Distraction Fits

ANNE STILLMAN

T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* opens:

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn
> Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
> I no longer strive to strive towards such things
> (Why should the agèd eagle stretch its wings?)[1]

This shows itself to be caught in the act of improvising a beginning, as if the lines are displaying their subject to be a distraction from their own composition, or staging the affliction of ever being on the verge of expression. Troubled inarticulacy turns into an act of inception, as a record-scratching weariness of repetition takes place within repetitiousness: 'Repeatedly with minor variants the same bygone. As if willing him by this dint to make it his'.[2] The poem starts up to 'a craving in the mind', a yearning for something other than that to which bewildered hope clings, and yet the lines can also be heard to conjure stammering hesitation into bravura, as the verse is studded with other poets' words; under this

[1] *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), p. 89. My thanks to David Nowell Smith for his editorial work. I'm grateful to Simon Jarvis for reading a draft of this essay for me.

[2] Samuel Beckett, *Company* (1980) in *Nohow On, Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 10.

Anne Stillman, 'Distraction fits'.
Thinking Verse II (2012), 27-67.
ISSN: 2049-1166.

aspect, the lines speak of an 'agèd eagle' but perform like a male peacock, flashing his brilliantly coloured wings.[3]

Later in *Ash-Wednesday*:

> And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
> The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
> Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
> Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
> Lilac and brown hair;
> Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over the third stair,
> Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
> Climbing the third stair.[4]

'Distraction' may refer to what precedes it, the brown hair, over the mouth, sweetly blown, lilac; and to what comes after, the music of the flute, the dawning of the act of becoming cognizant of the shape of attention, only realized in the act of its own fading: "'Is it oblivion or absorption when things pass from our minds?'"[5] Distraction implies drawing asunder; division, scattering; to be distracted is to be pulled mentally or physically in several directions; one such way, might be, as in French, *divertissement,* a pleasure, being, say, charmed by music, but the wild twin of diversion is diminishment of quality and purpose; stupefaction; vice; a permanent elsewhere; an unquiet mind; *Enter Ophelia, distracted.*[6]

These lines fleetingly hint at the sense of distraction as melodious diversion, but, as Ophelia does, Eliot muddies the tune. Lyrical diversions become tinged with disquiet until fading out, beyond hope and despair, to a sunken nowhere. Distraction is at once an abstraction from the surrounding objects, and therefore capable perhaps of linking them conceptually, as if all the fixtures of sweetness and flutes and blown hair hold the enchanting properties of distraction, while, at the same

[3] William Wordsworth, the note to *The Thorn* (1800) in *Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 594.
[4] *Complete Poems*, p. 93.
[5] Emily Dickinson to T.W. Higginson, as reported by Higginson, in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Jackson (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1958, reprinted 1960), p. 475.
[6] *Hamlet*, IV, iii. The stage direction is in the Folio version of the play, reprinted as *A Facsimile of the First Folio* (London: Routledge, 1998).

time, the word is merely among such parts, just another short-lived glitch found together with other objects of life's spent time, as fleetingly realised as inattention itself might be. Occurring in a surrounding where words are shown in heightened absorption to each other through self-enfolding sound, the concept is melodiously inflected. The lines convey how cogitations directed towards a scattering of charged words and their sounds is what distracts the thinking subject. Yet nothing in that summary conveys the quality of, say, 'maytime', not May time, and the felicity of this sound in English as both a time in spring and a possibility in time. 'Distraction' is a word applied to the behaviour of birds: 'distraction flights' are elaborate displays of diversions, 'injury-feigning', performed by adult birds to draw attention away from the off-spring in the nest, 'The pseudo-sleeping figure occurs commonly in the Oyster-catcher's complex series of distraction-behaviour patterns.'[7] Such elaborate displays might be compared to the behaviours of moments in lyric poems, where one diversion conditions the state of being less than wholly attentive to something else; and yet, in a poem, a distraction can be grasped only as intrinsic to the given poetic texture, and what is being diverted from cannot be uncovered or found out, in the sense that the nest defended by a pair of monogamous Oyster-catchers can be discovered. Although there may be no lyric nest egg from which these flights are decoys, the comparison might still be a way of apprehending how a poem can be heard as saying one thing and doing another, a contradiction, in Empson's sense, that is 'at once an indecision and a structure'.[8] To imagine poems as capable of making distraction flights is to understand poetic textures as significantly precarious.

Signature words from Eliot's poems (hawthorn blossom, enchantment, may, blown brown hair, distraction, lilac, hope, and despair), seem to be conjured up in *Ash-Wednesday* with a hollow flutter of wings, as prepared diversions by (or for?) the stops and steps of the mind. Eliot's poetic imagination has rip-tides, and these words are its foam, the nothing out of which something might begin to be conjured: 'Rien, cette écume, vierge vers'.[9] The swift concurrence heightens not only their

[7] From *British Birds*, XLIII, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2c.
[8] *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), p. 192.
[9] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Salut', *Poésies*, *Œuvres complètes*, Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 27. '*No thing, this foam, a virgin verse*', Peter Manson's translation, *Poésies*, *The Poems in Verse* (Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press), p. 9.

absorbed relations across the lines, but Eliot's deep absorption in and with them across his work, and so turns the poetic attention paid to those words into what sounds distracted, as if the poet is an improviser drawing on set but variable moves to fill a chasm of not quite knowing where to go, and so the very act of assembling the parts of an imaginative repertoire together in quick succession is just what shows the parts to be scattered, only finding common identity in being intimately riven, as, later in *Ash-Wednesday*, 'the bones sang, scattered and shining / We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other'; 'Forgetting themselves and each other, united / In the quiet of the desert'.[10]

Distraction is an evasive object of knowledge, for it draws our attention away.[11] To 'be distracted' seems at once a vague, all-encompassing enormity, and that which is barely perceptible, a fleeting vacuum in which things vanish. How can we attentively and thoughtfully describe what is apparently 'not thinking'? Or, what thinking could be so purposefully attentive and single-minded that it could not include distraction? To attend to distraction seems to make it disappear. Its fugitive nature suggests it would be pointless to try and take some measure of this force that only takes matter away. But verse practice is a rich ground in which to consider the properties of distraction as a form of absorption, through such aspects as the ever-precarious but alluring analogies between poetry with music, first personal accounts of poetic composition and manuscript drafts, together with the experience of rhythm, and the words through which the rhythms of verse are conceptualized. In Eliot's verse practice and writing about verse, distraction is treated as both a menace and a privilege. His work is the lens through which this essay attempts to consider the descriptive language for verse.

Music, like all art, is riddling. 'Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind', is alive to this truth, and may seem to be preoccupied with a tension between language and music; the lines are caught in the act of diverting to 'a means

[10] *Collected Poems*, p. 92.

[11] For extended thoughts on distraction in Aristotle, Augustine, Benjamin, Kafka and Heidegger see Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012). This essay is indebted to this work.

of cognition that is veiled both for itself and for the knowing subject'.[12] The apparition of music appears in *Ash-Wednesday*, as it does in other places in Eliot's poems, as a flickering elsewhere:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightening
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.[13]

The intensity of an absorbed experience is fringed here with an off-hand sigh, as if to shrug, 'Well, for most of us …'. It's hard to know how to hear, 'you are the music / While the music lasts'. The experience might be emphatically stressed, 'music gets hold of the individual as *this* man', perhaps, but imagine the lines sung ecstatically, and they can lurch into pop kitsch; or, if said ponderously, could imply: 'you are the music, but only for that very short moment when it lasts'.[14] After flitting between possibilities of what the unattended moment could be, the sentence ends on this ambivalent vision of absorption, as if the 'distraction fit' only existed in the conjunction 'or', between elements, as a privileged state of mind, or one that forever eludes the mind's attention. Distraction, then, might be a variety of deep attention. Music is evoked as a way of crystallising how only the rare moments of diversion from life permit us to take some measure of it.[15]

---

[12] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Music, Language, Composition', (1956), translated by Susan H. Gillespie, in *Essays on Music* edited by Richard Leppart (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2002), p. 122 and p. 117.

[13] 'The Dry Salvages', *Four Quartets*, *Complete Poems,* p. 190. For thoughts on T.S. Eliot, and *Four Quartets* in particular, I'm indebted to conversations with Eric Griffiths.

[14] 'The self is not only gripped by this element in some particular part of his being or simply through specific content; on the contrary in his simple self, in the centre of its spiritual existence, it is elevated by the musical work and activated by it […] music gets hold of the individual as *this* man', G.W. F. Hegel, 'Music' in *Aesthetics* : *Lectures on Fine Art* , 2 vols., translated by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, reprinted 1988), II, p. 906.

[15] A thought Eliot pursues in his writing on poetic drama, see for instance 'John Marston' (1934): 'as we familiarise ourselves with the play we perceive a pattern behind the pattern into which the characters deliberately involve themselves: the kind of pattern which we perceive in our own lives

'Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind' opens up to the desire to know how it may be possible to hear Wordsworth's phrase, 'The mind of man is framed even like the breath / And harmony of music' as a truth, yet what is more audible in Eliot's line is the discordant absence of inhabiting such fleetingly imagined grace.[16]

'Distraction' occurs together with an apparitional music in *Ash-Wednesday* and 'The Dry Salvages' because it is intrinsic to the power of music to effect change: whether of atmospheres, directions, thoughts. In Tennyson's *The Princess*, a maid is asked to sing: 'lightlier move / The minutes fledged with music'. She sings the lyric 'Tears, idle tears', moving herself to weep: 'the tear, / She sang of, shook and fell, an erring pearl / Lost in her bosom'.[17] The music of her voice and ghostly harp perform a cadenced interjection to the blank verse narrative, where the naturally expressive cry (sobbing grief, a sigh of pain) is depicted in measures excited by weeping but unlike the sound of crying, only deeply calling to mind this movement of the heart by being at once something and nothing like it. The natural cry is the source of the lyrical interlude, and its phantom outcome: the singer is the music, but only while it lasts. Then Tennyson's princess becomes stern: 'we should cram our ears with wool' at the sound of 'so sweet a voice and vague'. The transition between the lyric and blank verse narrative dramatises music as both a diversion warding off distraction, passing time, and a perilous distraction, lost time.

Tennyson's princess stands in a tradition of judging melodious sound to be hazardous: sense might drown in a whirlpool of sonority; purpose suspended in charmed nothing.[18] In 'The Music of Poetry' Eliot is repressively cautious about analogies between verse and music, as if we must stop up our ears because such

---

only at rare moments of inattention and detachment, drowsing in sunlight'. *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932, reprinted and enlarged, 1934, repr. 1999), p. 232.

[16] *The Prelude* (1805), I, ll.351-2, *The Prelude, the Four Texts* edited by Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 54.

[17] *The Princess*, IV, ll. 20-45, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, edited by Christopher Ricks (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 267. See Eric Griffiths 'Tennyson's Idle Tears', for a detailed account of this imbedded lyric, in *Tennyson: Seven Essays* edited by P.A.W. Collins (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 36-58.

[18] See, for instance, Eliot's 'Scylla and Charybdis' (1952), reprinted in *Agenda*, 237 1-2, (Spring - Summer 1985), pp. 5-21; 'Swinburne as Poet' (1920), reprinted in *Selected Essays*, pp. 323-27, or Theodor W. Adorno, 'Music, Language, and Composition' (1956), reprinted in *Essays on Music*, pp. 113-26 (pp. 114-5).

comparisons themselves could be distractions. The essay rehearses arguments that resemble this transition in Tennyson's *Princess*, imagining, through artists like Edward Lear and Mallarmé, worlds of magical sound as echo chambers where we might be charmed, until human voices wake us, and we drown. Eliot is defining himself against *poésie pure*, embracing something muddier: 'the music of a word is, so to speak, 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 contexts; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association'.[19] Although there is much throat-clearing in the essay about the limitations of analogies with music; here, it's the energy of this word alone which catches the relations between present attention and the diversions of local and historical surrounding. 'Music' is what intensifies the focus of the word by expanding its powers to unfold deep sediment and indefinite horizon, and so enables, as Mallarmé also imagines, a condition of being able to speak about the rhythm between relations, such relations as otherwise might remain obscure.[20]

Rustling through the lines from *Ash-Wednesday* are the sounds of thought's nascence and its retreat, but Eliot's lines also depict an act of mind suggesting 'distraction' to be not only an antonym to attention, but rather potentially bound up with what it means to apprehend thought, and perhaps especially to think melodiously:

PETIT AIR

II

Indomptablement a dû
Comme mon espoir s'y lance
Éclater là-haut perdu
Avec furie et silence,

[19] 'The Music of Poetry', a lecture given in 1942, reprinted in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), p. 32-3.
[20] 'Crise de vers', *Œuvres complètes* pp. 360-8; and see the afterword in Peter Manson's translation of *Poésies*, *The Poems in Verse*, p. 284.

Voix étrangère au bosquet
Ou par nul écho suivie,
L'oiseau qu'on n'ouït jamais
Une autre fois en la vie.

Le hagard musicien,
Cela dans le doute expire
Si de mon sein pas du sien
A jailli le sanglot pire

Déchiré va-t-il entier
Rester sur quelque sentier![21]

The heightened disjunction of Mallarmé's syntax is set against the coincidences proposed by the poem through rhyme: emphatically (suivie/vie) where the faces of words recur, and penumbral, in faint echoes at the beginnings of lines. In the heart of the echo-chamber: 'nul écho suivie'. The *rime d'attente* and the *rime-écho* ask the question, 'Where does the phenomenon of rhyming actually occur?'[22] If one rhyme presents a syllable to be rhymed with, and another remembers or echoes a syllable to be partly found again, then the scene of where exactly we hear this recurrence remains ghostly, as, in this poem, the very return of sound is shown to be as elusive, perhaps, as something you will never hear again: 'L'oiseau qu'on n'ouït jamais / Une autre fois en la vie.' So in one way, 'rhymes placed within this involved and often distracting texture, come to represent the principle of invariance and symmetry'; under this aspect, the rhymes focus attention.[23] But, under another aspect, the rhymes are distraction flights, a fabric of diverting echoes in a poem devoted to a singular irretrievable sound, forever on the edges of awareness. Both verse elements are 'at once an indecision and a structure': and

[21] 'Poésies', *Œuvres complètes*, p. 66. 'Little Tune II' 'Indomitably must / like my far-flung hopes / have gone up with a bang, lost / in fury and silence, /voice stranger to the wood / or followed by no echo, / the bird you get to hear / only once. / The haggard musician, / expiring in doubt / that my breast and not his / might have issued the louder sob / blown apart will all of him / still hit the road!' Peter Manson's translation, *The Poems in Verse*, p. 155.
[22] Clive Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 140.
[23] Malcolm Bowie, on '*Prose pour des Esseintes*' in *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, repr. 2008), p. 68.

seem to propose 'two things thought of as incompatible, but desired intensely by different systems of judgement.'[24] The lyric teases out a phantom acoustic as if to simulate how, say, in the cognitive act of forgetting a word, an expansive acoustic vista of language suddenly rises up in the mind and clusters around the gap where thought seeks for particular syllables. Lost sound and perpetually recurring sounds are two desires, and in the poem 'both desires are thus given a transient and exhausting satisfaction'.[25] 'L'attente, le doute, la concentration étaient *choses visibles*', Valéry said of *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, and this is just as audible in Mallarmé's diminutive lyrics, as his verse fastens its rhythms around the sensation of distraction and contingency, sounding out the liquid edges of thoughts, shown in the act of dawning and vanishing.[26]

The drawing away of thoughts, from one point or course to another may itself occur when the stops and steps of the mind are themselves thought of; when cognition itself is recognised as an object of knowledge, distraction may seem to be at once a perilous abyss into which acts of mind might disperse and fall way, but also strangely and closely allied to an agile power through which the privileges and predicaments of thinking are recognised. Consciousness goes beyond limits, but those limits are its own, and so it goes beyond itself: 'thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia'.[27] If thought's capacity to take itself as an object is one deep hope of philosophy, then the possibility of thought's distractedness [*Zerstreutheit*] might be imagined as the note of despair which only sharpens that hope. Just such a double aspect is captured in Augustine's phrase, 'In you, O my mind, I measure my times. Do not interrupt me; that is, do not interrupt yourself with a disturbance of your affections', where the attention to the addressed subject, the apprehending mind, becomes the object of thought and so the very source of its potential disruption, 'do not interrupt me; that is, do not interrupt yourself'; while, at the same time, in its intertexture of self-

[24] Empson, *Seven Types*, p. 226.
[25] Empson, *Seven Types*, p. 226.
[26] '*Le coup de dés*, lettre au Directeur des *Marges*', *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols., Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), I, p. 624. [Attention, doubt, concentration became *visible things*]
[27] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Millar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 51.

revision and hesitation, the phrase makes out what the stops and steps of a movement of mind could sound like, the staged equivalent of which might be something like Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape.*[28]

In a notebook entry Shelley writes:

> But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards;—like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile, and dares not look behind. The caverns of the mind are obscure, and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals. If it were possible to be where we have been, vitally and indeed—if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience,—if the passage from sensation to reflection—from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation, were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult.[29]

Shelley's note deeply inhabits the word 'apprehension', not by knowing its habitat, but by running from it. Cognition is apprehended in the act of its own near vanishing, as thought becomes a river, frightened by its own realisation, a fugitive in company of ghosts; thought is the inhabitant of the apprehensive mind, a tenant and exile from the shadowy landscape it generates, yet shining too, somehow, with secret lustre. If we tried to extract a theory of mind from Shelley's note, then it would seem bewildered and inarticulate. But, seen under another aspect, the metaphorical confusions are precisely a source of intellectual depth, as Shelley might be imagined to be vividly alive to the thought that 'the evanescent itself … must be regarded as essential, not as something fixed, cut off from the True, and left lying who knows where outside it'.[30] The writing is captivated by its own attempts to capture, a self-enfolded gulp for breath in a syntax with no time to

[28] *Confessions* XI, xxvii, in the edition and translation given by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), this discussion of time occurs on p. 276. Though here I am using the translation of Augustine as given by North of 'In te, anime meus, tempora mea metior. Noli mihi obstrepere; quod est, noli tibi obstrepere turbis affectionum tuarum.' For a discussion of Augustine and distraction see North, pp. 61-65.

[29] Fragment, arranged as "Difficulty of Analysing the Human Mind', placed under materials usually referred to as 'Speculations on Metaphysics and Morals', collected in *Shelley's Pro*se, edited by David Lee Clark (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), p. 186.

[30] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 27.

breathe is the sharp cause of its speedy hope and equally expeditious despair. Thought perhaps can visit the intricate chambers it inhabits, though not in this landscape. But a poem might show how it is possible to be where we have been, perhaps through poetic rhythm thought can mirror its own obsolescence.[31]

There are distractions that can seem, at first, to be more straightforward objects of knowledge, *Einklammerungen*, the distractions of the everyday, a sense of the word drained of violent perturbation of mind, temporary madness domesticated into pesky nothings, not perhaps demanding of us much thought, or attention: the street music I can hear from my window; a fatal red balloon seen from the corner of a driver's eye; the niggling dislike of a certain font of text; a rising temptation to open another window in the screen on which you type; the dismay that your attention has been captured by the advertisement on the edges of awareness 'the ruse by which the dream forces itself on industry'.[32] Distraction hovers in the threshold between dream and threat:

> Think now
> She gives when our attention is distracted
> And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
> That the giving famishes the craving.[33]

Eliot's verse is alive to the menace of an apprehension that prompts a craving for knowledge but eludes its satiation: someone indistinct seen on the fringes of attention, the noise on the edges of awareness, the corners of perception, 'an aimless smile that hovers in the air / And vanishes along the level of the roofs'.[34] The words for such an attention, captured only to fade-out, must occupy a strange tense. Can I say 'I am distracted?' Our own experience of distraction is accounted for belatedly. Where was I when I gazed at a stranger's face sitting opposite me on a train? To even ask the question is to experience return. To find his expression

[31] Mirrors its obsolescence is Peter Manson's translation of Mallarmé's line, 'Mire sa désuétude', Petit air I'. *The Poems in Verse*, p. 153.
[32] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 171.
[33] T.S. Eliot, 'Gerontion', in *Complete Poems*, p. 38.
[34] 'Morning at a Window', *Complete Poems*, p. 27.

delicate, to the lines of his face, to the passing landscape, to the averting of eyes. It is difficult to prolong or even to find an ontology for the flickering moment of asking, 'Where was I?'. The moment in time recedes the more our contemplation of it grows: 'But now/ I find myself the less the more I grow; / The World / Is full of voices …'.[35]

We name things 'distraction' to which we commit loving attention. My devoted concentration to one thing can be described as a distraction from another: 'Life is a continual diversion [*eine fortwährende Ablenkung*] that never once allows coming to reflection [*Besinnung*] on that form which it diverts'.[36] This sharply depicts the intractable knot that life makes, or engenders, or produces the absence of reflection on its own nature, a state that is itself without reflection. Attention is patient, enduring, connected to the will to give and to possess; attention takes time, distraction merely takes things away. But one distraction is thinking deeply about another person. To think of another with the imaginative loving that lies at the heart of 'real giving' and takes 'its joy in imagining the joy of the receiver', then this act 'means choosing, expending time, going out of one's way, thinking of the other as a subject: the opposite of distraction' [*das Gegenteil von Vergeßlichkeit*].[37] Whether distraction is a diversion sparing us from the 'growing terror of nothing to think about', or a self-deception in the face of despair, its fugitive nature means every age will repeat the sentiment that it believes itself to be living 'in an age of distraction'; the cliché becomes a commodified euphemism.[38]

Distraction especially preoccupies Eliot as an object of knowledge, because it moves towards the limit of what is known:

> Only a flicker
> Over the strained time-ridden faces

[35] North, *Distraction*, pp. 44 -48. Henry Vaughan, 'Distraction', from *Silex Scintillans* [1650] *Henry Vaughan*, edited by Louis L. Marz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 21.
[36] Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, edited by Jost Schillemeit, II (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), p. 340, and discussed in North, p. 76.
[37] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Umtausch nicht gestattet' in *Minima Moralia, Gesammelte Schriften* 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 47. Translated like this by E. F. N. Jephcott, *Minima Moralia, Reflections from Damaged Life*, (London: Verso, 2006) p. 46.
[38] 'And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen / Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about'. 'East Coker', *Complete Poems*, p. 180.

> Distracted from distraction by distraction
> Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
> Tumid apathy with no concentration
> Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
> That blows before and after time,
> Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
> Time before and time after.[39]

The syntax diverts elaborately from its phantom subject. 'Only a flicker ….' sets up the expectation of a singular action in time, then faces melt into phantasmagoria, whirled away into the event of nothing taking place, before or after. It is not just that 'distraction is where these people start and end, even if they have lost track of whatever their first distraction was', or that there is 'no hint of the redeeming double negative the logic might seem to promise'.[40] Eliot's lines are not so aloof from 'these people'; and, after all, 'the strained time-ridden faces', 'men and bits of paper', may not be people, exactly, at all. In the spirit of riveted attention to distraction, these words attend more profoundly to how the subject of being drawn restlessly away from the distractions of life by that which is itself a diversion resists being crystallized into something that bears scrutiny, or that can be thought *of*, as if life itself ever prevents the possibility of reflecting on the very passage of time it so persistently diverts. Eliot depicts this for us as an experience in rhythm; that is, an experience cut into time. In this sense, these finite centres, if they are persons, are not being judged for their 'distraction' by an exalted voice; the concept is endured by the poem.

Distraction edges towards being spell-bound, as toyed with in *The Tempest*, where distraction is a plot device, complex word, and property of art. Prospero finds his 'high charmes work, / And these (mine enemies) are all knit up/ In their distractions'; the fabric of the poetic drama spins around the fascinations and hazardous predicaments of being diverted and enraptured, which is one reason

[39] See North, *Distraction*, p. 13 on the limits of what is known. 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets*, *Complete Poems*, p. 144.
[40] Michael Wood, on these lines, in 'Distraction Theory: How To Read While Thinking of Something Else' in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XLVIII, 4 (Fall, 2009), p. 2.

why the play's aura is bound up with acts of poetic composition.[41] To be knit up in distraction can imply 'not thinking'. On one end of the spectrum, this is mindless diversion, and yet '*Die Rezeption in der Zerstreuung*' [Reception in distraction] brings the word closer to *Aussetzung* or *Suspendierung*, into openness to something outside the self, leading the mind back to dwelling upon the rhythms of thinking: distraction not as lassitude, but as a vehicle of absorption.[42]

Distraction may be the privation of attention, and, in one sense, we can distinguish between thinking that is distracted and that which is attentive just as we can distinguish between careful, trained drawing and an absent-minded doodle in the margins. But a writer's manuscript can seem to be a material embodiment of the difficulty of cutting a sharp distinction between attention and distraction. Records of poetic composition are 'intertextures of ordinary feeling and passion', splintering into distracted multiplicity, whether of the self shown in the act of indecision, or in their half-life as letters, words reaching for others' hands, tentatively, or apprehensively.[43] As the Letter from Goslar, from William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge is both intimately singular and shared by many hands.[44]

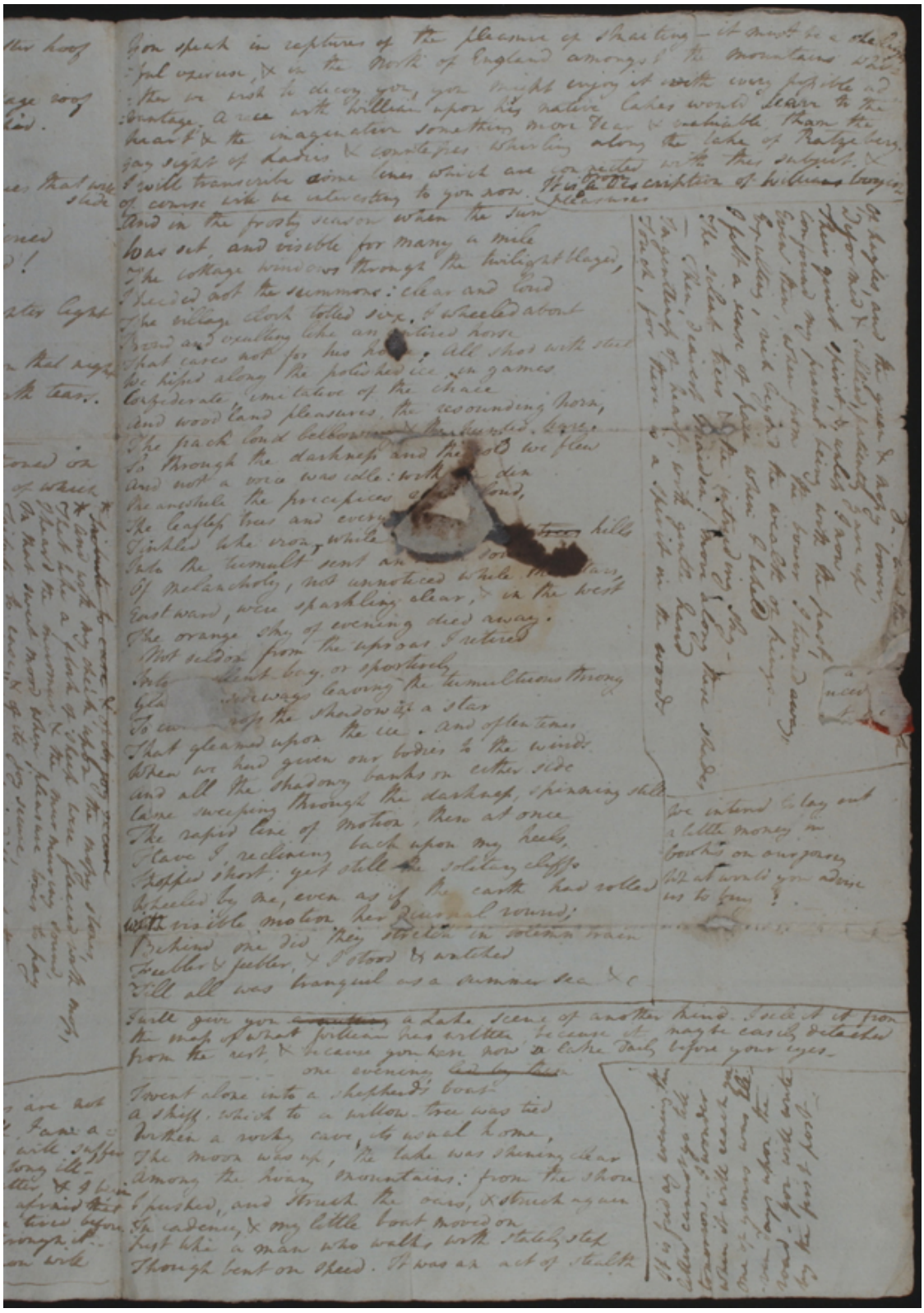
---

[41] *The Tempest*, III, iii.

[42] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Illuminations* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-235 (p. 233). For a discussion of early drafts of this essay and correspondence with Adorno, see North, *Distraction*, pp. 144-8. See also Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction", *Boundary* 2, 30:1 (2003), pp. 51-66. On distraction as absorption, Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* (Berkley: University of California, 1980).

[43] 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' [1802] in *Wordsworth*, ed. Gill, p. 609.

[44] http://collections.wordsworth.org.uk/GtoG/home.asp?page=Letterextract9. Accessed 19.09.2012.



The letter contains material for the poem 'Nutting' and the early *Prelude*, written in Dorothy's hand, every inch of paper is used for reasons of thrift: 'In my thoughts / There was a darkness, call it solitude' keeps company with other voices, 'I would once more hear your dear voices again William's foot is on the stairs/ he has been walking by moonlight'. Next to 'blank desertion, no familiar shapes / of hourly objects' we hear: 'It is Friday evening. This letter cannot go till tomorrow. I wonder when it will reach you. One of yours was eleven days on the road.' The intertexture of voices in the letter deepens and enriches our sense of the points of intersection within pronominal encounter: how and 'I' addresses a 'you', or, in Wordsworth's gentle phrase, 'as if to thee alone'.

'It is impossible to view one's own character from outside as it is *one's own handwriting*. I have a one-sided relation to my handwriting which prevents me from seeing it on the same footing as others' writing and comparing it to theirs' [*Man kann den eigenen Charakter so wenig von Aussen betrachten, wie die eigene Schrift*].[45] Manuscripts might seem 'one-sided' and so can apparently distil an aspect of lyric apprehended as intimate with the first person.

[45] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by G.H. Von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, repr.1994), p. 23e.

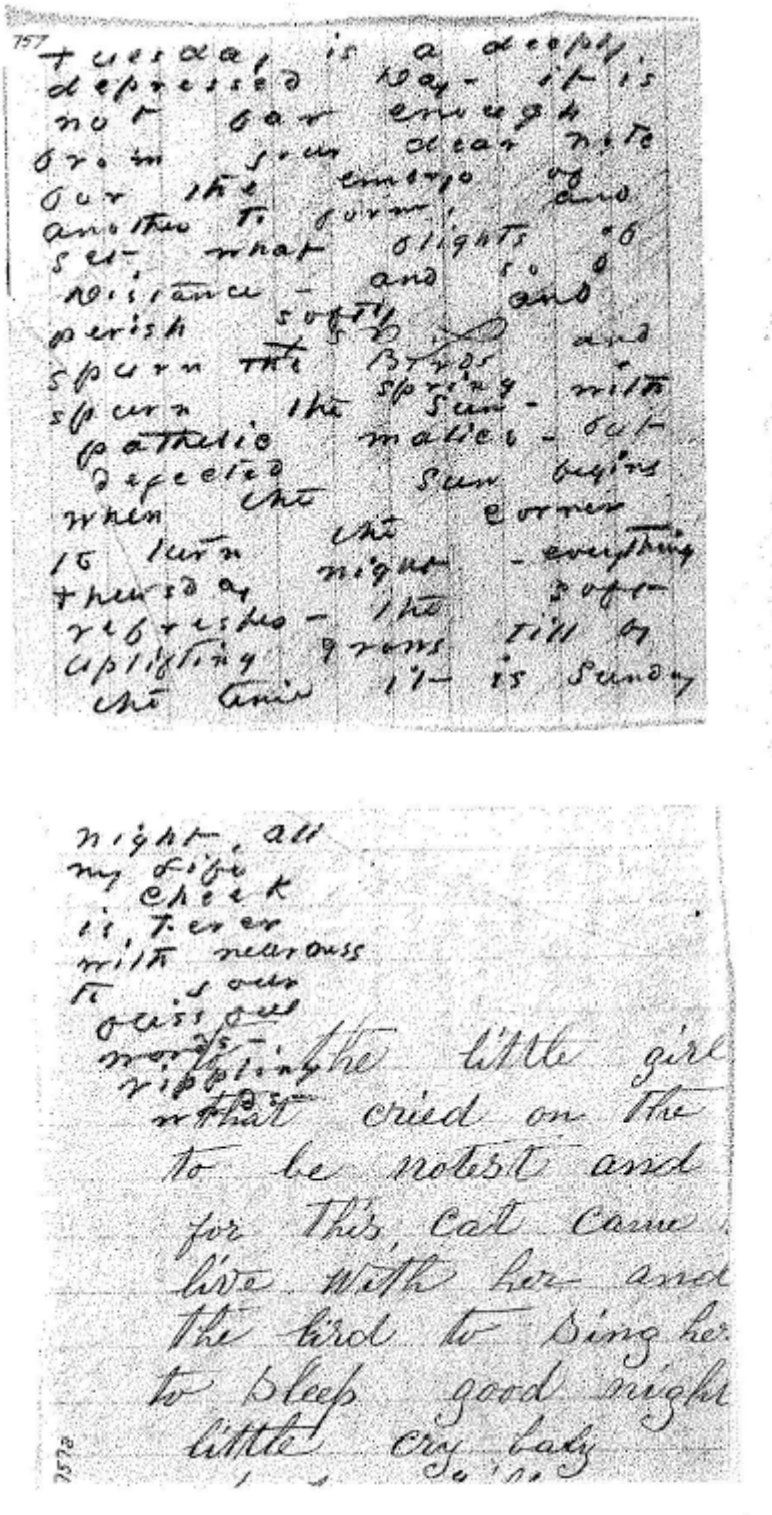


Figure 1: Letter A757 (c.1878)

This is one of the documents Emily Dickinson left to posterity, fragments of torn re-used paper. These have been described as 'extra-generic', an expression that shows up the compulsion to invent a genre to say something is without genre.[46] But it matters less what they are and more what they show: records of composition, stops and steps of her mind shown in the act of working out distraction in its many senses, from the desire to compose, to making words because of the distractions of love. Such scribbled gestures are always difficult to decipher even when or if they are legible, and may, like an elaborate riddle, have an elliptical beauty connected to lyric as a mode in its more finished forms, but unlike a riddle, which might exhort its reader to 'say who I am', here, the puzzle, though full of scattered parts, has no unifying answer.[47] Like an object that bears an inscription, and refers to its maker or owner ('so-and-so made this'), such a scrap of paper is intimate with the first person, yet not as, say, a child's drawing might be, when the little hand first learns to make the letters of her name, and then inscribes it, larger than life, on the page. The power of Dickinson's words to make apparent the deep power of another's words on her being can seem to leave the material circumstances of the writing, about which curiosity may be tempted but must ever remain reticent.

But what does it mean to find this object moving? It may not move you in the way that your mother's handwriting will perhaps move you, once she is dead. To be moved risks making such a scrap into a fetish, an object animated by the penumbral ghost of the scene of its creation. Manuscripts may have a material beauty, etherealized by a machine and by technical reproducibility, and perhaps, on reflection, this seems uncomfortably remote from the pains, or the ease, the author

---

[46] See http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/emily_manuscripts, and Marta L. Werner, *Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading; Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). [Transcription: 'Tuesday is a deeply depressed day – it is not far enough from your dear note for the embryo of another to form, and yet what flights of Distance and so I perish softly and spurn the Birds and spurn the spring / Sun with pathetic / dejected malice – but when the sun begins to turn the corner Thursday night – everything refreshes – the soft uplifting grows till by the time it is Sunday night all my life / Cheek is Fever with nearness to your blissful words/ to rippling words.' In Werner, *Open Folios*.]

[47] Daniel Tiffany, 'Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity', *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 72-98.

took at the scene of their making. It is alluring to believe in the distractions this document may seem to offer up, by looking at the two hands together, to read in the larger, cautiously neat hand, 'the bird to sing' and to hear Dickinson 'spurn the birds and / spurn the sun'; next to the naïve 'little girl', to listen to the 'soft / uplifting grows' of longing for 'your / blissful words', and to hear the strange cry of the single word 'last' near 'good night little cry baby'. The possible heat between all these pairings only heightens the consciousness of perversely enjoying a frisson of transgression in looking at something not intended for our eyes. The tentative becomes an icon. At which point it ceases to relate to the word 'try'.

The facets of attention and distraction in verse composition come alive in first-personal descriptions of how poems begin, where testimonies about creation take us to the obscure regions imagined by Shelley, combining the mysterious with practical labour. For Mayakovsy:

> I walk about, gesticulating, mumbling still almost without words, now shortening my steps in order not to impede my mumbling, now mumbling more quickly in time to my steps.
>
> Thus is the rhythm hewn and shaped—the rhythm which is the basis of all poetic work and which goes through it like a rumble. Gradually from this rumbling one begins to squeeze out single words.
>
> Some words simply rebound and never return, others linger, turn over, and twist themselves inside out several dozen times until one feels that the word has fallen into place. (This feeling, developed through experience is called talent.) First and most frequently, the main word becomes apparent—the main word which characterises the meaning of the verse or the word which is to be rhymed. The remaining words come and arrange themselves in relation to the main one. When the fundamentals are done there suddenly emerges a sensation that the rhythm has been violated—some tiny syllable or small sound is lacking. One begins to tailor all the words anew and this work drives one to distraction. It is as though for the hundredth time a crown is being unsuccessfully fitted to a tooth, and finally, after the hundredth attempt, it is pressed and falls into place. The similarity for me is strengthened, more over, by the fact that when, finally, that crown "falls into place" tears gush from eyes (literally) from pain and from a sense of relief.[48]

[48] 'How to Make Verse', translated by Valantina Coe, in *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry* ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbour: Ardis, 1974), pp. 124-5.

Mayakovsky depicts ordinary movement exerting pressure on the metaphysical. Poetic labour—deep attention to words—is work that 'drives one to distraction'. This account of a crown 'falling into place' is quite different from, say, Yeats's assertion that a poem comes 'right with a click like the click of a box', because for Mayakovsky the material object is not held at arm's length and closed, but physically endured, so the relief is conditioned by an element of bewildered agony.[49]

Compare Mayakovsky's account to stories about the rapper Jay- Z, as described by Pusha-T:

> Anything you've ever heard of anybody saying about seeing Jay-Z in the studio, what does he do? He mumbles to himself, he walks around, he mumbles to himself, he walks around, he mumbles to himself, then he's like, OK, I got it.[50]

Mayakovsky and Jay-Z share a vivid bravura by depicting the elusively unseen, and perhaps liking to be seen in the act. Both offer tantalizing glimpses of distraction in action, into the world before the poem, or in Jay-Z's case, before the recording, where an inarticulate, self-involved vocality coalesces into a form of words. What is 'it' in '*I got it*'? The sense could be 'I'm ready', or 'that's enough', or 'Eureka!', as 'it' could be a word-order painstakingly got together, or a thought or feeling previously elusive but now got in words, or maybe just the right appetite for a rhythm 'got' for the thing to come: 'Toute création suppose à l'origine une sorte d'appétit que fait naître l'avant-goût de la découverte. Cet avant-goût de l'acte créateur accompagne l'intuition d'une inconnue déjà possédée mais non encore intelligible et qui ne sera définie que par l'effort d'une technique vigilante'.[51]

---

[49] W.B. Yeats, in *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 22.

[50] Pusha-T, quoted in Paul Edwards, *How To Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), p. 144. I'm indebted to Conrad Steel for showing me this passage.

[51] Igor Stravinsky, *Poétique Musicale: sous forme de six leçons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), pp. 34-5. [All creation supposes at its origin a sort of appetite that is brought on by the foretaste of discovery. The creative act accompanies the intuitive grasp of an unknown entity already possessed but not yet intelligible, an entity that will not take definite shape except by the action of a constantly vigilant technique.]

Paul Valéry writes:

> J'étais sorti de chez moi pour me délasser, par la marche et les regards variés qu'elle entraîne, de quelque besogne ennuyeuse. Comme je suivais la rue que j'habite, je fus tout à coup *saisi* par un rythme qui s'imposait à moi, et qui me donna bientôt l'impression d'un fonctionnement étranger. Comme si quelqu'un se servait de ma *machine à vivre*. Un autre rythme vint alors doubler le premier et se combiner avec lui; et il s'établit je ne sais quelles relations *transversales* entre ces deux lois (je m'explique comme je puis). Ceci combinait le mouvement de mes jambes marchantes et je ne sais quel chant que je murmurais, ou plutôt qui se murmurait au *moyen de moi*.[52]

Valéry scrupulously attempts to anatomize 'd'une inconnue déjà possédée mais non encore intelligible', while, at the same time, the aside '(je m'explique comme je puis)', is a little nod towards its own gaucherie, for here the muse is not whispering in the poet's ear, nightly, under cover of sweet darkness, but making use of the man's 'living machine' in full view in a street in Paris like some demonic extremely musically gifted body-snatcher. The comedy in both Mayakovky's and Valéry's words is the condition of their seriousness. By turning their bodies into near self-parody in relation to abstraction and to music, the struggle to depict becomes persuasive, just because of a willingness to dwell within a phenomenology of the self-consciously uncertain, peculiar, flailing. Practice and abstraction from creative action do not cohere, and this is a source of wonder. This is because the difference between the breathing human and the material object he or she has made is what enables a true relation between them, so just as I can speak of a person as having a poetic soul, a line of verse itself can be distinctively 'poet-like, more human than

[52] 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 1322. [I left my house to relax from a tedious piece of work by walking and by a change of scene. As I went down the street where I live, I was suddenly *seized* by a rhythm which took possession of me and gave me the impression of a force outside of myself. It was as if someone else were making use of my *living-machine*. Then another rhythm overtook and combined with the first, and heaven knows what strange transverse relations were set up between these two principles (I'm explaining myself as best I can). They combined with the movement of my legs and heaven knows what kind of song I was murmuring, or rather which was being murmured *through* me.]

material', as in 'Don du poèm', when 'Mallarmé emerges from an insomniac night with a helpless, new-born poem which he invites his wife to breastfeed'.[53]

For Eliot, a poet is:

> …oppressed by a burden which he must give birth to in order to obtain relief. Or, to change the figure of speech, he is haunted by a demon against which he feels powerless, because in its first manifestation it has no face, no name, nothing; and the words, the poem he makes are a kind of form of exorcism of this demon. In other words again, he is going to all that trouble, not in order to communicate with anyone, but to gain relief from acute discomfort; and when the words are finally arranged in the right way—or in what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find—he may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and something very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable.[54]

The hesitations over his own figures of speech show a characteristic turn in Eliot's poetic thought to depict the intimate as unidentifiable and the unidentifiable as intimate, vividly describing a beginning and an end, passing across a broken middle. Here the embryo of a poem can be at once both as emphatically present as physical pain and a form so elusively penumbral that any description of it could only be tentative: 'it has no face'. The unsettledness throws up its hands to come to rest on the unsayable, 'in itself indescribable'. Such bewilderment is just what gives this attempt to inhabit composition its depth, especially as it veers towards absurd, peculiar self-dramatization, or even melodrama, as stories about composition can. Eliot shuffles between the ghoulish (the poem is exorcism) and the quaintly mundane ('all that trouble'), lurching between distraction as maddening possession and just merely niggling. Like Mayakovsky's account of composition, this is a more satisfying attempt, to my ears, in its self-dissatisfactions than such a self-satisfied description of a poem coming 'right with a click like the click of a box.'

First personal descriptions of composition may test credibility in one way, but part of their persuasive power is a living scepticism about whether such attempts

[53] Peter Manson, afterword to *The Poems in Verse*, p. 283.
[54] 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 98.

to depict can ever be fully persuasive, in any strong sense, as I can speak of a persuasive philosophical argument. You may not believe Mayakovsky, or Valéry, or Eliot. Perhaps in making such short stories out of the creative event, it's all become a fantastical retrospective auditory hallucination. Yet rather as the statement, 'I am distracted', shows the experience of distraction to be recognized belatedly, narrative reconstruction is an integral feature of this dialectic. Despite this narrative desire, acts of composition will occupy tenses that can't always be neatly named as beginnings or ends, so the stories of making occupy an elusive grammatical time:

> The process of composing verse also involves the recollection of something that has never before been said, and the search for lost words is an attempt to remember what is still to be brought into being ('I have forgotten the word I wished to say, like a blind swallow it will return to the abode of shadows'). This requires great concentration, till whatever has been forgotten suddenly flashes into the mind.[55]

This is put plainly, but the adumbration is not plain, or light. These words show how the fugitive nature of distraction might matter to the study of poems, by taking in such deep insights as understood by Wordsworth:

> Even forms and substances are circumfused
> By that transparent veil with light divine,
> And through the turnings intricate of verse
> Present themselves as objects recognized
> In flashes, with a glory not their own.

To be able to bring such lost words into being is a fragile gift, as the search is perilously bound up with the force that can take everything away, 'less quiet instincts—goadings on', captured only to fade, 'gleams of light / Flash often from the east, then disappear / And mock me…'.[56]

---

[55] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir*, translated by Max Hayward (London: Collins & Harvell, 1971), p. 187.
[56] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, V, ll.627-9; I, l.153; ll.135-6.

These first personal descriptions matter because their vivid uncertainties provide a salutary corrective to the tendency with which literary-critical discourse can be quick to say that something 'underlies' a work, and therefore accounts for it (as, say, the 'struggle to depict the self' apparently underlies many poems by Eliot, when this might equally apply to most works, and to many everyday utterances). But X can underlie Y and not account for it, rather as the carpet in this room has an 'underlay', but that does not account for its peculiar shade of green. For this reason it makes sense to say, '*Now* I understand Mallarmé's lines' after reading a line by Eliot, not because an underlying shared 'theme' has been grasped, but because something in a line of Eliot's verse reveals what Mallarmé's music is capable of: 'Ou par nul écho suivie, / L'oiseau qu'on n'ouït jamais / Un autre fois en la vie' can be heard differently after hearing the opening of 'Burnt Norton', where among 'other echoes' a bird speaks, 'Into our first world'; as Mallarmé's phrase, in 'Petit air I', 'mire sa désuétude', may be reflected in the glittering surfaces at the openings of 'Burnt Norton' and 'Little Gidding' but does not account for them. Both poets may, in these different instances, be concerned with singularly melodious encounters, and yet we are not gaining much by speaking at this level of conceptual generalisation, just as I'm not conveying much by saying Eliot's poems 'struggle to depict a self'. It is the particular inflection we want to hear, the accent such concerns acquire as particular to each, for encounters between writers are apparitional, like family resemblances, or the peculiar personal intimacies between close friends, suddenly vivid, then palpably absent just as the likeness is caught.

So rather than doubting the credibility of first personal writings on composition, it would be more intellectually exciting to imagine the doubt we may feel as an experience that modifies our sensibility: take these words as truthful thoughts about compositional absorption, even if they are theatrically lit. Stories about making verse and manuscripts showing the imperfect recording of the history of a composition can risk becoming permanent diversions, icons of the contingent and uncertain. Yet they can also work together to trouble theories of poetics, especially as such theories can become occasions for theories of something else. The point at which a theory of verse might become meaningful is also the point at which it

becomes open to the risk of being fantastical. Theories of verse must diverge from practice: this is the charm and point of a theory. And yet unlike a theory of gravity, for which the individual apple is unimportant, individual poems matter greatly for an understanding of poetry, and any theory about poetry. Similar questions are asked by the theory and by the practice of poetry, although the mode of asking is different. One such powerful question can be simply put, 'what kind of consciousness might rhythmicality be said to inhabit?' Like distraction, the ontology of *what* and *where* becomes elusive at once. Mayakovsky, Valéry, and Eliot all touch upon a question which might be formulated like this: '*Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without*?'[57] Such a mid-way reality can be compared to the kind of imaginative life a toy has for a child. It makes no sense to ask the playing child whether the toy bear she is talking to possesses a life that she, the child, conceived of, or whether the imaginative life of the bear was presented to her, somehow, from without, complete with the power to listen, to talk back, to feel sad. Wordsworth's description of the power of metre to 'divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition' gains some of its force by inhabiting the kind of mid-way reality Shelley's note delights in and flees from.[58] Wordsworth admits openness and uncertainty into creation and cognition. That is, the account takes in the possibility of an elusively divided attention, an awareness of a force outside of the person but intimate with the subject, by conceiving of a power that is receptive to what may not be immediately wholly apparent, and receiving this into its own powers of apprehension. Much of the intellectual depth of this attempt at formulation exist within and because of its qualifications—certain degree, sort of half,—all these phrases, might, under another aspect, be seen as vague; here only such tentativeness could be persuasive.

In Eliot's discussions of verse, distraction is privileged as diversion: 'Versification is a definite concession to the desire for play'.[59] Eliot's writings on verse transmute some of the philosophical questions in *Knowledge and Experience in*

[57] D. W. Winnicott, writing about toys and play, in *Playing and Reality* (1971, repr. Hove: Brunner Routledge, 2002), p. 12.
[58] 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' [1802] in *Wordsworth*, ed. Gill, p. 609.
[59] 'Prose and Verse', *The Chapbook* 22 (April, 1921), p. 9.

the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley into ways of thinking about verse practice. One preoccupation in the dissertation is a concern with problems of detailed particular content and elaborate peripheral context surrounding any case of judgement or perception: there will always be a 'field of quite uncertain extent'; 'a background of indefinite extent', 'capable of indefinite transmutation'.[60] The dissertation struggles to account for how it is that we come to recognise our thought falling short of the particular, but it is just this power to take in what exists on the margins of cognition that Eliot comes to see as embodied in, and enabled by, the power of verse. So echoed phrases from his dissertation return, not as philosophical predicaments, but as lyric privileges: the music of a word calls up an 'indefinite' context; in poetic drama 'there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action'.[61] Eliot depicts consciousness of verse rhythm in composition as existing on the peripheral edges of attention: 'the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the "freest" verse; to advance menacingly as we doze and withdraw as we rouse'.[62] Distraction, in this account, wakes you up, out of lassitude, into attention. The playful allusion to a play is not merely the 'concession to the desire for play', but points to metaphysically uncertain questions about what kind of cognitive and historical consciousness rhythm might inhabit, and so complicates the notion, voiced later in the same essay, that the life of verse is in 'an *un*perceived evasion of monotony' (my emphasis). It is perceived, or, crucially, recognised to be on the edges of perception. The *e muet* in French prosody is just such a ghost: pronouncing it is an embodiment, but the decision not to pronounce it still confirms the reality of the apparition, as if there is an aura of magic around the possibility that a line of verse might swell into another existence.[63] A wide field of possibilities opens, where ambiguous historical presences appear as co-present with the rhythmic self, sharing a sense of

[60] *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (London: Faber, 1964), p. 55.
[61] 'Poetry and Drama' in *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 86.
[62] 'Reflections on *Vers Libre*', in *To Criticise the Critic* (1965), p. 187.
[63] See Peter Manson, afterward to *The Poems in Verse*, p. 282.

watchfulness with Wordsworth's discussion of versification, and leaving us 'with the feeling that the world is full of possibilities'.[64]

Eliot says the poet's mind is 'in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.'[65] To describe the poet's mind as 'a receptacle for seizing' may sound like a poetic soul in possession of a butterfly-net. But the syntax flinches to depict a mind being actively passive, a vessel with the power to capture, and to receive not just numerous parts, but numberless particles, so entities beyond computation, as if it really is not possible to say whether it is oblivion or absorption when things pass through our minds. A 'receptacle for seizing', like '*Die Rezeption in der Zerstreuung*', absorbs the world. Crucially, this description conceives of the scene of creation as one in which a whole arises from the co-presence of particulars in way that is partially opaque to its author. This is also true of Eliot's descriptions of rhythm: 'I know that a poem may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches its expression in words'.[66] 'Realize itself', like 'are present together', takes out the first person, while still privileging the singular experience of the subject. Eliot refrains from making a judgement as to how it is that the individual mind brings these numberless constituents together, so one objection to this formulation might be that this is effecting a makeshift compromise, merely conjuring the illusion that things happen on their own. But Eliot's account of composition privileges the subject without narrowing subjectivity into a psychological attitude, so what might be taken as a conceptual vagueness has both a strong philosophical credibility and (to different ends) a literary strength.

The elusiveness of distraction means it could apply to any verse practice just as, say, 'hearing' could be. But Eliot's discussions of verse and his efforts to conceptualise poetic creation especially emphasise the uncertain frontiers of attention and cognition, and do so through turns of expression that derive from a philosophical training, but splinter up this language into something distinct,

[64] Eliot on 'William James on Immortality' *New Statesman*, 9.231 (8 September 1917), 547.
[65] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), *Selected Essays*, p. 19.
[66] 'The Music of Poetry', *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 38.

devoted to the very different but equally philosophical power of poetic language to take in what is 'beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action'.[67] Eliot privileges the enabling power of poetic language to think beyond the ordinary, but he can also be understood to be a poet of apprehension in all the shades of that word, as a signature movement of his verse depicts the dawning of thought as intimate with the disposition to fear.[68] The poems Eliot wrote throughout his life emphatically stress the varieties of distraction in the most apprehensive of its senses: the frayed edges of perception; severance; division; inattention; digression; thinking of nothing and possessed of empty thoughts; time wasted; violent scatterings of cognition; extreme diversion as both a cognitive predicament and, sometimes, a lyric privilege.

Lyric visions in Eliot's verse are subjected to distracted puncture, as, for example, when 'Preludes' begins to end, and an 'I' enters the poem, for the first time:

> I am moved by fancies that are curled
> Around these images, and cling:
> The notion of some infinitely gentle
> Infinitely suffering thing.
>
> Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
> The worlds revolve like ancient women
> Gathering fuel in vacant lots.[69]

'Fancies', here 'curled / Around' the line-ending, may be whimsical diversions, but you might also curl around or up to something, so 'I am moved' is both affective and dynamic: being moved inside, but also having been moved, by something other than the self. In a draft for 'Little Gidding II' Eliot wrote: 'the awareness of

[67] 'Poetry and Drama', in *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 86.
[68] Geoffrey Hill discusses 'apprehension' in 'Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', from 'Alienated Majesty' in *Collected Critical Writings*, edited by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 534-5.
[69] *Collected Poems*, p. 23.

the fact that one was moved while believing oneself to be the mover', a phrase that captures how here the boundary between a self and its surroundings is made less distinct through the movement of the fancies which seem almost to lift the personal pronoun with them.[70] What if the poem ended with 'Infinitely suffering thing'? That would be a snap-shot of the ecstatic poet feeling on behalf of others, a smug author's photograph, to turn to at the end of others' stories of woe. Instead, the verse overhears its own powers of fancy, and laughs itself to scorn. 'Preludes' lurches from the single 'thing', to an uncontainable plurality, rather as Baudelaire's *Le Cygne* ends by releasing into the air a cry for what the poem can't take in: 'Aux captifs, au vaincus! … à bien d'autres encor!'.[71] From gentle cogitations, 'Preludes' swerves to a dramatic self-consciousness of the lyric that suffers its own relentless gaze with tough philosophical laughter:

> Ce n'est point l'homme qui tombe qui rit de sa propre chute, à moins qu'il ne soit un philosophe, un homme qui ait acquis, par habitude, la force de se dédoubler rapidement et d'assister comme spectateur désinteréssé aux phénomènes de son *moi*.[72]

Eliot's work attends to this variety of distraction, when a character, '*sees himself* in a dramatic light'; or a poet is found in 'a *dédoublement* of the personality against which the subject struggles'. In one sense, this suggests vigilant attention to the self and its utterances, 'The sense of an artist as an Eye, curiously, patiently watching himself as a man.'[73] Under another aspect, a *dédoublement* is an extreme distraction, as every utterance is given up to the power to become ventriloqual. You are 'beside your self':

---

[70] *The Composition of the Four Quartets*, edited by Helen Gardner (London: Faber, 1978), p. 189.

[71] *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols, Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), I, p. 87.

[72] Baudelaire, 'De l'essence de rire', *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 532. [The man who trips over never laughs at his own fall, unless he is of a philosophical turn of mind, a man who has developed, by practice, the ability to swiftly conceive himself as two people at once and so to be present, as a detached spectator, at the experiences of his 'self'.]

[73] *Selected Essays*, p. 38; 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 12.48 (April, 1933), pp. 468-73 (p. 470); 'The Preacher as Artist', *Athenaeum* 4674 (November, 1919), 1252-3 (p. 1252).

> "On me discute en dedans, c'est comme s'il y avait en moi deux personnes" [...] on remarque une expression bizarre: "ma vrai personne pleure à côté de moi".[74]

The syntax doubles to describe the state of division ('On me discute en dedans': 'one discusses within me' 'one discusses me inside', 'I am discussed within'), but there is also still the ghostly presence of a self who can just say 'me'. The phrase 'ma vraie personne pleure à côté de moi' is called 'bizarre', but it is the ordinary use of 'beside myself' in this sentence which makes the 'real person' seem extraordinary.[75] Between these distracted aspects of the person there is still a peculiar personal intimacy. The expression 'ma vraie personne pleure à côté de moi', holds not only that which might be called distracted, fantastic, or severed, but that which is human, recognisable, and beautiful. Flaubert thought so:

> D'où vient que, quand je pleurais, j'ai été souvent me regarder dans la glace pour me voir? – Cette disposition à planer sur soi-même est peut-être la source de toute vertu. Elle vous enlève à la personnalité, loin de vous y retenir.[76]

For Flaubert, acts of self-witnessing point to an ideal, but the letter also brings out the uncertain terrain between a self-scepticism that can distract you from personality and the cripplingly distracted preoccupation with self-consciousness.

The dramatic self-consciousness of the lyric at the end of 'Preludes' becomes a structural principle in *Four Quartets*. The sequence stages a mind distracted by its own composition, as if the making of the work could be seen to be taking place within the work:

---

[74] Pierre Janet, *Les obsessions et la psychasthénie, Travaux Laboratoire de psychologie de la clinique à la Salpêtière* (Paris: Alcan, 1903), I, 312, 314. In *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 70, Piers Gray discusses Eliot's interest in the notion of *dédoublement*. See also Susan Steward, 'Lyric Possession', *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 34-63.

[75] [My true self is crying beside me.]

[76] *Correspondence*, Jean Bruneau, 4 vols (Paris, Gallimard, 1973), II, pp. 84-5 (8 May, 1852). [Why is it that when I wept I often went and looked in the mirror to see my own face? This tendency to hover over oneself is perhaps the source of all virtue. It frees you from personality, far from binding you to it.]

What is the late November doing
With the disturbance of the spring
And creatures of the summer heat,
And snowdrops writhing under feet
And hollyhocks that aim too high
Red into grey and tumble down
Late Roses filled with early snow?
Thunder rolled by the rolling stars
Simulates triumphal cars
Deployed in constellated wars
Scorpion fights against the Sun
Until the Sun and Moon go down
Comets weep and Leonids fly
Hunt the heavens and the plains
Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
The world to that destructive fire
Which burns before the ice-cap reigns.

That was a way of putting it – not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.

Not very satisfactory. How do we read this off-key sigh? Like Tennyson's princess, this 'sudden and unprepared transition' seems to tell us to stop up our ears.[77] Or is this a shrug of mild intransigence, a self-lacerating cut, a distraction from the distracting ornaments of the lyric, a sigh weary of the 'distraction flights' of the birds, which have ceased to distract, or ceased to amuse. Part of *Four Quartets* originated in cut lines from a play, another section began as a fragment of a short lyric dedicated to Mallarmé, and this double point of origin in the dramatic and the lyrical becomes a signature tussle in the sequence. 'That was a way of putting it', sounds like Lewis Carroll's Alice, after she has read the *Jabberwocky*, "'It seems very pretty,' she said when she had finished it, 'but it's rather hard to understand!" (You see she didn't like to confess even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all)'.[78]

[77] The 'Sudden and unprepared transitions' that Coleridge thought a defect of Wordsworth's verse, in *Biographia Literaria* , edited by Nigel Leask (London: Everyman, 1997), p. 262.
[78] *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: Thames, 1955), p. 135.

The lyric that is here distracted from makes an off-kilter music. To perform the first seven lines inflected as a question could sound absurd. The rhymes tease the voice with prospects of a pattern, but then the verse casts off for far-flung alliances between what is underfoot and what may be extra-terrestrial, aiming high, and tumbling down, as the lyric at once sings of an ethereal universal chaos but plunges into an earthly place where we all fall down, as if performing a pastiche of Mallarmé in English, and where, as in Carroll's poem, when the 'vorpal blade went snicker-snack', the jingles of 'whirled in a vortex that shall bring/ The world…' make up a riddling apocalypse.[79]

Eliot said of his own style, in the *Four Quartets*, that he hoped 'To get *beyond* poetry, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*.[80] The claim is ambitious and elliptical, and even if we imagine the points of transition in the sequence as 'catching fire between the extremes', or as 'sudden discontinuities that more than anything else characterise the very late Beethoven', the analogy is difficult to know how to translate back into verse, except to say that by 'poetry' perhaps Eliot means 'poeticism'.[81] The remark can be set alongside another description of *Four Quartets* as poems 'in which the true key is never sounded, but exists only by the norm by which all the voices are heard as delicately off-key, as voices of parody'.[82] *Four Quartets* by this account is imagined as something like a choral lyric, but a work where no one can hold a tune. Yet to be 'delicately' off-key, must be quite different from being off-key. Is 'The poetry does not matter', off-key, or delicately off-key? Attention, concentration, prayer, all matter to the sequence, and matter deeply to Eliot. One of the entanglements of *Four Quartets* is its self-deflection away from its own purposes, viewing theatrically the forms of absorption to which the poems seem to be devoted. This is the distraction of

[79] For a discussion of *Four Quartets* and Mallarmé, see Barbara Everett, 'T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and French Symbolism', *English*, 29 (1980), pp. 1-37. On Eliot and Carroll, Elizabeth Sewell, 'Lewis Carroll and T.S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets' in *T.S. Eliot, A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Hugh Kenner (New Jersey: Prentice-hall, 1962), 65-72.
[80] Cited in F.O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 89. See also Everett, p. 28.
[81] T.W. Adorno, 'Late Style in Beethoven', *Essays on Music*, p. 567.
[82] Donald Davie, 'T.S. Eliot: The End of an Era' (1956), reprinted in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum* edited by Barry Alpert (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977), pp. 33-41 (p. 41).

curiously, patiently watching yourself as a poet, and it is manipulation, in its ambivalent sense as a word that 'situates itself precisely on a fine line dividing praiseworthy dexterity from specious contrivance.'[83] Just such degrees of manipulation preoccupied Eliot as he came to end the sequence, worrying, as he tried to finish 'Little Gidding', that the poem was a parody of the previous three quartets and of himself as a writer, while also self-consciously borrowing from his verse written years before, to enfold self-allusion into this last, final tomb.[84] The apparitional voice in 'Little Gidding II' alludes to Mallarmé's 'Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu' from 'Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe'; but Eliot's sequence might also be compared to *Un Coup de dés*, because *Four Quartets* is a tomb of shattered poems.[85] *Un Coup de dés* prompts memories of all of Mallarmé's verse; it is vitally connected to his poems which do not in the least resemble this one in formal properties, but which this work can be understood to be both crystallising and smashing up. Part of what *Four Quartets* splinters is the symbolist lyric: all four quartets open to a place charmed by time, fleetingly conjuring Mallarmé's exquisitely simple phrase, 'RIEN / N'AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU', opening up with a shimmering lyrical evanescence that the rest of each poem in Eliot's sequence works to endure, survive, lament, and kick against.[86] *Un Coup de dés* at once distils composition and is a broken record of making: it reads 'like a cento constructed from the exploded remains of the *Poésies*; it also works the other way round.'[87] This is what it has in common with *Four Quartets*; of both Mallarmé and of Eliot it is possible to say that his 'work is *one* poem'.[88] And so these works endure and live out the truth that 'the experience of a poem is the experience both

[83] Geoffrey Hill, 'Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', from 'Alienated Majesty' in *Collected Critical Writings* , p. 545. And: 'Eliot's self-laceration in *Four Quartets* over questions of verbal incompetence, matters of his own volition and which he presents to us with enviable competence, gives not so much a syntax of self-recognition as a stasis of yearning, a yearning which is a negative correlative of a Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean exaltation of music as the supreme art.' (pp. 545-6).

[84] See *The Composition of the Four Quartets*, pp. 154-221.

[85] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 70.

[86] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 474-5. [Nothing will have taken place, except the place.]

[87]Peter Manson, 'On (translating) the *Poésies* of Stéphane Mallarmé, P*oems and Poetics*, May 2011. http://poemsandpoetics.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/.

[88] Eliot writes 'The whole of Shakespeare's work is *one* poem', in 'John Ford' (1932), *Selected Essays*, p. 203.

of a moment and of a lifetime. It is very much like our intenser experiences of other human beings'.[89]

Some of the descriptions drawn together in this essay show a courting of obscurity as well as a vivid struggle to depict it. The attempt on the part of an artist to inhabit the uncertain cognitive shapes of composition might place certain demands on the descriptive language for verse, which can be seriously taken up, or seriously ignored. That is, such descriptions are not places of enchantment merely because they are obscure, as if the sober literary critic can briefly travel to a region where there is no secure foothold, and return with a few souvenirs about the enigmatic nature of composition, to adorn a chapter heading. Instead, if the comedy, charm, and singular troubled inarticulacies of these descriptions are taken up, they should be considered as holding a serious argumentative strength because they can prompt us to think about what the descriptive language for poems might be unable to explain, and the extent to which the jargons of poetics may or may not be able to account for the mysterious. It may be compelling to imagine that poems can remember or retrieve such experiences as early language acquisition, or the erotic resonances of the materials of language.[90] The poets' own words for composition emphatically, even hilariously, confirm this to be true. Perhaps this is why some theories of lyric that rely heavily on claims about the apparitional compositional moment don't dwell over such first personal descriptions, as the poets' own explosive admissions of half-knowledge parodically combust any sweeping hermeneutic claim. In the physical sciences an explanation as to how a law is 'deep' will exist in proportion to the number of instances that such a law can govern. But this needn't be directly imported into what we may call the human sciences. Mayakovksy, Valéry, and Eliot, depict composition in similar ways, but the poems they wrote are utterly different from one another. This is why the conflicting notes of the struggle to depict, and the parody of depiction, should be kept alive in the descriptive language for verse, without resorting to either such wafting language as the 'the feel' of the poem, or to excessive devotion to words

[89] Eliot, 'Dante', *Selected Essays*, p. 250.
[90] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

like 'metalepsis', or, say, 'troping'. The descriptive language for verse will always risk seeming to evade precision all together, or, by adhering dogmatically to a notion of precision, will seem to stick a sterilised band-aid over the doubtful cognitive shapes of composition. Both approaches seem to flee from the ragged particulars within which art loves to dwell, such particulars as might be characterised by what Hegel calls the 'concrete universal', the recognising of the particular through the greater consistencies by which the individual is individuated:

> The understanding hurries, because either it forthwith summarises variety into a *theory* drawn from generalisations and so evaporates it into reflections and categories, or else it subordinates it into *practical ends*, so that the particular and individual are not given their full rights. To cling to what, given this position, can only have relative value, seems therefore to the understanding to be useless and wearisome. But in a poetic treatment and formulation, every part, every feature must be interesting and living on its own account, and therefore poetry takes pleasure in lingering over what is individual, describes it with love, and treats it as a whole in itself.[91]

Distraction, then, does not underlie Eliot's verse practice or his writings about poetry nor account for it, but it is a 'motivic' force in his work, in the sense that we speak of a motivic structure of a piece of music, one small phrase that renews and transfigures in changing patterns, a force that drives on, though is bound up, as perhaps all motivic forces are, with attrition. Eliot's writing on verse and his own practice together form a philosophical body of thought, but to try and account for this by saying that he wrote a dissertation on F.H. Bradley would be futile, while also neglecting the fact that although Eliot was trained as an academic philosopher, he also formally chose to give this activity up.[92] Eliot writes that a person 'falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of

---

[91] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* II, p. 981.

[92] Eliot writes, 'without a doubt, the effort of the philosopher proper, the man who is trying to deal with ideas in themselves, and the effort of the poet, who may be trying to realise ideas, cannot be carried on at the same time. But this is not to deny that poetry can in some sense be philosophic.' *The Sacred Wood* (1920, reprinted London: Faber), p. 162; and 'for a poet to be also a philosopher he would have to be virtually two men', *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933, reprinted London: Faber, 1964), pp. 98-9.

the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes'.[93] Behind this literary-critical remark are the shades of Bradley's fleeting particulars and the 'whole of feeling' to which he said they belonged. Bradley may be present in Eliot's work in the way that Spinoza is present in this phrasing, but, more emphatically, Eliot's work invites comparisons between poetry and philosophy by insisting that these two practices are recognised as different to the point of being antagonists, a distinction that is the condition of imagining a creative relation between them. It is not wrong, then, to place Hegel's description of what poetic treatment can lovingly describe next to the end of 'Burnt Norton', but it is only right if we imagine such a juxtaposition as igniting sudden, mutually illuminating differences.

'Burnt Norton' is the first poem in a sequence, but it began as not knowing it would be the particular inception of a larger whole. The end of the poem that ended up as a beginning sounds like this:

> The detail of the pattern is movement,
> As in the figure of the ten stairs.
> Desire itself is movement
> Not in itself desirable;
> Love is itself unmoving,
> Only the cause and end of movement,
> Timeless, and undesiring
> Except in the aspect of time
> Caught in the form of limitation
> Between un-being and being.
> Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
> Even while the dust moves
> There rises the hidden laughter
> Of children in the foliage
> Quick now, here, now, always –
> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after.[94]

[93] 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Selected Essays*, p. 287.
[94] *Complete Poems*, pp. 175-6.

The finical syntax of the lines seems to speak in riddles, trying to 'be where we have been', revisiting the chambers thought can seem to inhabit, and yet the apparent philosophical depths slip away just as they are grasped, the quickness singing through the lines is the substance of the song and the means through which its subject matter eludes attention. The lines depict the double nature of a work of art as apparently whole, and still, a pattern, and yet this patterned stillness only occurs through a series of fluctuating, particular movements. A pattern of musical notes, or a composition of words in a poem, can be thought of as a whole, and, as such, immobile, as it is when notated, and yet the whole is made up of many small details, of many distracting movements, or dancers, or actual occurrences and recurrences of singular words (like 'only' and 'movement' in this poem). The lines imagine how the relation between an aesthetic activity as conceived as a whole, and the process by which such parts move to form a whole, might perhaps give us an analogy for thinking about the relations between singular and universal forms of love. But the leap up or down from 'between un-being and being' to 'Sudden in a shaft of sunlight' shows mystery falling into experience, or concept rising up to become event. The end of 'Burnt Norton', in its concentrations and in its sudden flashes, presents a philosophical experience of feeling, but not in the same way as a philosophical account might attempt to depict such truths. Surfaces, here, are 'intimate with … depths'. Listening 'to the surface we are most likely to come to the depths, to the abyss of sorrow': 'Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after'.[95] Not all time is a ridiculous waste; but 'the waste sad time' is. Yet the lines also show how, what has been forgotten, in the wastes of time, in the wastes of your life perhaps, can flash into being with luminous splendour, and what was waste suddenly gleams. A distraction fit, and evanescence is shining. 'The suddenness of all!' Then, 'Pfft occulted. Nothing having stirred'.[96]

[95] Eliot on Tennyson, *Selected Essays*, p. 337.
[96] Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, in *Nohow On*, p. 58.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor W., *Essays on Music* ed. Richard Leppart (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

–, *Minima Moralia, Gesammelte Schriften* 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980).

–, *Minima Moralia*, *Reflections from Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2006).

Augustine, St., *Confessions*, translated by R.S. Pinecoffin (London: Penguin, 1961).

Baudelaire, Charles, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols., ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

Beckett, Samuel, *Company* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* in *Nohow On* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

–, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* translated by Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-235.

Blasing, Mutlu Konuk, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Bowie, Malcolm, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Thames, 1955).

Coleridge, S.T., *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask (London: Everyman, 1997).

Davie, Donald, 'T.S. Eliot: The End of an Era' (1956), in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum*, ed. Barry Alpert (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977).

Dickinson, Emily, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Jackson (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1958, reprinted, 1960).

Edwards, Paul, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009).

Eiland, Howard, "Reception in Distraction", *Boundary* 2, 30:1 (2003), pp. 51-66.

Eliot, T.S., *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969).

–, *The Composition of the Four Quartets*, ed. Helen Gardner (London: Faber, 1978).

–, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (London: Faber, 1964).

–, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957).

–, 'Prose and Verse', *The Chapbook* 22 (April, 1921).

–,'The Preacher as Artist', *Athenaeum* 4674 (November, 1919), pp. 1252-3.

–, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932, reprinted and enlarged, 1934; reprinted, 1999).

–, 'Scylla and Charybdis' (1952), reprinted in *Agenda*, 237 1-2, (Spring-Summer 1985), pp. 5-21.

–, *To Criticise the Critic* (London: Faber, 1965).

–, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933, reprinted, London: Faber, 1964).

–, 'William James on Immortality' New Statesman 9. 231 (8 September 1917), p. 547.

Empson, William, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947).

Everett, Barbara, 'T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets and French Symbolism', *English*, 29 (1980), pp. 1-37.

Flaubert, Gustave, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) (vol. 2).

Fried, Michael, *Absorption and Theatricality* (Berkley: University of California, 1980).

Griffiths, Eric, 'Tennyson's Idle Tears', in *Tennyson: Seven Essays* edited by P.A.W. Collins (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 36-58.

Gray, Piers, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

Hill, Geoffrey, *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Hegel, G.W.F., *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, reprinted 1988).

–, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Janet, Pierre, *Les obsessions et la psychasthénie, Travaux Laboratoire de psychologie de la*

clinique à la Salpêtière (Paris: Alcan, 1903), vol. 1.

Kafka, Franz, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, edited by Jost Schillemeit, II (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992).

Matthiessen, F.O., *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Mallarmé, Stéphane, *Œuvres complètes,* eds. *Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945*).*

–*, The Poems in Verse (Poésies*) translated by Peter Manson (Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2012).

Mandelstam, Nadezhda, *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*, translated by Max Hayward (London: Collins & Harvell, 1971).

Manson, Peter, 'On (translating) the *Poésies* of Stéphane Mallarmé', *Poems and* Poetics, May 2011. poemsandpoetics.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir, 'How to Make Verse', translated by Valantina Coe, in *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry* ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbour: Ardis, 1974).

North, Paul, *The Problem of Distraction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Tiffany, Daniel, 'Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 1 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 72-98.

Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, *The Princess*, in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

Scott, Clive, *The Riches of Rhyme* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

Sewall, Elizabeth, 'Lewis Carroll and T.S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets', in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (New Jersey: Pretence-Hall, 1962).

Shelley, P. B., 'Speculations on Metaphysics and Morals', in *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Lee Clark (London; Fourth Estate, 1988).

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, in *A Facsimile of the First Folio* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Stravinsky, Igor, *Poétique Musicale: sous forme de six leçons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942).

Stewart, Susan, 'Lyric Possession', *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1 (Autumn, 1995).

Valéry, Paul, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols. ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957.

Werner, Marta L., *Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading; Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Culture and Value,* ed. G.H. Von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, reprinted 1994).

Yeats, W. B., *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Vaughan, Henry, 'Distraction', from *Silex Scintillans* [1650] *Henry Vaughan*, edited by Louis L. Marz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Winnicott, D. W., *Playing and Reality* (Hove: Brunner Routledge, 2002).

Wood, Michael, 'Distraction Theory: How to Read While Thinking of Something Else', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XLVIII 4 (Fall, 2009).

Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude, the Four Texts*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

–, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads [1802]' and the 'Note to *The Thorn*', in Wordsworth, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).