of faith a continual labour to keep open the frontiers of the world, a labour against the contractions of ‘secular philosophy’. And so, rather than resolving the dilemma, Eliot’s conversion marks an intermediate stage in the gradual reframing of this predicament in more particularly Christian – and consequently more urgent – terms. As Eliot put it in the *Criterion* in 1933, to come to believe in anything is to join ‘that bitter fraternity which lives on a higher level of doubt; no longer the doubting which is just play with ideas [...] but that which is a daily battle’.³⁰

In his critical prose of the late 1920s and 1930s, Eliot addressed this dilemma in a series of essays on the relation between humanism and Christianity:³¹ ‘The Humanism of Irving Babbitt’ (1928), ‘Second Thoughts about Humanism’ (1929), and ‘Religion Without Humanism’ (1930). In ‘Second Thoughts about Humanism’, Eliot framed the problem thus: ‘there is no avoiding that dilemma: you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist’ (*SE*, 485). In 1932, writing for *The Listener* on the subject of the ‘modern dilemma’, Eliot framed it as the choice between Communism and Christianity.³² And in 1937 Eliot extended this thought, claiming that the ‘modern dilemma’ was the choice between the ‘secular philosophy’ of Communism and the ‘revelation’ of Christianity.³³ In

²⁹ *Revelation*, ed. by John Baillie and Hugh Martin (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 12.

³⁰ Quoted in Russell Kirk, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot’s Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2008), p. 181.

³¹ See John Paul Russo’s account of how Eliot’s (and Richards’) concern grew out of ‘a series of controversies over humanism and religion [which] started up on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 1920s and early 1930s’: *I. A. Richards: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 346–51 (p. 346).

³² T. S. Eliot, ‘The Modern Dilemma: Christianity and Communism’, *The Listener*, 16 March 1932, 382–83.

³³ Baillie and Martin, pp. 38–39.

his letters and in his essay on ‘Dante’ (1929) Eliot addressed the dilemma in terms of the difference between poetic ‘belief’ and philosophical ‘belief’, wondering if perhaps verse offered an intermediate condition of experience, occupying a middle ground between the metaphysical scepticism that seemed necessary in *The Waste Land* and the soul’s ‘painful’ dream of something that transcends its private world. And in his poetry this dilemma is expressed as a concern not with demonstrating the ‘truth of a creed’ but with ‘how a believer comes to his belief’,³⁴ a concern, that is, with what it means to actively occupy – to keep open – that uncomfortable zone between metaphysical scepticism and supernatural experience that is the place of embattled ‘belief’. As Barry Spurr puts it, ‘Eliot’s poetry from his Christian period [...] focuses, repeatedly and profoundly, on the difficulties of faith and the elusiveness of transcendental experience, while urging that it remains necessary, constantly, to strive towards these things’.³⁵ And so Leon Surette’s description of Eliot’s ‘modern dilemma’ as ‘the loss of faith in Judaeo-Christian beliefs’ is too narrow: Eliot’s concern in the 1920s and 1930s is rather with the possibility of sustaining belief in – and, perhaps, participating in – the transcendent reality which our modern commitments (whether humanist, naturalist, or communist) seem to exclude.³⁶

* * *

Ash-Wednesday (1930) is Eliot’s first post-conversion poem and the superlative instance of what Ricks (thinking of the verse written between *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*) calls the ‘between-poems’: ‘it is not their plight or their position merely, this being between, it is their occupation and their element’.³⁷ This condition of ‘being between’ is the result of Eliot’s increasingly acute experience of the ‘modern dilemma’: the tension between our secular habits and the transcendent instincts of the soul. *Ash-Wednesday*, Eliot insisted, represented a ‘certain intermediate phase’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, v, 258) and a ‘certain stage of the journey’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, v, 199). It was intended, he said, as ‘a modern *Vita Nuova*, on the same plane of hallucination’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, v, 258): a poem taking its cue from Dante (that exemplary poet of the middle way) and occupied with that between-place in which strange kinds of knowledge and experience become possible, whether the ‘hallucination[s]’ of *The Waste Land* or (in the language of ‘Dante’) the ‘visions’ of Christian poetry (SE, 243). The extent to which *Ash-Wednesday* reframed the condition of being ‘between’ as the modern choice between secular philosophy and Christianity is evident in Eliot’s letter to William Force Stead: in *Ash-Wednesday*, he wrote, he was attempting to occupy that space ‘between the usual subjects of poetry and “devotional” verse’, that ‘very important field still very unexplored by modern poets – the

³⁴ Kirk, p. 264.

³⁵ Barry Spurr, ‘Anglo-Catholic in Religion’: *T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), p. 113.

³⁶ Leon Surette, *The Modern Dilemma: Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot and Humanism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), p. 4. See also Denis Donoghue’s account of Eliot’s resistance in this period to ‘the Enlightenment project’, pp. 181–205.

³⁷ Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, pp. 207–08.

experience of man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal' (*Eliot's Letters*, v, 288). This 'very important field' is that frontier or boundary between the material and the immaterial. To explore this space is to labour to keep open the possibility of belief in the transcendent or divine in order to 'explain' or sustain those feelings for which we have no adequate convictions: to 'search' – if only in a preliminary and distinctly modern way – for God.

Ash-Wednesday represents a series of returns to the places, images, and figures of the earlier poems, reimagining their intermediacy in explicitly theological terms. Like 'La Figlia', *Ash-Wednesday* begins by figuring its occupation of the between-space as a moment of hesitation, caught between the compulsion to 'turn' and the related but conflicting impulse to 'turn again': indeed, *Ash-Wednesday* III was provisionally entitled 'SOM DE L'ESCALINA', a specific revisiting of the steps of 'La Figlia', finding its hesitation 'at the first turning of the second stair' (91).

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn

(87)

In 'La Figlia', to 'turn' or '[turn] away' was to lose a moment of sensuous intimacy ('I wonder how they should have been together') or a moment of aesthetic contemplation ('I should have lost a gesture and a pose') (28). But now 'turn' is heard as part of the ecclesiastical discourse of 'Ash Wednesday': to turn over these questions about turning or otherwise is to think about and to find a figure for the act of conversion, the temptation towards disavowal, and the ways in which this hesitation between belief and unbelief might become the rhythm of the Christian's life, the 'turn' of conversion becoming the habitual 'turn' of repentance. And so the repetitions of poetic language which, in the earlier poetry, were a means of sustaining an apprehension of an unknown loveliness or a hallucination of absent water, become a means of working to sustain belief in the 'divine goal'.

Ash-Wednesday II returns to the waste land in which the criss-crossed repetitions of poetic language conjured the 'sound of water only'. But now the stakes are higher: the desert has become the Valley of Dry Bones, a place where to conjure with the breath is to prophesy for the Lord God, where to speak is not to discover acoustic dreams of life-giving water but to command the dead to live. As in the 'water-dripping song', the song of this dry valley is characterized by patterns of two-part repetition, the first of which is heard in God's address to the poet and the dry bones:

And God said
 Shall these bones live? shall these
 Bones live? And that which had been contained
 In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
 Because of the goodness of this Lady

(89)

The repetitions of language in Eliot's verse generate points of intersection in which we might discover another kind of intersection, a moment of brief contact between our world and one that transcends it. As 'Shall these bones live?' repeats it is broken over a line-end: 'shall these | Bones live?'. The line-break introduces neither a momentary hiatus in our reading nor a sudden reconfiguration of sense. It introduces the possibility of a prosodic hesitation between the competing cadences of line and question but, in practice, the monosyllabic pattern of both means that each syllable takes a strong emphasis and the hesitation remains unrealized. The line-break thus represents an unreal interval: it does not direct our reading or our understanding but rather stands as a textual sign for the recognition that, though identical, the second question exists at one remove from the first, the interval replete with the strange possibilities for re-hearing and re-imagining that only become available as words begin to repeat. Similarly, in 'Journey of the Magi', line-breaks disrupt and diffract deictic signalling, becoming a sign for the obscure and oblique relations between the moment of speech, the text of the poem, and the hypothetical transcription: 'set down | This set down | This' (102). The line-break thus also tactfully acknowledges the inexact relation between inspired scripture and scripture-echoing verse, confessing that these poetic experiences of 'belief' might only become necessary or available as orthodox formulations of faith begin to subside.

Eliot's choice of the line-break as a sign for the unreal, unrealized, or unrealizable towards which the patterned, criss-cross form of poetry labours is, perhaps, an oblique comment on the limitations of some modernist verse. In a period in which the other formal elements of verse were widely contested, the line-break remained a last visible sign for the poetic. As such, to locate the unreal in the line-break is to suggest that it is only through the peculiarly poetic organisation of language (rather than, say, the merely literary) that we might come to an apprehension of the inapprehensible. A poetry that seeks to free itself from these constraints (and this is not so much *vers libre* as the 'bad verse' that goes under its name and which is characterized by an 'absence of pattern') might find itself devoid of such moments in which our understanding of the world is extended and our 'intenser human feelings' are sustained by apprehensions of the divine ('Reflections on *Vers Libre*', 1917; *CP*, I, 512). In 1945, having lived through the high tide of modernism, Eliot put the case more strongly: the decline in 'religious sensibility' (the ability to feel in certain ways towards God and man) seemed likely, he thought, to bring about a corresponding decline in the 'feeling for poetry, and the feelings which are the material of poetry'. It might, he worried, ultimately prove impossible to write good poetry in a secular age ('The Social Function of Poetry'; *On Poetry*, 25). In the meantime, perhaps, we might trust in the failing resources of poetry to sustain a faded sort of 'belief'.

There is, in one sense, nothing to the unreal line-breaks of *Ash-Wednesday*: they signal only the possibility of experiences of 'belief' that are more uncertain than those of Dante's age – they are, to use Eliot's own language, the place of 'hallucination'. And yet, just as the illusory 'sound of water' in *The Waste Land* was transformed into the third-voice song of the hermit thrush, so in *Ash-*

Wednesday, as repetitions begin to gesture towards the possibility of unrealized and unrealizable vocal possibilities, the unheard song of the interval is transposed into the third voice and the bones begin to sing their ‘chirping’ song. A few lines later, the ‘chirping’ song of the bones is conjured once again by the twofold repetitions and reversals of ‘And God said | Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only | The wind will listen’ (89). This ‘chirping’ song arises out of ‘that which had been contained’ in the now ‘dissembled’ (89) or ‘scattered’ bones (90). The song suggests voice but this voice remains unspecified. The unspecified voice is itself disembodied or only remembered, haunting the place where there was once a singing body but where there is now only a pattern of dry bones in a dry land. This song thus exists at a double remove from the scattered bones, in the realm of the inaudible or the unreal, without voice and without body, or, to use the terms invited by Eliot’s image, the ghost of a ghost.

This song is thus a lyric for the third voice, an unreal or otherworldly song arising out of the repetitions of poetic language but exceeding and eluding them. It is a song that sings of a ‘Lady’, a ‘Rose’ (89), and a ‘Garden’ (90), of a world that closely resembles that of ‘La Figlia’ in which the lovely girl turned silently away, her arms overflowing with flowers: it is a song of the point of intersection’. And it begins to draw attention to some of the most significant and enduring characteristics of this briefly apprehended, song-conjured world. It is a place of ‘silences’ where there is ‘Speech without word and | Word of no speech’, a place lying beyond that quiet ‘frontier’ where words fall silent but beyond which meanings might endure (90). And it is also an ever-receding ‘end’, the place that is the distant object of our journey, the ‘goal’ that is the unachieved condition of understanding towards which poetry labours: ‘End of the endless | Journey to no end | Conclusion of all that | Is inconclusible’ (90). This lyric for the third voice, conjured out of the dry bones, enables us, momentarily, to imagine that distant state towards which poetry labours, affording a brief apprehension of that which is otherwise inapprehensible. As Eliot put it in ‘Whispers of Immortality’ (1918) with a bitter sense of the diminishments of modern life and the poverty of its poetic and philosophical project: ‘our lot crawls between dry ribs | To keep our metaphysics warm’ (48). When the song comes to a close and the moment of lyrical vision has passed, we find that this song is no longer something ‘contained’ within the pattern of the scattered bones but merely the song of the bones themselves: ‘Under the juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining’ (90). To speak of these strange moments of understanding after they have passed is to find them diminished, the momentary apprehension of the otherworldly ‘chirping’ song reduced to the chipper song of the bones themselves.

The later lyrics of *Ash-Wednesday* move away from these more particular considerations of song, voice, and repetition in order to think about what – or ‘who’ – we might discover in the unreal, peculiarly lyric intervals of verse:

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between

The various ranks of varied green
 Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
 Talking of trivial things
 In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour
 Who moved among the others as they walked,
 Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs

Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
 In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,
 Sovegna vos

(*Ash-Wednesday* IV; 92)

In the between-place of *The Waste Land* there was no water, no streams between dry rocks. It was a barren and bounded place in which one might only dream of better, life-giving possibilities. But into the desert of *Ash-Wednesday* comes a figure dressed in 'Mary's colour', moving 'among the others as they walked'. She is a third man figure like the singing thrush or the shadowy companions of the Emmaus road and the glaciers of South Georgia. And, like these other figures, she stands as a sign for possibilities that we cannot comprehend. She walks through the desert leaving visible and acoustic 'token[s]' of the 'word unheard, unspoken' (93): water, a singing bird, her own Marian guise. Like the singing thrush of *The Waste Land*, she is not herself the transcendent reality but only a token for it, a sign that in the 'higher dream' of the between-place (its shadowy figures, its distant music) there might be more truth than we at first realize. There is a memory here of Eliot's essay on 'Dante' (written during the composition of *Ash-Wednesday*) and his careful distinction between 'dreams' and 'visions':

We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions [...] was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming. We take it for granted that our dreams spring from below: possibly the quality of our dreams suffers in consequence.

(*SE*, 243)

'Dreams' are derivative, an undisciplined extension of our ordinary state of consciousness; 'visions', on the other hand, spring not from 'below' but from above. To 'dream' is to remain within the mind-bound world of the secular age; to see 'visions' is to come to consciousness of a truly transcendent and (in the case of Dante) a truly Christian reality. And so, to 'Redeem | The unread vision in the higher dream' is to rediscover intimations of transcendence, to recover the 'dreams' of a dry land as memories of a 'first world' which was more open, more numinous than our own, and so to transform the desert into the 'varied green' of an Edenic garden (92).

The criss-crossed surface of the waste land is a figure for the criss-crossings of poetic language. In *Ash-Wednesday* V, Eliot turns his attention to the possibility that the in-between places of poetic language (like the places between the violets) might contain tokens of the 'word unheard, unspoken':

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
 If the unheard, unspoken
 Word is unspoken, unheard;
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
 The Word without a word, the Word within
 The world and for the world;
 And the light shone in the darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 About the centre of the silent Word.

(94)

The ‘Word’ is ‘within | The world’, an inaudible and ineffable centre. In *Ash-Wednesday* IV, the ‘silent sister [...] signed’ towards the incarnate ‘Word’ hidden within the dream of the desert-land and the dry recurrences of verse (92). But now there is no such simple, signifying relation between the dimension of human experience and the incarnate ‘Word’, between that which we might see or hear and the unseen and unheard. The ‘world’ in *Ash-Wednesday* V is a whirling vortex: it is defined by and as a pattern of rotation. To draw out the allusion to Sir John Davies: ‘the *World* [...] is *whirled round*, | And for it is so *whirl'd*, is named so’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 751). The ‘unheard, unspoken | Word’ is present within these lines as a three-word figure, as a linguistic motif. But the recurrence of this three-word figure, its disturbed repetitions, and the presence of other interrelated patterns of consonance results in a linguistic whirling that does not move centripetally towards a silent centre but rather throws attention outwards, towards the ear- and tongue-twisting texture of language and the troubled experiences of listening and speaking that it consequently affords. Poetic language is not simply the ‘token’ by which we know or know of the incarnate ‘Word’ but rather a testament to (and, perhaps, the agent of) our distraction, our inability to come to consciousness of that which is present within and behind every act of speaking and listening. The only unheard and unspoken word that we might be aware of in these lines is St John’s damning – and unquoted – conclusion to his meditation on the incarnation of the eternal Word: ‘and the darkness comprehended it not’ (John 1.5).

This shifting sense of the relation between the patterns of poetic language and the possibility of apprehending the incarnate Word is replayed in ‘Burnt Norton’ V. The ‘words’ that ‘reach | The stillness’ begin to ‘crack’ and ‘break’ before becoming the ‘voices of temptation’ that attack the ‘Word in the desert’. Iconic language becomes iconoclastic. That which was once a labour towards recognising the silent presence of the incarnate Christ becomes a devilish attempt to conceal or destroy this knowledge amid the ‘shrieking’, ‘crying’, and ‘chattering’ of recurrent, word-whirling verse (183-84). This shift – occurring in each poem within the space of a few lines – between imagining verse as a ‘token’ of incarnation and imagining it as the agent of our modern distractedness is symptomatic of the tentativeness with which Eliot begins to re-imagine his verse in terms of an incarnational poetics.

An incarnational poetics, at its most fully realized, can sustain belief (in the divine, in poetry) in ways in which much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century verse, assuming a fundamental

discontinuity between poetry and life, cannot. For Hopkins, the doctrine of the incarnation means that the God who is hidden ‘behind’ the sensuous forms of the world might be encountered as the sensuous forms of the poem are stressed and broken. To labour towards the divine is not to labour towards the limits of the sensuous, to that frontier where the physical thins into the spectral and words reverberate as music: it is to return to the sensuous and discover within its material particularity an instress – a revelation – of the incarnate Christ. To put it another way, the doctrine of the incarnation precludes the (characteristically modern) notion that God dwells in a distant world of transcendence with which, due to the enclosures of our secular philosophy, we have lost contact. Rather, the doctrine of the incarnation means that God is present within the familiar and the sensuous – present even within the ‘immanent frame’ of modernity. And this return to the sensuous means that the apprehensions afforded by poetry are continuous with other kinds of significant sensuous experience. For Tennyson and Hardy, poetry was a means of sustaining ‘belief’ in things no longer believed in. But for Hopkins, poetry is the means by which we tell of our redemption, our reading practices continuous with the ways in which we mark (perceive, understand, or act upon) the world, testifying (if we read rightly) to our participation in the marked and suffering body of Christ.

But while Eliot, like Hopkins, insists that the ‘fullness of Christian revelation resides in the essential fact of the Incarnation’, Eliot’s incarnational poetics are not so fully realized.³⁸ For Hopkins, the doctrine of the incarnation meant that words were ‘heavy bodies’, icons or instances of the incarnate Word, their breaking a revelation and communication of the divine in the same way that the broken body of Christ is both a revelation and communication of his deity (*J&P*, 269). But Eliot’s preferred terms for thinking about words are prosodic rather than corporal: words become ‘voices’ and ‘echoes’, a song at a double remove from the scattered bones (‘Burnt Norton’; 184, 179). Voices and echoes only suggest bodies and so they can only suggest incarnation. It is this prosodic rather than corporal understanding of language that means Eliot’s verse conjures only infrequent and curiously bodiless visions of the incarnate Christ, offering only ‘hints and guesses’ of ‘Incarnation’ (‘The Dry Salvages’; 200).

Because Eliot’s incarnational poetics are only half-realized his poetry affords curiously intermediate experiences of ‘belief’ that occupy the middle ground between, on the one hand, the unbelieved ‘beliefs’ of Tennyson and Hardy and, on the other, the real and sustained commitments of Hopkins’ poetic practice. The ‘belief’ of the poet, for Eliot, is not quite the ‘belief’ of the ‘philosopher, theologian or scientist’ (*Eliot’s Letters*, IV, 305): indeed, it might be better to talk about ‘poetic assent’ in contrast to ‘philosophical belief’ (‘Dante’; *SE*, 257). Eliot sometimes identifies this intermediate kind of ‘belief’ as a state of ‘doubt’ which hesitates but tends more towards belief than disbelief, ‘living parasitically [...] on the merits of men of genius of the past who have believed something’ (*CP*, III, 20). Any ‘higher’ religion, he thought, only intensified this experience of occupying the difficult space between belief and disbelief. ‘The more conscious becomes the belief’, he wrote in *Notes*

³⁸ Baillie and Martin, p. 2.

Towards the Definition of Culture (1948), ‘so the more conscious becomes unbelief: indifference, doubt and scepticism appear’.³⁹ Or, as he put it in his ‘Leçon de Valéry’: ‘there is only one higher stage possible for civilised man: and that is to unite the profoundest scepticism with the deepest faith’.⁴⁰

And so, in the conclusion to *Ash-Wednesday* VI, to read verse is to accommodate oneself to such intermediate experiences of ‘belief’: ‘Teach us to care and not to care | Teach us to sit still | Even among these rocks, | Our peace in His Will’ (97). The lines allude to *Paradiso* III – ‘*la sua voluntate è nostra pace*’ (*SE*, 265) – and to the condition of Piccarda de Donati who dwells in the lowest sphere of Dante’s heaven. To continue in this middle way is to work to cultivate a peaceful acceptance of those kinds of ‘belief’ that – however preliminary and hesitant, however much they fall short of the belief of the philosopher – are nevertheless enough for redemption. To continue in this middle way with de Donati is to discover the ‘mystery of the inequality, and of the indifference of that inequality, in blessedness, of the blessed’ (‘Dante’; *SE*, 265) – a mystery that, for Eliot, was ‘one of the greatest ideas of the Christian religion’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 775).

* * *

Of all the poems of the ‘point of intersection’, it is ‘Marina’, published just after *Ash-Wednesday* in the autumn of 1930, which dwells longest in that dreamcrossed region at the limit of the world. The poem begins with a ‘woodthrush singing through the fog’, its muffled song remembering those other birds who sang of other worlds in *The Waste Land* and in the deserts of *Ash-Wednesday* – a lyric sign, for the ways in which this poem arises out of those earlier poems of intersection (107). The bird, song, rocks, and water are (in the self-conscious language of the poem) those ‘images’ that ‘return’, tokens for a poetry that labours towards that ‘point of intersection’ in which two worlds, like waters, ‘meet’ (107). Writing three years later and with memories of ‘Marina’, Eliot would wonder ‘why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird’ (‘Conclusion’; *Use of Poetry*, 148). The answer, at least in part, is that these images recur because they are tokens for this particular strain of self-theorising poetic thought, alerting us to its presence, even as it is reframed in poem after poem.

But these returning images also constitute the moment of thought itself, the lyric occasion of the poem. In *Ash-Wednesday*, Eliot introduced a trio of rhymes to describe a world in which there can be no knowledge of the incarnate Word: ‘No place of grace for those who avoid the face’ (94). These rhymes return in ‘Marina’ to describe a seascape that (like the desert and the garden) is a between-place in which we might wait on apprehensions of that which lies beyond the world in which we live:

³⁹ *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 67.

⁴⁰ ‘Leçon de Valéry’, in *Paul Valéry Vivant* (Marseilles: Cahiers du Sud, 1946), pp. 74–80 (p. 76).

'unsubstantial, reduced by a wind, | A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog | By this grace dissolved in place' (107). As the rhyme-words return they are reduced to an acoustic memory persisting within the 'breath'-like atmosphere of this place of sea-fog and song. This language of 'breath' and 'song' suggests that not only have the returns of Eliot's compositional process provided the thought of this poem but they have become its *prosodic* occasion, the moment of lyrical speech in or through which we might apprehend something of the 'point of intersection'. To 'cross' in verse, for Eliot, is to find both one's subject matter and the distinctive voice with which one might write poetry.

'Marina', as a song of the 'point of intersection', belongs to the lyric rather than the discursive strain of this series of poems. 'La Figlia' is the first poem in this lyric series, a poem in which thought revolves around a single moment of otherworldly encounter. *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*, by contrast, are meditations on the poetic labour towards such moments, long lyrics which afford (like Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Hardy's *Poems of 1912-13*) a series of brief visions. 'Eyes that last I saw in tears' (1924) is a minor poem within this lyric series, a poem that dwells 'here in death's dream kingdom' in which 'the golden vision reappears' (139). So, too, is 'New Hampshire' (1934), a poem occupied with that intersection time 'between the blossom- and the fruit-time' and in which we might 'swing, | Spring, sing' ourselves 'up into the apple-tree', that hidden world of leaves and children's voices which in *Four Quartets* will become a figure for other worlds of unimagined possibilities (144). 'Marina' might be thought of as Eliot's 'Tithonus': it does not labour (as Ulysses does) towards that frontier where words cease and we become conscious only of the meanings that occupy this shadowy, resonant world beyond words: rather, it imagines what it might be like to dwell forever in the chill mists of this uncertain zone.

The quiet limit of the world in 'Marina' (as in 'Tithonus') is imagined as the border between a fading life and a youthful afterlife, and as the border between speech and silence: 'Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me | Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken' (108). This quiet limit is where an old man might be reunited with a beloved woman (Aurora, perhaps, or Marina); an encounter that has been much desired but which occupies that uncertain interval between dream and vision. To Pericles, Marina is 'this face, less clear and clearer | The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger – | Given or lent?' (107). She is at once a spectral figure, her faint pulse, her life, 'given' to her by her dreaming father, and a warm and real woman, her strong pulse lending something of its vitality to the dying Pericles. Eliot's juxtaposition of title and epigraph works to keep both possibilities in play. The title, 'Marina', alludes to Shakespeare's *Pericles*; the epigraph is a quotation from Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. The intended effect, Eliot explained to G. Wilson Knight, was a 'crisscross between Hercules waking up to find that he had slain his children, and Pericles waking up to find his child alive' (*Eliot's Letters*, v, 368). Once again, it is in that lyric moment arising from a cross that we find ourselves occupying that uncertain space between the two possible worlds.

And so the dilemma of Eliot's poetry of the 'crisscross' or the 'point of intersection' returns: in the strange, intermediate places of verse do we encounter a 'world of time beyond [us]' or only a vague and impossible dream of redemption – the 'hope, the new ships' (108)? Empson, in his 1931 review of 'Marina', saw this dilemma clearly: the 'dramatic power' of the poem's symbolism, he argued, lay in 'the balance maintained between otherworldliness and humanism; the essence of the poem is the vision of an order, a spiritual state, which he can conceive and cannot enter'.⁴¹ This is the 'modern dilemma' between the bounded world of modernity and that which lies as a perpetual possibility over the horizon. To put it in the language of Eliot's critical prose of the late 1920s and early 1930s, it is the choice between 'humanism' and religion.⁴² And yet this is not such a clear-cut dilemma as a 'balance', an incipient choice that, for the time being, remains out of focus. As Ricks observes, 'Marina' is a poem of many 'satisfactions' – 'satisfactions' that are the thought of a coming but as yet unrealized reconciliation, of a 'perpetual possibility | Only in a world of speculation' ('Burnt Norton'; 179).⁴³ Hugh Kenner caught this satisfying suspension of an otherwise potentially tragic dilemma when he observed that 'the poem faced toward a domain of waking dream', its gaze towards that distant frontier but without perceiving any distinction between the dream of sleep and the wakeful vision.⁴⁴ It is this delicately 'half-conscious' occupation of the uncertain border zone that justifies Denis Donoghue's claim that 'Marina' is 'one of Eliot's most incandescent poems and one of his most elusive'.⁴⁵

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Four Quartets (published 1936-42) is Eliot's final and fullest attempt to figure in verse the poet's occupation with the 'point of intersection'. Like each poem in this self-theorising series, *Four Quartets* arises out of and contains within itself earlier attempts to frame in verse the peculiarly poetic labour towards apprehension. The opening lines of 'Burnt Norton' have their origins in a fragment from *Murder in the Cathedral* (first performed 1935): 'the producer pointed out to me that the lines were strictly irrelevant to the action and didn't get things forward. Well, those lines led to *Burnt Norton*' (quoted in *Poems I*, 904). Not only does 'Burnt Norton' arise out of lines from an earlier text, but it arises from lines that are no longer present in the original text: Eliot's compositional borrowings and crossings in *Four Quartets* start with that which has only a marginal or, more correctly, a drafted existence. And, as with 'Marina', Eliot's processes of compositional crossing give him both his lyrical

⁴¹ William Empson, *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), p. 356.

⁴² Although, as Ricks notes, 'Eliot believed that humanism mistook itself when it arrogated the primary of religion, but he deplored those who believed that religion did not stand in need of humanism'; as such, he 'would have resisted the terms of Empson's antithesis': *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, p. 235.

⁴³ Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Hugh Kenner, *Historical Fictions* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 216.

⁴⁵ Donoghue, p. 164.

occasion and his subject. As Helen Gardner observes, this attempt to recover that which never was is itself the subject of Thomas Becket's second temptation: 'the temptation to attempt to retrace one's steps, to try to go back to the moment when a choice was made and make a different choice'.⁴⁶ This, in turn, gives Eliot's labour in *Four Quartets* towards the 'point of intersection' its particular inflection. This is a poem which works through the intersection of the unreal and the absent in order to find its way into a realer and richer world: 'What might have been and what has been | Point to one end, which is always present' ('Burnt Norton'; 180).

Four Quartets frames its labour towards the 'point of intersection' in terms of that garden in which one might be compelled by intimations of the aesthetic, the otherworldly, or the divine. It is a return to the garden of 'La Figlia' in which the weeping girl wove sunlight through her hair; it remembers that troubled dream of *The Waste Land*, of coming back late 'from the hyacinth garden, | Your arms full, and your hair wet [...] and I knew nothing, | Looking into the heart of light, the silence' (56); and it remembers the sudden greens and violets of the desert-turned-oasis in *Ash-Wednesday*. To enter into the garden is to open oneself to discoveries of new or forgotten conditions of knowledge and experience; to remain outside is to inhabit the barren rocks of modernity.

These gardens become the 'rose-garden' of 'Burnt Norton', a world which lies beyond the 'door we never opened' (179), a world of delicate meetings and intersections, a space 'crossed' by an 'unseen eyebeam' (180). As Gardner observes, Eliot's 'rose-garden' owes much to the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*.⁴⁷ To enter into the 'rose-garden' is to enter into a curious world of inversion in which that which seems most impossible might, in the end, prove most real. Writing of Dante, Eliot described the experience of reading the visionary *Vita Nuova* in similarly Carrollian terms:

such study is vain unless we have first made the conscious attempt [...] to pass through the looking-glass into a world which is just as reasonable as our own. When we have done that, we begin to wonder whether the world of Dante is not both larger and more solid than our own.

('Dante'; *SE*, 276).

To enter into the 'rose-garden', in Eliot's late account of the poet's occupation (although he had seen this possibility almost a decade earlier in the poetry of Dante), is to alter the terms of the dilemma posed by the apparent discontinuity between poetry and life, discovering that this other world is not thinner and less substantial than our own but rather 'larger and more solid' – more significant and more interesting than the 'ringed' world of secular or humanist thought.

But how do we enter the 'rose-garden'? How do we go through that 'door we never opened'? For Tennyson, Hardy, and de la Mare, we enter this ghost-ridden zone between the material and the immaterial through careful attention to the 'delicate, invisible web' that is the paralinguistic music of

⁴⁶ Helen Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London: Faber, 1978), p. 39.

⁴⁷ Gardner, p. 39.

verse. For Hopkins, too, we enter into a saving apprehension of the incarnate Christ through those marked acoustics that are ‘an ark | For the listener’ (*‘Deutschland’*; 62). And for Eliot it is also a question of attention. To occupy the ‘frontiers of consciousness’ is to attend to that limit in which speech endures only as a meaning-bearing resonance; it is to occupy that ‘fringe of indefinite extent’ in which ‘we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express’ (*‘Poetry and Drama’*, 1951; *On Poetry*, 86-87). And so, once again, the thrush is heard singing, its song a token for a world that exceeds that which we might speak of or imagine, a world that we might apprehend – if only briefly and uncertainly – as we begin to listen in to the crossed music of verse. The bird calls us to attend to those ‘echoes’ that ‘inhabit the garden’, its song a response to the ‘unheard music hidden in the shrubbery’ (179). To listen in to that which is on the cusp of audibility is to apprehend – if only for a brief, sunlit moment – the still world beyond our own. To listen is to find that the strange acoustic experiences afforded by verse draw us into visions of that which we could not imagine. In the language of *The Family Reunion* – and shifting from the acoustic to the olfactory – these apprehensions of the un-entered rose-garden are like ‘a sweet and bitter smell | From another world’ (CPP, 311).

What exactly it means to listen to ‘unheard music’ becomes evident as we listen in to the crossed acoustics, the allusive music, of ‘Burnt Norton’ V:

Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

(183)

The lines seem to remember Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. Eliot claimed that he ‘did not have Keats’ *Ode* in mind’ but was rather trying to convey something that had occurred to him ‘some years ago when there was a Chinese exhibition, I think at the Royal Academy’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 921). And yet on other occasions in which he denies a conscious allusion he keeps open the possibility that words or images might return through less conscious processes. John Hayward wrote to Eliot asking if the rose in a draft of ‘Little Gidding’ III was a reference to Sir Thomas Browne; Eliot replied: ‘Damn Sir T. Brown, a writer I never got much kick from: I suppose it *is* a reminiscence, though I was thinking of the Ballet’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 1035). ‘Reminiscence’ is an apt term: these lines recall Keats to the mind rather than the ear – or, perhaps, only to what Hopkins called the ‘mind’s ear’ (*Correspondence I*, 456). There are no audible echoes but only a profound sense of affinity that arises from the oblique meetings of near-synonyms (‘Chinese jar’ / ‘Grecian Urn’) and the fact that each poem dwells in and on the peculiarly poetic set of conditions that are coordinated by the word ‘still’: the unmoving, unheard, unchanging, and unceasing. To borrow from Griffiths’ account of Eliot’s indebtedness to Shakespeare, this memory of Keats’ ‘Ode’ is ‘not a matter of identity but of kinship, a profound

relatedness in the fibre of his writing'.⁴⁸ The memory of Keats' poem is not summoned through invocation or quotation but rather inhabits the unabridged difference of the texts, a silent echo apprehended at their point of intersection.

As we begin listening in to those inaudible acoustic memories that inhabit the 'point of intersection', we find that this memory of Keats is itself a memory of a garden and a figure for the kinds of attention to a supersensible music that might be required of those who would dwell there. The 'leaves', 'flowers', silent 'guests', and 'dry [...] pool' of 'Burnt Norton' resemble the 'leaf-fringed legend' and 'flowery tale' of Keats' Grecian Urn, its 'men and maidens' and its 'desolate' villages.⁴⁹ Such a resemblance would be unremarkable were it not that both these un-entered regions resonate with an 'unheard music' (179):

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone⁵⁰

Keats' 'sweeter' music plays not to the 'ear' but to the 'spirit'. And as the spirit begins to listen we find that this new sweetness is the music of the 'ear' transposed into the register of the 'more endear'd': the attention of the 'ear' develops into a condition of ultra-attentiveness, a practice of listening-in to that which is more deeply in-ear-ed, resonating in that threshold space between 'ear' and mind, between the audible and the inaudible, the real and the imagined. Our attention moves further and further 'in'. Eliot's account of 'words' and 'music' requires us to practise the super-subtle kinds of listening it describes in order to hear the Keatsian account that was its unheard point of origin. Keats' account of poetic attention similarly only reveals its subtleties as we begin to attend to the ways in which the 'ear' (that token for the audible) echoes within the 'endear'd' but toneless music of the mind. To listen in *Four Quartets* is to exchange the 'sensual' knowledge of the ear for a practice of listening in to inaudible echoes that recede inwards, resonating sweetly and solely within the deep ear of the mind. As Eliot puts it in 'The Dry Salvages', the 'point of intersection' is that place in which we might discover a 'music heard so deeply | That it is not heard at all' (200).

But it is as Eliot listens in to echoes of his own, earlier poetry that he finds his subtlest figures for the kinds of ultra-attentiveness that might be necessary if we are to apprehend those things that inhabit the 'crossed' region between our world and the one beyond. *Four Quartets* is the final composition in – or, rather, re-composition of – Eliot's poetry of the 'point of intersection': writing to Mary Hutchinson in 1936, he observed that in 'Burnt Norton' he thought he had 'written rather a nice poem to conclude my Collected Poetical Works' (quoted in *Poems I*, 883). This process of re-composition was most acute and most anxiety-inducing in 'Little Gidding', a poem burdened with the

⁴⁸ Griffiths, p. 158.

⁴⁹ Keats: *Selected Poetry*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 177–78.

⁵⁰ Cook, p. 288.

double task of concluding the ‘Collected Poetical Works’ and bringing *Four Quartets* itself to a close: as Eliot explained in a letter to Hayward, the image of the ‘children in the apple-tree’ in ‘Little Gidding’ V was intended to ‘tie up with *New Hampshire* [1934] and *Burnt Norton*’, concluding both the sequence of garden-poems and bringing to a close the *Four Quartets* (quoted in *Poems I*, 1018). As a result, ‘Little Gidding’ is acutely conscious of its own echoes and crossings and of its responsibility to use these ‘point[s] of intersection’ to bring about a new thing – to demonstrate, for a final time, that the crossings of verse are generative, a means of moving towards new worlds of knowledge and experience. Kenner argues that *Four Quartets* ‘deals with opposites, first falsely, then truly, reconciled’, but this misses the animating intention behind these crossings and adjacencies: they are a tactic for apprehending that third term that is their extension and transmutation.⁵¹ This tactic does not always succeed⁵² but the possibility of this unapprehended reality remains, anxiously, in view: as Anthony Domestico observes, the particular power of *Four Quartets* lies in ‘this tension between the analogical and dialectical modes’.⁵³ Eliot’s ‘chief fear’ concerning ‘Little Gidding’, according to Hayward, was ‘that he was simply repeating himself and so running into the risk of producing an elegant parody of the earlier poems in the group’.⁵⁴ Eliot expressed his fear in less elegant terms, thanking Bonamy Dobrée for reassuring him that the poem stood in ‘organic relation to the others’ and was not ‘merely a wooden leg’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 992). It is through the difficult, constitutive, cross-corpus echoes of ‘Little Gidding’ that Eliot finds his most precise figures for the ways in which the poet’s occupation with the ‘point of intersection’ might be generative of moments of apprehension – its ‘Midwinter spring [...] Between melting and freezing’ becoming the place in which we might discover a ‘bloom more sudden | Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading, | Not in the scheme of generation’ (201).

‘Little Gidding’ II, in particular, is occupied with that ‘uncertain hour before the morning’, that period, in the strain of verse exemplified by de la Mare, in which ‘two worlds meet, and intersect, and change’ (203). It is a final return to those conditions of experience first described in ‘La Figlia’. There is no garden in this bombed-out landscape, but the laughter-filled ‘leaves’ of ‘Marina’ and ‘Burnt Norton’ find a rusty afterlife as ‘dead leaves still rattled on like tin | Over the asphalt’ (203). This is the time of ‘intersection’, that in-between place of ‘meeting’ that is caught in the ‘nowhere’ between dusk and dawn, between ‘last year’s words’ and ‘next year’s words’, and ‘between two worlds become much like each other’ (204). This between-place is where we might encounter a weeping girl, a silent sister, or – in this case – the ‘familiar compound ghost’ of one who looks and turns away. This return to the peculiarly poetic conditions of experience first described in ‘La Figlia’ is signalled by a return or ‘throw back’ to its ‘autumn weather’ in an early draft of the conclusion to

⁵¹ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen, 1960), p. 267.

⁵² Michael D. Hurley suggests that failing, for Eliot, is a strategy for working towards apophasis knowledge: ‘T. S. Eliot: Failing Better’, in *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Poetic Belief* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 129–57.

⁵³ Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), p. 43.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Gardner, p. 25.

'Little Gidding' II (quoted in *Poems I*, 1018). The use of 'autumn weather' as a sign for that peculiarly poetic moment – that moment in which brief vision resolves into disappointment – has its origins, perhaps, in the 'leaves' of 'La Figlia': that verb for the departure of soul from body becomes a foliate sign for a poetry that knows of but can no longer apprehend these lost intimacies of knowledge and experience – a poetry, that is, that dwells in an atmosphere that remembers but cannot recall those 'leaves [...] containing laughter' (180). The poem's other verb for departure, 'deserts', becomes the deserts of *The Waste Land* and *Ash-Wednesday*, an emblem for a poetry which labours, without hope, towards such moments of transcendent encounter.

This 'throw back' to 'La Figlia' results in a difficult kind of listening:

He turned away, and in the autumn weather
I heard a distant dull deferred report
At which I started; and the sun had risen.

(Poems II, 526)

In this typescript draft, the 'distant dull deferred report' is the reverberation of an explosion: the passage, as Eliot explained to Hayward, recalls an 'early air raid' (quoted in *Poems I*, 1018). But it is also an oblique comment – a textual 'report' on – this long-deferred echo of 'La Figlia' and the girl who 'turned away, but with the autumn weather | Compelled my imagination many days'. And so, this 'intersection time', this moment of 'meeting nowhere', is retrospectively imagined as occurring between the first sounding of the phrase (in 'La Figlia') and its secondary 'report' (at the end of 'Little Gidding' II) – the ghostly companion (like the weeping girl) glimpsed in that resonant interval between the first sounding of the text and its repetition, turning away as the interval comes to a close. This 'report', this act of self-conscious self-echo, is absent from the published version of 'Little Gidding' II:

The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
He left me, with a kind of valediction,
And faded on the blowing of the horn.

(205)

The 'distant dull deferred report' was both a commentary on the repetition of a line from 'La Figlia' and a re-imagining of this repetition as an audible echo within the narrative. As the memory of the weeping girl recedes behind draft after draft and the poem reaches its final form, this 'report' is itself lost, remembered only in that new and resonant sound, 'the blowing of the horn'. The peculiarly poetic moment of meeting with a 'ghost' in the 'uncertain hour' before morning persists in the final version of 'Little Gidding' II. And yet to understand that this meeting is not only a narrative event but a final figuring of the kinds of experience that become possible at the 'point of intersection' requires a near-impossible kind of listening in – hearing in the 'blowing of the horn' not only the 'All Clear' siren of the narrative but an acoustic memory of those self-reporting processes of repetition and revision that

created this lyric of ghostly ‘intersection’ out of memories of ‘La Figlia’. It is only a *near-impossible* kind of listening because the lines are also an acoustic cross, involving not only an echo of ‘La Figlia’ but an echo of *Hamlet* I.ii and the ghost that ‘faded on the crowing of the cock’.⁵⁵ The Shakespearean allusion alerts us to the ways in which the sound of the ‘horn’ reverberates with the memory of other texts and of other occasions in which the uncertain hour before morning was the moment of ghostly encounter. The ‘composite ghost’ of ‘Little Gidding’ II is not simply composed of the faces of those who the speaker knew personally, but a presence arising out of crossed and composite memories of those other literary ghosts that once haunted the intersection time. In ‘Little Gidding’ II, as at the beginning of ‘Burnt Norton’, it is only as we listen in to the inaudible echoes of that which ‘might have been’ – the echoes that were never heard in the ‘passage which we did not take’ (79) – that we begin to discover the subtle kinds of attention that are required of us if we are to enter into that ‘intersection time’ afforded by the crossed acoustics of Eliot’s verse and so encounter the ghosts who dwell in that ‘uncertain hour’.

‘Little Gidding’ V comes to a close with a final instance of self-echo:

Through the unknown, remembered gate
 [...]
 The voice of the hidden waterfall
 And the children in the apple-tree
 Not known, because not looked for
 But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
 Between two waves of the sea.

(208-09)

The lines have their origin in *The Family Reunion* (1930): ‘Inaccessible, half-heard. | And I hear your voice as in the silence | Between two storms’ (CPP, 309). This ‘voice’ arises in the silent space between ‘two storms’, a figure for that third voice that arises out of the crossed acoustics of poetry and which sings its half-heard song of that which is ‘inaccessible’, unapprehended in the world beyond our own. The echo of these lines in ‘Little Gidding’ V was there, Eliot explained, for no other reason than that it opened up a new resonant interval: ‘I think silence will have to stand, because I was using a line from the *Family Reunion*’ (quoted in *Poems I*, 1043). (The same logic is behind the ‘throw back’ to ‘La Figlia’.) This resonant interval between the two texts becomes the oblique subject of ‘Little Gidding’ V, the ‘voice’ that arose between ‘two storms’ rediscovered in the voices that are heard between ‘two waves’ and transposed into the composite lyric voice of the later poem itself. This is the ‘voice of the hidden waterfall’, a voice that recalls the closing passage of ‘The Dry Salvages’ in which the ‘waterfall’ (like that ‘music heard so deeply | That it is not heard at all’) stands as an emblem for the ‘point of intersection’, that ‘moment in and out of time’ (200). And, in the context of ‘Little Gidding’, the ‘voice of the hidden waterfall’ joins with those other returning images for the ‘point of intersection’: the ‘children in the apple-tree’ and that ‘rose-garden’ that lies beyond the ‘unknown,

⁵⁵ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), p. 1143.

'unremembered gate'. As such, Eliot's practice of self-repetition develops into a figure for the ways in which the crossed acoustics of verse afford moments in which we hear that 'half-heard' voice – that wordless music – that resonates in the world beyond waves and words.

In Eliot's most explicit articulation of the ways in which poetry takes its reader towards that 'unremembered gate', that frontier-zone where the known world fades into the unimaginable and inapprehensible, he reaches for a new word to describe what it might mean 'to apprehend | The point of intersection of the timeless | With time': 'No occupation either, but something given | And taken, in a lifetime's death in love' ('The Dry Salvages'; 199-200). 'Love' is the note to which Eliot's poetry returns. His published poems begin with a 'Love Song' and each concluding part of *Four Quartets* closes with a meditation on love. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the disappointments of his own love-affairs during his career as a poet, Eliot's verse turns upon the thought of a lost or only dreamt-of love: 'I wonder how they should have been together' ('La Figlia'; 28). Eliot's verse works towards love as both a practice and a distant, stipulated state of being. 'Love' is the labour of reading verse, of occupying its intersections, meetings, and crossings, working to apprehend something of that which lies beyond and which might, briefly, become manifest in these between-places. But love is also the end towards which Eliot's poetry moves: 'Love is itself unmoving, | Only the cause and end of movement' ('Burnt Norton'; 184). 'Love' is the apotheosis of 'stillness' and 'silence', the inaudible and invisible centre towards which 'words' and 'music' move.

These two senses of love hold together. The love that labours towards those things that lie beyond oneself, beyond the 'familiar scene' of our world (and this is the labour of 'selflessness and self-surrender') meets with the 'Love' that dwells there ('The Dry Salvages'; 200). At the close of 'Little Gidding' V, the 'point of intersection' becomes a 'crowned knot of fire' (209), recalling the 'ghostly knot of burning love betwixt thee and thy God' from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and so uniting the poet's loving labour towards apprehension with its object, the 'Love' that is the incarnate God (quoted in *Poems I*, 1043). In earlier poems, Eliot variously figured the 'point of intersection' as dream, vision, mirage, song, ghost, rose-garden, and 'Incarnation'. But in each instance the 'point of intersection' is where love becomes possible and, at its best, where love is given and taken – the place where the weeping girl stands and the silent sister prays, the place where the ghostly guests are 'accepted and accepting' ('Burnt Norton'; 180) and the Word displays the love of God in and for the world. And so to listen in to Eliot's verse, to attend to the intervals and between-places afforded by its crossed acoustics, is to approach – if never, perhaps, pass through – that 'unknown, remembered gate' which leads to 'the Garden | Where all love ends' (*Ash-Wednesday*; 90).

The question about what poetry might do for us is an old one. But the particular configuration of it as a question of poetic ‘belief’ and its continuous or discontinuous relation to other categories of commitment registers some of the distinctive philosophical, theological, and aesthetic anxieties of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. For these four poets – each working from the assumption that poetry has somehow become disconnected from life – writing verse becomes a means of labouring towards recuperating, however provisionally, those experiences of ‘belief’ that are felt to be imperilled, excluded, or forfeited by the enclosures of modern life. Charles Taylor, with a view to the broader history of secularization, sees this investment in art as a means of sustaining otherwise untenable experiences of ‘belief’ as the particular burden of post-Romantic aesthetics:

The dimension of profundity is entered through art, whose subtler language can open us to mystery, but with its ontic commitments suspended and undefined. The post-Romantic space that the nineteenth century carved out is still being occupied. And it is good that it should be; many of us need it to live.⁵⁶

But my concern here is more particular. The suspicion – shared by these four poets – that art might entail a suspension of ‘ontic commitments’ tells us something about the ‘post-Romantic space’ but it also plays out within their self-theorising poetics, felt as both an affordance and an anxiety as it brings a newly urgent attention to the configuration of the relations between poetic language, knowledge, and experience. For Tennyson and Hardy, and for Eliot in poems such as ‘Marina’, it is poetry’s suspension of ‘ontic commitments’ – its confirmed disconnection from everyday life – that means it can be recovered as a mode in which those feelings for which we have no corresponding beliefs might be expressed and (if only momentarily) legitimized. But a poetics of suspended ‘belief’ has only an uncertain value. It is not the experience of ‘belief’ itself that these poets demand of poetry so much as the preservation, confirmation, or ratification of those other, more necessary experiences on which love and life seem to depend – whether that is the presence of the woman much missed, the felt touch of a hidden God, a glimpse of a lost friend, or an apprehension of a world that transcends and transmutes our own. A poetry in which ontic commitments are suspended cannot offer consolations, assurances, or atonements that we can take with us into our ordinary life: it requires us to keep our heads unturned so that we might appreciate the delicate, provisional intimations of the unrealized and unrealizable that it affords. It is only when the doctrine of the incarnation becomes the foundation for both theology and art (as it does for Hopkins and, to a lesser extent, for Eliot) that poetry can be understood as existing in real, continuous relation to life – shaping, securing, and testifying to our metaphysical and aesthetic commitments. The incarnation becomes the basis for a poetics of unsuspended belief – a poetry that we can, in a truer sense, live by.

⁵⁶ Taylor, p. 411.

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