

HELEN THAVENTHIRAN



RADICAL EMPIRICISTS

Five Modernist Close Readers

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This book is dedicated to Joan Berry (1922–2012).

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Introduction

Modernist criticism and the meaning of meaning

I. RADICAL EMPIRICISM

‘The Poem Itself—that was what the New Criticism purported to be about’.¹ Criticism in the first half of the twentieth century could appear a very empirical exercise, looking closely at quotations, words on the page, poems themselves. Ezra Pound opens his *ABC of Reading* (1934) with a parable for this kind of pure scrutiny. A teacher presents a student with a specimen (here a fish stands in for a poem). The teacher asks the student to describe this specimen; the student, insulted by the simplicity of the exercise, is prompt with a textbook definition, to which the teacher responds with an instruction to look again, describe again. The student does so, differently, and is urged to continue for some time. ‘At the end of three weeks,’ the anecdote concludes, ‘the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it’.² Critical knowledge, for the modernists, takes the form of radically close attention.

This equation transformed the old functions of criticism (appreciation, instruction, ‘gossip and praise’³) and its forms (touchstones, impressions, moral deductions) into some new terms and techniques of reading. Of the ‘old’ criticism, a near caricature appears in a work from early in the century, Stopford Brooke’s *Studies in Poetry* (1907), in which he writes: ‘The best examples of Keats’ Odes need neither praise nor blame. They are above criticism, pure gold of poetry—virgin gold [...] for these high things of poetry come forth from the spiritual depths of man’.⁴ Into this appreciative atmosphere, modernism brought its tenacious analytical practices and frequently acerbic judgements. Very little was ‘above criticism’. From primer sentences such as ‘The cat sat on the mat’, to the formal involutions of lyric poetry, critics found opportunities to exercise their powers of verbal analysis, scrutiny, practical criticism, close reading, ‘minute examination’.⁵

Even a 'verbal icon' such as the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' proved fertile ground for the new sciences of interpretation. Its penultimate line—'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—was the occasion for a virtual symposium of Anglo-American modernism's main critical minds. T.S. Eliot, for example, gave the tart judgement that its penultimate line was 'a serious blemish on a otherwise beautiful poem'; Cleanth Brooks traced the play of paradox by which this line was sustained; I.A. Richards proposed some neat algebraic formulae for how numbered senses of the words 'Beauty' and 'Truth' might coordinate; William Empson worried away, by obdurate paraphrase, at the meanings of this 'hag-ridden' phrase from 'the pot'.⁶ Such fiercely detailed attention to small but complex pieces of language was, of course, no more novel than much that modernism appeared to 'make new'.⁷ An overview of criticism from 1937 readily acknowledged precursors such as Coleridge, who passed 'over a poem as one of those tiniest of tiny night-flies runs over a leaf, casting its shadow, three times as long as itself, yet only just shading one, or at most two letters at a time'.⁸ Yet the 'minute examination' of literature was now pursued with such evident vigour and formal innovation that it was difficult to suppress the implication that 'previous criticism had read only an average of three words per line'.⁹

This modernist zeal for close reading has been the source of much subsequent discussion and derision. Literary historians and theorists blame it for the mid-twentieth-century prevalence of 'empiricist poetics filled with incongruities',¹⁰ and for much subsequent criticism that has been 'nit-picking, censorious, or "minute"'.¹¹ 'Today the New Criticism is considered not only superseded, obsolete, and dead but somehow mistaken and wrong', as René Wellek summed up, only a little over half a century after its first flourishing.¹² Such critiques are prevalent and, from their force, the case against the early twentieth century's new modes of close reading can often seem closed. But do they offer a fair representation of this phase of literary-critical history? How much do their arguments and narratives owe to the persistent disciplinary habit of failing to read closely the history of close reading? This book contends that much of the polemic against such criticism derives from approaching critical history as a pattern of ideas and influences rather than as a body of prose and set of practices—and, thus, that we need a new history of 'the new criticism'.

To return to my opening quotation, 'The Poem Itself—that was what the New Criticism purported to be about', previous histories have focused on the metonym ('The Poem Itself') and on what it signals: the recalibration of critical concern, which saw 'investment in small-scale reading practices',¹³ and essentializing of poetry. What I propose in the following chapters is to draw attention to the rather quieter claim of this phrase: that

carried by the seemingly flat preposition, 'about'. Criticism is always a matter of being 'about', shaping itself as language alongside, around, pointing to, representing, or concerned with other words. This is so much its medium that the philosophical puzzles implicit in this discursive form—what it means to 'mean', or to be 'about'—often pass unnoticed.¹⁴ Against the backdrop of the modernist crisis of meaning, however, this fundamental quality of critical discourse, its 'aboutness', comes to attention in heightened form, and becomes self-conscious. How, in these reflexive circumstances, did critics continue to negotiate their business of crafting words *about* other words?

Here, I seek to address this question by considering some characteristic forms within five distinctive critical styles or voices, which all bring this crisis to the fore: those of I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, William Empson, R.P. Blackmur, and Marianne Moore. The great modernisms were, Fredric Jameson writes, 'predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your finger-print, as incomparable as your own body'.¹⁵ The great modernist criticisms were also unmistakable in style; even as critics aim to take the fingerprint of the styles of others, their own forms, manners, and practices appear strikingly distinct. Since the book's aim is to suggest a new formalism in our accounts of some of the voices of twentieth-century criticism, its version of critical history does not follow the usual narrative, ideological, or institutional lines, and its characters are a more heterogeneous group than the usual roll-call of figures 'behind the English critical renaissance of the 1920s and early 1930s', and their New Critical heirs of the 1930s onwards.¹⁶ '[I]t is the most critically self-conscious writers who stand out as the major critics', one historian of criticism writes, and the critics on whom I focus here are all 'major' in this respect, if not always in their current literary-historical standing.¹⁷ All had some affinities, connections, and, in several cases, profound relationships with all of the others; thus they form a loose interpretive community. But historical and circumstantial intersections are less significant in this grouping than certain intellectual and stylistic biases: the prose of all five critics is marked by reflective innovation in critical form. This is not, then, another study of Cambridge English, charting the evolution of principles in, and controversies surrounding, the criticism of Richards, then following through to that of Leavis. Nor is it a study of the emergence of the New Criticism and diagnosis (or even defence) of the fallacies and heresies of Brooks and Wimsatt. Instead, this book proposes readings of some striking negotiations of critical form that emerged alongside modernism in the early work of Eliot, Empson, and Richards, and then looks to the adventures of style in the essays and reviews of Blackmur and of Moore. With these

critics, my focus is on typical practices of prose exposition, in particular on the moments where the critics appear to be at their most empirical, taking words or lines, small samples or quotations, and writing around them in order to tease out their meanings and meaningfulness. Yet my concern is also with how these moments allow us to see the possibilities not for mere empiricism but instead for what we might call 'radical empiricism'.

This term derives in spirit from the pragmatist philosophy of William James. James used the phrase in articles between 1904 and 1905, which were published posthumously, on the cusp of modernism, as *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1912. Here he argued for a double-barrelled account of experience, which 'does full justice to conjunctive relations' as well as to those between discrete entities. 'I give the name of 'radical empiricism' to my *Weltanschauung*,' James explains, to distinguish it from traditional empiricism, which 'lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual'.¹⁸ Like a traditional empiricist, James also 'starts with the parts', in what is 'essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts', but the epithet 'radical' signals a difference: here, '*the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system*'.¹⁹ Another term from the philosophical prose of William James, 'stream of consciousness', has long since found a settled home in literary-critical discourse. This borrowed phrase has helped give form to our understanding of a wide spectrum of the formal innovations of literary modernism—and holds the potential to aid our understanding of the devices and inscapes of critical modernism. There is similar scope for the term, radical empiricism. This book adopts it in reference to critics who are notable for paying close attention to particulars, to a plurality of 'facts', but also for how they unfold some aspects of the complex experience of how these facts connect and can be approached. These critics have an undeniable relation to empiricism in the traditional sense, displaying 'the urge to go first to the texts'.²⁰ Richards and Empson, for example, have been described as representing 'a strongly empiricist tendency in Cambridge criticism, which approaches the making of meaning as an informed testing of texts: a practical criticism'.²¹ But rather than a form of empiricism that abandons 'meaning' to a spectral zone somewhere above and around the individual pieces of language in question, these critics find innovative forms for describing and representing its varieties. They negotiate between the types of knowledge we ordinarily divide into 'direct acquaintance' (mute, intuitive) and 'knowledge-about' (chatty, discursive), and which it was James's aim to coordinate under the banner of 'radical empiricism'.

It can, however, be difficult to distinguish the workings of this prose from critical empiricism in the non-radical sense, of which there had also been a recent surge just prior to the early twentieth century. This rise in more traditional varieties of empiricism owed in part to established prejudices concerning the experiential immediacy and transcendent value of literature; prejudices that became only more acute towards the end of the nineteenth century as the study of English began to become an academic discipline, prompting rear-guard defences of literature's superiority to any conceivable procedures or terms of investigation. On the cusp of this change we find, for example, one of the early American professors of English literature, Hiram Corson, asserting in *The Aims of Literary Study* (1894) that 'Literature is not a knowledge subject'—or rather hoping, against the spectre of positivist disenchantment, that it is not so. Corson's practical conclusion is that the only way to teach literary works is to read them aloud to students in their entirety.²² What appears an eccentricity of teaching method here was, in fact, only the logical application of some common notions about literature, which, in barely milder forms, underpin much critical commentary. Such logic flourished again in new forms under the influence of some strands of modernism, with their forcible varieties of empiricism. Our encounters with words should, one poet affirms, be experiences of reading 'literally, literally, literally, without gloss, without gloss'.²³ The author of this phrase, Laura Riding, makes a representative gesture for such drastic empiricism when she presents, in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), as a critical account of her own poem, 'The Rugged Black of Anger', a mere reprint of that poem. If an illustration were needed for D.A. Miller's assertion that the early-twentieth-century criticism was characterized by an 'almost infantile desire to be close, period, as close as one can get, without literal plagiarism, to merging with the mother-text',²⁴ then it could be Riding's reprint.

The critics I consider in this book struggled free of such positivist delusions, although not always with absolute success. Blackmur, for example, betrays the strong pull of the notion that the best poems are 'autoanalytic', needing only 'actual complete presentation', and that the sum of all else that might be said about them would be inconsequential.²⁵ Eliot can also play possum with regard to meaning, answering a call for an explanation of the meaning of his line, 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree', with these words: 'I mean, Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree'.²⁶ Here, the poem becomes fetish and the forms of criticism a mere transparency over the work. We see the shadow of what one critic has described as 'the eclipse of meaning' in modernist poetics.²⁷ Yet, in spite of these anticritical temptations, Blackmur is an infinitesimally 'close' reader in many respects, continuing to circle his examples

with unbounded energy for further refinements. Meanwhile Eliot proves himself, in the textures of his prose, determined to make progress from precursors in the empirical line: for example, while traces of Matthew Arnold's 'touchstone' method linger, Eliot's criticism (as I explore in Chapter III) works by the dynamic revision of this practice to that of the annotated quotation, which does not presume literary meaning to be self-sufficient.

Richards and Empson betrayed still more robust confidence in the possibilities (and need) for writing about meaning. Richards works from the principle that the problem of 'the meaning of meaning' is certainly not as insurmountable as it might seem, provided critics are prepared to work at the refinement of their expository techniques. Rather than 'premature scepticism'—'Are 'mean' and 'know' themselves too clumsy in their meanings for the question to remain sense?'—critics should instead concentrate efforts on the practical business of achieving a better 'technique for identifying, arranging, and communicating meanings'.²⁸ A similar principle grounds some more practical judgements by Empson, which are informed by a stubborn sense of the discussable nature of meaning. We see something of this confidence, for example, in his contributions to a series of commentaries around Hart Crane's 'Voyages III', as he offers this rebuke to another's vaguer reading: 'In short,' Empson declares, 'if you see what he is seeing I think that all the words fit in, and the "associational meaning" is not "indefinable" at all'.²⁹ Implicit even in such local quarrels or quibbles is the much broader intellectual history, surrounding the five critics considered here, of the oscillations towards and against forms of positivism in the human and linguistic sciences of the early twentieth century.³⁰ Much of the force and interest belonging to this prose thus lies in the details of the small victories (often just partial) of these writers against the temptations of positivism or silence; in their inventive capacities to forge radical versions of empiricism for modernist criticism.

II. NOT THE NEW CRITICISM

This is a book about some 'new criticism' of the first half of the twentieth century. It is not concerned with the 'New Criticism', with its firm capitals. In fact, it proposes that, although three of the book's subjects, Richards, Eliot, and Empson, have been firmly associated with the capitalized form (all are given a chapter in John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism*, 1940), this association is unhelpful. The standard narrative of the New Criticism—a set of techniques for reading developed from the

1920s through the early 1950s by I.A. Richards, William Empson, T.S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, F.R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, and others, and principally disseminated by Brooks and Warren³¹—concentrates some of the more common and damaging kinds of misreading that the literary-critical history of this period perpetuates, and for which this book seeks an alternative. How far the work of the American New Critics can usefully be considered alongside the work of their English precursors and contemporaries is already doubtful. Not only do Brooks, Wimsatt, Ransom, Warren, Tate, and Winters have their own particular contexts of writing and of influence, but even where they draw most directly on the work of these other critics, they are not always (or not long) in agreement.

Taking Brooks as a typical case, although his early version of literary history in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) is distinctly Eliotic, less than a decade later, his best-known work, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), abandons Eliot's 'canon' and many of its associated principles of reading. Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Keats return to favour, as do symbols and organic unities: Brooks's response to Richards was also mixed; he recounts reading *Principles of Literary Criticism* 'perhaps a dozen times' during his year in Oxford (1929–30) but concludes: 'In my own tussle with Richards's early books, my appropriation of his ideas was, as I have already indicated, highly selective'.³² Nor is Brooks's resemblance to Empson at all deep; their shared preference for the term 'ambiguity' only makes more pronounced the rift in their styles of thought, which became still more apparent by the 1940s as Empson delved into historical semantics while Brooks preferred 'History Without Footnotes'.³³ Empson himself is, as Terry Eagleton notes, 'sometimes included in the New Criticism; but he is in fact much more interestingly read as a remorseless opponent of their major doctrines'.³⁴ Eliot openly ridiculed what he called 'the lemon-squeezer school of criticism', while Blackmur began to fear, as its 1930s exuberance waned, that close reading was 'grinding into a self-centered methodology'.³⁵ 'What troubled Blackmur,' one critic glosses, 'was the feeling that the wrong kind of order had been made, but he did not have a clear alternative'.³⁶

Blackmur's disquiet yet inability to propose 'a clear alternative' is typical of the criticism with which this book is concerned. It gives a hint of why it has been easy for literary-critical history and literary-theoretical diatribe to subsume these diverse critics into 'the New Criticism': they remain recalcitrant in their practicality, establishing no comparably clear sets of terms and well-ordered declarations of principle. It has proved tempting for historians of literary criticism to fill this gap. 'What makes Empson seem a New Critic,' Terry Eagleton writes, is 'the breathtaking offhand

ingenuity with which he unravels ever finer nuances of literary meaning; but all this is in the service of an old-fashioned liberal rationalism deeply at odds with the symbolist esotericism of an Eliot or Brooks'.³⁷ The textures of prose styles here reduce to opposed constructs and labelled ideologies; 'liberal rationalism' versus 'symbolist esotericism'. This, for all its incidental sharpness of characterization, does methodological violence to its subjects. My focus is, then, a more fine-grained reading of these forms of close reading that, although they share a context and often a coincidence of topic or forum, do not belong to the New Criticism and often defy some of its central prohibitions and assumptions. For practitioners who belong to this looser category of some kinds of early to mid-twentieth-century critical reading, the phrase 'the new criticism' should be decidedly lower case.

As with the value, the radically empiricist force of this criticism, its newness, as I understand it here, has much to do with its self-consciousness about meaning. 'Long ago when the world was young and literary criticism had just been invented we learnt from William Empson that a poem might mean more than one thing at the same time', one critic writes of this dawn of self-consciousness.³⁸ Of course, criticism has 'no discernible beginning', and certainly not one in 1930; this fable form ('Long ago') suggests a wink over the heads of those who might credit the tale that literary criticism began here.³⁹ At the same time, this does register the sense of a moment in literary-critical history at which, alongside and in the aftermath of modernism, critical forms and practices, in their address to the problem of meaning—whether singular or multiple—could appear 'startling and new'.⁴⁰ Before this, questions of meaning had been evaded in favour of forms of appreciation or, where addressed, had been subject to the distorting frames of other disciplinary measures, such as those of philology. One anecdote about the philological dryness of method practised by one early professor of literature gives a caricature of the latter case:

Whenever he came to one of the words which he could derive he would trace its pedigree. The young women at first had a tendency to stop idly at a hard passage in the text and ask, 'What does that mean, sir?' But the philologist sternly rebuked them and replied, 'Mean! It means what it says!'⁴¹

Within the frames of reading of modernism, however, there was no such expectation. It was instead almost elementary that 'a poem might mean more than one thing at the same time', or might not 'mean what it said', nor even 'say' anything at all.

This sense of meaning-complexity was both the product and the *telos* of the new forms of close reading. Modernist criticism, to invert the famous slogan of 'significant form', both sought and proliferated 'forms of significance';

a repertoire of terms for the occasions on which sense surpassed plain meaning. As descriptive-analytic terms for such varieties of meaning multiplied, critics proved themselves, as Leavis remarked of Pound, 'amateurs of abstractions', forging a critical diction that was halfway between homespun and technical in quality.⁴² In this vein, Wimsatt revived and amplified 'chiasmus'; Brooks mutated 'paradox' and 'ambiguity' from their more logical use; Pound included 'melopœia', 'phanopœia', and 'logopœia' in his apparatus of abstractions for describing how 'language is charged or energized in various manners', for how words can mean 'over and above their plain meaning'.⁴³ Complexities of sense were analysed, taxonomized, celebrated. Yet this criticism was also anxiously occupied with what might constitute meaning, and a valid explanation of it. So, on the other side of all this phrase-making around 'meaning', there were also fierce campaigns to preserve the due difficulty of meaning in poems. Wimsatt and Brooks launched two powerful shibboleths, 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Heresy of Paraphrase', in order to proscribe two of the most familiar versions of 'meaning'—authorial intention and prose summary respectively—in order to make poetic meaning invulnerable to their reductive forms of exposition.⁴⁴ Such concerns with meaning took some particularly strident forms in critical writing yet they were also, as the next part of this introduction suggests, part of a broader crisis of 'the meaning of meaning'.

III. THE MEANING OF MEANING

By the end of the nineteenth century, meaning had become established as a fashionable intellectual topic, pursued in the new sciences of 'significs', comparative philology, and, more practically, by lexicographers publishing the earlier alphabetical sections of the *New English Dictionary*. One early 'linguist' and philosopher, Victoria Welby, a correspondent of C.S. Peirce and Bertrand Russell, reflected on this in her book, *Grains of Sense* (1897): 'One thing is certain: the subject of "significance" and of the comparative failure of established means of expressing sense or meaning—import or intention—is "in the air". One can hardly take up a paper, a review or a magazine without discovering that.'⁴⁵ This persisted into the first half of the twentieth century, during which it could seem to commentators that it would take 'a second Dean Swift to do satiric justice to the battle that has been raging round the word Meaning'.⁴⁶ This was 'the heyday of meanings', as a later philosopher has termed it (in contrast to the era of 'ideas' that preceded this and of 'sentences' that ensued).⁴⁷

The 'heyday of the meaning of meaning' would, however, be a still better designation. Even as the Oxford lexicographers were completing

their dictionary with its affirmation on a grand scale of 'meanings' compiled, defined, and illustrated, modernist experiments under the slogan, 'the revolution of the word', paraded a strong strand of linguistic anarchism that had been building at the confluence of literary experiment, nonsense writing, symbolic logic, and semiotics at least since Lewis Carroll. If, in the aftermath of high modernism, mere 'meaning' no longer seemed enough, then the effects for readers and for critics could be vertiginous. When the Shakespeare critic, John Dover Wilson, published a pamphlet, for which the title was *The Meaning of the Tempest*, in 1936, he felt compelled to begin it with an apology for not being fashionable enough: 'In an age when "the meaning of meaning" is one of the favourite inquiries of subtle minds, I fear my title may seem a little crude, or shall I say rather early Victorian to some of the younger among you'.⁴⁸ The Imagist poet, Richard Aldington, also found this new preoccupation with 'the meaning of meaning' disturbing. In *Artifex* (1935), he imagines a scene in the modernist *locus classicus*, the caves of Altamira, where one of 'the modern colossi', the scientist, encounters the rather more 'dejected' figure of the artist, who is sketching the figure of a bull in imitation of those on the cave walls. To this the Scientist responds, 'it is pretty but what does it *mean*? What do we mean by the meaning of meaning?'⁴⁹ Aldington concludes that 'we are chilled to the spine by the suspicion that he believes in Scientific Criticism'. What did it now mean, under these conditions, to talk of 'meaning'?

General statements or words, Pound once cautioned, resemble cheques, drawing only on the promise (sometimes empty) of banked resources.⁵⁰ 'Meaning', both here and elsewhere, seems to be a case of a general word, and a word about which general statements are often made, that draws on rather uncertain 'means'. This is a problem for which Noam Chomsky, gives this succinct summary: 'Part of the difficulty with the theory of meaning is that 'meaning' tends to be used as a catch-all term to include every aspect of language that we know very little about.'⁵¹ This tenaciously vague term can be an occasion for philosophical wonder; 'how is it even possible for a world—a natural world of things in space and time, and made of flesh and blood—to contain some things which *mean* other things?'⁵² Wonder can also turn to a sense of unease, in which meaning is uncannily like 'a parasite cut loose, a spirit without a body seeking to rest in another, an abstraction from the concrete'.⁵³ Any endeavour to explain 'the meaning of meaning' tends to involve an acute version of what Fredric Jameson presented in his introduction to A.J. Greimas's *On Meaning* (1987) as 'the infinite regress of metalanguages that seems to result whenever we try to isolate the meaning of a certain verbal complex, only to find ourselves producing yet another text in its place'.⁵⁴ Whenever

'meaning' becomes the subject, we risk an abstract circulation of terms and tautologies, or a series of deferrals and substitutions. Gilles Deleuze diagnoses a similar problem for one of meaning's surrogate terms, 'sense', in his study of (non)sense from the Stoics to Lewis Carroll, *The Logic of Sense* (1969). Deleuze finds, in a scene from *Alice in Wonderland*, a neat illustration for how 'sense', although always presupposed, vanishes in a series of substitutes whenever there is an attempt to state it. The more emphatic the White Knight becomes about the correct mode of reference for the song he describes to Alice, the less direct he is, until he is obliged to use this serially deferred form: 'that's what the name of the song is called'.⁵⁵

Attempts to provide logical or semantic support in the form of explicit definition or discussion of meaning threaten to make the problem only more entrenched. A symposium on 'The Meaning of Meaning' published in the philosophical journal *Mind* for October 1920 notes the difficulties of achieving conceptual clarity in an area where even the basic vocabulary is deficient. In most languages, the first contributor, F.C.S. Schiller, remarks, 'meaning' is confused by periphrasis with other terms, such as 'saying, calling, declaring' ('Was soll das heißen?'; 'Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?').⁵⁶ In English, the muddle ensues from its apparent synonyms, 'sense' and 'significance', the first of which encourages a false association with perceptual qualities, the second, a misleading impression of a particular intensity of experience. It 'is the oddest thing about language,' I.A. Richards remarked, 'that so few people have ever sat down to reflect systematically about meaning'; Schiller might retort that, given the obstacles, it the least surprising thing.⁵⁷

When Richards himself attempted to rectify this 'odd' omission in company with his fellow Cambridge polymath, C.K. Ogden, they adopted the title from this *Mind* symposium for their book, *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923). In spite of its miscellaneous nature, its scrappy density of epigraph and quotation, and its tendency to reductive schematism (notoriously, the triangle diagram for meaning), the book proved sufficiently popular, during this vogue for reflection about meaning, to go through eight editions by 1948. In it, Richards and Ogden attempt to 'reflect systematically' by offering 'a representative list of the main definitions which reputable students of Meaning have favoured', including, among its sixteen, the following:

Meaning is—

An Intrinsic property.

A unique unanalysable Relation to other things.

The other words annexed to a word in the Dictionary.

The Practical Consequences of a thing in our future experience.

Emotion aroused by anything.⁵⁸

This last phrase, 'by anything', only indicates how such definitions of 'meaning' can do very little to make the possible meanings of 'meaning' finite. Even the simplest 'definition', '[t]he other words annexed to a word in the Dictionary', summons difficulties; dictionary sense is no straightforward matter. This was particularly so at this time when interest, both public and specialist, in the dictionary as a vehicle for 'meanings' was notably high in response to the part-by-part publication of the *New English Dictionary*, culminating in the first full edition in 1928. The fascicle, 'L–N', which carried the entry for 'meaning', one of the dictionary's most reflexive words, had been published in 1908, and had included for this word a set of senses both wide-ranging ('remembrance', 'mention', 'significance'), and of concentrated complexity. One subheading, for example, begins as follows: '2. That which is intended to be or actually is expressed or indicated (see also DOUBLE MEANING.)' Meaning, even within its dictionary definition, is already either multiple or prone to fail, opening a space within its own bounds for irony and the infinite regress of other meanings. For all the bold territorial ambitions of Richards and Ogden, it is clear that annexing other words to a word remains a process resistant to systematic reflection.

Furthermore, terms such as 'meaning' require attention not only to their separate senses but also to the possible equations and interconnections between senses—a principle for which Empson, building on the work of Richards, later argued in a book thoroughly engaged with the limits and potential of dictionary sense, *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951).⁵⁹ For this principle, Empson takes as illustration the word with which 'meaning' often seems interchangeable, 'sense'. 'Sense', Empson finds, derives its tensile strength from its capacity to signify both 'knowledge gained through sensory apprehension' and 'knowledge gained through rational deliberation (shading into well moderated judgment: "common sense")'. For 'meaning', it is not, at first glance, so obvious what generates the equivalent intraverbal tensions. There are, however, some clear cases of where one sense of the word seems to be defined against the grain of another. For example, a gap can open between two distinct senses of the verb, 'to mean': 'to intend' (to have in mind), and 'to signify' (to indicate a certain object or to convey the sense), such that a speaker can 'fail to mean what they mean' (to signify what they intend). Another intraverbal tension that can arise with 'meaning' owes to the senses and moods belonging to the word: for example, 'mean' can be used as an intensifier, to signal a degree of force, whether of sincerity or scepticism: 'When I said I was sorry I meant it'; 'you don't mean to say that you believe this?' Such uses tend to typify the sense 'intended', giving it a mood for which the typographical representation might be an

exclamation mark, and an illocutionary force that enables it to perform honesty, solemnity, a verbal pledge.

Another division characteristic of the term is that between 'meaning' as an ascertainable matter of lexical, grammatical, or logical form, and 'meaning' as a nebulous matter of 'import' or 'significance' ('Man lives in the *meanings* he is able to discern. He extends himself into that which he finds coherent and is at home there').⁶⁰ The phrase, 'the meaning of meaning', could also attract both positivist over-precision and metaphysical imprecision. One of its more typical homes was grandly titled meditations, *The Uniqueness of Man*, for example, or *The Mystery of Life*, where 'meaning' could point towards some irrefragable dimension to the author's sense of the world. Yet the phrase also has life in hostile or satirical presentations of modern positivism, such as Aldington's *Artifex*, where it seems to designate the restless excesses of rationalism. Perhaps, with Donald Davidson ('Truth and Meaning', 1967), we can conclude no more about meaning than that 'paradoxically, the one thing meanings do not seem to do is oil the wheels of a theory of meaning'.⁶¹

In the context of literary criticism, 'meaning' becomes even more elusive. Here there is also the suggestion of the exceptional case, whether this exceptionality acquires a positive or negative hue. On the one hand, 'poems very often do none of the things philosophers tend to think language *must* do if it is to bear meaning'.⁶² On the other, it is a common contention that 'there is in fact an *écriture poétique*, whose connotations of richness, density, and depth of meaning are so powerful' as to project us into an incomparable 'fullness of signification'.⁶³ The critic's challenge is to make meaningful not only the particular piece of language being considered but also something of the version of the concept of meaning by which it works; under this double burden, statements about meaning in critical prose are unsurprisingly slippery. Much like the term 'form', the tactics of explanation within the language-game of critical prose seem to require 'meaning' to be both richly textured and suitably blank.⁶⁴ To take an example from early in this period during which meaning became a central preoccupation of critical discourse, in his 1901 lecture, 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake', A.C. Bradley holds the word 'meaning' between quotation marks not, as one critic has argued 'to trivialize it but to indicate the inadequacy of the signifier to convey the idea behind it'.⁶⁵ Meaning, within a defence of pure poetry, needs a certain grandeur to be invulnerable to the critic's ready devices of reduction to poetry for prose's sake. It must, then, Bradley concludes, be considered 'a spirit. It comes we know not whence. It will not speak at our bidding, nor answer in our language. It is not our servant; it is our master'.⁶⁶

Eliot also holds the word in inverted commas in his own reflection on its awkward dimensions in a lecture of 1933:

The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be (for here again I am speaking of some kinds of poetry and not all) to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog. This is a normal situation of which I approve.⁶⁷

'Meaning' in a poem, Eliot provokes, is a diversionary tactic; one of the poet's means to an end. But turning this remark back on itself, 'meaning' as a counter in this critical prose appears equally strategic. Eliot suspends the word in the thinner air of his irony while the reader is provided with the 'bit of nice meat' of the joke about the burglar; a hint of vaudeville humour fenced between more prescriptive solemnities ('the chief use', 'of which I approve'). The effect is to keep the reader 'diverted and quiet' while the difficulties surrounding the meaning of this term, 'meaning', slip past. Were the meaning of Eliot's 'meaning' to be pursued, there is a sense that he might repeat some lines from his 'Prufrock': 'That is not it at all, | That is not what I meant, at all'.⁶⁸

Since Eliot, literary-theoretical work has developed a still more 'sensational scepticism' about meaning.⁶⁹ A decline of faith in valid interpretation—where 'a valid interpretation is one that succeeds in recovering the meaning of a text'—can be charted across a broad swathe of works, to the point at which the association between problems of 'meaning' and our more complex kinds of reading is no longer self-evident.⁷⁰ Critics at most damn with faint praise the new-critical methods as ways of apprehending the meaning-(fulness) of texts, granting only that '[c]lose reading remains a useful way of looking at texts'.⁷¹ Much stronger polemics against such reading are common. Franco Moretti, for example, makes a case for 'distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, *Less is more*'.⁷² The words on the page, rather than being subject to focused scrutiny for their intricacies of sense, now 'disappear'. Much literary-critical practice is, however, still dominated by forms of reading for which some version of 'meaning' remains the premise, and there has been a notable recent resurgence of interest in versions of practical criticism, commentary, or gloss, attentive to the detail and the concept of sense. The linguistically innovative glosses and commentaries of late modernism, for example, continue to explore the contours of meaning,

meaningfulness, and meaninglessness, even as they disdain narrower versions of sense. Doubts about the role of 'meaning' as an informing concept for literary-critical practice thus seem somewhat peremptory, and it is at least the case that we 'must elucidate the meaning of meaning before we can speak of its loss'.⁷³

For this elucidation, a particularly rich field remains these 'new' modes of close reading of the early to mid twentieth century, which we know variously as practical criticism, formalism, or the new criticism, and for which 'meaning' was both an immediate and abstract problem. Only to skim this prose is to see how 'meaning' and 'sense' are often the terms by which critical judgements are marshalled, and to see that colourful compounds or neologisms for their varieties proliferated. Critics wrote of 'meanings and congeries of meanings', 'complex meaning', 'meaning-suggestiveness', 'meaning-functions', 'meaning-vitality', 'sense-depth', 'sense-accretion', 'double-meaning', 'Total Meaning'—even if these terms still pale alongside some of their companions in modernism's experimental prose, for example, Joyce's ironic repertoire of sound-sense for the 'meanam', the 'sinse', and for what is 'deeply sangnificant'.⁷⁴ This literary criticism seemed, as the authors of *The Meaning of Meaning* remarked of contemporary writing in philosophy, 'bespattered with the term' 'meaning' and its correlates, across its particular close readings and its more general formulae.⁷⁵ Yet for all this noise and fanfare, the scope, main senses, and even obvious tensions of 'this plausible nomad', to which literary-critical prose seemed so hospitable, still remain resistant to ready accounts.⁷⁶

A glimpse of how, for critical prose, meaning could either present a concept with a rich coexistence of levels or an awkward muddle is possible if we examine two typical passages: one from the new criticism of Blackmur, one from the New Criticism of Brooks. Blackmur, in the essay 'Examples of Wallace Stevens', discusses how the word 'funest' in the poem, 'Of the Manner of Addressing Clouds', may or may not typify Stevens's innovations in the area of word meaning:

The word means sad or calamitous or mournful and is derived from a French word meaning fatal, melancholy, baneful, and has to do with death and funerals. It comes ultimately from the Latin *funus* for funeral. Small dictionaries do not stock it. [...] The oddity of the word having led us to look it up we find that, once used, *funest* is better than any of its synonyms. It is the essence of the funeral in its sadness, not its sadness alone, that makes it the right word [...] If Mr. Stevens stretches his words slightly, as a live poet should and must, it is in such a way as to make them seem more precisely themselves than ever. The context is so delicately illuminated, or adumbrated, that the word

must be looked up, or at least thought carefully about, before the precision can be seen.⁷⁷

In elucidating 'funest', Blackmur does not at first appear to take up any particularly distinctive stand on what 'meaning' means for his critical prose. The phrases around which he structures his exposition, 'The word means [...] and has to do with [...]'. It comes ultimately from [...]', are so habitual that their assumptions are no longer visible. The word's etymology is granted some explanatory status yet there is no very forceful implication that Blackmur is serious about philology. This seems then to be a case of merely taking the ready-to-hand sense of 'meaning' as 'that specified in a dictionary entry'. Behind this apparent pragmatism, however, is a critical principle: for Blackmur, Stevens's 'funest' is an exemplary case for how words in poems should mean. Words should aspire to their dictionary senses and this use of 'funest', in spite of its appearance of recondite ornamentation, is, when we look it up in the dictionary, 'perfectly precise'.⁷⁸ Within the interpretive economy of this criticism, the dictionary is not just a practical repository for meanings but rather a model for ideal usages, so that it becomes possible to say of a poet's practice that 'the meanings in the words themselves are superior to the use to which he put them'.⁷⁹ From this general premise about the conditions of possibility for meaning, Blackmur evolves a strong principle for individual critical judgements of where Stevens attains to, or fails to reach, the 'reality' of words and the occasions on which he surpasses them by such a precise, knowledgeable sense of meanings that words become idioms, gestures, or symbols.

Brooks equivocates rather less fruitfully with the term 'meaning' in one of the best-known essays of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), 'Keats's Sylvan Historian: History Without Footnotes'. Here, Brooks writes that, although 'there is much in the poetry of Keats which suggests that he would have approved of Archibald MacLeish's dictum, "A poem should not mean | But be," ['Ars Poetica' (1926)]', his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' still ends in 'a statement of some sententiousness'; in fact, we could say of the line, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', that 'this is "to mean" with a vengeance'.⁸⁰ These comments first seem to suggest that 'mean' is equivalent to 'state', reaching, by its intensification, 'sententiousness'. But this, as the edge to his phrasing implies, is an equation Brooks explains rather than endorses. His critical position in fact relies on keeping 'to state' as the antonym of 'to mean' and on redefining 'meaning' as 'significance' in order to sustain his thesis about the poem's nature as an unparaphrasable structure of paradoxes, a well wrought, inviolable urn. Keats might appear to launch aphorisms but he in fact choreographs movements of paradox. In this

fashion, the true poet, Brooks contends, achieves 'meaning' (significance) by going beyond 'meaning' (statement) to reach a level of dramatized, non-propositional language, to which any subsequent language of statement on the part of the critic could only do heretical violence. 'A poem should not state | But mean'.

As the interest of Blackmur's reading, and the tangles of that by Brooks suggest, the 'regress of metalanguages' occasioned by this term 'meaning' is not limited to a quirk of nonsense writing, or to a struggle of philosophy; it can be the vital dynamic of expository prose that takes care with its workings. As outlined in this introduction, the strengths of versions of reading more radically empiricist in their sense of meaning remain difficult to recover because previous literary-critical histories present two substantial obstacles to such archaeology: first, the general habit of reducing criticism's complexities to those of ideas and influences, rather than of prose and practices; second, the unshakeable assumption that close reading cannot escape its supposed 'New Critical birthright'.⁸¹ The New Criticism and modernist close reading are, however, neither synonymous nor hopelessly entangled and their conflation only prevents any account of close reading's more vital forms. To restore a sense of these strengths, the approach these chapters propose is—as the remainder of this introduction shall now outline in more detail—to turn close reading back on itself.

IV. CLOSE READING CLOSE READING

Close reading criticism is (for some good reasons, and some bad) strongly resistant to close reading. The editors of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 7: Modernism and the New Criticism* give a typical narrative for criticism of this period. Eliot's 'inventive body of criticism' between 1917 and 1924 'was worked up into a corpus of acceptable interpretive techniques by I. A. Richards, among others, in the years immediately following', culminating in 'the brilliant exercise of those techniques by Richards's student William Empson'; subsequently, 'these various influences fed into the work of the American New Critics'.⁸² The aim here is to précis some substantial bodies of work; to indicate a distinct line of influence by the use of proper names as placeholders, yet this intentional starkness does throw into sharper relief a general problem: scholars have, in the terms in which René Wellek characterized his mode of writing for *A History of Modern Criticism*, tended towards the 'doxographical, expository', responding to critical ideas and influences rather than critical prose.⁸³

A similar 'doxographical' bias can be seen even in one of the earliest attempts at a summary, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) by Wimsatt and Brooks. Although these authors declare an interest in 'semantic analysis—the subtle and elaborate examination of verbal complexities', the subtlety of their critical subjects is, in the main, subdued by the stronger lines of a doctrinal account: this, they announce, is 'a history of *ideas* about verbal art and about its elucidation and criticism', in which '*the critical idea* has priority over all other kinds of material'.⁸⁴ To take a practical instance of this principle, the critical position that the authors hyphenate as 'Empsonian-Ricardian complexity' is given this redaction:

The great poems reveal an organic structure of parts intricately related to each other, and the totality of meaning in such a poem is rich and perhaps operative on several levels. In terms of this view of poetic excellence, a principal task of criticism—perhaps *the* task of criticism—is to make explicit to the reader the implicit manifold of meanings.⁸⁵

At a glance, this does present a central aspect of the critical positions of Empson and Richards—the elucidation of richness of meaning—albeit an aspect discussed to the point of commonplace and sufficiently general as to encompass many other very different critics. But the deliberate concentration on extracting the 'ideas' underpinning such criticism, rather than on its distinctive prose textures, seems to leave this judgement vulnerable to distortion; the figures of the 'organic structure', the 'manifold', bear a stronger imprint from the New Critical poetics of *The Verbal Icon* (1954) and *The Well Wrought Urn* than from either Richards or Empson themselves.

There are undeniable advantages—'consistency, purity, and seeming logic'—to drawing on such a metalanguage of critical terms and values, against the messy particularity of what we might call, by contrast, 'paralanguage' around particular prose occasions.⁸⁶ Metacriticism or 'analytical aesthetics' can, as Richard Shusterman argues, 'provide a clear map or picture of a very complex and vague terrain, intuitively familiar to critics who were its best explorers but had no skill in precise cartography'.⁸⁷ This, however, seems still a shade too confident in the desirability of a theoretical overview. The failure of these new critics to be cartographers tends not to be due to an absence of principles; instead, this criticism often takes a stance of principled practicality, seeking to elucidate occasions of complex verbal meaning not by a set of fixed doctrines but rather by certain kinds of argufying, intonation, and use of style. Where such criticism is more 'theoretical', it often follows the logic that Richards formulates in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*: 'for this study is theoretical only that it may become practical', aiming to keep its critical forms 'consciously provisional, speculative and dramatic'.⁸⁸ Accordingly, the chapters of this book still explore,

in their close readings of critical styles, an alternative to both doxographical and narrative versions of literary-critical history.

Some later literary-critical history has already been much more responsive to 'other kinds of material' beyond 'the critical idea', and to explanatory modes beyond the schematic survey. A collection of critical essays, *Some Versions of Empson* (2008), opens with this statement of method: 'this volume engages not only with Empson's critical arguments and agendas, but also with the characteristic pitches and uses of style in his writing'.⁸⁹ This hits a surer note, yet most practical attempts to engage with these critics' 'uses of style' can seem rather lacking; in some ways fine-grained to the point of seeming 'specialist', in other ways, still too close to perceptive impressionism, failing to touch on the metacritical significance of close reading this prose or even to reach a very satisfactorily analytical account of its workings. If 'doxographical' histories of critical ideas are flawed, then close readings can suffer from their own forms of limitation if sealed against any more general circulation of thought about meaning or method. To address these critical manners and forms it does not help to do what they refuse; to take a view from 'outside and above'. Yet it may be equally true that 'a microscope is a bad instrument with which to find one's way about a town' (to borrow a remark that Richards once borrowed in a parenthesis on method).⁹⁰ Practical critics are already easy targets; practical criticism of practical criticism risks only amplifying the negative traits—parochialism, or even positivism—that attend on this kind of critical mode. How, then, is the critic of criticism to remain attached to the particularities of this prose, while moving beyond such constraints?

One answer might be to work towards what we might call 'a grammar' of the critical forms of the new criticism. A grammar of this kind involves some occasional generalizations that allow us to see round the case while it avoids erecting fixed principles. But what are critical 'forms'? Criticism lies alongside the forms of its objects, in a relation not quite in-forming: at most, collateral form. It is often shy even of collateral forms; the New Criticism in particular 'functions on the strength of certain scrupulous avoidances, constantly deferring any audit of the terms, procedures, and values upon which it relies'.⁹¹ While it may, on first reading, seem to suffer from an excess of terms, on closer examination we can see that New Critical prose is marked by the occlusion (and even the polemical denunciation) of clear forms of explanation, of 'procedures' such as paraphrase. Where it does permit and approve terms, they soon become fixed into patterns, so that poems can be repeatedly classified by structures of 'paradox', 'ambiguity', or 'irony'. These labelled moments present later critics of this criticism with an easy target. Catherine Gallagher, for example, in her contribution to an *MLQ* special issue on the new

formalism, writes this of the narrowed aesthetic experience permitted by the New Critical methods and terms:

Little knots of impacted, concentrated, dense language; paradoxes, ambiguities, and indeterminacies; self-reference and repetition—all the language that seems to cross back and forth over itself and consequently to thwart forward movement—come to epitomize the literary.⁹²

Although Gallagher's critique makes a sharp point about the wearily reflexive atomism of such prose, it rests on a rather unsteady conflation of moments of linguistic difficulty or interpretive complexity (ambiguities, for example) with examples of the 'thickening of language', the 'obtrusive excess of the medium' (perhaps rhymes, puns, or repetitions). The effect is to blunt the force of the critique by drawing back our focus to the literary object rather than to the critical prose itself. What takes place in Gallagher's analysis is an entirely typical swerve in histories, even formalist ones, of criticism. It is against such histories that this book presents its argument that, in order to account clearly for some versions of the new criticism, particularly as they escape from the failings of the New Criticism, what literary-critical history now needs is to allow the prose itself to come into focus, unfolding its typical 'terms, procedures, and values', even as it avoids erecting these into theories or labels.

Moving towards this are encouraging way-markers such as the prose of another critic also contemporary with the New Critics but not definable as one, Kenneth Burke. Burke evolves an informal taxonomy for critical forms in *Counter-Statement* (1931), which offers a persuasive set of potential diagnostic tools for formalist prose style. Burke, for example, proposes the term 'minor or incidental forms' under which to assemble the variety of kinds of small unit from which formalist analysis or close reading works but about which it struggles to achieve clarity in its own metacritical accounts:

When analyzing a work of any length, we may find it bristling with *minor or incidental forms*—such as metaphor, paradox, disclosure, reversal, contraction, expansion, bathos, apostrophe, series, chiasmus—which can be discussed as formal events in themselves. Their effect partially depends upon their function in the whole, yet they manifest sufficient evidences of episodic distinctness to bear consideration apart from their context.⁹³

The strength of Burke's taxonomy is that it concentrates on forms that give shape to moments of interpretive complexity, involving calculation of the possible meaning(s): in other words, the term 'minor or incidental form' frames instances of complex meaning rather than highpoints of style. This allows for a sense of the critic as an informing presence in the process of reading rather than merely as a transparency over the formally

complex language of others—and, with this, can return a sense of the activities of reading that critical history characteristically obscures. My chapters attempt to take Burke's strategies of rhetorical reading still further, directing attention away from the kinds of distinct literary form that can be labelled and explained, towards the critic's forms of explanation. In this, I move away from a critical toolkit, towards a broader level of the 'forms' (modes or practices) of critical prose as it surrounds and explores meanings.

Within this more flexible category of 'critical forms' there are differences of emphasis: some of my subjects will be kinds of expository practice or activity with regard to complex pieces of language (emendation, paraphrase); some are aspects of scholarly procedure—or parodies of these (notes, bad examples); some are closer to traits of style (circumlocution, reticence). 'The "technique" that is not studied as the expression of a given particular sensibility is an unprofitable abstraction, remote from any useful purpose of criticism',⁹⁴ Leavis once wrote in criticism of the criticism of Pound, and this principle can be extended to the prose forms I consider here; Empson's paraphrase, for example, is an 'unprofitable abstraction', unless read as part of his bluff style of prose as it mediates his commitment to some versions of rational humanism. It is this coordination of technique and sensibility, of abstraction and particularity that I attempt to trace in the following accounts of some modernist critical forms and techniques of reading.

Criticism's versions of the concept 'meaning' are, it is clear, not circulating abstractions. They occur within the 'rich obscure practical' textures of prose, within a particular phase of literary-critical history, marked by its constitutive tensions, even fractures. To see these complexities above all involves tracing, by close reading, the forms of such critical prose, addressing 'meaning as literary criticism understands it—meaning as instantiated in reading'.⁹⁵ Individual chapters of this book present detailed readings of the prose of five poet-critics: Richards, Eliot, Empson, Blackmur, and Moore. To borrow a caveat from another historian of twentieth-century criticism, it 'does not attempt a 'rounded' study of the critics discussed: it leaves aside many questions of their technique and of their particular judgments of authors and literary works'.⁹⁶ But what it does seek to achieve is a fresh picture of each of these poet-critics under the aspect of one of their distinctive critical activities as they grapple with the problem of how to write about the meaning of literary works.

Part I of the book (*How to read*) considers some forms of critical experiment with elucidating complex meanings, with what can be read and said; Part II (*How not to read*) considers some forms of critical defiance to narrowly formalist constraints as to what (not) to say about

poems. If modernist interest in 'the meaning of meaning' has a spiralling complexity, then 'reading' (the practice by which 'meaning' takes form for literary criticism) seems at first glance to be a matter for some more down-to-earth talk. In parallel with these complex, ramifying explorations of 'meaning', there is a proliferation of instruction manual titles, falling somewhere between pedagogy and self-help, concerned with 'reading'—how to, and how not to, do it. So, in 1926, Virginia Woolf titled an address to a school, 'How Should One Read a Book?';⁹⁷ Pound followed suit with a piece under the blunter title, 'How to Read' (1927), which Leavis rebutted with his own *How to Teach Reading* (1932); Mortimer Adler contributed the more instructional, *How to Read a Book: A Guide to Self-Education* (1940) and Richards wrote about the basics of *How to Read a Page* (1943). Of course, these were not the first or last of the genre: in the nineteenth century's spirit of self-help, 'how to read' guides had acquired some popularity before that century's end. The early years of the twentieth century saw some more explicit curricula for the reading of literature, as reading shifted from one of the fine arts to one of the school—and now university—subjects.⁹⁸ Yet, even in the apparent heyday of the genre, these 'how to read' books are not, behind the (mock) practicality, literal attempts to address what Richards diagnosed in *Practical Criticism* as the 'widespread inability to construe meaning'.⁹⁹ Instead, as with Richards's own experiments, the direction of interest tends to be towards occasions when the seemingly transparent, uncomplicated activity of reading can, once slightly estranged by difficulty, wonder, or thought, come to seem epistemologically complex; occasions when 'reading' can seem too modest a word and 'meaning' an uncertain measure.

The opening anecdote to Richards's own contribution to the 'genre' stages just such an encounter of simple and complex:

A slip of the log I am sitting on [...] has given me as an alternative title, 'How to *reap* a page', which perhaps better suggests the aim. We assume we know how to read: spell it *r e a p*, and we begin to wonder how we do it.¹⁰⁰

As Richards remarked at another point in his guide, despite the facility promised by his title, there can be no relief from difficulty: 'A list of the vices of reading should put first, as worst and most disabling, the expectation that everything should be easily understood'.¹⁰¹ Criticism, even in the instructional form of the 'how to read' primer, should not make reading any more immediate or easy. It is no paradox, then, that these instructors in the basics of close reading also fit into Geoffrey Hartman's category, 'the difficult critics'. 'Further education in analysis may be derived from Mr. W. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*,' Leavis announces in *How To Teach Reading*, but what seems like an offer of a

key to the problem of writing about complex meaning immediately becomes a statement of startling exclusivity: 'those who are capable of learning from it are capable of reading it critically, and those who are not capable of learning from it were not intended by Nature for an advanced "education in letters."' ¹⁰² In presenting Eliot as a model for critical reading, Leavis offers a still more drastic version of the part critical prose might play in the reader's experience of learning, or not learning, to read: 'the student will be able to learn from Mr. T.S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* or not at all'. ¹⁰³ While criticism offers, as Leavis argues, no neat lessons for extraction and application, to assume the yield of its prose is either self-evident, or nothing, is severely to restrict its possibilities and probable readers. Close attention to criticism for its difficulties, rather than just for those it addresses, can reveal a much more intricate picture of where its forms encourage and where they rebuff reading. By some close reading of such prose, which involves its readers in the complex, ironical experiences of writing about meaning, 'the meaning of meaning' emerges from being a practical problem to become a source of some rich critical forms.

The chapters composing Part I consider three versions of close reading, of quoting complex pieces of language and worrying at their meaning, or judging their significance, in terms of their distinctive critical forms. These are three versions of close reading with a formative role in what has been described as 'the age of criticism'. First, the judicious epithets by which Eliot gives his quotations an annotative frame; second, the experimental exercises through which Richards attempts to cure bad reading; third, the forms of emendation that Empson considers in his readings of ambiguities in Shakespeare against the editorial model of the crux. In looking to the critical forms adjacent to their objects, I sketch the epistemological horizon of this new criticism, in particular its forms of, and resistances to, empiricism, and the modernist-formalist fragmentation of the units of critical attention into nodes of complex meaning. This, then, is a formal reading of some early experiments in these 'new' sciences of interpretation, emerging primarily from the 1920s and in some senses from Cambridge, where Eliot delivered his 1926 Clark Lectures on the Metaphysical Poets, Richards staged his experiments for *Practical Criticism*, and Empson began the analytical fireworks of his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

These chapters consider the rhetoric of novelty attaching to this criticism, exploring how far these apparent innovations in critical prose in fact draw on forms of activity in related disciplines for their forms of exposition. New Criticism was, as I have been arguing, wary of the 'procedures' it permitted to literary criticism; these risk absorbing 'the Poem Itself' back into the discourses about language and meaning (linguistics, philology, or history) from which it has only just escaped. Leavis gives a strong

articulation of this principle in 'Sketch for an English School', originally published in *Scrutiny* in 1940:

The essential discipline of an English school is the literary-critical; it is a true discipline, only in an English School if anywhere will it be fostered, and it is irreplaceable. It trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating a sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence—intelligence that integrates as well as analyses and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy.¹⁰⁴

The critics on whom I concentrate do not, on the whole, express this anxiety very forcibly. In fact, their forms of prose test the boundaries of criticism against other disciplines, if not from some conviction about its elusive specificity, then certainly without any ferocity about excluding other modes of prose reasoning. So, Richards evolves his methods of criticism against the model of experimental psychology and also that of 'fieldwork', of what we might call, with a debt to Wittgenstein, 'the anthropological perspective'; Eliot thinks about how criticism, although it might seek to be annotative in its forms, resists available models such as classical commentary; Empson tests his critical form, ambiguity, against that of editors, the crux. If one of the best-known myths about close reading remains that it denies value to contexts, then, by these readings, I seek not only to challenge this myth but also to restore to close reading some of its own contexts in the history of prose.

Part II of the book argues that, if this was 'the age of criticism', then it was also the age of anticriticism. It was a time of some virulent kinds of formalist resistance to critical practices of explanation, marked by the assumption that, at some point, '[f]or explication to be truly critical, the critic had to turn against his method'.¹⁰⁵ Rather than looking to some of the anticritical polemics themselves, however, I keep with the detail of particular practices as they defy these polemics and yet continue to be critical. My chapters explore three forms of what, by New Critical measures, would appear to be bad critical style; Empson's paraphrases, Blackmur's circumlocutions, Marianne Moore's paratactic sentences. Such critical forms are characteristic of these individuals and are also points where criticism seems poised on the edge of a decision about whether or not to accept its role as a mode of explanation, of presenting 'other words' about words. Rather than remaining with the critical forms most immediately in the margins, or around the edges of their objects, the chapters composing Part II look to three forms of apparent excess or disproportion at the level of critical style, where criticism seems to escape its object, or its usual bounds. On these occasions, the form of the criticism threatens to come to greater prominence than the forms criticized, or even to

contravene them. By some strong re-readings, I argue that the tone and tactics of these three writers achieve some triumphs against our historically narrowed horizons of expectation for critical prose. For example, modernist anxieties about viewing the meaning(fulness) of poetry under the aspect of 'statement'¹⁰⁶ become a positive experiment in 'direct speech' paraphrase for Empson; circumlocution becomes, for Blackmur, a practice of attentiveness to insurmountable difficulties of meaning, rather than mere evasion of them; resistance to conventional explanation and analysis becomes Moore's powerfully expressive mode of 'natural reticence'. Against some of modernism's drastic challenges to the conditions of possibility for writing about complex meanings, these critics, to take a phrase from one of Empson's villanelles, all 'learn a style from despair'.¹⁰⁷

Between Part I and Part II of the book, readings of Empson's critical forms provide the bridge. As a critic whose early work has become metonymic for cornucopian polysemy, 'finding meanings no one else had thought to look for',¹⁰⁸ he is in some senses a 'central character'¹⁰⁹ for this study in some critical forms for meaning but, as with the book's four other critical subjects, I concentrate not on a general account of his evolution as a critic but instead on the two distinctive modes of his practice, which I term 'emendation' and 'paraphrase'. 'Most of what I find to say about Shakespeare has been copied out of the Arden text', Empson jokes with the reader of his *Seven Types*. Critics have given Empson's references to, and use of, textual scholarship, little credit but here, by uncovering the detail of how far Empson did engage with the Arden (I) notes, I show the truth of Empson's claim and explore its significance for understanding his main critical legacy, the concept of 'ambiguity', which does not, as critics and linguists have wrongly assumed, equate to 'multiple meaning'. Textual scholarship is also the spur to a trait of critical style that, since the publication of *Selected Letters of William Empson* in 2006, has been much to the fore: his argufying. 'To try to make a printed page mean something good is only fair', Empson writes in *Milton's God* and, in his later work, Empson is always at his most vehement around textual difficulties. When, I ask, does this effort of mind to make a printed page mean something good cease to be 'generous and agreeable', becoming instead a coercively fierce confidence in what the author ought to have meant? Empson's prose, considered under the aspect of emendation, offers a good measure for this perennial critical question.

Another strikingly Empsonian critical form is paraphrase. It remains the critical orthodoxy that for poems, paraphrase should not be attempted: this does violence to their mode of meaning. 'When a thing has been said so well that it could not be said better, why paraphrase it?'—as Marianne Moore wrote, repeating verbatim her own previous use of these words.¹¹⁰

Empson, however, not only paraphrases but also presents paraphrases vigorously unlike their objects, typically in a brash mock-up of direct speech. Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy', for example, is paraphrased in the voice of a cynical uncle. His feats of ventriloquy refuse to occupy the only place the 'heresy' argument makes available for paraphrase: that of straightforwardly hermeneutic reasoning and 'plain prose', at the expense of poetic thinking. I present a brief history of literary-critical paraphrase and its associated polemic, followed by an account of Empson's distinctive varieties of paraphrase, measuring his demotic against some of the registers and sounds of the 1920s and '30s. Empson's example, I argue, allows us to lift an old, unreflective constraint on the critic's repertoire of techniques for knowing poems.

For Empson, T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards provide ready companions. My first chapter considers Eliot's mode of 'close reading'—and, indeed, whether this term holds for a critic often wary of too much detailed scrutiny of his literary examples. I explore the argument that Eliot might prefer to quote than to analyse, and offer the counterargument that Eliot did sustain his own characteristic forms of commentary, however minimal: his particular innovations can, I suggest, be seen in his practices of annotation. I explore first how, across a range of contexts, from his student lecture notes on classical philosophy, to his revisions as editor and self-revisions as poet and critic, Eliot's forms of reading often take place, in an intimately material sense, in the margins of works. But Eliot was, more importantly, also an 'annotative' critic in a less literal sense: a critic whose essays could take a form closer to that of commentary than argument, based around fragments of quotation, held together by an instructive grammar and by epithets. I consider the genealogy of this annotative mode of criticism by tracing Eliot's responses to forms of comment around quotation in the criticism of Pater, Arnold, and Swinburne and suggest that, if re-read in this way, Eliot's prose techniques play a central part in his powerful re-interpretation of what constitutes the 'metaphysical': the 'alienated majesty' of second thoughts.

Chapter II considers the criticism of Richards, as a key figure for any account of literary criticism as 'a young science' in both senses of that phrase (the attempt to establish criticism on an objective footing, and the risk that the methods may lack disciplinary maturity). His works, described by Blackmur in rather slanted praise as, 'a preparatory school to good criticism, just as the dictionary is to good writing',¹¹¹ thus offer one possible foundation for this alternative history of the new criticism. *Practical Criticism* is one of the most definitive contributions to this phase of critical history, yet it seems to have fallen victim to a version of its own method, reading without context; few thick-textured accounts of its

genesis or contexts have been proposed. Here, I explore how this work shares a tone of voice and a set of techniques with some of the experimental methods of linguistic philosophy and the early fieldwork in anthropology with which it is contemporary. Within such a framework, we can see how the apparent simplicity of the empirical activity, 'reading', and the pedagogic optimism of the Ricardian approach to it, easily slides towards some of our most knotty problems of perception, cognition, recognition, and description. This chapter also extends to consider how Richards's keyword, 'practical', receives a different inflection in his subsequent works, *Mencius on the Mind* and *Interpretation in Teaching*, which have their own distinctive methods of experiment in how to address complex meaning and, I argue, their own forms of critical bathos.

Moving, by way of Empson, from Cambridge, England to Cambridge, Massachusetts, Part II of the book considers the criticism of R.P. Blackmur, who, for all his influential admirers (from Wallace Stevens to Edward Said), is now a relatively shadowy figure in literary-critical history. 'Saying too little, for too long, too teasingly', his critical prose has only seemed to leave readers 'longing for sex and politics'.¹¹² Yet, as often as he is criticized for verbosity, Blackmur is praised for being one of the most brilliant critics of modernism. His essays unfold some detailed accounts, for which I offer some close readings, of how a variety of modernist poets—E.E. Cummings, Emily Dickinson, Laura Riding, Hart Crane—fail to make their words 'mean'. These accumulate towards a strikingly original version of modernist critical poetics, yet one that has, in part because of his explicit refusal of systems, theories, and even 'ideas', received little analysis. To redress this, this chapter gives close consideration to the workings of Blackmur's prose style. Blackmur is, I argue, radically circumlocutory, experimenting in the possibilities for words around words after 'the revolution of the word'. Circumlocution, in his criticism, becomes a critical and philosophical aesthetic, in essays that meditate on the epistemology of response to the challenges of modernist verbalism. What appears 'bad style' might, then, prove to be 'an answerable style' for the embarrassments of explanation that modernism presents to the critic.

Alongside Blackmur, I consider another often disregarded new critic, Marianne Moore, who is also embarrassed about explanation and who also responds—as Richards, Eliot, and Empson rarely do—to the immediate challenges of Anglo-American modernism and its experiments with forms of verbal meaning. Particularly striking in Moore's case is the asymmetry between the very considerable attention devoted to her poetry and the lack of concern for her impressive and intriguing prose, even since Faber's publication in 1987 of the *Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. During some of Moore's most prominent and prolific years, 1925–9, at which

time she edited the *Dial*, she wrote no poetry: her medium was prose, and this work amounts to a substantial, distinctive, and rewarding body of writing. Moore's prose is undoubtedly resistant to analysis; she cultivates a style of criticism she describes by the phrase 'natural reticence' and holds to the principle that 'expanded explanation tends to spoil the lion's leap' ('Feeling and Precision', 1944).¹¹³ Her essays often present a practical refusal of these familiar functions of criticism, to expand and to explain. They present a carapace of rich details, facts, and quotations around poems but links between these are suppressed; Moore even declares an objection to the word 'and'. In these qualities of minimal statement, maximal detail can be heard a distinctive and distinctively lucid critical voice, responding to, and participating in, some of the technical challenges of modernism: forms of objectivity, quotation, parataxis.

* * *

Writing at the end of the period with which this book is concerned, Randall Jarrell voices what seems like a renewed version of the traditional empiricist's hope that literature will be able to stand alone, to be read for 'itself'. Jarrell expresses this in his 1952 review of Stanley Edgar Hyman's *The Armed Vision*, which presents a retrospective over criticism from the first part of the twentieth century. Jarrell takes up Hyman's title conceit to write: 'Critics are so much better armed than they used to be in the old days: they've got tanks and flame-throwers now, and it's harder to see past them to the work of art'.¹¹⁴ But to this rather hostile image, Jarrell then adds (if not without some hint of irony): 'in fact, magnificent creatures that they are, it's hard to *want* to see past them'. The radical empiricists who form the subjects of this book are critics we would not want to see straight past. Looking closely at their prose, this book explores their varied styles and forms of modernist 'magnificence'.

PART I

HOW TO READ

- I Annotation: T.S. Eliot and marginal commentary
- II Experiment: I.A. Richards and critical bathos
- III Emendation: William Empson and the textual crux

I

Annotation

T.S. Eliot and marginal commentary

I. A FEW NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

Professor Briggs used to read, with great persuasiveness and charm, verses of Donne to the Freshmen at Harvard [...] I confess that I have now forgotten what Professor Briggs told us about the poet; but I know that whatever he said, his own words and his quotations were enough to attract to private reading at least one Freshman who had already absorbed some of the Elizabethan dramatists, but who had not yet approached the metaphysicals.¹

Eliot often remembered the ‘persuasiveness and charm’ of quotations when their surrounding commentaries had faded or even when he disliked the critic’s wider argument. Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), for example, he described as ‘execrable’, yet still important for him because of its quotations.² Similarly, Swinburne’s *Age of Shakespeare* (1908), although it ‘contains no information and conveys no clear impression of the dramatists discussed’, is redeemed by including ‘a few notable quotations’.³ Eliot’s own criticism is also ‘notable’ for an unusually thick texture of quotation: a characteristic structure for his essays is that of a series of quoted lines of verse or prose, framed by commentaries. Edmund Wilson writes, in *Axel’s Castle* (1931), that ‘in reading Eliot and Pound, we are sometimes visited by uneasy recollections of Ausonius, in the fourth century, composing Greek-and-Latin macaronics and piecing together poetic mosaics out of verses from Virgil’.⁴ The implied object of this uneasy reading is only the poetry; the ‘ventriloquial pastiche’⁵ of Eliot’s quatrains, ‘the police in different voices’ of *The Waste Land*. Equally distinctive, however, is the mosaic or macaronic quality of Eliot’s critical prose. Close quotation of fragments of the ‘tradition’ forms part of Eliot’s ‘individual talent’ as a critic.

Behind this screen of other voices, Eliot, with the proper decorum of modernist objectivism and impersonality, may even retreat entirely: as

Geoffrey Hartman asserts, 'Eliot quotes closely rather than reads closely'.⁶ This aphorism has a complex truth, and to explore it is the aim of this chapter. What might it mean for a critic to quote rather than to read, and to do either 'closely'? Quotations can be well selected, and can show 'discriminating taste', but these would be ambivalent virtues for Eliot, anxious as he is not to appear in a line of literary appreciators. Quotations can be transcribed with close attention, marking a scholarly care for detail but Eliot's criticism has the rare distinction of misquoting in a number of languages.⁷ The main force of Hartman's comment may, then, be negative: it characterizes Eliot's critical style as one of 'no comment'. 'Only quotation is adequate',⁸ Eliot at once grandly and humbly declares and his critical essays are indeed often marked by resistance to going beyond their quotations.

Although Hartman's comment is, in this way, acute, it also perpetuates a typical misreading of Eliot's critical strategies. For Eliot, quotations are still more often 'notable', in the sense, 'productive of notes'. Notes he repeatedly described to be one of his favoured forms for critical activity—'The workman's notes on the work form one of the most precious types of criticism'⁹—and some traits of Eliot's own voice become particularly distinct in the immediate surroundings of another's voice. It is in his 'brilliant responses to such particular instances, rather than in his apprehensions of philosophical or theological wholeness,' that he is 'at his most impressive as a critic',¹⁰ Frank Kermode writes. Kermode goes on to describe Eliot's quotations by the term 'shudder': when Eliot experiences a particular line with heightened responsiveness, he quotes—or, very often, misquotes—it, and this constitutes a shudder. Misquotation is so common on these occasions because the lines quoted bear the marks of the forceful initial experience, unmodified by second thoughts. So, despite textual evidence to the contrary, Eliot continues to 'recreate', a line from *The Revenger's Tragedy*, 'For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute', as the line that most reverberates for him: 'For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute'.¹¹ I propose here that, for Eliot's criticism, it may be better to adapt this figure so as to consider how a shudder is also a form of vibration that causes the surrounding air to vibrate. A quotation that solicits and is solicited by a shudder might deny any commentary, standing in the space of the white, unannotated margins into which its energies can dissipate before the return of discursive prose. But it is more likely that such quotations disperse their energies through the surrounding prose, jarring it a little, causing minor displacements. Eliot's prose is, in this way, rarely undisturbed by its quotations. These disturbances become notes around quotations and acquire some of the contours of a distinctive critical form. Ezra Pound reflected, in 1929, on the demise of critical

annotation: 'One of the diseases of contemporary thought (and probably running back 100 years or more) is due to the loss of making commentaries. I mean marginal commentary on important texts'.¹² Against the ruins of this commentary tradition, Eliot's annotative style of criticism seems to shore at least some fragments. How then might we understand the importance of notes, annotations, or marginal comments for Eliot's criticism?

'Eliot' and 'annotation' are hardly strangers in literary-critical history. *The Waste Land* presents one of the best-known stories—or even tragic plots—of annotation. Its early triumph began at the margins: the scattered drafts and verses were brought together by T.S. and Vivienne Eliot, with Ezra Pound, and were reformed by the technique of annotation. Eliot lends his ear to Vivienne's markings on the manuscript so that the calls of 'Good night' become the 'splendid last lines' to 'A Game of Chess': 'Goo night, Bill. Goo night, Lou, Goo night, George, Goo night'.¹³ But he resists, by marginal dialogue, any changes that would serve only 'photography': her proposed 'Somethink' for 'Something' meets his response: 'I want to avoid trying show pronunciation by spelling'.¹⁴ 'Photography' is, after all, one of Pound's dismissive notes, as he directs Eliot between the dangers of naïve realism and whimsy. (Of the latter, he deletes lines such as, 'Phantasmal gnomes, burrowing in brick and stone and steel!' with the marginal mock: 'Palmer Cox's brownies'.)¹⁵ From this emerges *The Waste Land*, formed and reformed from a heap of fragments. But the decline begins with Eliot's subsequent gesture of annotation, the endnotes supplied as 'a few more pages of printed matter' when the periodical format became the Boni and Liveright edition.¹⁶ Readers, in search of elucidation were teased with empty comment: 'A phenomenon which I have often noticed', for example, or: 'I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience'. The poem's final line, 'Shantih shantih shantih', is only darkened with the gloss: '*Shantih*. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The Peace which passeth understanding" is a feeble translation of the conduct of this word'.¹⁷ For this kind of annotation, William Empson, an advocate of notes as the relief from obscurity rather than for the purposes of obscurantism, scolded Eliot with more than usual justice. 'One must not', Empson rebukes, try to put some more into the poem through the notes, like Mr. Eliot on *Shantih*—'I suspect you are not being as impressed as you ought to be by the depths of meaning to be found in this word'.¹⁸ Bad annotations only seem to breed worse; Eliot's 'remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship' has since been the subject of many more critical annotators, many pursuing what Eliot later described as 'the wrong kind of interest' invited by his original notes.¹⁹

But what of the form, annotation, itself?—on this subject there are other, less familiar stories to be told. One is that Eliot, at the most literal level, seems, from the evidence of copies of books he owned, to have been habitually an annotator. From his marginalia as a student of philosophy, noting difficulties in Aristotle, to his blue-pencilling work as Faber editor,²⁰ his ways of being intimate with, or critical of, works include marking in their margins, across a range of occasions. Eliot's own marginalia are of interest for what they reveal both of his varieties of 'technical' experience (for example, in the methods of philosophical explication) and of his kinds of responsiveness as a reader. But do they bear on his more sustained forms of prose for public reading: reviews, essays, lectures? My argument here is that Eliot was indeed an 'annotative' critic in a broader sense: a critic whose essays could take a form closer to that of commentary than argument, based around fragments of quotation, held together by an instructive grammar ('Observe . . .', 'Compare . . .') and by judicious epithets. In fact, some of the tenacious difficulties of Eliot's style of critical thought—the balance of authority and irony; of dogmatic assertion and corrosive insinuation; of scholarly precision and obdurate misquotation—might become less forbidding if his prose is reconsidered under the aspect of 'annotation' or, in Pound's phrase, of 'marginal commentary'.

The term offers a useful way to signal a range of expository practices, which have in common certain ways of relating to their objects: particular qualities of attentiveness, focused yet fragmentary, of intimacy, and of being at once necessary yet already superfluous. In the context of Eliot's criticism these general qualities of annotation can have some distinct yield. Annotations can work, for example, as modernist fragments, shards of language that create effects of irony or multiplicity in their relation to the texts on which they comment. Defined by this relation of supplementarity ('notes to', 'notes on'), notes can offer a technical correlative for one of Eliot's consistent preoccupations and occasional criterion for great literature: 'the greatest poetry, like the greatest prose, has a doubleness; the poet is talking to you on two planes at once'.²¹ Annotations can also be forms of erudition, the vehicle for scholarly details, and so can present occasions for thought about a problem that perturbed Eliot and still puzzles his critics: the appropriate degree of 'learning' and the formal possibilities of 'pseudo-learning'.²² Another technical possibility notes offer is for the lapidary judgement: the brevity of the form permits a critical style that is both assertive and minimalist—and, in these ways, Eliotic. Comments and annotations are above all particular, occasional, varying in their forms with the forms of their occasion and, as such, they are particularly characteristic of the spectrum of responsive, collaborative, and revisionary activities by which Eliot's criticism has increasingly been defined. To think

about annotation is thus to add some further detail to the portrait of Eliot as a responsive critic, miscellaneous, even 'scrappy', in his reading and writing, rather than the author of the kind of crushingly coherent critical programme that his rhetoric (and his prefatory ambitions) would sometimes imply: a critic still concerned to turn opportunism into strategy where possible, to create a tactical readership, yet driven more by the vitality of accident, by 'chance encounters, appreciations and revulsions'.²³

This chapter considers some of the distinctive forms and functions Eliot's annotations take on particular occasions in his early criticism, from the initial reviews and *The Sacred Wood* (1920), through to his Clark Lectures on the Metaphysical Poets (1926). To explore the genealogy of Eliot's 'annotative' mode of criticism, I retrace some of his responses to notes around quotations in the criticism of Pater, Arnold, and Swinburne. But as a prologue to this main history of Eliot and his forms of critical annotation, I first consider two instances of his marginalia in the more literal sense: annotations in his copies of the texts of both his 'Perfect Critic', Aristotle, and perhaps his most 'Imperfect Critic', Pater.

II. A SYMMETRICAL EDUCATION

'The notes to *The Waste Land* are a joke,' one of Eliot's critics concludes, 'but they suggest that he would be quite willing to be edited like an ancient classic'.²⁴ Even if this is not quite his wish, Eliot was certainly alert to what such a version of annotation would involve from acquaintance, during his Oxford studies (1914–15), with classical commentary on Aristotle. Eliot's copy of *De Anima*—Aristotle's enquiry into the soul, self-consciousness, imagination, and into the motions of the five elements (fire, air, water, earth, ether)—is dense with annotations, which, in turn, draw on many past commentators.²⁵ But did Eliot take in earnest this training in annotating the classics, or was it merely more 'bogus scholarship'? As Pound was to recall, Eliot could easily be persuaded to exchange his Aristotelian education for some more ironic forms of comment:

So Mr. Eliot came to London, with all the disadvantages of a . . . symmetrical education . . . and dutifully joined the Aristotelian Society [. . .] And he took me to a meeting. And a man with a beard down to here . . . spoke for twenty minutes on a point in *Aristotle*; and another with a beard down to *here* rose up and refuted him . . . And I wanted *air*. So we were on the portico when old G.R.S. Mead came up, and catching sight of me said 'I didn't expect to see *you* here'; whereat Eliot with perfect decorum and suavity said,

'Oh, he's not here as a phil-*os*-opher;

He's here as an an-thro-pologist.'²⁶

The Aristotelian Society for the Systematic Study of Philosophy had, since its foundation in 1879 been a forum for scholars, men of letters, and interested amateurs concerned with 'the close and conscientious study of all questions on which philosophy or metaphysics could be said to bear'.²⁷ To join it was dutiful for Eliot as a young poet-critic arriving from Harvard by way of Oxford, still completing a thesis on F.H. Bradley, and still not yet resolved against a career in academic philosophy. It was, in another sense, dutiful of him to escape from papers to portico, in the company of Pound, who was eager to disrupt some of Eliot's symmetrical disadvantages with the harder lines and more turbulent energies of Imagist or Vorticist experiment. So, this anecdote marks one small shift in allegiance as Eliot began the transition from student commenting in the margins of the texts of classical philosophy and modern Idealism to author of *The Waste Land* and its annotations.²⁸

But first, in some greater detail, what were these experiences of Aristotelian annotation from which Eliot appears to have turned away? His copy of *De Anima* carries this note on the flyleaf, as cipher to its annotations:

Copy used in 1914–15 with notes made during R. G. Collingwood's *explication de texte*, and extracts from Pacius' commentary on the *De Anima*, which Joachim made me read. T.S. Eliot Presented to John Hayward Esqre 3.x.51.²⁹

The marginalia to which this refers range widely. There are prompts to scepticism ('not to be taken seriously'); quibbles with the available translations ('In the 1st place means segments, 2ndly faculties. Hicks thinks it means faculties all through'); elliptical fragments that are half-translation, half-comment ('25. A corpse cannot be said to have the potentiality of life').³⁰ Oxford, at the time of Eliot's studies there, did not have an Aristotelian Society to debate such points. In the early 1880s, one had grown out of the Old Mortality (the society of Pater, Swinburne, T.H. Green, and others),³¹ but it had lapsed in 1908 and would not be resurrected until 1923.³² Eliot's grounding in Aristotle was nonetheless thorough. As he records in letters to one of his Harvard tutors, J.H. Woods, he was attending a number of lecture series: Collingwood's on *De Anima*, H.H. Joachim's on the *Ethics*, and those of J.A. Smith on the *Logic*. In addition to this, Eliot was discussing Aristotle at Smith's 'Informals' and in Joachim's supervisions on the *Posterior Analytics*.³³ The aim of these lectures and discussions continued to be, in the spirit of the nineteenth century *Literae Humaniores* degree, 'a linguistic understanding and a literary appreciation of the texts', as well as an understanding of their continued relevance 'to contemporary philosophical debate'.³⁴ There was also a markedly strong emphasis on how 'to read an Aristotelian text

closely but, interestingly for understanding Eliot, some differences of opinion prevailed as to whether this meant that commentators should be used as protagonists in the interpretive argument or 'only in an ancillary role'.³⁵ Collingwood, for example, describes a practice of close reading that dissolves commentarial labour:

Over and over again, I would return to a familiar passage whose meaning I thought I knew—had it not been expounded by numerous learned commentators, and were they not more or less agreed about it?—to find that, under this fresh scrutiny, the old interpretation melted away and some quite different meaning began to take form.³⁶

But use of past commentators was, by others, encouraged—as Eliot's remarks suggest, in another letter to Woods: 'The *Posterior Analytics* I find very difficult. I accompany it with the commentary of Zabarella [1582], which is remarkably good, and very minute, so that this reading takes most of my time [...] J.A. Smith also said that he owed most of his knowledge of Aristotle chiefly to Zabarella.'³⁷ Eliot's marginalia are a practical testimony to this faith in past commentators, with frequent notes such as the following: 'Simp. Takes this to refer to the Dialecticians. Wrong. It refers to those for whom the Natural is in distinguished: the Philosophers + the Mathematicians' (where 'Simp.' refers to Simplicius of Cilicia, c. 490–c. 560 CE, a Neoplatonist writer of commentaries on Aristotle). Such marginalia offer more evidence that 'like any ironist Eliot worked best with received ideas'.³⁸ But Eliot's particular admiration for the commentarial techniques of his tutor, Joachim, did extend to both methods: the way in which he 'sticks pretty closely to the text', as well as his 'abundance of cross references'.³⁹

At this stage, Eliot appeared to be the very model of the Oxford 'Greats' student—or so Bertrand Russell implies in a letter to Ottoline Morrell, in which he gave the following sketch of the student he had previously met at Harvard:

My pupil Eliot was there: the only one who is civilized, and he is ultra-civilized, knows his classics very well, is familiar with all French literature from Villon to Vildrach, and is altogether impeccable in his taste but has no vigour or life or enthusiasm. He is going to Oxford where I expect he will be very happy.⁴⁰

Eliot was not, however, 'very happy'. Although he found the Oxford methods of close reading 'fine', 'subtle', they had too little 'vigour' even for him. 'I do not think,' Eliot wrote, 'that anyone would come to Oxford to seek for anything very original or subtle in philosophy, but the scholarship is very fine'; 'I should hate', he added, 'to have to subsist *only* on the Oxford

sort of philosophy.⁴¹ So Eliot surfaces, with Pound, for 'air', observing with rather cool irony this 'impeccable' philosophy, with its versions of 'reading, explaining, and commenting upon the text'.⁴²

This ambivalent experience of Oxford philosophy may be the impetus for the unexpected term in Eliot's cipher to his *De Anima* annotations: '*explication de texte*'. Eliot returned often to the problem of what to call his critical activities: 'appreciation' was tempting but generally too Paterian; 'judgement' he described as the recourse of 'the dogmatic, or lazy, mind';⁴³ 'interpretation' was too coercive ('Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret'⁴⁴). Eliot could resolve on some more local terms of approval—'comparison' and 'analysis', for example—but for broader descriptions of method he struggled to find more than uneasy compromises. *Explication de texte* is also infelicitous: it has a certain taint of association with methods 'positivist rather than critical in perspective',⁴⁵ and has the ring of a classificatory term that does not imply participation. Eliot, who at no point makes use of this term for his own practices of critical reading, perhaps remains the anthropologist of such philosophical commentary.⁴⁶ So, if Eliot's Oxford apprenticeship in 'minute' responsiveness in some respects provides foundations for his subsequent practice as a reader and critic who writes, with intimacy, around particular quotations, then it is to a significant degree as negative instruction: these studies teach Eliot that literary-critical reading needs to recover a more positive sense of 'annotation' from the narrow workings of *explication de texte*.

If these kinds of concern belonged to the margins of Eliot's 'perfect critic', Aristotle, then his marginalia to the prose of Walter Pater—Eliot's predecessor in moving from the Oxford world of *Lit. Hum.*, with its study of classical texts, to the criticism of vernacular ones—only confirmed Pater's position as Eliot's favourite bad example. On one occasion of annotation, Eliot was kind to Pater. These lines do not survive his marginal revisions of *The Waste Land*:

Fresca was baptised in a soapy sea
Of Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee.⁴⁷

On other occasions, Pater was a less fortunate object of Eliot's annotation. On the front flyleaf of his copy of the first edition of *Studies in the Renaissance*, Eliot remarks: 'The notes in pencil, on the margin of the Conclusion, were made by me, comparing the text with the later edition.' These marginal notes represent Eliot's purest version of marking on a text: they simply note the revisions that Pater had introduced in the third edition, in which the briefly suppressed conclusion was restored—copyist's work, including no comment, nothing that Pater did not write

in his own self-annotations.⁴⁸ Eliot even refrains from adding to Pater's prose the kind of 'corrections'—modulations of phrase, qualifications of statement—that seem so habitual that he tends to mark them on prose that will not be changed by his changes. One of David Cecil's lectures, for example, *Reading as one of the Fine Arts* (1949), attracted from Eliot this kind of attentive and annotative (if not exactly 'fine') reading.⁴⁹ Alongside Cecil's term 'conditioning', he notes, 'a coarse + vulgar word'; against Cecil's list, 'faith, hope, charity, humility, patience, and most of the other Christian virtues', Eliot adds: 'name them'. Here, the marginal tone moves between the schoolteacher's slight scolding and the Faber copyeditor's precision but at no point expects an audience. Such notes mark Eliot's private experiences of absorbing yet repudiating as he reads.

Pater is still more emphatically, for Eliot, one of the people 'whom one fights against and who absorb one all the same'.⁵⁰ Yet Eliot refrains from any quite so explicit editorial condescension in his annotations. Where these notes acquire critical force may be in this very refusal to comment. Eliot once owned, 'I can never re-read any of my own prose writings without acute embarrassment: I shirk the task',⁵¹ yet here he takes the measure of all of Pater's 'third thoughts', and the effect is very much one of 'acute embarrassment'. Pater, for example, rethinks his choice of verb in the following sentence: 'An undefinable taint of death had clung always about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself stricken by mortal disease'. For 'stricken' (1868 version), the 1888 revision reads 'smitten'. Eliot's marginalia have the effect of casting a rather coldly appraising eye over the refinements of a stylist who could, after twenty years, return to a such a sentence and trouble to make an 'improvement' of this kind. Annotative intimacy is not necessarily 'appreciation'—to take one of the rare words that Eliot sometimes consented to share with Pater.⁵²

Somewhere between these extremes, Eliot's criticism shapes its own forms of marginal commentary that are neither mere gasps of appreciation nor assiduous close work in the margins of texts. His marginalia to the models for critical perfection (Aristotle) and imperfection (Pater) that stand behind his prose are, then, different forms of apprenticeship in 'closeness' to the words of others. The main activity in these cases, however, remains that of annotation, fragmentary and brief. What I now explore is what happens to these annotative forms when Eliot's medium is the sustained prose of critical essays, where quotation becomes a more active gesture, summoning words not otherwise present, and where 'notes' blend into continuous argument. Moving from classical commentary to literary scholarship, from Bradleyean metaphysics to the metaphysical poetry of Crashaw and Donne, how did Eliot come to understand, and to use, forms of annotation?

III. TOUCHSTONE, SHUDDER

'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal'.⁵³ Eliot's now famous aphorism from *The Sacred Wood* was first launched in an essay that was a methodical example of such maturity. Eliot uses the occasion of his review of A.H. Cruickshank's *Philip Massinger* to launch the argument that Massinger 'borrows from Shakespeare a good deal', conducting this by means of a series of paired quotations from the two writers—pairs that are 'stolen' directly from the Appendix to Cruickshank's study.⁵⁴ 'Let us profit', Eliot instructs, 'by some of the quotations with which he has provided us'. Eliot attaches to these paired quotations some brief notes drawing out the contrastive principle of Cruickshank's expository form. In this way, by well-chosen epithets the raw material of an *apparatus criticus* becomes a full critical commentary:

Massinger: Thou didst not borrow of Vice her indirect,

Crooked, and abject means.

Shakespeare: God knows, my son,

By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways

I met this crown.

Here, again, Massinger gives the general forensic statement, Shakespeare the particular image. 'Indirect crook'd' is forceful in Shakespeare; a mere pleonasm in Massinger. 'Crook'd ways' is a metaphor; Massinger's phrase only the ghost of a metaphor.⁵⁵

'The difference e.g. between blue and red,' Eliot's tutor, Joachim writes, 'is for us at first just a difference. We feel it, experience it immediately, and there seems no more to be said' (*The Nature of Truth*, 1906).⁵⁶ Cruickshank's method asserts, with scholarly positivism, the same about the difference between Massinger and Shakespeare. But, as Joachim extends his argument about the immediacy of knowledge to say that, 'as knowledge grows, we can and do mediate it', so Eliot mediates between his quotations: "'Drowsy syrop" is', he elaborates in a typical note between quotations, 'a condensation of meaning frequent in Shakespeare, but rare in Massinger'—and, in brief phrases such as this, the contrast is given critical point.⁵⁷ So Eliot steals to change; to add marginal comments to quotations, so that they become literary-critical descriptions rather than scholarly evidence—an early version of a gesture that was to become typical of his reflections on critical method. For understanding this gesture more fully, however, it is perhaps not memorable aphorisms but rather the quieter sorts of expository phrase in their surroundings that give the clue. Take the phrase, 'Let us notice', of which Eliot is fond. This phrase is

typical of the impersonal voice of scholarly protocol, poised between command and entreaty, that Eliot, for all his distinctions between critical and scholarly forms of note, habitually imitates as he introduces his 'thefts' from the poets. This was a tactic for which Pound, when engaged in similar practices in his own prose, felt the need to apologize:

Compare (pardon the professorial tone whereof I seem unable to divest myself in discussing these matters), compare the anonymous rather unskilled work in the translation of *Sixte Idillia*, with Marlow's [sic] version of *Amorum*, lib. Iii, 13.⁵⁸

Here Pound apologizes for a 'tone' but what sounds most 'professorial' is the form: the introduction of a pair of illustrative quotations with an instruction, 'Compare'. Eliot, without the apology, makes much use of such professorial forms ('Observe', 'Compare', 'Let us'). They play a part in his concern, from these earliest essays onwards, to work out just what kinds and degrees of imitation and theft from scholarship lead to 'mature' criticism. It is, as his criticism across the next decade betrays, a difficult proportion to achieve.

In addressing the university audience for his 1926 Clark Lectures, Eliot performs the position of the poet-critic, who cannot aspire to being a scholar, pointing out 'in common modesty that these lectures will not continue or develop the work of scholarship'; that, with due humility, his attitude is 'that of a craftsman who has attempted for eighteen years to make English verses, studying the work of dead artisans who have made better verses'.⁵⁹ What authority he has is that of the practical (practitioner) critic, Eliot reflects, and throughout the lectures he bows to more reputable sources; 'Professor Grierson's admirable and almost impeccable anthology', for example.⁶⁰ But, even as Eliot bows, he insinuates an 'almost'. In spite of his rhetoric, Eliot is often at variance from Grierson's texts and notes and, where they are not quite 'impeccable', readily sets up his own alternatives with all the apparent trappings of scholarly judgement. For example, for Donne's 'The good-morrow', Grierson's annotations cite Aquinas and Coleridge as illuminating parallels. Eliot, after stating his preference for an alternative parallel—with Racine—concludes that Donne posits 'a distinction, a disjunction, between soul and body of which I think you will find no expression whatever in the *trecento*, and for which I do not think you will find much authority in Aquinas'.⁶¹ Grierson's notes, to which he pretends deference, are in practice repudiated; against the grain of his own declaration, Eliot does seem interested in the quibbles of scholarship. But, with the offhand 'no expression whatever', he overplays his hand, earning a gentle warning from one of his most challenging correspondents about the lectures, Mario Praz, who urges

Eliot towards greater consistency about whether he is taking the approach of the scholar or the craftsman. This sweeping statement about the *trecento*, Praz reminds him, lacks scholarly rigour and a 'little inaccuracy of interpretation, which remains unnoticed when slurred over in the course of a lecture, may wreck the whole work, when insisted upon and magnified in a book'.⁶²

This was a warning to which Eliot would have been ready to attend; the criticism of Praz was one of his measures for the persuasively literary-critical rather than prohibitively scholarly treatment of the metaphysical poets. In one of his reviews for the *TLS*, Eliot explicitly opposed Praz's merits to the flaws of a critic who, for him, was evidence for why not to exchange the craftsman's insights for the scholar's information: 'What Signor Praz performs with greater care, in his study of Donne, is a correction of some of the excesses of that scholarly and standard book, "Les Doctrines medievals chez Donne" by Miss Mary Ramsay'.⁶³ Eliot's best epithet for Ramsay's work, 'thoroughness', is very faint in its praise. She was, like Cruickshank, not to be admired yet still to be stolen from for the purposes of literary criticism: Eliot could disdain Ramsay's scholarly notes yet still make unembarrassed use of them—'happily', Eliot remarks, 'her documentation is so complete that it provides itself the means for us to qualify some of these conclusions.' This, for Eliot, is a typical manoeuvre: literary-critical comments depend on scholarly notes yet despise them. Eliot sometimes pretends that he is not opposed to 'thoroughness', only short of time for it—as here, for example, in one of his most characteristic prefatory tropes (that the book version would be much more authoritative, only for the book version never to transpire):

It is the intention of the author to rewrite these lectures as a book. Beyond the obvious alterations—the conversational style and the constant repetitions to be removed—the whole argument is to be reformed; assertions must be proved; much detail of fact and authority must be added.⁶⁴

But to introduce 'much detail of fact and authority' would, in fact, require Eliot to lower some of his defences, including the well-erected barrier of argument about the superiority of craftsman's notes to excessive scholarly annotations.

While refusing the position of the scholarly annotator, Eliot remained firm that it was important to put quotations to greater use than mere appreciative mention. Eliot remains anxious that his criticism does not come to resemble the aestheticism of Pater, who, as Edward Thomas wrote in a critical study of 1913, 'could make a work of art by a cento of quotations, and in certain essays might appear to be doing hardly more'.⁶⁵ In this, Pater comes dangerously close to the popular nineteenth

century anthology form of 'gleanings', with their typically coy titles and subtitles—'Salad for the Solitary', 'A Melange of Excerpta'—and baroque chapter headings: 'miscellanea, collectanea, scrip-scrapologia, olla podrida, hotch-potch, omnium-gatherum'.⁶⁶ Eliot is eager to avoid the use of quotation as miscellany, or as melodic interlude, or as framed image, rather than as reasoned example, well-surrounded by comment. The kind of quotation he disdains is not entirely absent from his prose. He, for example, gives this introduction to some lines from Dante: 'before analyzing the speech of Donne let me leave in your memory, for the sake of contrast, one image of Dante'.⁶⁷ Similarly, of an extract from Crashaw's 'Book and Picture', he declares any notes largely redundant: the images are 'fused beyond analysis and perfected beyond criticism. This is the ultimate literary expression of the religious feeling of that strange period of sensual religious intensity'.⁶⁸ On another occasion, however, he chides Crashaw for images that are not so completely realized, appearing more like 'a string of pearls, a garden of beauties' than a fully metaphysical conceit, and these figures—the string of pearls, the garden of beauties—linger, like a Paterian brain-wave,⁶⁹ pointing to what Eliot does not want his quotations to be. In these trailing images is a hint that 'cento' criticism was a residual anxiety against which Eliot had to define his sense of being a modernist critic, not a decadent appreciator, while still making significant use of quotation.

Pater is not the only literary-critical predecessor behind Eliot's anxiety about the function, for criticism, of quotation: Matthew Arnold's 'touchstone' method of criticism by eminent examples and counterexamples also seems to be in the background of Eliot's self-consciousness about the quotation of single lines. Quotation is not, in the general texture of Arnold's critical prose, a particularly striking feature. Its use can be anonymous, brief, and syntactic in a way that is foreign to Eliot's style, for example in carrying through, with elegant economy, this wider suggestion:

Perhaps the life of their beautiful Greece could not afford to its poets all the
fullness of varied experience, all that power of emotion, which
 '... the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world'
affords to the poet of after-times.⁷⁰

Wordsworth is neither subject nor example here but rather the conjunction. But Arnold's 'touchstone' method of reading—explained here in his Preface to T.H. Ward's *The English Poets*—does make distinctive use of the practice of quotation:

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to

apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently.⁷¹

High poetic quality was not the only marker for Arnold's quotations: when considering its function not just for the general reader but rather in a setting particularly concerned with what will 'do us most good', the school book, Arnold also used negative touchstones, examples of the lowest poetic quality. For example, in his comments on Stopford Brooke's *A Primer of English Literature*, Arnold addresses his concerns about the author's high praise of Gray by arguing for the use of negative touchstones: instances of Gray's occasional 'false style' should, he urges, also be highlighted to ward against the assumption of uniform excellence. Nor is Shakespeare immune, with this verdict from Arnold on one of the quotations the primer offers:

'Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapp'd in proof
Confronted him with self-comparisons—'

There is but one name for such writing as that, if Shakespeare had signed it a thousand times,—it is detestable. And it is too frequent in Shakespeare. In a book, therefore, where every sentence should be sure, simple, and solid, not requiring mental reservations nor raising questions, we ought not to speak of Shakespeare as 'altogether, from end to end, an artist'.⁷²

All this places Arnold, as one critic has suggested, steadfastly on the 'stony' side of 'touch-stone'. 'To avoid the personal fallacy,' this critic argues, 'Arnold does not make "touch" primary. Rather, stone dominates: "Excellence dwells among rocks hardly accessible," he writes in an essay on Milton'.⁷³ The point here is that Arnold's quotations aim at presenting a set of unquestionably 'high' (and low) examples, rather than a subjective set of 'gleanings' by personal taste: criticism by 'fact' not by 'sense of fact' to borrow Pater's distinction.⁷⁴ But borrowing from Pater is very much to the point here: this quotation from Arnold's essay on Milton already unsettles our sense of the 'stony' version of quotation he practices—as its original setting emphasizes:

Excellence is not common and abundant; on the contrary, as the Greek poet long ago said, excellence dwells among rocks hardly accessible, and a man must almost wear his heart out before he can reach her.⁷⁵

This reverberates, if unwittingly (or unwillingly) against one of the best-known sentences of the critic on the side of 'touch' rather than 'stone',

Pater, whose vampiric Mona Lisa is 'older than the rocks among which she sits'.⁷⁶ The reverberation suggests how, although Arnold's excellence among the rocks is not Pater's, their forms of quotation do have some common qualities that merit consideration against the forms that Eliot establishes in his criticism. That their forms of misquotation are unlike has been succinctly argued: 'Pater's misquotations are the rewriting of his authors so that they say special Paterian things. Arnold's misquotations [...] are the rewriting of his authors so that they say unspecial things'.⁷⁷ Arnold will, for example, remove the slight surprise of Wordsworth's almost tautology, 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life', by misquoting: 'On God, on Nature, and on human life'. Pater, on the other hand, will make near tautology where there was none, turning Shakespeare's line, 'Frightening her pale-fac'd villages with war?', into, 'Frightening her pale-fac'd visages with war?' But, is it also the case that, in their forms of quotation (and in these forms as models or counterexamples for Eliot's practice), there are some strong grounds of similarity: a preference for the emphatic, unexamined example that amounts to faith in the demonstrable excellence of brief quotations, yet also a sense that this value remains mysterious, 'hardly accessible', granting the critic the role of curator for rare specimens.

The touchstone method can be seen at work in Arnold's essay, 'Maurice de Guérin', in which he argues that '[t]he grand power of poetry is its interpretative power', glossing this as its power of 'so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them', a sense by which we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them'. His long sequence of quotations begins with this:

It is not Linnaeus, or Cavendish, or Cuvier who gives us the true sense of animals, or water, or plants, who seizes their secret for us, who makes us participate in their life; it is Shakespeare with his

'daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take

The winds of March with beauty;

It is Wordsworth, with his

'voice . . . heard

In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,

Breaking the silence of the seas

Among the farthest Hebrides;⁷⁸

'It is not Linnaeus,' Arnold says, who can give us a 'true sense' of objects and their relations, yet his own process adopts something of the Linnaean example. He assembles related specimens under the category

‘poetry with interpretative power’; examples of language that relieves our ‘bewildered and oppressed’ sense of objects, as much as they resist this by refusing any systematic classification by annotation. Eliot also takes up a relation of resistance yet adoption when a version of this sequence from Arnold finds its way into his own meditations on poets and objects, in the essay, ‘Swinburne as Poet’:

It is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object. When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find always that the object was not there—only the word. Compare

Snowdrops that plead for pardon

And pine for fright

with the daffodils that come before the swallow dares. The snowdrop of Swinburne disappears, the daffodil of Shakespeare remains. The swallow of Shakespeare remains in the verse in *Macbeth*; the bird of Wordsworth

Breaking the silence of the seas

Remains; the swallow of ‘*Itylus*’ disappears.⁷⁹

Eliot has, it seems, absorbed from Arnold not only certain touchstones but also an expository sequence, the larger movement of a critical paragraph. Eliot, perhaps with the streamlining effect of memory, keeps his circle tighter: flowers then birds, opening and resolving with Swinburne and absorbs details (such as the quotation from *The Winter’s Tale*, ‘daffodils that come before the swallow dares’) into his prose, with an effect between quotation and allusion. What is striking is that Eliot’s quotations are staged in such a way that they are no longer a series of examples of ‘high poetic quality’ but instead a concatenated circle, with the words of the poets sometimes distinct from, sometimes absorbed into, the surrounding critical commentary. The effect is to express something of the hallucinatory quality of objects and meanings that Eliot finds in Swinburne’s verse: ‘Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified’—Swinburne’s language does not.⁸⁰ Nor does Eliot’s—he sometimes fuses, sometimes distinguishes his objects from his commentary—but his annotative critical forms, around these quotations, place him rather differently to Arnold, with his taxonomic mode of quotation. Eliot, by contrast, is at once a detached observer and, by the intimacy of his responsive language, a participant in the rhythm of Swinburne’s bewildering style. The details of this difference may be minor in what remains a moment of unexpected proximity between the practices of quotation of Arnold and Eliot; almost as small as the marginal marking to which Eliot subjects Pater’s ‘Conclusion’, and yet, as with Pater’s text, they are significant: they suggest how Eliot’s annotative style is formed by, yet re-forms, the Arnoldian touchstone.

Pater's quotations, if they were to be considered by this same figure of the 'stone', would have a high polish; a sheen captured by a phrase with which, in an essay on Joachim du Bellay, he introduces a quotation: 'Here is a perfectly crystallized example'.⁸¹ Pater's prose generally follows a rhythm of endless refinements that stops short, as Christopher Ricks suggests, of superlatives: while Pater uses 'finer' excessively, he avoids 'finest'; this would bring satiety and so a premature end to further refinement.⁸² But this restraint assumes that such moments exist, and that to withhold from them is partly to fear their capacity for exhaustion—a conclusion that intimates that Pater was, in a strange way, knowing about bathos. On occasion, Pater does, however, reach towards a superlative, and this often seems to come in conjunction with a moment of quotation. Of some lines from du Bellay he writes: 'That has, *in the highest degree*, the qualities, the value, of the whole Pleiad school of poetry, of the whole phase of taste from which that school derives'.⁸³ Such quotations from Pater remain 'rare', from the pressure only to be 'rare', to take the epithet he matches to his quotation from Milton ('Satan's prostrate bulk' to 'that sea-beast | Leviathan'): 'So masterly a handling of the figures which usage and taste prescribe to learned writers is rare indeed'.⁸⁴ Nor can Pater, as the following example suggests, afford to continue very far into commentary after quotation:

When a lyric begins with the splendid lines,
 Love still has something of the sea
 From whence his mother rose,

the further development of that song is already fixed and its knell is rung—to the last line there is no escaping from the dazzling influences that presided over the first. Yet to carry out such a figure in detail, as Sir Charles Sedley set himself to do, tarnishes the sudden glory of the opening.⁸⁵

The 'knell is rung' for annotation too. Pater, whose openings are often marked with the shy man's tendency to 'awkward abruptness',⁸⁶ comes to an equally abrupt end; after the splendid opening, any further words seem tarnished.

Sometimes Eliot can seem, in this fashion, Paterian: the immediacy of a quotation substitutes for 'close reading', or even resists it. There can be a strong sense in Eliot's commentaries around quotations of what Joachim called the 'residuum opaque to mediating thought'. Sometimes this is an opacity that bears the marks of the Freudian unconscious: as Eliot famously remarks, there is, for example, 'some stuff' in *Hamlet* that 'the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art'; you 'cannot point to it in the speeches', nor is it 'in any quotations that we might select'.⁸⁷ But, more often, this prose shows a formal and critical anxiety not to stop at 'cento' criticism of the Paterian kind. This anxiety does not,

however, seem to translate into a fuller practice of analytical commentary or practical criticism in the exegetical mould that Richards recommended and Empson practised. E.M.W. Tillyard touches on the possible influence of Eliot on practical criticism: 'the change of taste typified and promoted by Eliot, the reaction from Romantic emotionalism to more cerebral types of poetry, fostered the urge towards practical criticism because it directed attention to a kind of literature for which minute exegesis was especially apt'.⁸⁸ In some ways Eliot may indeed have 'fostered the urge' for 'minute exegesis', but this is not equivalent to practising it in his own criticism. This may, then, be where Hartman's characterization—Eliot 'quotes closely', but does not 'read closely'—finds its truth: the force of the term 'annotation' for Eliot's criticism may be in defining his position on the cusp of different forms of critical comment around quotations, between appreciation and exegesis. In the final section of this chapter, I explore this position, with its implications for the development of modernist critical practice, through some close attention to Eliot's forms of literary judgement around quotations—in particular, to the degree to which they are marked by immediacy versus the mediations of second (or even third) thoughts.

IV. FROM IMMEDIACY TO THIRD THOUGHTS

'This is the wrong note. Elsewhere we have the right', Eliot writes, in a brusque transition between two quotations.⁸⁹ Eliot is at his most Arnoldian in his frequent use of quotations as superlative examples, for which the function of the surrounding comments is to announce their excellence. 'Here there is no flaw, no criticism can be cast upon the verse,' Eliot writes after some lines from 'A Valediction'.⁹⁰ Of the last two stanzas of Donne's 'The Blossome', he exclaims: 'one would go to gaol for ten years if it would help to write as good lines as these!'⁹¹ He exclaims equally over quotations that are exemplary failures: these make the successful lines stand out in relief. Good scholarship, Eliot argues, 'bestows a method, rather than a judgement',⁹² and in his turn away from scholarly forms of quotation and comment, towards those of criticism, Eliot takes up the task of adding in the judgement. He is often more than usually dogmatic in the environs of quotations, where his language tends to be terse, laconic, even utilitarian. A quotation in Eliot's prose can still be a 'bewildered minute', offered without the assumption that it can be explained,⁹³ but a note of dogmatism about its probable meaning and value is often sounded. Sometimes this rhetoric does not only presume consensus but also anticipates—and forestalls—objection. After a quote from Jonson, Eliot

comments: 'the words fall with as determined beat as if they were the will of the morose Dictator himself. *You may say*: merely invective, but . . . *And you may say*: rhetoric; but . . .'. Of a passage of syntax in Massinger, he defies the reader not to find excellence: '*It is impossible to deny* the masterly construction of this passage . . . *It is impossible to deny* the originality'.⁹⁴ Here, quotation takes on the mantle of bossy positivism, presenting the reader with 'undeniable' evidence for the accompanying critical comments. Eliot's deliberately laconic lawgiving around his quotations can on such occasions appear both overly critical (judgemental) and insufficiently critical (judicious).

But this is an image of Eliot at his most starkly instructive. Normally the shudder of responsiveness is stronger and unsettles any complacent pronouncements. It is not, however, if we return to Kermode's word and develop its implications, always a 'shudder'. There are quite a number of varieties of motivating emotion behind Eliot's notes to quotations that differ from the 'shudder', and for which a wider taxonomy would help: the grimace, the frown, the shrug, the wince, the raised eyebrow, and perhaps also the blush. There is, as implied by Kermode's choice of the word 'shudder', a slightly dramatized, oratorical dimension to the way Eliot stages his scenes of quotation and commentary, which invites physiological figures. Eliot's tone in commenting on his quotations ranges widely, sometimes hitting a less sure note than on other occasions, but 'shudder' only works well for the occasions on which there is a sense of being powerfully, if a little inadvertently, moved; it is, then, too strong a term for the occasions on which Eliot sounds unmoved, except to mild contempt or surprise, by the badness of a poet or a line:

Thus Rupert Brooke, after a number of lines which show a really amazing felicity and command of language, in 'The Fish,' descends to:

O world of lips, O world of laughter,
Where hope is fleet and thought flies after.⁹⁵

This is not a shudder. 'Amazing' does double work, not only as description of previous 'felicity' but also, by implication, as transferred epithet for the subsequent sharp descent. Yet there is no frisson here; the expression is somewhere between being coolly sardonic and heavily condescending. It could be said that, while Eliot's criticism develops a varied repertoire of negative comment around 'bad' quotations, giving the subtlest different shades and nuances of disapproval, 'shuddering' remains relatively rare. Nor does the term always work for positive examples, for when Eliot quotes and comments to mark the profound effect of some words (in particular, their profound typicality for the author in question). It does, however, have more scope here. A shudder is, for example, the yield of his

comparison between the scene of Cleopatra's death in Shakespeare's presentation and in Dryden's; it is the visceral quality of the response to the slight differences ('Ah, soldier!', for example) that make all the difference. Yet there are many other shades of presentation of quotations, from complacency (implying 'this is very good, and that's all I have to say'), to a suggestion of the sublime ('this pierces'), a sudden and shaking form of responsiveness to some sense of an event or shift in atmosphere—and these challenge the term with their variousness.

What, then, might be some of the gestures of Eliot's other forms of responsiveness around quotations? It seems more grimace than shudder when Eliot quotes Donne's 'The Extasie' with the comment, 'a very beautiful poem indeed, begins with one of the most hideous mixed figures of speech in the language'.⁹⁶ This becomes an affectation of a grimace, some critical playacting, when Eliot continues: 'the simile comes into sharp collision with a metaphor—the bank is pregnant [...] I pass over the question of the beauty of obstetrical metaphors in general: they were in the taste of the epoch, which is not ours'—although behind the moue seems to linger a real hint of distaste. Around Cowley's 'My Dyet', Eliot's forehead creases sternly: 'observe the cleverness and the vapidty'.⁹⁷ It seems to be with a raised eyebrow that Eliot prepares us, with the following words, for a quotation from Cleveland: 'What are we to say to this, of John Cleveland:'⁹⁸ which is followed by a shrug: 'A stanza which, I admit, I have never taken the trouble to understand.' Further into Eliot's criticism of 'The Extasie', grimace and mock grimace undergo a change of expression:

The blemish of this quatrain is first, that the figure of the hands as cemented is not left to itself, but is rubbed over by the more complicated image of grafting. Second, the 'begetting' of 'pictures' is a figure which violates nature. And third, the poet cannot keep his mind on the ecstasy, but must needs be comparing the state already with physical union in the ordinary sense.⁹⁹

Eliot is embarrassed. He can put up the barriers of organized critical commentary around this quotation ('first... Second... And third') but figures still do disconcerting things; the poet's figure of 'the hands' works its way into the critic's responsive, too responsive, language so that figuration is described as being 'rubbed over'. The attempt to admonish, by the lines of a frown, the poet's wandering from 'ecstasy' to 'physical union in the ordinary sense', comes to look more like a blush; a blush for Donne's blemish and for Eliot's own handling, or 'rubbing over' by way of commentary. Sometimes the sense of strain between the physiology of the example and Eliot's pedagogical rhetoric can seem too much, for example, in this moment of analysis from the Clark Lectures:

Even when we come across lines like:

There's a plumber laying pipes in my guts, it scalds,
we must not allow ourselves to forget the rhetorical basis any more than when
we read:

Come, let us march against the powers of heaven
And set black streamers in the firmament
To signify the slaughter of the gods.¹⁰⁰

Here, Eliot fails to let work what we might call, in this taxonomy, 'the chuckle', and so, while the point may be sound, the delivery comes over awkwardly. This is not lecturing as what Empson called 'a fairly good music-hall show', unless Eliot is the poker-faced, clumsy-footed comedian.¹⁰¹ But for the most part, physiological figures are tempting for these notes around quotations precisely because they seem to offer powerful critical forms in which judging and feeling are not dissociated.

To consider what Eliot is doing in the variegated forms of response immediately around his quotations in less physiological, more philosophical terms, we can turn again to the vocabulary of Joachim, the strong influence of whose philosophy of immediate knowledge lingers in Eliot's criticism for sometime. 'The Universe is one', Joachim writes, 'but its unity is expressed and revealed in an infinity of individual differences, which retain for the finite mind their 'irrational flavour', their 'immediacy''. What rescues Eliot's judgements from excessive dogmatism is their sense of this 'infinity of individual differences', often conveyed by his habit of measuring particular qualities (good or bad) against each other rather than imputing absolute values. It is, in this way, one of the most characteristic of Eliotic strategies to introduce contrastive quotation as demonstration of what particular authors 'could not do'. Eliot can, with calm assurance, quote a line from Marlowe as 'something which Shakespeare could not do, and which he could not have understood'.¹⁰² But Eliot is then just as assured in demonstrating what Shakespeare could do by virtue of what others could not:

there are kinds of figures of speech, of which it would be tempting to multiply examples, which abound in Shakespeare and which would be impossible for Donne, which are of the highest rank. To take one which I have often quoted from *Anthony and Cleopatra*—

She looks like sleep
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

You would not say that this had the same rational necessity as an image of Dante, but necessary it is, in some other way; and it is an image of which Dante never would have thought.¹⁰³

The relative scale of values here tends to shade the rhetoric of relation with the reader away from one that is coercive, towards one that seeks to persuade through particular demonstrations. How persuasive it is of course remains in question: Eliot's poets have, for him, this kind of certain distinctiveness, which, if pressed in any more analytical way, can seem to have the 'irrational flavour' to which Joachim referred. His comments may only carry conviction with the reader when the surrounding circumstances of the prose encourage us to trust these judgements: what is outside of the annotations may matter more than what Eliot compresses into these taut, immediate forms.

Eliot also shares Joachim's conclusion that 'intelligence' (one of Eliot's preferred terms for critical qualities) 'attains to truth in so far as its mediation progresses, and not in so far as its progress is barred'.¹⁰⁴ This conviction gives shape to some of his more elaborate attempts to test comparative qualities and deficiencies, in order to mediate as far as possible between immediate and explained knowledge. One example of this can be found in his early essay, 'Swinburne as Poet', in which Eliot offers his readers this sequence of quotations with accompanying critical notes:

What we get in Swinburne is an expression by sound, which could not possibly associate itself with music. For what he gives is not images and ideas and music, it is one thing with a curious mixture of suggestions of all three.

Shall I come, if I swim? wide are the waves, you see;

Shall I come, if I fly, my dear Love, to thee?

This is Campion, and an example of the kind of music that is not to be found in Swinburne [...] in Swinburne there is no *pure* beauty—no pure beauty of sound, or of image, or of idea.

Music, when soft voices die,

Vibrates in the memory;

Odours, when sweet violets sicken,

Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,

Are heaped for the beloved's bed;

And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,

Love itself shall slumber on.

I quote from Shelley, because Shelley is supposed to be the master of Swinburne; and because his song, like that of Campion, has what Swinburne has not—a beauty of music and a beauty of content.¹⁰⁵

This, five years before the experimental lectures that led to Richards's *Practical Criticism*, is a prototype for the 'new' method of close reading—if with an Eliotic twist. Two quotations are presented 'anonymously', with authors names deferred to the subsequent note ('This is Campion', 'I

quote Shelley'). What makes this rather more mischievous is that the quotations have been orchestrated so that the reader is encouraged to hear them as Swinburne's, only to find afterwards that they are not. Not only are the quotations not from Swinburne; they are examples of what Swinburne could not do. When Eliot adds a third quotation to the sequence, it is from Swinburne, but only after the reader has already been through an experience of blind tasting, smuggled in under the guise of an elucidation of a particular poet. Eliot has quietly disrupted the usual arrangement of quotation and comment in discursive prose, by which one usually illustrates or demonstrates the other in orderly fashion. This can read as disappointment—we sample other poets only to learn negative truths, a list of qualities that the poet in question lacks—or even as deception. A reader who had diligently sought what Eliot describes as Swinburne's 'curious mixture of suggestions' in the words from Campion that follow this description (when this 'mixture' was neither there, nor even possible for Swinburne) may be tempted to return the power of exposition to the critic, against the fear of further error. They may, in other words, experience the humiliation of performing a bad 'protocol'. But this passage is also a powerful demonstration of Eliot's skill in the choreography of quotations and their accompanying comments so that the formal arrangement of the expository sequence becomes more than mere vehicle for its particular critical judgements. In these ways, 'marginal commentary' around quotations becomes, for Eliot, in a rich sense of the word, 'a form'.

It is metaphysical poetry that leads Eliot to his most reflective, and reflexive, forms of marginal commentary. 'Eliot's metaphysics sometimes require the exquisite pointing of a word or two, as in 'Ah, soldier', and at other times do not. Bradley famously observed that metaphysics is 'the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct'.¹⁰⁶ This reflection from Geoffrey Hill on Eliot's practice of quotation yokes it to what we might call the reasoning by second thoughts of metaphysics. It is an important comment for understanding Eliot's critical forms but works by a compressed grammar. To unfold it requires some attention to 'Eliot's metaphysics', first as they shape the definition of 'metaphysical' that he argues out with George Saintsbury, and then as he puts this definition into practice in his Clark Lectures, Eliot's most self-conscious set of explorations of this relation of quotation and marginal comment, of instinctual belief and 'bad reasons'. Eliot's and Saintsbury's arguments over the definition of 'metaphysical' took place around a quotation from Swinburne. In response to Eliot's 'Metaphysical Poetry', a review of Grierson's anthology, Saintsbury had proposed, in a letter to the *TLS*, what he called an 'annotation' to Eliot's review: 'I wonder if you would admit something in

the way of an annotation—not in the least critical and still less hostile—to your excellent article on Metaphysical Poetry?’¹⁰⁷ An annotation, or second thought on second thoughts, in fact: Saintsbury’s proposal is that metaphysics is a form of second thoughts, of the ratiocination that follows the first intuitions or impulses; we can define ‘metaphysical, by way of its etymology, as that which comes after the natural’. Metaphysical poetry is, therefore, the poetry of second thoughts: ‘the metaphysical poets are those who seek something beyond or after nature—refinements of thought and emotion—ergo they are metaphysical’ (to take Eliot’s paraphrase of Saintsbury’s claim).¹⁰⁸ Eliot’s first response to these definitions was to differ and to phrase this difference as scorn for Saintsbury’s inferior talent for illustrative quotation, exemplifying such ‘metaphysical’ refinements by some lines from the Chorus of Swinburne’s ‘Atalanta in Calydon’. For Eliot, ‘second thoughts’ are more complex, hovering between ‘regrets’ or embarrassed retractions (versions of *arrière pensée*¹⁰⁹), and a more forwards-facing form of self-revising reflection, of the kind implied when Eliot regrets that Swinburne did not regret:

Nor can I believe that Swinburne thought twice, or even once, before he wrote:

Time with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran’.¹¹⁰

In the ensuing correspondence, Saintsbury is quick to concede his quotation but not quite his argument,¹¹¹ to which Eliot remains half-opposed. Eliot’s own sense of ‘metaphysical poetry’ takes more interest in another kind of intersubjective ‘second thinking’; that which takes place at the level of thoughts borrowed from others. For example, he finds Chapman not to be ‘a philosophical poet’ because he borrows thoughts from others while taking little ‘trouble to do much thinking for himself’.¹¹² When Eliot, in a case of his own second thoughts, returned to Saintsbury’s ‘*jeu de mots*’ in his Clark Lectures, he was, however, more generous both in direct statement (‘Mr. Saintsbury’s phrase should’, he urged, ‘be kept in mind, because it implies an artificiality, perhaps a deliberate exploitation of the senses, which we shall have to examine’¹¹³), and also in supportive readings; it is just this deliberation, artificiality, or overextension that Eliot teases out as the quality of the poetry of the metaphysicals. ‘It is not,’ he suggests in his second lecture, ‘so much in the thought as in the development of the thought, that Donne’s metaphysical peculiarity resides.’¹¹⁴ There are, then, different kinds of second thoughts; in poetry, and in the criticism of this poetry. Eliot’s practices of putting comments to quotations, while complicating the sense of contrast between the immediately ‘given’ and the reflective outcome, explores these distinctive

characteristics both of metaphysical poetry and of its critic, who goes beyond the mere quotation to do some 'thinking for himself'. Eliot ultimately seems to suggest that 'metaphysical' involves the 'alienated majesty' of being the second thinker: in other words, the process of taking on someone else's words and thinking through them, rather than the more regretful or revisionary kind of 'second thoughts' involved in returning to our own work.

This sense of metaphysical second thoughts seems to be particularly at work with reference to a line from Donne's 'The Relique', which recurs in Eliot's criticism as a 'touchstone' for his sense of the qualities of immediacy of a poem. The line is this: 'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone', and its appearance in the Clark Lectures is, in fact, a case of 'third thoughts'. Eliot shapes two previous commentaries around this line, both of which risk rather drastic empiricism. The first, in his 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry' in the *Egoist* for September 1917, explores the line as an example of how, in Donne's best poetry, the 'feeling and the material preserve exactly their proper proportions':

A poet of morbidly keen sensibilities but weak will might become absorbed in the hair to the exclusion of the original association which made it significant; a poet of imaginative or reflective power more than emotional power would endow the hair with ghostly or moralistic meaning. Donne sees the thing as it is.¹¹⁵

Eliot also aims to see this line 'as it is' and, on his return to it in 'The Metaphysical Poets', he appears to do so, even to the exclusion of critical comment:

some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts:

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of 'bright hair' and of 'bone'. This telescoping of images and multiplied associations is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period.

These second thoughts are even more restrained than Eliot's first impressions in their move from immediacy to mediation, from quotation to comment. Eliot seems trapped in mere tautology. Only on its third appearance in his criticism, in the Clark Lectures, does Eliot begin to offer something more like commentary around this quotation, in part through self-consciousness about the relation of this touchstone for 'metaphysical poetry' to its form of comment. If the movement of secondariness, from 'first impulse' to 'anticlimax of ratiocination' is a characteristic

of metaphysical verse, another kind of second thinking then takes place between the quotation and its annotations; where the second thoughts of the poet are digested through another's thoughts, becoming the subject of 'notes' in its margins. So, when Eliot returns, with third thoughts, to those lines from Donne, critical comment takes a more exploratory form. Eliot begins in the familiar vein:

the famous line

A bracelet of bright haire about the bone
is an example of those things said by Donne which could not have been put equally well otherwise, or differently by a poet of any other school. The associations are perfect: those of 'bracelet', the brightness of the hair, after years of dissolution, and the final emphasis of 'bone', could not be improved upon. And the close of the stanza is impeccable.¹¹⁶

But after these praises and reiterations, he introduces a note of doubt: 'Yet even here, [quotation of three further lines] is there not a slight distraction, a slight diversion, an overdevelopment, after the ultimacy of the great line [...]?' Donne's initial brilliancy of expression and image, Eliot finds in his protracted reading, 'fades into the play of suggested ideas'. In support, Eliot quotes Praz: 'whilst in other singers the whole poem vibrates under the impulse of the first impetus, with Donne on the other hand the impulse is suddenly [...] broken by an anticlimax of ratiocination'.¹¹⁷ From 'the ultimacy of the great line', we end at 'an anticlimax of ratiocination'—not only for negative touchstones but rather in exemplary cases: this is the movement of the style of Donne as a metaphysical poet and the reason why his poetry invites us, Eliot argues, to be 'sympathetic' readers. Sympathy is, in this sense, a strong emotion, varied without being mixed in quality, and similar to the kind that Empson evokes as a 'pastoral' feeling—'[w]hat is so impressive about the Elizabethans,' Empson writes, 'is that complexity of sympathy was somehow obvious to them'.¹¹⁸ The complexity of sympathy at play in Eliot's criticism involves both the quotation and its critical comment: it is sympathy with the relation of ultimacy to ratiocination, of immediacy to mediation, and so, in a sense at once complex and obvious, sympathy with the work of criticism as it takes place between the quotation and the critic's notes.

Praz opens an article on the *trecento* for Eliot's *Criterion* with this sentence: 'Chaucer, like most medieval minds, had an immoderate craving for what was deemed then the supreme achievement of learning, namely a multifarious command of quotation'.¹¹⁹ Offhand about some of the usual trappings of 'learning', Eliot works hard for authority and persuasion not so much by his quotations as around them—for a 'multifarious

command' of techniques of marginal comment whose forms can imitate or even steal those of scholarship, while deciding against them, in favour of literary-critical versions of 'notes'. It is the 'workman's notes on the work', Eliot argues, that 'form one of the most precious types of criticism'.¹²⁰ Still, such forms of exposition must not be too 'precious': criticism that merely resembles notes can also be a symptom of an undisciplined style—Swinburne, for example, Eliot accuses of offering us nothing but 'his notes upon poets whom he admired', and so of being merely 'an appreciator and not a critic'. Always ambivalent around the question of appreciative reading, Eliot does then claim, in an apparent about-turn, that 'the notes upon poets by a poet of Swinburne's dimensions must be read with attention and respect'. Such notes can exemplify 'fragmentary and fine perceptions'.¹²¹ The making of 'notes', and their orchestration around quotations, as though in the margins, is, on the whole, a form of criticism that Eliot advocates (not least for not being scholarship) and the formal aspect under which his early literary criticism might best be read. Perfect lines demand little annotation; critical ratiocination, and so marginal commentary, arise when the rhythm of perfection slackens. But perfect criticism, as Eliot learns in part from encounters with Aristotle, requires such slackening: without it, it would be difficult to be 'sympathetic', to re-form lines and words into elucidative forms, without 'obscuring with philology' or reducing to the dry outlines of an *explication de texte*. Marginal comments are fragments shored against ruins—and against the ruin of the lines, as they move from perfection through further development. They are a formal expression of belief in the shuddering power of the quotation but also a sign that such shudders are felt as they displace the air around them, in this case the surrounding and responsive critical prose.

II

Experiment

I.A. Richards and critical bathos

Where is he living, clipp'd in with the sea
That chides the banks of England, Scotland, Wales,
Which calls me pupil, or hath read to me?
And bring him out that is but woman's son
Can trace me in the tedious ways of art
And hold me pace in deep experiments.

[Shakespeare, *Henry IV; Part I*]

I. MAKING UP ONE'S MIND

'One cannot make experiments if there are not some things one does not doubt', Wittgenstein contends in *On Certainty*.¹ When I.A. Richards stages the experiments in reading poetry that form *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), there are some bold things he does not doubt: that reading poetry offers one of the greatest exercises in the 'self-ordering development of intelligence', for example, and that 'making up one's mind about a poem', is 'the most delicate of all possible undertakings':

We have to gather millions of fleeting semi-independent impulses into a momentary structure of fabulous complexity, whose core or germ is only given us in the words. What we 'make up', that momentary trembling order in our minds, is exposed to countless irrelevant influences.²

Success consists in achieving a form of order that is just the right side of fiction: what the reader makes up must not be made up, and the best readers are many-minded without submitting to omnipossibilism. Richards also holds it certain that the stakes for this experiment are high. In 'weighing these possibilities' for meaning, he writes, we are 'for the moment more like our fellow human beings than we are when our decision has been taken'.³ The best reading of poetry is decisively

practical, achieving not just an individual alchemy but also a democratic power.

Yet when poems from 'Woodbine Willie' and Edna St. Vincent Millay, Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Donne are presented anonymously to readers attending his Cambridge lecture courses in 1925 and 1927, their responses ('protocols' in the experimental idiolect⁴) fall into a variety of confusions, howlers, revealing errors and eccentric misreadings. Few readers think alike and even fewer think well. At one lecture, Richards presented a poem on the subject of clouds, with the exclamatory lines: 'O sprawling domes, O tottering towers | O frail steel tissues of the sun'. A student chastised the poet: "Sprawling", which is anyhow an ugly word to bring into the climax, does not belong to the kind of cloud that has citadels and a golden belt, but to the filmy pink variety'. Richards then chastises the student with his note: 'The chorus-girl type perhaps!'⁵ Richards needs no more than italics to highlight where other protocols fall into the weaknesses that he labels the 'Stock Response' and 'Sentimentality'. These, his italics insinuate, are the all-too-evident failings of the following commentary: '*Spring has always been the favourite theme of poets whose outlook is what we ordinarily term 'Romantic'. [...] a little poem like this does do for my feelings, what spring does for flowers and birds and fields after winter*'.⁶ When Richards assembles 'these scraps of literary opinion', the result is less a salvific vision, more 'a modern *Dunciad*'.⁷ 'I cannot make up my mind whether or not I understand it or whether or not I like it', one protocolist, at the mildest end of the spectrum of readerly ineptitude, confessed of a poem.⁸ Most readers admitted less self-doubt and were even more emphatic in their mistakes, offering a convenient multitude of error for this self-appointed pioneer of the new method of reading to 'discover'.

Richards's confident vision for poetry should surely be thrown into doubt by the extremity of these findings; a spectacle not of the 'fabulous complexity' of modern minds but instead of their varieties, both idiosyncratic and generic, of 'stupidity'.⁹ For this radical disappointment, another title from Pope might be still more appropriate: *Practical Criticism* is a modernist *Peri Bathos*, an exercise in 'the Art of Sinking in (the Analysis of) Poetry', in which Richards plummets from the heights of grand statements about poetry's power of ordering minds with delicacy and humanity to the depths of his experimental findings. These protocols disappoint in two senses; not only in their exposure of the indelicacies and errors of readers, but also in their demonstration of the inadequacy of the method to the task. 'There is something almost comic', as T.S. Eliot reflects, 'about the way in which Mr Richards can ask an unanswerable question which no one has ever asked before, and

answer it with a ventriloqual voice from a psychological laboratory situated in Cambridge'.¹⁰ Richards's method seems wrong but is it too practical or insufficiently so? He may be excessively practical (pragmatic, empirical) in aligning himself 'with the "scientific" mode of literary criticism, with "psychological" explanations of everything, and columns of a reader's sensitivity-coefficients'—to borrow a dismissive phrase from Empson.¹¹ Or he may be too impractical (unrealistic, 'prophetic' even) when, despite all the evidence, he sustains his faith in his unanswerable questions. If bathos is a form of sinking, then it is the rising movement of optimism that he prefers to follow. When his high hopes for the reading of poetry prove laughable in practice, Richards does laugh, but only before restating his firm belief in poetry's possibilities and in the practicality of its criticism. In light of this 'self-disproving optimism', it can be tempting to conclude, as Geoffrey Hartman does in his 'short history' of the mode, that practical criticism 'never grew up'.

Perhaps, as Hartman implies, there was no easy way in which practical criticism could ever become a mature method. Although Richards urges that 'the varieties of interpretation which a well-chosen passage can elicit' are 'capable of presenting a fascinating synopsis of intellectual history—not less interesting for being more compassable', Hartman finds slight hope for a method that seeks to accommodate its insights so neatly.¹² Practical criticism is, he damns with faint praise, 'so attractive because it is exegesis, but also because it is accommodated to what students can manage, given the complexity of art'.¹³ Other critics have also scorned the approach. There can be no significant meaning to 'practical' used as a qualifying adjective for criticism, another of its sternest critics remarked, 'unless it is loosely employed to describe the action of an editor who throws a poem into a waste-paper basket'.¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, although less pragmatically brusque in his reflections on the method, still struggles to praise it:

Even if his criticism proves to be entirely on the wrong track, even if this modern 'self-consciousness' turns out to be only a blind alley, Mr Richards will have done something in accelerating the exhaustion of the possibilities. He will have helped indirectly to discredit the criticism of persons qualified neither by sensibility nor by knowledge of poetry, from which we suffer daily.¹⁵

Eliot's stridently cautious terms here are, however, already Richards's own—in a concluding section to *Practical Criticism* titled 'Humility', Richards acknowledges the peculiar 'practicality' of the method by a similar hypothetical negative:

If the specimens of contemporary judgments given in Part II have no other uses, they will, at least, do us this service: that those who have read carefully through them will be for a little while after less impressionable by literary judgments, however confidently or trenchantly expressed, less dogmatic, less uncharitable, less subject also to floating opinion [...] The critical reading of poetry is an arduous discipline; few exercises reveal to us more clearly the limitations under which, from moment to moment, we suffer.¹⁶

The difference is that, after characterizing practical criticism as a mode of 'humility', Richards then moves on to a more sanguine next sentence: if the protocols reveal to us the difficulties we currently 'suffer', then 'equally, the immense extension of our capacities that follows a summoning of our resources is made plain'.

Is this staunch optimism the sign of a strong, self-confident 'discipline' or of an irreconcilable immaturity at the heart of the method? Refusal to doubt some things may be a prerequisite for experiment, but sustained refusal to doubt, against the evidence of failure, cancels the possibility of experimental knowledge. This chapter puts some pressure on Richards's experimental method for literary judgement and on the Ricardian sense of 'practical'. It does so first in relation to the book which takes this term for its title, *Practical Criticism*, then in relation to *Interpretation in Teaching* (1938), the work Richards assembled from a later set of protocol exercises designed to examine 'the conduct of the mind in interpretation', and which he dramatized as 'the grand hinge on which I swung away from literary into educative pursuits', and towards 'practical problems in the everyday conduct of words'.¹⁷ As a brief interlude between these, I consider, the seemingly impractical project of *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition* (1932), Richards's 'big enquiry into Chinese mentality, by means of a blend of literary criticism and psychology', in which he explores the 'condensed poetry' of the ancient philosopher's ideograms.¹⁸ Each of these books presents a different phase of Richards's vision of how to be 'practical' in criticism. Vision is an appropriate term here for the optimistic, even prophetic, dream of greater practicality Richards offers. In each book, this visionary element also has a methodological correlative; a particular mode or form of criticism by which Richards attempts to realize his dream. The vision in *Practical Criticism* is that we can be cured of our stupidities in literary judgement. The method is the empirical correlative to this: to look closely at samples, drawing on the methods of experimental psychology, because such a study of the reading mind in its purest forms, free from the trappings of received opinion, exposes where we succeed and fail in judgement. The vision in *Mencius* is of a cooperative language that is neither combative nor coercive in its operations in our minds, but calmly, harmoniously systematic—for

which Richards believes Mencian ideograms, and their associated modes of explanation by multiple definition, provide a model. The vision in *Interpretation in Teaching* is that we can all become more intelligent (and so, for Richards, better citizens) by thinking more sharply about the inner workings of prose sentences, particularly when they engage in parallels, metaphors, or analogies. The method, like that of *Practical Criticism*, involves the responsive protocol but in this case the material for the readers consists of passages of prose and associated exercises in synonymy and summary, which are then subjected to Richards's scrutiny.

Together these works constitute what we might call Richards's experimental decade (1929–38), in which he pursues variations on a theme of the energetically practical exercise in interpretation.¹⁹ The most obvious story to which these works have so far lent themselves in literary-critical histories has been one in which Richards shifts his focus from poems in the mind (*Practical Criticism*) to the prose of the world (*Interpretation in Teaching*), against a backdrop of increasing urgency about what a 'practical' understanding of verbal complexities might constitute. Frank Kermode detects in Richards's growing preoccupation with the improvement of general communication and the argumentative resources of prose, rather than the imaginative force of poetry, a certain 'practical' pressure, which gains impetus: 'even before Spain made a cruder form of action seem urgent, Richards had been considering the problem of right reading on a larger scale, as a problem of universal communication', Kermode writes. After Spain (or, more pertinently in Richards's case, after China), this only seemed even more imperative: 'however salvific poetry might be for some, the world at large urgently needed instruction in the reading of prose'—and the world at large was always Richards's canvas: as he pledges in *Speculative Instruments*, 'the salvation we are seeking is for all'.²⁰ Richards's experimental decade, this reminds us, is also 'the Thirties', and, 'hounded by external events', even practical criticism was forced to 'grow up', and to 'leave home'.²¹ Still, for Richards, political crisis did not mean abandoning his critical experiments but instead deepening his sense of their relation to each other. 'The world crisis', he affirms, at the height of this, 'is reproduced inside every genuine experiment in interpretation'.²²

Here, I explore some of the variety of Richards's methods of 'experiment' in interpretation in order to probe his assumptions about, and claims for, forms of practical criticism. The two most obvious senses of 'experiment' that seem of immediate relevance to Richards's method are those of modernist innovation and of basic science ('Poetry in the Laboratory', practical criticism has been aptly labelled).²³ Yet for all the tempting consonances, both modernist and laboratory connotations of 'experiment' are to some degree distractions. With regard to the former, Richards could

only ever be in ambivalent relation to the avant-garde; with regard to the latter, it is clear that he is just as anxious 'to cut the realm of "values" free from threatening scientific encroachments' as he is to adopt some of the scientist's experimental procedures.²⁴ Rather truer to Richards's procedures is the sense of 'experimental' form presented by the philosophical investigation. 'No excuse is needed for treating the conduct of the mind in interpretation as a philosophical subject', Richards asserted, and the kinds of 'exercise in thinking better' of the major philosophers of his early Cambridge years, G.E. Moore and Wittgenstein, appear to exert some influence on the evolution and shape of his own reflections on 'the mind in interpretation'.²⁵

Richards admired Moore's method particularly. He described it—in a paraphrase of the lines from Shakespeare's *Henry IV: Part I* that form the epigraph to this chapter—as one of 'deep experiment'.²⁶ His *Principles of Literary Criticism* had the working title, *Principia Critica*, in homage to the book he claimed to know almost by heart, Moore's *Principia Ethica*.²⁷ He also owned some immediate effect from the philosopher's lectures; they were, he reflected, an impetus behind his 'dream of communication'; hearing them, he recounts, '[I] got really interested in language because I felt something must be done to stop the leakage of information that was going on there all the time'. Moore was, in Richards's description, 'the best teacher I ever knew'—no faint accolade from Richards, who would have been happier to claim for himself the term 'teacher' than 'critic' ('I hate the word "critic" myself', Richards notes in a letter to his wife, Dorothy).²⁸ Yet tracing this influence from Moore across the surface of his early work is not easy. As Richards speculated that '[i]t is reasonable, is it not, to expect that a deep influence may take years—even decades—before producing its full effect. And the effect produced may often be very unlike what might be thought likely'.²⁹ This is a remark that holds some truth for the effects of the philosophy of his 'old mentor—no my old dominator' on his critical thought. From this 'deep influence', it is perhaps possible to see no more than a shadow or relief: 'where there was a bulge in Moore, there was a hole in me', Richards suggests.³⁰

Wittgenstein represented less of a direct 'influence' on Richards yet some of their respective forms of investigation, in particular with regard to limits of experimental psychology and the intellective force of logically acute perception of figures of speech, develop in intriguing parallel, as this chapter goes on to explore. 'Philosophic theories (in the large non-technical sense I have here in mind) are intellectual organs—very like eyes', Richards wrote, adding that, '[a] philosophy, in this sense, is no more and no less than the mode of the contexts we are using'.³¹ Resemblances between Richards and Wittgenstein may be best considered in this 'large

non-technical sense', with attention to their shared 'contexts'. So, Richards's method of practical criticism extends to the case of 'literary judgement' a version of the dialectic between common sense certainty and scepticism that Moore and Wittgenstein investigated in their philosophical remarks. Of course, there may still be more of a relation of 'bulge' to 'hole' between the philosophers' 'deep experiments' with meanings and Richards's often deliberately shallow comedy of errors with the meanings of poems, ideograms, and prose. This chapter attempts to take the measure of this relation by reconsidering the particular forms and contexts for Richards's versions of 'practical' criticism, as they evolve across his experimental decade.

II. A MODERN DUNCIAD

Around Poem II of *Practical Criticism*, Christina Rossetti's 'Spring Quiet', Richards's protocolists demonstrate a version of a perceptual phenomenon that contemporary experimental psychologists referred to as 'subjective accentuation':

Full of fresh scents
Are the budding boughs
Arching high over
A cool, green house.

One protocolist has no patience with the image as he hears it: 'I think this is utterly absurd. [...] Who has ever seen a "green" house?' (2.2). Another, also emphasizing the word 'green', extends such literalism, and resultant contempt for the poem, even further: 'Green houses are not usually cool, though I suppose they might be if anyone was foolish enough to erect them under arches of budding boughs' (2.21). A third protocolist, however, does achieve a detailed account of how such problems of literalism and mnemonic irrelevance are produced (and can be solved) by ways of reading the poem differently for the rhythm:

Again, with the accent thrown off 'green' in the 3rd stanzas, one is less likely to be worried by thoughts of 'greenhouses', or alternatively (which is worse), of houses of brick and mortar, painted that blatant shade of bright green which is so distressing. The cool green house is of course the place under the trees. The important points are (1) that it is cool (2) that it is like a house. But if one accentuates 'green', these are just the points which do not stand out. (2.6)

This protocol (which has been attributed to Mansfield Forbes) is still not without some comic excess; the reader's nicety about 'distressing' shades of

green, for example.³² Yet it is sufficiently acute to be already performing the work of commentary usually reserved for Richards: that of self-critical reflection on the risks of reading, alongside some projected formal solutions. Here, what Richards calls 'technical remarks' and 'critical remarks' are in rare concord and the effect is persuasive. The variation between how the other protocolists (mis)hear the poem's accents is not, however, data in support of a purely formalist case of perceptual testing; these different ways of hearing are already marked by semantic investments. Accenting 'green' accompanies the senses 'glass house' or 'house painted green' (both of which are erroneous); leaving 'green' unaccented matters for attending to the analogical structure of the phrase and its descriptive force (that it is like a house, sheltering and cool). A good response to the line is not merely a matter of perceptual acuity; it involves being well-versed in metrics and also in the kinds of figurative arrangements we might find in poems.

As a study in the individual perception of accent, these protocols for the Rossetti poem have some initial similarities of outline, in spite of their rather thicker texture of response, to some previous experimental investigations in subjective accentuation from the 'psychological laboratory situated in Cambridge', whose traces Eliot detects in Richards's criticism. One undergraduate in Philosophy, who frequented these laboratories, David Pinsent, notes this in his diary for May 1912:

At 2.30 I went chez Wittgenstein and we went on to the Psychological Laboratory, where I had arranged to act as a 'subject' in some experiments he is trying: to ascertain the extent and importance of rhythm in music. Not bad fun.³³

Pinsent's diary entries record a period of several months during which he worked with Wittgenstein on some experiments with rhythm and its role in the appreciation of music, in the Cambridge Psychological Laboratory. Wittgenstein, alongside experimental psychologists such as Charles Myers, a participant on the 1898 Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait, and a keen investigator of musical tone, rhythm, and phrase, was interested in perceptual phenomena and their differences between subjects.³⁴ His particular investigations concerned how 'in some circumstances, all the subjects of the experiment heard an accent on certain notes which were in fact not accented by the machine which was being used'—a typical inquiry for this 'golden age of experimental psychology', before investigations turned to more pressingly practical problems: 'shell shock and industrial psychology and intelligence tests'.³⁵ Other 'aesthetic experiments' at the Laboratory considered perceptual phenomena such as the relative 'heaviness' of colours, or articulations of the experience of a single musical note, for the individual differences and generic errors of

perception that they revealed.³⁶ There was a strong vein of formalism here; an instance of 'a modernist impulse in the human sciences', with experimenters aiming to isolate as far as possible what Pound would call the 'primary pigment' of the form under investigation. Such studies also took place in direct parallel with the ethnographic investigation of 'primitive' forms, again construed as an opportunity to seek out 'the primary pigment' of certain human experiences and skills. Myers, for example, also contributed to works such as the Seligmanns' study of a Ceylonese forest people, *The Veddas* (1911), exploring how 'in the Vedda music we seem to meet with the very beginnings of melody-building [...] There is no other people in whose music the gradual construction of melody on these simple lines can be discerned'.

Wittgenstein's experiments seem to have had a similar impetus: to study how musical response in simplified conditions could illuminate more complex cases. G.E. Moore comments in a letter that these psychological tests were conducted 'in the hope that they would throw some light on questions of Aesthetics'.³⁷ This hope seems to have been more than fleeting; in May 1913, almost a year after his main phase of experimentation, Wittgenstein participated in the ceremonial opening of the new laboratory for experimental psychology with a demonstration 'of an apparatus for psychological investigation of rhythm'.³⁸ Yet, for all this, Wittgenstein's participation was perhaps never entirely earnest, even at its height. The *British Journal of Psychology* records a contribution to the British Psychological Society meeting in Cambridge in July 1912 in this form, 'Experiment on Rhythm (Demonstration), L. Wittgenstein and B. Muscio (Introduced by C.S. Myers)'; Wittgenstein dismissed the same in a letter to Bertrand Russell as 'a most absurd paper on rhythms'.³⁹ In Pinsent's diary, the references to conducting these experiments occur alongside references to attending concerts and to excursions down the Cam in a canoe: Wittgenstein, Pinsent urged, should have more 'hobbies' and psychological experiments appear to fall into this category: 'Not bad fun.'

To return to Moore's letter on the subject and expand the quotation, these may have been experiments Wittgenstein conducted 'in the hope that they would throw some light on questions of Aesthetics, *but of course they threw none*'.⁴⁰ The 'of course' here is in part Moore's, a touch of certainty from one of its firmest philosophers, and in part Wittgenstein's own, a report of his emphatic statement to Moore that psychological experiments could have no philosophical yield. Psychology, Wittgenstein concluded, and in particular, experimental psychology, was suffering from thorough conceptual confusion rather than the mere disciplinary immaturity that its early practitioners might claim in its defence. In a book from the same year as *Practical Criticism*, for example, Wolfgang Köhler's

Gestalt Psychology (1929), one chapter titled 'Psychology as a Young Science' reflects on the shift from qualitative observations to quantitative measurement that psychology, on the pattern of more mature disciplines such as physics, must now undergo. This Wittgenstein would, throughout his writing, repudiate: 'The confusion and barrenness of psychology is not to be explained by calling it a "young science" [...] comparable with that of physics, for instance, in its beginnings. For in psychology there are experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*. (As in the other case, conceptual confusion and methods of proof.)'⁴¹ Although this strong dismissal comes from the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein was already, by the time of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, arguing that 'psychology is no nearer related to philosophy than is any other natural science'.⁴² Letters suggest that these convictions evolved as early as his Cambridge experimental phase—this to Russell, for example, in 1912, describes an attempt to convince his fellow experimenter, Myers, of the limited possibilities for philosophical insight through psychological inquiries: 'I had a discussion with Myers about the relations between Logic and Psychology. I was very candid and I am sure he thinks that I am the most arrogant devil who ever lived.'⁴³ What he was 'very candid' in saying to Myers, Wittgenstein is very elliptical about in writing to Russell: there is no sense that a case even needs to be made for the dismissal of experimental methods in psychology as a window onto 'modern "self-consciousness"'.

Yet, while Wittgenstein may not have kept Myers company for long in psychological experiments, he did continue to share with him an interest in ethnographic investigation, at least as a model for thought. It was characteristic of Wittgenstein to find philosophic force in inquiries for which there were no comfortably supporting contexts of familiarity. His remarks often take the form of the experiment in thinking through such unfamiliar scenarios, imagining how language might look when considered with the slight detachment of the ethnographer. This approach he characterized as taking the 'anthropological perspective', and one of the most memorable scenarios he gives for it is this:

Two people who are laughing together, at a joke perhaps. One of them has said certain somewhat unusual words & now they both break out into a sort of bleating. That might appear *very* bizarre to someone arriving among us from quite a different background. Whereas we find it completely reasonable.

(I witnessed this scene recently on a bus & was able to think myself into the skin of someone not accustomed to it. It struck me then as quite irrational & like the reactions of an outlandish *animal*.)⁴⁴

Wittgenstein sits on the bus and sees laughter as very odd, then comes to reflect on what laughter might be: behaviour that is not unfamiliar becomes so by the artifice of the thought-experiment, thus opening onto philosophic consideration. While Wittgenstein's form of investigation adopts an almost child-like wonder about 'forms of life', it is at the same time marked by complexity: the ethnographer, who is the observer of the behaviour of others, is also, in his attempts to articulate a response to 'behaviours' without familiar contexts, like an experimental subject, who can be observed in turn. This involves what Richards, drawing on the physicist, Niels Bohr, would later call a complementarity principle, in which '[t]he properties of the instruments or apparatus employed enter into [...] belong with and confine the scope of the investigation'.⁴⁵ If carefully controlled, this can be restrained from an unstable regress and can become the strong form of self-critical investigation we find in Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks.

What, then, of literary criticism as a 'Young Science'? Does Richards's encounter with experimental psychology have similar outlines to that of Wittgenstein, and lead to comparable revolutions of method? It seems likely that the simplified conditions of an exercise in experimental psychology would throw no more light on the complexities of literary judgement than Wittgenstein's musical tests threw on aesthetics. Nonetheless, Richards continues to make use of 'the services that psychology may afford us' in order to test his hypothesis concerning the alarming 'current state of the culture', as revealed in the difficulties readers have in making up their minds about poems. He drew 'enthusiastically and impartially on physiological and neurological psychology, behaviourism, Pavlov's conditioned-reflex psychology, psychoanalysis, Gestalt, and snips and snatches from almost every other psychological theorizer or experimenter, as well as on his own empirical observations'.⁴⁶ Footnotes and passing comments indicate that his psychological interests also include an acquaintance with numerous previous experiments in the measurement of perception and in evaluative responses to aesthetic experience. The appendix to *Practical Criticism*, for example, refers to 'kymograph' experiments, conducted to measure the duration of spoken sounds, while a footnote in *Interpretation in Teaching* cites an experimental study, 'Phenomenal Regression to the Real Object' (1931), which considers phenomena such as perceived distance and apparent brightness.⁴⁷

Yet, at the level of detail, it remains the case that Richards 'paid little attention to earlier workers in the experimental and audience-study traditions he inherited'.⁴⁸ As with Wittgenstein, psychology provides only a launching pad. What he seems most keen to preserve from these initial contexts is a version of the 'anthropological perspective': the experimental

form of *Practical Criticism* is less that of the Psychological Laboratory, more (in Richards's own description) that of 'a piece of *field-work* in comparative ideology'.⁴⁹ Making things 'seem odd'—to quote from Empson's poem, 'To an Old Lady'—was very much the note of Cambridge critical modernism; its drily restrained version of avant-garde defamiliarization. Sometimes this meant an exploration of new perspectives, those of Empson's interplanetary spaces, for example. The experiments that compose *Practical Criticism* appear to follow this anthropological principle at two main levels: first, Richards takes the perspective of the anthropologist standing back from the readers and finding them 'outlandish'; second, Richards also puts his protocolists in the position of anthropologists, committed to study the rather 'outlandish' examples of verbal behaviour presented by poems with no explanatory frames. When the reader is encouraged not to feel at home, these words on the page can seem drastic contraventions of the rules for literal sense—as protocolist 12.4 complains in this near parody of positivism:

The rest of the poem seems to be rubbish because:

- (a) A cloud cannot have 'desires'.
- (b) A mantel cannot have 'imaginations'.
- (c) 'Imaginations' cannot 'trail'.
- (d) 'Milk' does not 'smile'.
- (e) 'Dim with flowers' is rather weak. I always thought flowers brightened things.⁵⁰

The basic method behind Richards's experiments—to invite an anthropological perspective by the simple expedient of removing obvious coordinates (author, title, date, for example)—has, however, caused consternation; surely such simple changes do not render poems sufficiently 'outlandish' to account for such weak responses, such radical failures to read? Critics puzzled by this seeming disparity between method and results have sought answers in some broader contextual forces; modernism's disorientating conditions for reading, for example, against which backdrop these experiments are staged.⁵¹ Perhaps, against these innovations of sense and significance of contemporary poets and prose-writers, Richards's readers struggled to feel at ease in their experiences of verbal meaning? Certainly, the protocolists do demonstrate some extreme responses when faced with Richards's boldest challenge, Poem VI, a lyric ('Márgarét, áre you grieving') from Gerard Manley Hopkins, first published in 1918 and so, if only by temporal dislocation, in some ways 'modernist'. The poem elicited some fierce, condemnatory responses. 'A nonsensical conglomeration of words, expressed in jerky, disconnected phrases' (6.32) one writes; another

surmises: 'It might be a part of a dialogue, in which one lunatic addresses another' (6.35). Protocol 6.37 surpasses even these confusions to achieve a compact demonstration of many of the forms of misreading that it was Richards's hope to prevent:

6.37. This is the worst poem I have ever read. It is vague and incoherent, and does not appeal to any of my senses, except my sense of humour. The parent or whoever it is who is advising Margaret is a bitter, hard individual who seems to be trying to take away all the hope and happiness of the child [...]. I have looked up both 'wanwood' and 'leafmeal' in four dictionaries, and I cannot find their meanings. I see no excuse for making a poem so vague.

Some protocolists are, however, rather less angrily disorientated. 'Love at first sight', declares protocol 6.8 (almost certainly by Richards's colleague, Mansfield Forbes), before developing a strong reading of the poem's distinctive rhythm, which earns one of Richards's rare compliments: 'Finally a long and very subtle analysis of the rhythm'.⁵² 'I like this best of all,' concurs another more ambitious protocol, 6.21 (which has been attributed to F.R. Leavis).⁵³

Even without these skilled exceptions, the set of protocols for the Hopkins poem, when taken together, ultimately proves no more extreme than that for any of the other poems, where any immediate modernist disorientation is not in question. In general, Richards's selection of poems could be best described in the words of one of his protocolists, remarking on Poem III: 'Quite an ordinary piece of versification, neither striking nor inspiring.'⁵⁴ Richards has not made his students face the fragments or sharp collocations, philological density, or compacted parataxis of modernist free verse. Instead they have lines such as the following, from Wilfred's Rowland's 'Ivory Palaces':

Solemn and gray, the immense clouds of even
Pass on their towering unperturbed way
Through the vast whiteness of the rain-swept heaven.

Or this from J.D.C. Pellew's 'The Temple':

How strong each pillared trunk; the bark
That covers them, how smooth; and hark,
The sweet and gentle voice
With which the leaves rejoice!

The poems Richards selects are notable only for their 'middle-of-the-road' (lack of) quality—perhaps a condition for their safe anonymity—and thus involve no more than a carefully moderated degree of estrangement. One review of *Practical Criticism* for the *Criterion* remarked on this mediocrity

of material as a weakness of the Ricardian experimental apparatus: 'the ordinary piece of fairly well turned verse appeals, like the ordinary piece of domestic furniture, to a middle range of sentiment that is much more variable and fluctuating in quality'.⁵⁵ Richards, this implies, has not designed his investigation into bad reading so that participants can read well. This is not a weakness Richards owns: he is dismayed by the prevalence of the 'middle range of sentiment' and excludes much of it from his printed data ('the part of the material least adequately represented is the hawing, non-committal, vague, sit-on-the-fence, middle-body of opinion. I would have put in more of this if it were not such profitless reading').⁵⁶ Here, the experimental design looks drastically flawed.

Critics of practical criticism have also been quick to say that the method fails because no poem can be read well in a vacuum; it is instead perhaps more accurate to complain that no mediocre poem, presented out of context, is likely to yield very scintillating critical writing. When Richards offers readers these poems, with few opportunities to say rich things, it is as if the anthropologist on the bus had been forced to reflect on, for example, the relative speed with which passengers paid for their tickets, rather than a rich and strange form of human expression such as their laughter. This has the effect of throwing undue emphasis on the 'outlandishness' of reading behaviour rather than of verbal behaviour in poems, and so obliges Richards to assume the corrective stance of the pedagogue rather than the exploratory view of the ethnographer. Rather than a complex spiral of observation and reflection, in which the anthropologist should own himself also caught up, this method gives only the reductive outlines of an educational scenario. What Richards later holds to be important, under the name, 'complementarity', he seems to feel only to a limited degree in the experimental design for *Practical Criticism*. Falling short of true 'field-work', the Ricardian method remains closer to that other 'young science', experimental psychology, than it might itself wish to be.

III. UNHOMELY READING

Practical reason, in the broadest terms, has two modes: first, consideration of action; second, incitement to action. Richards often seems to pull back from both: his examples are not of reading-in-action but instead some specimens of how-not-to-read; nor does he lead from these bad examples, through a theory of better reading, onto improved practical examples—Richards does famously little close reading of his own and when he does offer glosses, it is often with the suggestion that they are partial and only

perhaps helpful to some. He has, in general, no very high opinion of glossing. 'Richards was eighty-one when he published his first book of practical criticism, *Beyond*,' his biographer notes, and even then he remained firmly of the opinion 'that most literary glosses failed to perform the same clarifying function served by good theory'.⁵⁷ This he held as a point of principle rather than merely a matter of critical temperament or incapacity. 'Some further suggestions towards elucidation may save the reader trouble. If he does not need them I crave his forgiveness', Richards remarks alongside one of his rare earlier ventures in glossing (in this case, of some lines from Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'The Windhover'). Notions of 'practicality' and 'humility' are once again in very close proximity, to the point at which practical criticism, in the most familiar sense—the close reading of 'the words on the page'—retreats, with due modesty, from the scene of Richards's criticism.

Literary-critical historians circumvent this apparent paradox at the heart of practical criticism—that its founder remains a theorist—by suggesting that Richards's role was to provide the theory for the method, which others then put into action. His best-known pupil, Empson, for example, 'pushed the fierce and minute scrutiny of short texts very far', taking practical criticism beyond the parochial contexts of university pedagogy, into the mainstream of literary criticism, with his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).⁵⁸ But such narratives introduce their own difficulties, as we see from the following account of *Seven Types* from another of the founding figures for the Cambridge English degree, E.M.W. Tillyard: 'Anyone quick to distinguish the rotten from the ripe and to sniff the taint of incipient corruption might now have guessed that an impulse had attained its maximum strength'. Practical criticism, considered as a method of glossing particular poems, had not only 'grown up', it had aged too quickly: ripe in 1929, 'rotten' by 1930 (and decidedly stale by the time it becomes trapped in the positivist accommodations of New Critical routine in the following decades). This over-accelerated narrative of decline signals some substantial problems with the applied model of practical criticism's role in literary-critical history. Richards, for all his admiration of readings such as Empson's, understands the 'practicality' of practical criticism rather differently than as a capacity to produce more, and more impressive, close readings. Where he did intend his findings to take practical effect was not so much in the production of further commentaries on poems, as in the improvement of readers' capacities for complex (and so, 'valuable') thought. This, to take Eliot's terms, was to be a radical education in 'modern "self-consciousness"'. When F.R. Leavis, one of the original protocolists, responds to Ezra Pound's 'How to Read' (1927) with his own mock manual, *How To Teach Reading*

(1932), he develops just this sense as he argues that Pound misunderstands the problem in equating literary education with an absurd litany 'of literature in which the cultivated modern must pretend to be at home'.⁵⁹ Education is, Leavis counters, a matter of techniques for judging complex language.

Richards's pedagogic successes and struggles may, then, become more visible if we trace the responses of two of his early pupils to his essay, 'Gerard Hopkins', published in the *Dial* in 1926. Both pupils, Empson and E.E. Phare, engaged very directly with the Ricardian method. Phare recalled writing responses to poems by George Meredith and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which (according to her annotated copy) figure in *Practical Criticism* as protocols 9.77 and 13.45. After attending one of the lectures, she commented in her diary for 26 October 1927, 'Richards humbling and excellent'.⁶⁰ Empson, although also a ready commentator on the method, took a less diligent view of the lectures—'I confess I could not attend the original lectures because I found them embarrassing'.⁶¹ He does, however, seem to have attended at least one and has been suggested as a possible contributor of protocol 5.81 (although the stronger case is for Mansfield Forbes).⁶² Empson and Phare debate and extend Richards's essay on Hopkins, first in correspondence, subsequently by the publication of their own analyses of the 'appalling tension' of this poetry; in particular, of 'The Windhover'.⁶³ Richards's remarks on the poem begin from a typical sense of 'humility' about the possibilities for glossing:

For a while I thought that the apostrophe, 'O my chevalier' (it is perhaps superfluous to mention that this word rhymes strictly with 'here' and has only three syllables) had reference to Christ. I take it now to refer only to the poet, though the moral ideal, embodied of course for Hopkins in Christ, is before the mind. Some further suggestions towards elucidation may save the reader trouble. If he does not need them I crave his forgiveness. Kingdom of daylight's dauphin—I see (unnecessarily) the falcon as a miniature sun, flashing so high up. Rung upon the rein—a term from the manège, ringing a horse = causing it to circle round one on a long rein.

Even as he offers these glosses, Richards's parentheses suggest some significant hesitancy about the practice; a characteristic phrase is '(it is perhaps superfluous to mention)'. His parentheses also frame concerns about some particular forms of gloss—for example, he catches, in self-critical brackets, his own slip into a 'troublesome source of critical deviations' particularly popular with his protocolists, visual images, as he describes himself seeing '(unnecessarily)' the falcon as a miniature sun.⁶⁴ For all these feints, the remarks do build towards a more confident reading of the line, 'My heart in hiding':

I should say that the poet's heart is in hiding from Life, he has chosen a safer way, and that the greater danger is the greater exposure to temptation and error than a more adventurous, less sheltered course (sheltered by Faith?) brings with it. Another, equally plausible reading would be this: Renouncing the glamour of the outer life of adventure the poet transfers its qualities of audacity to the inner life. (Here is the bosom, the inner consciousness.) The greater danger is that to which the moral hero is exposed.

At this point Richards again draws back: '[b]oth readings may be combined, but pages of prose would be required for a paraphrase of the result'—practical criticism is possible but laborious and perhaps threatens exposure ('I am not a moral hero', as Richards once dryly remarked to Leavis).⁶⁵ Empson shared something of this sense that detailing what goes on in literary judgement was often excessive. As with anagrams, he argued, it might be as well to resist setting out the minutiae of what many can perceive 'at one shot', since 'the analytic process is not intellectually difficult but only very tedious'.⁶⁶ He was, however, less forgiving of Richards's retreat from the implications of points discovered in the work of practical criticism: 'Passages in *The Windhover* [...] mean both the opposites created by their context, it seems plain; Richards said that once, and then edged away from it', thus retreating from what a fiercely practical criticism might reveal about 'the audacity of the inner life'.

Empson makes this complaint in a letter to Phare, who was proposing an article for the first issue of *Experiment* magazine (1928), that would set out 'the antithetical principle', 'between the static and the dynamic', as it can be traced in the poetry of Valéry and Hopkins.⁶⁷ 'Do send along your Hopkins article,' Empson instructs her after the initial exchange, 'it would be rather a smack at Richards if we got somebody to say something quite different'.⁶⁸ He does so with the relish of the editor and also the pupil keen to grapple with a figure attracting near adulation; Richards's lectures were of such popularity that, as Empson reports, 'more people would at times come to his lectures than the hall would hold, and he would then lecture in the street outside'.⁶⁹ Yet, rather than a 'smack', Phare's readings of 'The Windhover' almost trump Richards in a display of practical-critical humility. No detailed criticism of the poem at all appears in her brief contribution to *Experiment*, where it is merely mentioned as 'Hopkins's best and most typical'. Phare does, however, return to this example in more analytical depth when she develops the principles of her early sketch at some length in her subsequent book, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1933). Here, she quotes, in full, 'Dr Richards's much fuller and more fluid' reading of the poem and concedes that, against its measure, her own interpretation is too 'purely personal'. What 'personal' might mean here is not very clear. The following paraphrase of the line, 'Brute beauty and

valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here | Buckle!’, for example, seems the height of impersonality as it circles, lists, and repeats the poem’s own words, making its refrain the single word that Empson, first in their correspondence and later in his *Seven Types*, highlighted for comment, ‘buckle’:

Brute beauty, courage, act, air, the bird’s pride in itself, the power of flying, are all contracted, buckled within the small span of the bird’s body: all these things buckle to, set to, that the bird may fly and wheel as its nature directs it: all buckle, give way, collapse, beneath the bird’s dominant impulse.⁷⁰

The power of Phare’s reading is in its capacity to ‘wheel’ across the words of Hopkins and the critic’s own prose without any abrupt sense of a turn. In this compact sentence, which seeks to trace the movements of mind that the poem elicits, without introducing any new associations or summaries—few new words, in fact—Phare is very much Richards’s pupil in practical-critical ‘humility’.

Empson’s own comments on the poem also seem, at first, rather less eager than usual for ‘a smack at Richards’, acknowledging himself ‘indebted to Dr. Richards for this case; he has already written excellently about it. I have little to add to his analysis and use it here merely because it is so good an example’.⁷¹ Empson then supplies a list of glosses that recall the form of those Richards employs in his essay. But he then finds the poem to contain strong examples of ‘the use of poetry to convey an indecision, and its reverberation in the mind’, in the fashion he later associates with seventh-type ambiguity, and this leads him onto a rather different mode of reading.⁷² ‘It is,’ Empson writes to Phare, ‘a trick often used in poetry, and always in jokes, to express two systems of values, an agony or indecision of judgment. Freud and Ambivalence’, adding, ‘in fact, I wish you had driven that home.’ When Empson drives it home in his own later reading, ‘buckle’ proves the point at which he seeks to extend practical criticism beyond the Ricardian forms of humility. ‘A boy riding a bicycle is for me a typical instance of the organization of impulses’, Richards had commented in response to a review of *Practical Criticism* that highlighted the word ‘organisation’, adding that it is ‘the biological sense of organisation not the business or administrative’, that he intends here.⁷³ Against this Ricardian principle of organization, Empson’s close reading of the poem delivers a striking provocation: ‘*Buckle* admits of two tenses and two meanings,’ he claims: “they do buckle here”, or “come, and buckle yourself here”; *buckle* like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action, and *buckle* like a bicycle wheel, ‘make useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion’.⁷⁴ Hopkins, Empson suggests, experiences fierce, distorting distress in his longing both for beauty and renunciation.

With this reading, the well-ordered ideal of the 'boy riding a bicycle' becomes the fierce 'buckling' of the bike wheel, under the pressure of a Freudian sense of how the mind can work by heavily strained opposites—both in composition and in literary judgement.

For Richards, modern minds are brittle, patchy, and so in need of experimental help, as a precursor to 'curative pedagogy'. Yet his version of exploring the mind remains little concerned with the drama of mental pathologies, with minds under intolerable strain. In this respect, he remains distinctive among the early-twentieth-century versions of verbal analysis that were still keener to experiment with psychological possibilities. This distinction was not immediately clear to his readers and, Richards felt, required reiteration. Defending some of the principles of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* in the preface to *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards again has to deny the relevance of a Freudian sense of over-determination to his readings: 'the principle of contradiction has to do with logical relations between meanings, not with the psychological concomitance of contradictory meanings', he asserts.⁷⁵ Given the psychological trappings of Richards's experiments in *Practical Criticism*, his readers seem to have suspected him of reticence bordering on repression about mental operations, whereas, in fact, his interests were instead in a latent logic of multiple meaning, which only becomes articulate in later works such as *Mencius on the Mind*.

Verbal tact, as Richards defines it in *Mencius*, is a trained capacity for choosing words firmly and well: when we speak the language in which we feel most at home, '[o]ur definiteness comes from our tact in deciding when we may and when we may not use the word and our tact comes from the prolonged social drill we have been through'.⁷⁶ Empson seems to have absorbed this lesson when he later reacted against his brief participation in the vogue for Freudian literary analysis and the errors of tact to which its 'unhomely' sense of language had led. In the second edition of *Seven Types* (1947), he added a footnote to this analysis of 'The Windhover', which comes at the pinnacle of his argument about the divided mind of the poet writing seventh-type ambiguities. The footnote acknowledges the reading as his least tactful: 'It is perhaps the only really disagreeable case in the book'. Empson now feels that, if aware of this reading of the word 'buckle', then Hopkins, 'after much conscientious self-torture would have suppressed the poem'.⁷⁷ At the time of writing this footnote, Empson's regret may have been sharpened because he was once again engaging with the scope and limits of Richards's methods for practical-critical analysis, while completing his third book of verbal analysis, *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951). This book was written in circumstances that tested to its limits the capacity for tactful analysis of what language betrays about the

mind; early chapters were written while Empson taught with the refugee University of Peking during the Sino-Japanese war; later chapters were completed after his work as Chinese Editor for wartime propaganda at the BBC. One of its strong concerns is to show that, despite what his BBC colleague, George Orwell, might suggest in 1984, 'the human mind is not irremediably lunatic, nor can it be made so', and that this resolute rationality can be demonstrated by linguistic analysis of the covert intraverbal structures of ordinary communication. Empson is firm in declaring that, in such analysis, 'psychology' plays no part: 'I am trying to write linguistics not psychology; something *quite* unconscious and unintentional, even if the hearer catches it like an infection, is not part of an act of communication'.⁷⁸ In repudiating any infections from the unconscious, Empson does not, however, just have the experimental psychologies of *Practical Criticism* in mind; he also responds to the versions of linguistic and mental activity found in Richards's subsequent work, including *Mencius*, with which *Complex Words* shared the Chinese context.

'[U]nknown, unrecognized failures of understanding and on such a scale, always hitting you. I felt I must do something.'⁷⁹ This is not, in spite of appearances, Richards's description of his experiences in writing *Practical Criticism*. Although the move from a litany of classroom disaster to a vow for reform is familiar from this book, here it comes as a reflection from the unfamiliar contexts of teaching English in China, from which Richards shaped *Mencius*. This book explores 'Chinese modes of meaning', addressed through the 'condensed poetry' of the characters and concepts of the moralist and philosopher, Mencius, with an appendix composed of transliterated passages, at which Richards had worked during seminars with, as the book's dedication reads, 'my collaborators L.T. Hwang, Lucius Porter, A.C. Li' at Yenching University.⁸⁰ This difficult exercise causes Richards to redefine his definition of 'tact', the quality he held synonymous with the power of good decision making, and so placed at the heart of verbal intelligence: 'The very conditions which make tact successful are absent,' Richards concludes, 'when we study a strange language or a remote author'.⁸¹ *Practical Criticism* is a preliminary exploration of what happens to the tactful business of 'literary judgement' when the author is made, by experimental conditions, deliberately 'remote'; *Mencius* extends this even further, evolving methods of verbal analysis from the material of 'a strange language'. Once again, Empson is Richards's first pupil and his first critic, positioning his own forms of verbal analysis in *Complex Words* in firm counterpoint to those of Richards in *Mencius*—although, as he does so, he once again finds more marks of Ricardian influence than he can easily acknowledge.

A poem is a prism, Richards writes in *Practical Criticism*, 'separating the mingled stream of its readers into a number of distinguishable types'.⁸² For all that he borrows an objective tone of observation here, the results of this refraction leave little about which to be sanguine: these are, as we have seen, 'distinguishable types' of error and eccentricity. Richards, who drew from Coleridge the principle that a mind should be plural, yet that this pluralism should always be under the good regulation of the Imagination, uncovers, from these experiments, 'data' that appears like an alarming cross section through the disordered mind of Fancy. In *Mencius*, he takes out the main experimental variable, the different readers, in order to present the prismatic quality of interpretation as ordered by a single systematic thinker. Here, variability of response is harnessed into a positive principle of method that he terms 'multiple definition'. Mencian ideograms, Richards argues, demonstrate that no simple practice of synonymic substitution is adequate for their apprehension. By analogy, he proposes, we learn an appropriate method for unpacking important English words. So, to understand 'Beauty' for example, we must separate the mingled stream of the word into its many, distinguishable 'senses' and 'gestures'; Richards finds at least ten of the former, six of the latter. The purpose of such multiple analysis is 'practical' in a strong sense of that term. With it, Richards aims both to promote critical thinking by fostering our capacity to be many-minded about words so that we can 'protect ourselves from the coercive suggestion of any one interpretation which seems for the moment to fit', and also to test a method suitable for a 'future dictionary', which would enable cooperative communication.⁸³ In this second respect, *Mencius* is an abstract or oblique version of the more immediately 'practical' kinds of international language project, such as Basic English, with which Richards was involved and about which he was almost unfailingly enthusiastic. The cooperative internationalism of *Mencius* is not of the more direct kind that promotes an international auxiliary language; instead, the premise is that, if we look to the Chinese example, we not only gain some understanding of something unfamiliar, but also some fresh means of understanding what is familiar.

Such a cooperative vision requires work at the level of general rather than particular terms. This means, for Richards, that criticism can be considered practical insofar as it finds some useful handles for our understanding of the 'immense system'. Empson objected to this theory: 'if you take it seriously, there is no longer much hope of talking about a particular case', which, for him, remained the chief hope for verbal analysis.⁸⁴ But, for Richards, all thinking involves abstraction, to a varying degree, with the difference between good and bad thinking the capacity to identify the stages of abstraction, thus identifying what is essential against what is only

accidental. His systems of meaning, Richards might argue, deal in the essential, while Empson's textures of meaning are closer to the accidental (if not to the negative extreme of the protocolists, with their mnemonic irrelevances and personal associations). Accordingly, the method of multiple definition Richards draws from his Chinese adventures concentrates on verbal 'contexts' understood as the systems, rather than the textures, of possible sense. What makes this possible is the removal of verbal analysis to the unfamiliar scene of ancient Chinese philosophy.

Once the method is established, it can be extended back to familiar English examples, instances of what Empson might call 'the particular case'. This Richards does on two occasions in *Mencius*: first, with some lines from Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', and second, with some sentences from Herbert Read's *English Prose Style*. For the former, he calmly detaches the final lines of the 'Ode' and presents, according to the principles of multiple definition, an analysis of their keywords, 'Beauty', 'Truth', and 'Knowledge', by way of numbered lists for Senses and Gestures. So, 'Beauty' multiply defined, has ten Senses and six Gestures (by which term he covers Intention, Feeling, Tone). The former are presented in the form of statements, for example:

- 1) X has Beauty—an ultimate, unanalysable quality.
- 4) X represents something as it should be (The Typical or The Ideal).⁸⁵

The latter are presented as direct speech exclamations, including:

- 1) 'Something here worth while!'
- 4) Tone gestures as in 'What a beautiful baby!' With or without ironic complications.⁸⁶

Drawing these lists for 'Beauty' together with their equivalents for 'Truth', Richards can offer some neat formulae for the line. So, for example: 'the ranges of Beauty and Truth overlap at three points (B5 = T2b; B8 = T5; B9 = T4b)'. This, he calculates, accounts for the line's 'peculiarly strong suasive force'.⁸⁷ Richards also puts his numbered lists to work to produce neatly compact translations of past critical opinions, in order to expose their logic (or its absence). So, he quotes from Arthur Quiller-Couch this bracing description of the line: 'a vague observation—to anyone whom life has taught to face facts and define his terms, actually an uneducated conclusion'. Richards demolishes this by an application of his formulae to reveal that Q's description is in fact just an improbable sum: that of taking 'Beauty 7 with Truth 1 and 5 combined or confused'.⁸⁸ Such work in multiple definition might seem to fit characterizations of his prose as 'a highly managerial scientific model, one that is born in the laboratory or is sustained by the ideal of controlled experimentation'.⁸⁹ Richards seems to

have abandoned, here, his conviction that we should work from 'the biological sense of organisation not the business or administrative'. Yet Richards still frames these readings with another, equally characteristic mode; the 'prophetic'.⁹⁰ 'We compared different translations of them in a kind of *rapture*', he writes of his initial experiences in translating the Mencian ideograms, and his optimism regarding the yield of the method for other cases, including English poetry, was almost unbounded.⁹¹ The disparity between hopes, method, and results may not be as flamboyantly funny as in *Practical Criticism* but *Mencius* also seems to follow the contours of bathos; once again, Richards is practising the art of sinking in criticism. From these grand visions, we descend first to close readings of some Chinese phrases, and then of some English examples by way of the Mencian template, the first of which prove too obscure, the latter too thin-textured to inspire confidence in the method, let alone 'rapture'.

'Always rather embarrassing,' Empson reflected, during his own time in China, 'to wonder what one gets from travel to make up for its privations; except that it requires so much imagination to stay at home'.⁹² Eliot articulated something similar about the privations of travel in correspondence with Richards. If the motto Richards desired to promote for *Mencius* was 'understanding through estrangement', Eliot's own preference was more for resisting the privations of unfamiliarity (and not just in the quip with which he responded to Richards's invitation to visit China: 'I do not care to visit any land which has no native cheese'.)⁹³ Eliot's letters detail how his intellectual wariness about this venture into 'Chinese modes of meaning' arose from his own struggles with Sanskrit translation. 'The conclusion,' of his own experiments had been, Eliot wrote, 'that it seemed impossible to be on both sides of the looking-glass at once'.

I came to wonder how much understanding anything (a term, a system etc.) meant merely being used to it. And it seemed to me that all I was trying to do and that any of the pundits had succeeded in doing, was to attempt to translate one terminology with a long tradition into another; and that however cleverly one did it, one would never produce anything better than an ingenious deformation [...] I thought that the only way I could ever come to understand Indian thought would be to erase not only my own education in European philosophy, but the traditions and mental habits of Europe for two thousand years—and that if one did that, one would be no better off for 'translating', and even if such a feat could be accomplished, it didn't seem worth the trouble.⁹⁴

Again, even more emphatically than in his response to the (im)possibilities of practical criticism and its role 'in accelerating the exhaustion of the possibilities', Eliot greets Richards's 'outlandish' experiments, his bold linguistic fieldwork, with a splendid crescendo of negatives. Again,

Richards is undeterred: in the text of *Mencius*, he takes up these statements of scepticism from Eliot's letter and, while preserving their words almost exactly, adapts them into rhetorical questions.⁹⁵ The effect of this rhetorical adaptation is already to affirm what Eliot denies; that there *are* possibilities to be explored in this field of radical translation, new formations of thought rather than merely deformations: to the question forms Richards presents, his own answer is always a tentative 'yes'.

IV. PROSE DIAGRAMS

From Peking in 1930, Richards wrote: 'Our task in this age is to understand, not to combat, and as we realize this the temper and technique of criticism is changed'. China had given him visionary hope for a newly practical form of criticism, one that would be conducted through interpretative cooperation rather than rhetorical ferocity. On his return from China, Richards's next venture into the experimental method, *Interpretation in Teaching*, put this to the test. The contexts for this work are eminently practical; it began, as Richards writes in a preface, 'under the kindly stimulus of the General Education Board, as a Statement on the Application of Theory of Interpretation to General Education', and the main bulk of it was delivered to a Rockefeller conference of educationalists in March 1936. With such audiences in mind, Richards was concerned to focus on interpretation as a matter for effective educational practice, rather than as an impractical ('hopelessly abstruse and philosophical') subject for speculation.⁹⁶ The aim is, then, to fulfil what he describes in an apology for one 'bout of abstractions' within *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* as 'the promise that we shall come out again to practical problems in the everyday conduct of words'.⁹⁷ But the book also aims for what Richards calls, in a variant of the phrase in which he praised Moore, 'a deeper examination'. This phrase comes in a wistful retrospective comment on the difference of the work's reception from that for *Practical Criticism*: 'I have often wondered why that display of people's judgments of poems should have met with an eager, if often aghast or hilarious welcome while *Interpretation in Teaching*, though offering a deeper examination of concerns nearer everyman's essential capacities, was comparatively little studied'.⁹⁸ The final part of this chapter considers what the grounds for a reversal might be. If, as Richards also remarks, 'the beginning of every research ought to be superficial', then might *Interpretation in Teaching* reach beyond the superficial early experiments of *Practical Criticism* towards a version of the 'deep experiment' for which Richards continued to hope?⁹⁹

Although we currently suffer from 'large-scale ineptitude in the apprehension of arguments', Richards finds, our minds can become more capable, more intelligent through practice in diagnosing figurative operations as they appear in prose sentences.¹⁰⁰ *Interpretation in Teaching* put this to the practical test, charging its protocolists with particular exercises, such as the provision of paraphrases or parallel sentences, or even equivalent metaphors.¹⁰¹ Some of the responses from readers are, of course, entertainingly bad, permitting Richards his former style of mocking comment, for which the brief exclamatory caption is typical: 'The perfect hostess surely!', or 'Amorous inanities indeed!'¹⁰² The exercises expose a large 'group of the fence-sitters, the hedgers', of whom Richards writes trenchantly: 'These followers of a false middle way that is no way to anywhere, lacking both the ardour, which might land them in truth or in discussable absurdity, and the self-critical caution which would tell them when they were out of their depth, make the poorest pupils'.¹⁰³ This he supports with a long quotation from Legge's translation of *The Works of Mencius*, in which Mencius admires '[t]he ardent', who 'would advance to seize their object'. It is not enough, Richards concludes, to cultivate a well-ordered mind through the ordered interpretation of figures; it is also vital, to put this mind to the practical work of making good decisions. Yet the combination of method and material in these later experiments does not cause their subjects to fail quite so flamboyantly, or at least causes them to fail differently, with less of the drastic comedy of the category mistake. In *Practical Criticism*, many readers disappoint at the most fundamental level, finding, for example, that poems are incomprehensible or absurd because of their metaphors (a cloud cannot have 'desires', 'Imaginations' cannot 'trail'). In *Interpretation in Teaching*, however little acuity the protocolists may show in their particular readings, they do at least suspend such basic varieties of disbelief, analysing the workings of figures of speech rather than rushing to dismiss such verbal conduct as 'outlandish'.

Improvements in response inevitably meant a much flatter, less readable book. While *Interpretation in Teaching* bears the imprint of concern with wider difficulties of communication and with general education, it was *Practical Criticism* that, in practice, proved to have a more marked educational impact. A Ministry of Education pamphlet, 'Language. Some Suggestions for Teachers of English and Others' (1954), cites *Practical Criticism* as a 'pioneer work', commenting that '[t]here is no doubt that it has been extremely influential in English Schools during the last 25 years. It has been misunderstood at times, and misapplied frequently, but, more than any other single influence, it has helped to change the spirit and method of study of poetry in grammar schools and therefore indirectly in all schools'.¹⁰⁴ Misread and misunderstood yet still

'extremely influential', *Practical Criticism* had classroom success (however much this pamphlet overstates the extent), while this continued to elude the work that Richards had more explicitly 'written for teachers', *Interpretation in Teaching*, which, by his own acknowledgement, was another of his practical failures: '[m]y fat formidable books are just too much for teachers, They never get to the places where I'm talking to them'.¹⁰⁵

One factor contributing to the relative failure of *Interpretation in Teaching* might be that Richards finds himself less secure in his pedagogy, both with his immediate and implied pupils, his lecture audience, and his readership of teachers he hopes to teach to teach. After China, where he was himself a pupil of a language in which he was not 'at home', Richards returns to an English-language medium for verbal analysis only to find that even here he is no more the authoritative educator: 'in the matter of the conduct of our native language we are all our own pupils'.¹⁰⁶ In spite of some persistence of the characteristic Ricardian optimism and resilient sense of general purpose, this self-knowledge seems to weigh more heavily on *Interpretation in Teaching*, leading to some marked articulations of hesitancy, and of 'self-critical caution'. It becomes a refrain of the book that students have found the exercises 'too difficult', yet Richards does not seize on this with quite the glee of *Practical Criticism*.¹⁰⁷ Although readers 'quite unable to interpret such prose, or form a defensible opinion as to what it says or as to its merits', sometimes do take the blame, there is a new note of humility in Richards's prose about whether these failures might not belong more to his role as an educator. One of his classroom exercises reads as follows: 'Please frame parallel sentences to the following, indicating whether your parallel supports, or does not support, the argument that the author in your view intended to urge'. To this, he gives the regretful footnote: 'The instruction was very badly phrased'.¹⁰⁸ Of another exercise he writes, 'the further task of comparison was so confusedly handled that I must conclude that the exercise was unsuitable'.¹⁰⁹ Of the poor responses elicited by a third, he writes, 'A large proportion were too baffled by the novelty of the task, or too distracted by uncertainty as to what it was, to be held responsible', adding, when particular bafflement recurs over the figurative language of the passage in question, 'I suppose I must take responsibility for the "metaphor" fog here'.¹¹⁰ Richards is still not altogether humble; when one reader appears unreformed in some of his assumptions in reading, rather than supposing his own previous lectures to have been ineffectual, 'I like to think,' Richards writes, 'that this man was a new-comer', yet this phrase does not quite attempt to conceal the hint of wishful thinking.¹¹¹ Richards has, it seems, come to experience some doubts about his experimental apparatus. The readers are no longer the only variable; there is an acknowledgement, however minor and sometimes

grudging, that the apparatus itself may need to be, if not dismantled, then at least refined.

Richards is certainly no longer so confident about the protocol method, which appears, within *Interpretation in Teaching*, rather like a vestige of an 'old science', which he is no longer content to let speak for itself. 'To reform teaching is so much easier on paper than in practice', he owns in one letter from 1934.¹¹² These doubts contribute to his continual shifting of position between advocacy of theoretical and practical modes of verbal education. Given his general prolixity and rather loosely controlled thread of argument, remarks can be found to support either case with equal strength, and also to contradict each other. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, the theoretical work that precedes the practical data of the prose exercises in *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards vows, 'For this study is theoretical only that it may become practical'.¹¹³ Yet when he reaches the practical plane, he also begins to argue for an opposite trajectory; practical knowledge can, he posits, already be deep and thorough, in advance of its theoretical articulation. This he reinforces when introducing one of his prose protocol exercises in *Interpretation in Teaching*—six different sentences with different inflections of the word 'is'—Richards remarks that it is of course the case that 'we do all use the word "is" with incredible adroitness, but that our theoretical understanding of *how we do so* lags far behind'.¹¹⁴ Against this practical faith is a substantial body of statements indicating that Richards may believe in being practical only in order that he may become more adeptly theoretical. 'We must translate more of our skill into discussable science. Reflect better upon what we do already so cleverly. Raise our implicit recognitions into explicit distinctions', he urges in one typical construction.¹¹⁵ Giving ballast to these theoretical claims are the proportions of the book itself, in which the balance of what Richards calls 'documentation' and 'general reflections' can seem to be more towards the latter. In a symptomatic moment in the closing pages, Richards draws back from giving the data of another of his experiments: 'I shall not give much of the protocols here in detail—rich though they were in minor points of interest. I can summarize the main positions without citation; it will be easier so to sketch clearly the kind of discussion which may profitably be developed, and the morals that may be drawn'. Although this comment applies to a particular case, it also tells a more general story about Richards's shift to a position where his faith in the efficacy and 'profitable' nature of summary seems to outweigh his empirical convictions about the power of data and 'documentation'.

As a counterpoint to this turn towards argument 'without citation', however, *Interpretation in Teaching* does include more extensive 'data' from self-observation. When critics remark that Richards does virtually no

close reading of his own until the end of his life, they tend to look through the narrowed prism of 'poetry' as the object of close reading; Richards does not produce scintillating accounts of the detail of short lyric poems, in the fashion made famous by his pupils and by his other 'new critical' heirs. Yet *Interpretation in Teaching* demonstrates that Richards is already, in the 1930s, a close reader of prose. Here he offers his own extended protocols for some passages, explaining in detail how they work—a process he describes, with a wry phrase, as 'going over the canvas with a microscope and naturally missing the perspective'.¹¹⁶ The speculative instrument of the microscope was one Richards more firmly associated with Empson, whom he characterized as 'the inventor and first user of an ultra-microscope for the discernment of shades of meaning'.¹¹⁷ Here, however, he claims the microscopic method for his own. As he does so, his theoretical inclinations assert themselves, with Richards expressing a hint of doubt about what such close reading, 'naturally missing the perspective', may cost him. Still, the amount of 'documentation' of Richards's own responses remains substantial and, in his subsequent work, *How to Read a Page*, receives theoretical support. 'The main source of any view, sound or silly, which we have of how we read must be our own observations of our own doings while we are reading', he remarks in this book: '[t]here, in the most convenient form, is an admirable experimental set-up'.¹¹⁸

In *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards is not only content to include his own self-observation but also invites it from his readers by the form of his experimental model. Exercises are no longer based around the 'pure' sample, the poem on the page, with debts to the context-less methods of Bullough and Myers and the aim of shaking off stock assumptions. It is not even clear that Richards performed the basic move for which he is most famous—stripping the texts of author and date—when presenting his protocols; the indications are that he did not. He does still espouse a 'words on the page' method, forcing analytical attention onto small pieces of writing, yet he does so without the same strength of interest in making words 'seem odd'. The students of these prose pieces are instead sufficiently exercised by the particular tasks assigned and by the complexity of their material; these are the new barriers against the distractions of assumptions or irrelevant associations. For example, with the aim of encouraging reflexive thinking, Richards presents his readers with a passage with many metaphorical variants for 'love', alongside a critical response, which, from an extreme point of literalism about language, diagnoses these sentences about love as 'nonsense'. This critical passage is, in tone and assumptions, already like one of the bad protocols from *Practical Criticism*. The consequence is that these later protocolists (even the few who consider the author to have hit the right note) are already

relatively moderate, and halfway towards a more reflective response. While this arrangement of material creates an interpretive spiral that inhibits the simple outline and comedy of *Practical Criticism*, it does reflect Richards's new purpose (even if it does not always serve it): the cultivation, by teachers and their pupils, of a self-conscious understanding of language.

For educating readers in self-critical yet still ardent thought about thought, Richards finds his best material in figures of speech. These provide both ready exercises, neat samples of prose, and concentrated complexity. He includes, in the third section of his trivium, 'Logic', the following epic simile (a typical form of his prose), which gives this characteristic balance of practical education with vertiginous heuristic possibilities:

No one who spends much time on Logic refrains from comparing it to a cave [...] so deep that it seems impossible for the stream of thought falling down out of sight in the depths to find its way into the daylight again [...] we cannot help feeling that we are losing sight of the outer world of common experience, that dark vacuities surround us, that there is nothing under our feet and nothing to grasp but obsolete tackle, left dangling by former explorers, from Aristotle to Jevons, men in any case long-dead and probably ill-advised. These feelings are inevitable when thought turns to consider itself [...] In some Swiss gorges, engineers have hung a convenient hand-railed track through the more spectacular gulfs. It is no part of a teacher's duty to do that for Logic; our aim is not to attract tourists but to train thinkers.¹¹⁹

His mode here is also his main subject and coordinating concern for his exercises: 'the figures of speech—similes, metaphors, analogies, comparisons—which, when interrogated, become exercises in Logic'.¹²⁰ Figures of speech are, Richards argues, not just 'a sort of happy extra trick with words'. 'The conduct of even the plainest, most 'direct' untechnical prose is a ceaseless exercise in metaphor' ('as many of my audience pointed out', Richards adds in another self-critical note), and this constitutes much more than just an accidental inconvenience. Figuration is, he argues, the radical principle of language and the movement of expression by which we think best—or, where it proves most harmful when we think badly or fail to interpret with acuity. If poetry represents 'the most delicate of all possible undertakings' in the ordering of cognitive and emotional experience, then figurative prose involves the strongest test of intelligence: 'We think by paralleling; and to think better, to be more intelligent, is to use better parallels', Richards believes. His later exercises thus work against problems such as the suspicion of metaphor and the use of 'remote, inessential or irrelevant analogy'.¹²¹ Here Richards is again in accord with his philosophical contemporaries, Wittgenstein particularly, who

declared to one of his interlocutors, Francis Skinner, in a set of recently discovered remarks from conversations in Cambridge between 1933 and 1941: 'Usually we think of similes as second-best things, but in philosophy they are the best thing of all.'¹²² With the shift from 'as' to 'are', Wittgenstein positions similes not just as parallels for philosophical thought but as a form of it. Richards shares this conviction and its corresponding hyperbole, writing, in a parallel construction to Wittgenstein's, of the "greatest thing of all", a command of metaphor—which is great only because it is a command of life'.¹²³

For Richards, considering whether or not the analogy works, 'the critical examination of likeness and unlikeness', is 'a better exercise in argument than any that formal instruction in the syllogism provides'.¹²⁴ It was to test this in practice that Richards fashioned his new set of 'protocol' exercises for his 1935 Cambridge lecture course, 'Practical Criticism, Prose'. As one of these 'exercises in the interpretation and judgment of argumentative metaphor', he gave his lecture audience (initially an audience of over 250, but subsiding to around 40), the following sentence, from Herbert Read's *English Prose Style*: 'Meaning is an arrow which reaches its mark when least encumbered with feathers'.¹²⁵ This sentence, Richards demonstrates, already includes 'a double metaphor'—the underlying metaphor of meaning as expression or missile, 'shot out in language', as well as the surface metaphor of meaning as an arrow (with the first of these 'so familiar that we may hardly recognize that it is a metaphor'). For this, students had to provide both an explanation and a parallel sentence—of which the following are a sample:

Meaning is a bird which reaches its mark when least encumbered with wings.

Meaning is a picture most easily appreciated when enclosed in a simple frame.

Meaning as a pill is most efficacious when uncoated with jam.

Some of the parallel sentences are rhetorically acute, either finding equivalent analogies or exposing the possible absurdity of the metaphor. 'If we take this to suggest that any feathers at all are an encumbrance,' Richards remarks, then 'the sentence is unhappy'. Some of the explanations the protocolists provide are perceptive: 'The parallel does not hold good,' one protocolist begins his dissection of the figure, 'because "meaning" is an infinitely complex and difficult matter whereas the shape of an arrow is constant'. Yet many miss the point entirely; few achieve a sense of how this sentence hovers just between absurd and acute. Together, however, these protocols do not constitute quite such a 'bundle of strange documents' as those for *Practical Criticism*.¹²⁶ 'Metaphor which is translatable need not be weak', Richards reassures, and with this comes greater promise for these prose exercises than those conducted earlier with poems. Richards could

not have said, with equal comfort, 'Poetry which is translatable need not be weak', and in this discomfort lies the difficulty of the original exercises, performed as they were against the sense that some methods of prose response were, skilled or otherwise, inimical to their material. Prose interpretation seems to present a different case from the start; if, as Richards proposes, 'argument is very largely, and rightly, an exchanging and substitution of phrases', then this paraphrase method for argumentative metaphors may offer a neat experimental set-up.¹²⁷

Yet in practice, the strength of these methods of analysis is dependent on their participants going deep enough, and most of Richards's readers still fail to do so. In supplying them with exercises such as those surrounding Read's sentence, Richards does not just want his pupils to restrict themselves to a simple judgement as to the appropriateness of tenor to vehicle. Instead he wants them to see that the sentence goes beyond a figure towards a caricature of one; a case of paralleling that its author has overplayed by adding an overt metaphor to a tacit one. 'The missile-vehicle is so familiar that it does not need comparison with an arrow (the second vehicle) to support it', Richards diagnoses. It is, as this particular example again suggests, difficult to judge the pitch of analysis that Richards seeks; his work flickers with much uncertainty between claims for simplicity (which might also appear to be forms of reduction or shallowness) and for depth ('to study verbal misunderstanding, its nature and causes, *deeply* enough to find and apply a cure').¹²⁸ Readers are suspended between the cave 'so deep that it seems impossible for the stream of thought falling down out of sight in the depths to find its way into the daylight again' and the 'convenient hand-railed track', which guides a way out.

One of the best illustrations for this movement can be found within *Interpretation in Teaching*, in its use of diagrams that invite us to an experience halfway between the optical illusion and the philosophical meditation. Richards—again, like Wittgenstein—presents his arguments about interpretation in general, and that of metaphor in particular, by drawing from the repertoire of visual tests (or tricks) of gestalt psychology. Richards prints two 'geometrical outline figures which fall into alternate reliefs as we gaze', diagrams of stairs and of a cube, which resemble those of *Philosophical Investigations*, in which a Maltese cross appears in stark outline then becomes background to a pattern of white shapes; a duck becomes a rabbit.¹²⁹ Alongside his versions, Richards prints the following sentence for consideration: 'The metaphor must correspond with its meaning'. He argues that to weigh up a sentence such as this (is 'correspond' an appropriate metaphor?—does it 'correspond?') is '[t]o watch oneself shifting one's interpretation', in an equivalent fashion to when

we watch ourselves shift between interpretations of the convex-concave stairs or cube.¹³⁰ But exactly what these illusory diagrams illustrate about the depth of the Ricardian method can be difficult to determine. Although, as his epic simile suggests, Richards believes in intelligence as a form of bold leaping, without guide-ropes (an impetus he also celebrates in a poem to Dorothy: 'Leaping crevasses in the dark, | "That's how to live!" you said. '), this form of the diagram, to which he turns frequently in his journey 'through the more spectacular gulfs' of thought in and about metaphor, might appear to be very tourist-friendly.

On second thought, the diagrams themselves prove elusive, tricky: it is also true, as Richards reminds us, that a 'diagram is itself, of course, a species of metaphor—a representation, a figure'. To this defence, Richards does immediately add the caution that the diagram is a particularly constrained, even atypical species of metaphor 'with severe restrictions upon how it should be read. It must not be taken too far'. Yet, hardly one to heed his own cautions, he then reverts to boldly optimistic overstatement about the possibilities of the diagram: 'its services in exposition may be immense; and I should not be surprised if, in time, most of the theory of language came to be expounded chiefly through diagrams'. Richards's own use of diagrams dates back to his earliest work—*Principles of Literary Criticism* includes a notoriously fantastical notation of mental process—but the degree to which diagrams populate the prose in *Interpretation in Teaching* also marks a new conviction; that the future of the theory of language, no less, lies in such practical devices.¹³¹ In spite of his advocacy of their complexities, this hope for diagrams gives rise to the suspicion that there are only new forms of bathos alongside the new forms of experiment represented by Richards's later exercises in verbal intelligence: if language can be so easily reduced, then is this the end of an experimental sense of critical possibility?

'Doubt has its depths and shallows like belief', Richards acknowledges, and some of his own doubts about his method in *Interpretation in Teaching* are fleeting, minor, while others also seem to present evidence of a more thorough shift in approach.¹³² Although the last page of the book hopes only for 'paper to blacken and opportunity to experiment', for Richards, experiment is now a fading form; his subsequent criticism moves into a new phase in which he writes few sustained books unified by a method, more disparate essays, later collected around related themes—and, for the first time, poems.¹³³ His only subsequent book that might appear to fit the earlier model is *How To Read a Page: A Guide to Effective Reading*, but it is rather less clear, on further examination, that this work is a simple coda to his experimental decade. As the title declares, this is a manual of sorts (or 'verbal machine', as Richards would prefer to

characterize it), rather than an exploratory venture into some practical exercises from which the author has drawn speculative conclusions. Rather than digesting the results of past experiments, Richards presents his readers with a set of exercises to enable them to read better, projecting the pedagogic principle into the future tense, rather than adhering to the critic's role of subsequent comment.

The early chapters appear dense with comments that hover uncomfortably between ironic self-observations on the works of his last decade and fashionable laments: Richards discusses the current vogue for works bemoaning our degenerating cultural and verbal capacities. Richards does not quite execute the expected *volta* that brings him to say that of course such gloomy stories of decline are at least overstated, if not wrong altogether. Instead, he shifts to a slightly more administrative tone, concluding that there is of course 'enough solid evidence' to support these laments, and that the problem with this literature of pessimism is not that it exists, but rather that it does not do its job of diagnosis well enough; we now need still sharper narratives of 'downfall', as preliminaries to future remedies. Richards, it would seem, still has some residual confidence in an experimental outline for future critical practice, even if only as he begins to abandon his own attempts at its more practical forms.

* * *

For every opinion there is, Richards suggests, 'a spring of ironical comedy' that comes from the knowledge that it might equally well have been its opposite. Even the grandest Ricardian ideal, the 'dream of communication' that informs the books of his experimental decade, is never without this sense of the possibility that things might have been otherwise: 'communication does not occur [...] This is not a heartbreaking conclusion'. Literary judgement, for Richards, whether of poetry or prose, is not the 'agony or indecision of judgment' to which Empson, in his early letters on Hopkins, refers.¹³⁴ It is, undoubtedly, a matter of 'life' and of 'world crisis', yet it is still best handled with equanimity of style and statement, and with well-organized experimental design. So, Richards contemplates problems of mind, meaning, and metaphor with reasoned serenity, at neither of the poles of introspective error he labelled, in *Practical Criticism*, 'Sentimentality' and 'Inhibition'. The turn of his sentences has relentless buoyancy. When he surveys the wasteland of the early-twentieth-century classroom, where 'the heresies, the confusions, the outworn, exploded, exposed-to-death, assumptions that have frustrated so many possible poets and prophets, are being reinvented', it is with unquenchable life in that last word, 'reinvented'; what he finds here is not wearying repetition but invigorating scope for reinventing differently.¹³⁵ There are, throughout

Richards's prose, glimpses that his optimism about the possibilities of limitless verbal intelligence is balanced against the self-knowing sense that this is also 'a dream of impossibilities'.¹³⁶ Richards can be as grandly serious about figures of speech in prose and about Chinese ideograms as about poetry. With all of these varieties of complex meaning, he narrowly avoids the kind of earnestness that could lead to disappointment, rather than to the ironically educative powers of critical bathos. Practical criticism may never quite 'grow up' but it continues to reinvent itself spectacularly across Richards's decade of bold experiments in literary judgement.

III

Emendation

William Empson and the textual crux

Let textual variants be discussed
We teach a poem as it grew.

[Empson, 'Autumn on Nan-Yeuh']

I. MATURE CRITICS STEAL

'Most of what I find to say about Shakespeare has been copied out of the Arden text', Empson assures his reader: the 'complicated and particularly Empsonian readings of Shakespeare' that populate *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), which risk appearing so 'startling and new', in fact represent no particular advance on variorum notes.¹ When, for example, he reads into Macbeth's phrase, 'the Rookie Wood', not only that 'the wood was dark and misty', but also that Macbeth, as he is 'spurring on his jaded hatred to the murder of Banquo and Fleance', is attempting to see himself by the metaphor of the vegetarian rook not the Carrion crow, Empson is not indulging a private flight of fancy: he is merely reworking some editorial material, which includes Henry Cunningham's annotations to the 1912 Arden (I) edition of *Macbeth*, alongside other sources such as Samuel Johnson's *Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765) and the *Shakespeare Glossary* (1822) of Robert Nares.² 'Some critics,' Frank Kermode reflects, 'tend to be ventriloquial, and sound from time to time like their topics, or like other critics. Others, whatever they're saying, retain a recognizable voice at all times: the gruff mandarinism of Empson, for example'.³ But here this exemplary figure for critical individuality declares a 'copied out' mode of criticism: what seems most distinctive of his critical voice in its address to difficult or ambiguous meanings proves most indebted to other voices. The puzzle of how to read Empson's recourse to 'my Arden' thus goes to the core of the question of how to characterize his criticism, and how to give sense to that adjective, 'Empsonian'.

Empson's surprisingly studious thefts from editions of Shakespeare are in sharp contrast with the practices and claims of another early Cambridge 'close reader', Dadie Rylands, who published *Words and Poetry* in 1928. Halfway between defensive bravura and boast, Rylands declared this of his criticism of Shakespeare: 'The following notes are the fruit of my own reading; they are not pilfered from the commentaries of annotated editions'.⁴ With a style more at risk of an excess of originality, Empson's aim is rather different: to assure us that, on the spectrum of literary labours, he is further away from the 'careless ease' of the gentleman critic, closer to the graft of the scholar.⁵ His disarming honesty reads, then, as artifice: pilfering is an alibi for the crime of over-reading, with the implication, 'at least I can't be guilty of *this* because at the time, I was busy being guilty of *that*'. To offer an Empsonian paraphrase, the challenge he throws to the reader is this: 'I know you'll say this reading of Shakespeare is excessive, but you might as well save your breath: the Arden edition backs me up (and I know you won't question the authority of that)'. So, between the 'not pilfered' critical remarks of Rylands in 1928 and the 'copied out' readings of Empson in 1930 unfolds a distinct drama of critical method: a drama that, while it turns on the narrow subject of editorial annotations, participates in some of the widest controversies of modernist interpretation and of the 'invention' of English literary criticism as a distinct discipline, with its own rules for glossing difficulties of meaning. If, in T.S. Eliot's often-stolen aphorism, 'immature poets imitate, mature poets steal', then what of critics?⁶ And does Empson's critical strategy of borrowing share some of the distinctive forms and qualities (ventriloquial, allusive) of modernist style? I explore, in this chapter, how textual criticism, in these early days of practical criticism, proves both technical resource and rhetorical target for the literary critic, and how this opens some formal avenues for the critic attentive to the implications of the experimental forms of modernism.

But, first, how seriously can we take what appears to be 'William Empson's plunge into textual criticism'?⁷ Critics have tended to give his references to, and use of, textual scholarship, little credit, finding them at best a puzzle but more probably a practical joke. Empson was not quite many things: from an ethnographer of Buddha statues, to a science fiction novelist, to a 'choreographer' of ballet scenarios, yet 'textual critic', or even 'critic with a sustained interest in textual scholarship', would still be a surprise on this list: Empson the editor manqué remains an imaginative feat. Even when he came closest to that role much later in his work, collaborating with David Pirie on the edition, *Coleridge's Verse* (Empson supplied the introduction, Pirie the annotations and other editorial matter), his correspondence suggests a firm division of roles. Writing to Pirie

to propose a possibly contentious change to the text of 'The Ancient Mariner', Empson offers him this escape clause: 'I know you have your reputation to consider, as a serious textual editor, and I have not'.⁸ The critics concurred, he did not; even sympathetic reviews of the edition imply tolerance that, whether amused or generous, owes something to the sense that this is a piece either of Empsonian whimsy or of Empsonian rant. As one comments, '[t]o restore Coleridge to himself, Empson and his coeditor, David Pirie, have rewritten the *Ancient Mariner*'.⁹ Empson's reputation as a serious reader and critic of the work of other editors was no more stable, with little seriousness expected from him on textual matters. Nor was this, when encountered, fully countenanced—one critic of his *Ambiguity* notes with mild disbelief, 'oddly enough, he does have a great respect for textual scholarship', only to turn at the conjunction, 'but as a kind of sublimely inaccurate poetry, which is probably more offensive to the scholars than outright rejection of their work'.¹⁰

Certainly, as far as his interests in emendation, crux, and variant extend, Empson is generally not a 'serious' scholar if 'serious' implies 'conscientious'. He tends to make opportunistic rather than thorough use of the available materials, with some striking lacunae both in his practice and its explanation. What, for example, motivates Empson's unexplained choice of the Arden (I) as a reference point for his readings in *Ambiguity*, rather than, for example, the Cambridge University Press *New Shakespeare*, which appeared from 1921? 'The Arden edition, which happens to be the nearest, tells me of four authorities', Empson notes in a later explanation of a crux in *Hamlet*, and perhaps the reason is really as slight as this.¹¹ Yet Empson does more than simply refer to the Arden (I) editions: he makes concerted use of their annotations, with some extensive quotation of specific editorial notes, which, if not entirely accurately transcribed, are sufficiently so to suggest that his engagement with the textual apparatus went beyond his more usual forms of loose recollection.¹² The quotations from Shakespeare in Empson's prose do not, however, reprint the Arden (I) texts, either in detail or in general editorial principle—they are not, to take a significant difference, consistently in the Arden's modern spelling.¹³ One explanation for this might be that the quotations have been corrected and made uniform by Empson's own editors at Chatto and Windus. (Certainly, in the case of *Complex Words*, his editor had to make substantial interventions to revise Empson's 'quotations', of which 'about ninety percent needed corrections—some of a major order'.)¹⁴ Another interpretation might be that the quotations already mark an editorial intervention on Empson's part: eclectic texts of his own in miniature, bearing the marks of certain interpretive choices. However this discrepancy is interpreted, it does testify to the difficulty of

judging the extent and seriousness of Empson's 'plunge into textual criticism'. Yet across the range of these occasions, the more surprising conclusion seems to be that, when matters of editorial detail are concerned, it is rare for Empson to be merely flippant or rhetorical. Both aspects of this surprise—the tenacity and sincerity of his interest in textual criticism, and its apparent discrepancy with the received account of Empson's critical style—merit a fuller account.

'We could not,' Empson writes in *Milton's God*, 'use language as we do, and above all we could not learn it when babies, unless we were always floating in a general willingness to make sense of it; all the more, then, to try to make a printed page mean something good is only fair.'¹⁵ Making 'a printed page mean' is not only a literal activity for Empson (in Milton's case it barely involves this at all; since 'his poetic style does not let us watch him in the process of deciding', the critic's energies are diverted towards interpretive rather than editorial problems), but it often is so.¹⁶ Throughout Empson's critical prose, in its various forms, from brief letters 'smacking' opponents, to concerted studies such as the unfinished book on the complex textual status of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, there is a more than casual importance granted to the critical tactic of arguing for a particular interpretation by looking to (or inventing) the textual history that would justify it. Even his earliest venture into textual scholarship, his remarks in *Ambiguity* about the Arden notes, prove more than a passing flourish of rhetoric: not only is Empson willing to give retrospective defences of his 'copied out' scholarship, he also uses the same strategy—'merely from my Arden'—in later bouts of critical argufying. When, for example, Empson revisits his review-essay on Dover Wilson's 1947 edition of *Macbeth* (originally published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1952) and revises it, thirty years on, for publication in the collection that became, posthumously, *Essays on Shakespeare* (1986), these revisions include the addition of a defence of his 1930 reading of one of the textual cruces in the play ('amoved' or 'and move'). This reading Empson recalls with undiminished conviction: 'I still feel strongly what I said about *move* here in my *Ambiguity*'.¹⁷ That Empson's Arden editions had been on his mind in the intervening years, with enduring strength of feeling about what he had deduced from their notes, is still more apparent in a well-known critical quarrel with F.W. Bateson, in the pages of *Essays in Criticism*, in 1953—a quarrel that remains a point of reference for contested definitions of practical criticism, as 'close' reading, or as reading 'closed' to historical contexts. Bateson charges Empson with an irresponsible interpretation of the line 'bare ruined choirs', from Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, 73: Empson has, in a sweeping commentary, linked this to the dissolution of the monasteries when no such historical context can possibly be intended. One of

Empson's lines of defence is established in the following remark: 'Looking up my old Arden text of the *Sonnets*, I find I had marked an eighteenth-century suggestion that the monasteries were in view here, so I can't be accused of wanton novelty'.¹⁸ Editorial annotations, it is implied—again, with a hint of tongue-in-cheek deference—represent sources of accrued readings, which have acquired authority by consent and reiteration; as such, they represent a level of analysis that if not unquestionably objective, certainly seeks to avoid idiosyncrasy or over-reading.

By the time of this quarrel with Bateson, however, Empson has to make his rhetoric around the Arden annotations work a little harder: what his critics had excused as 'youthful exuberance' in *Ambiguity* appeared, by this point (certainly for more hostile critics), fixed as his habit of inveterate over-reading. In this quarrel, Empson is on the cusp between criticism in which the editorial example is a spur to closer readings and criticism in which it is the impetus behind polemical conjecture. In terms of his general critical trajectory, it is clear that the interests in textual criticism that were strongly at work in the margins of his first two works of verbal analysis, *Ambiguity* and *Pastoral*, had faded in his third, *Complex Words* (1951), in which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) replaced editorial annotations as a measure for how literary criticism ought to address questions of difficult meaning. When Empson, in what is usually seen as the second phase of his critical career, returned to textual interests—in fact, made them a central part of his strategy in the crusade 'against the Christians'—his powers of persuasion were even more fiercely challenged. In his later essays, on some difficulties in Shakespearean dramaturgy, for example (how fast did the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* really fly?), and on the censor's marks on *Dr Faustus*, it seemed that Empson, in his recourse to textual details, was almost always 'Wild Bill'.¹⁹

These varied and shifting engagements with the work of textual scholarship therefore involve some distinct forms of attention. In Empson's early criticism, there is a sense that, for all that this consideration of the editorial example may seem insubstantial (his reworkings of the Arden notes, after all, amount to only a few pages of prose), it remains difficult to push to the periphery: significant questions, such as that of what Empson might mean by 'ambiguity', are at stake here. The later prose, at the points where Empson returns to textual details, provokes rather different questions about his critical strategies and persuasiveness. One question that exerts itself with increasing force for the reader is this: when does the effort of mind to make a printed page mean something good cease to be 'generous and agreeable', becoming instead a coercively fierce confidence in what the author ought to have meant? Of this later work, it is easy to complain that Empson takes variant readings and possible cuts too

seriously; that, despite vestiges of the usual debunking humour, he seems to lose his capacity for lightness of touch in the dogmatic pursuit of eccentric textual histories, substantiated only by a capacity for dazzling flights of literalism. He can, for example, assert that, in 'The Ancient Mariner', the line '*The dew did drip*' must be 'shockingly wrong for the story': 'surely the mariners would have enough sense to drink this dew, which could have saved their lives?' Perhaps, he continues, eager to consider all the possibilities, 'there would only be enough to save one or two of those 300 lives; perhaps the Mariner, always the only inventive mind on board, really did lick up all the dew, and it explains the mystery of his survival?'²⁰

Empson's own 'inventive mind' and talent for worrying at 'the story' lead him to equally implausible conclusions when applied to some more conventional areas for textual scholarship, such as the set of material circumstances surrounding the reception of particular texts. For example, he seeks a rational explanation for the appearance of two pirated sonnets by Shakespeare in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599): 'I think,' Empson proposes, 'that a visitor was left to wait in a room where a cabinet had been left unlocked—rather carelessly, but the secret poems were about five years old; he saw at once that they would sell, but did not know how much time was available. Thumbing through the notebook (the poems cannot have been on separate sheets, or he could have taken more without being noticed), he chose two with saucy last couplets for hurried copying.'²¹ Graphic, casually detailed, and plausible, this flight of explanatory fancy works by the calculus of probability of good storytelling rather than by that of substantiated argument. For Empson, such narrative conjectures are not mere decorative additions to argument; instead, by substituting for other kinds of persuasion, they form the basis for some of his most sustained interpretations and protracted quarrels.

The tone and tactic of this recourse to the editorial example, as it evolves across Empson's criticism, offers a common thread through the varying forms of argument and the fluctuating degrees of conviction required by such criticism. Particular references to textual criticism hold an interest beyond that of considering whether Empson was more 'scholarly' than he pretended, or for probing the paradox of a distinctive critical voice composed of imitations and thefts. They also invite attention to questions of scale, tenacity, novelty, and authority that bear on the general rhetorical workings (and misfires) of modernist critical tactics for glossing difficulties of meaning. To explore this in more detail, I consider, here, the broader significance of Empson's early remarks about, and use of, the Arden notes: these, I argue, play a surprising role in one of his main critical legacies, his conception of ambiguity as the catalyst for a new technique by

which the practical critic can offer further descriptions for some occasions of verbal difficulty. To bring this into sharper relief, I explore a brief contrast with the forms that Empson's textual interests take after *Ambiguity*: his experiments with a Carrollian, 'through the looking-glass' logic of textual reconstruction in his middle works; the increasingly fierce textual idealism of his later bouts of argument around editorial details.

II. AMBIGUITY, CRUX, GRIDIRON

It is not only Empson's close readings, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, that are hardly 'startling and new'; his rhetorical borrowing of editorial practice to launch a 'new' technique of interpretation is also 'copied out'. Editorial preoccupations (textual variants, cruces, emendations) and critical activities have long been neighbours but Empson's version of the conjunction seems to have some more immediate origins in the work of his critical predecessors. There is, for example, the possibility of a direct riposte to Rylands's claims for 'originality' and, alongside this, an influence from the methods of close reading associated with Robert Graves—the critic against whose success Empson measures Rylands's failure in his review of *Words and Poetry* for the *Granta*:

The Robert Graves' school of criticism is only impressive when the analysis it employs becomes so elaborate as to score a rhetorical triumph; when each word in the line is given four or five meanings, four or five reasons for sounding right and suggesting the right things. Dazzled by the difficulty of holding it all in your mind at once, you feel this at any rate is complicated enough, as many factors as these could make up a result apparently magical and incalculable. Mr Rylands, however, is seldom bringing off the trick with sufficient concentration.²²

Empson's own criticism attempts a better imitation of Graves, 'the inventor,' he claims, 'of the method of analysis that I was using' in *Ambiguity*.²³ The most immediate influence here would seem to be a chapter in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), titled 'William Shakespeare and E.E. Cummings: A Study in Original Punctuation and Spelling'.²⁴ Here, Riding and Graves analyse *Sonnets*, 129 as part of a polemic against the trend for modern spelling editions of Shakespeare. Modernizing in the attempt to achieve clarity has, they claim, only had the effect of making the *Sonnets* more 'difficult' (inaccessible, unclear), while disabling their more rewarding kind of difficulty (exacting, strenuous). This leads—or leaps—to an argument about modernist style: it is, Riding and Graves argue, this kind of distortion by 'unjustifiable emendations' that pushes

modernist poets towards their surface devices of difficulty. The 'typographical perversity' of Cummings, for example, is an attempt to be 'safe from emendation', and, as such, it represents a further misunderstanding of genuine poetic difficulty.²⁵ Editorial interference with Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is, then, one step on the path that leads some versions of modernist poetry (understandably but disastrously) towards the reduction of the poem to 'a methodic and fool-proof piece of machinery'.

Empson's account of the influence of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* is, however, rather qualified and the book stands, on closer reading, as a model for the use of textual scholarship against which he sets his own. Textual criticism, insofar as Empson invokes it, is not just a rhetorical counter, as it is for Riding and Graves, whose errors of fact, as well as their swift move to polemic, betray a tendentious use of the editorial details.²⁶ Although he makes some rhetorical play with the 'authority' of textual criticism, it matters to Empson more as a practical activity, against which to test and refine the techniques of the close-reading critic. For his understanding of these practical tasks composing the 'job of an editor', a summary by one of the twentieth century's more Empsonian editors, Stephen Booth can suggest a useful outline: the editor's principal tasks, Booth writes, are 'to establish as far as possible the author's text and to provide glosses for words, constructions, idioms, and allusions with which a modern reader may be unfamiliar'—in other words, emendation and annotation.²⁷ Emendation represents the sharpest form that editorial activity can take; the moment of 'crisis', typically involving a single word or short phrase, where the textual critic intervenes to decide that something in a text, rather than just in its explanatory surroundings, should be otherwise. Here, the editor has to be at her most persuasive to produce what a prominent textual scholar among the New Bibliographers, W.W. Greg, termed 'an acceptable emendation' ('I mean, of course, one that strikes a trained intelligence as supplying exactly the sense required by the context, and which at the same time reveals to the critic the manner in which the corruption arose').²⁸ Since such changes may not be persuasive alone; supplementary defence in the editorial annotations is also common, and these defences appear alongside the more general run of annotations (glosses offering further information or interpretation for patches of difficulty), which resemble the usual activities of practical criticism, although in more fragmentary, marginal form.

Empson engages with both these aspects of textual scholarship, emendation and annotation. In a functional sense, Empson, as critic not editor, is engaged in commenting on rather than creating texts: his interest in emendation therefore takes the form of explorations of the textual cruces that have resulted from emendations by past editors. But if we extend the

term 'emendation' to cover a rather broader range of activities around uncertain words, then it can capture a certain quality of Empson's practical-critical activities. As one critic writes, '[t]he first flowering of William Empson's genius as an anatomist of language, his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, included discussions of several passages in which he found the authorial readings inferior to revisions which he could make'.²⁹ Emendation is a likely extension to commentary for a critic notable for taking considerable liberties with 'the words on the page', whether through misquotation or adherence to the principle that 'a poetical effect is not easily disturbed by altering a few words'.³⁰ Hypothetical emendation seems to offer, for Empson, the pleasure of a very practical form of criticism that is the shadow of re-creation. When he takes, for example, a line from Donne's 'Song: Goe and catche a falling starre' and considers it from an editorial perspective ('if I were set to emend that truncated line . . .'), he discovers something critical by way of a process that imitates the writing of verse: 'I did not appreciate the grace of the construction [. . .] till I realized how hard it would be to reinvent'.³¹

Yet, on balance, the quality of Empson's interest in emendation still shades towards that of the critic who measures what is probable rather than the poet who suggests what the best words, in the best order, might have been. To take a particular example, Empson engages with a long-standing editorial puzzle around an often-amended line by Shakespeare, for which Samuel Johnson proposed an inversion of an 'M' to a 'W':

Thus to take one of the most famous cruces in *Macbeth*,

My way of life

Is false into the Seare, the yellow Leafe,

is an achievement we must allow no emendation to remove; but Johnson's *May of life* seems to me a valuable piece of retrospective analysis, because it shows how the poetry was constructed; first, there would be an orderly framework of metaphor, then any enrichment of the notion which kept to the same verbal framework and was suggested easily by similarity of sound.³²

The note in the Arden edition hesitates between 'May', which seems too bold a textual conjecture, and 'Way', which seems too bold a mixture of metaphors, but finds relief in the gist: 'Fortunately, there can be no question as to his general meaning'. Empson prefers to see this textual 'uncertainty' as the residue of poetic thinking: this is not a case of either/or but of both/and; of Shakespeare enriching his first thought, 'May', by consonance of sound, to 'Way'. Shakespeare creates with this word a sense of pliancy of meaning that can encompass not only 'May' in the sense that creates a seasonal rise-and-fall but also 'may' in the sense of possible plenitude (for *Macbeth*, unrealized or curtailed). Empson does not,

however, argue this from a sense of the importance of recovering—and honouring—the author's decisions and revisions. There is no absolute division, in his view, between wordings that belong to the prehistory of the text and those resulting from the subsequent history of its corruption: 'The garbling of a copier may be exactly like the first clumsy effort of an author.'³³ There is already a hint in this rather drastic democracy of copier and author of Empson's later textual idealism, which over-rides probabilities, and even near certainties, in order to do justice to what he thinks the author ought to have meant. But, for now, emendation, whether his own hypothetical version or that of a previous editor, primarily offers Empson a way to think through 'the grace of the construction', or the richness of lines, and a means of doing so without forcing the usual false functional distinction between emulative creation or critical puzzle.

Empson also impersonates the editor's other main role, annotation, in the glosses for individual words and lines (including those for which the textual choice is not in question) that he weaves into his critical comments on particular poems or plays. Sometimes, in *Ambiguity*, this involves transcription of, or reference to, the comments of previous editors; sometimes it does not, with 'copying' extending only as far as the general annotative form. In the former case, Empson seems to have been a particularly attentive reader of the detail of Henry Cunningham's notes to the Arden (I) edition of *Macbeth*.³⁴ In his glosses for the words 'trammel' and 'surcease' from the following lines: 'If th' Assassination | Could trammel up the Consequence, and catch | With his surcease, Success', Cunningham offers these possibilities:

[*Trammel up*] entangle, as in a bird net [...] Nares mentions a contrivance for teaching horses to move their legs on the same side together [...] But *Trammel* also had the meaning of an iron hook for suspending pots over a fire; and Shakespeare's metaphor may have reference to this; the idea being to 'hang up' or destroy the consequences.

Surcease (O. Fr. *sursis*, from *surseoir*) is a legal term meaning the stop or stay of proceedings in a suit, or the supersession of a jurisdiction.³⁵

Empson's readings appear closely indebted to these notes in terms of information, if distinct in both register and what they allow to remain within the orbit of 'the possible meaning':

Trammel was a technical term used about netting birds, hobbling horses in some particular way, hooking up pots, levering, and running trolleys on rails.³⁶

Surcease means completion, stopping proceedings in the middle of a lawsuit, or the overruling of a judgment; the word reminds you of 'surfeit' and 'decease', as does assassination of hissing and 'asses' and, as in 'supersession', through *sedere*, of knocking down the mighty from their seat.³⁷

For 'trammel', the casually phrased list appears like a colloquial digest of Cunningham's note, dropping some of the pedantry of detail and supportive evidence; phrases such as 'in some particular way' gesture to Empson's rather rougher level of technicality. By means of his rapid listing of present participles, which give a greater alliterative density and compactness to this compilation of pieces of further information, Empson packs in the richness of potential meaning more thickly; conveying the range of possibilities seems to matter more than establishing, with any exactitude, which one of these might map onto Shakespeare's use. Again, for 'surcease', there is a strong resemblance to Cunningham's gloss at the level of informational content but not in the range of analytical attention. Empson opens out to what 'the word reminds you of', with the second person plural only a token curb on a rather idiosyncratic sweep of thought. Any relevant words and associations that may have been circulated in the composition or the reading, without firmly belonging to the text (including words that have only homophonic proximity) may, this asserts, be an important part of the effect and so should be included in experiencing the meaning of a word.

Elder Olson, in an attack on the excesses of Empson's criticism, particularly in its over-use of the dictionary, complains of glosses such as these that they intrude an improbable surplus of lexicographical detail at a point of dramatic tension:

We are actually being asked to believe that the speech actually *means* all these various things; that Macbeth, trembling on the brink of murder, and restrained only by his fears of what may follow, is babbling of bird-nets, pothooks, levers, trolleys, assessments, lawsuits, and what not; and all this on the shadowy grounds that the *OED*, or whatever dictionary, lists alternative meanings for 'trammel', 'surcease', and 'assassination'.³⁸

To this stutter of incredulity ('*actually* being asked to believe . . . *actually* means'), Empson responds:

These current uses of the word appear to Shakespeare or his audience as a kind of feeling about what you could do with it [. . .] Macbeth is trying to feel that this is only a kind of engineering problem; if only he can get the murder done efficiently, he thinks, all this fog will lift and he will be able to see clearly again. Both the mechanical analogy and its underlying complexity still seem to me very direct parts of the speech.³⁹

Analysis alert to the 'speech act' quality of a line of verse, does not, in Empson's view, have to forfeit an acute sense of lexical complexity: this, in fact, forms part of the normal, active experience of 'what you could *do*' with a word. But what is interesting is that, if there is any excess in this

reading, then it does not seem to be that of the dictionary entry—Empson in fact appears to ignore one of the most pertinent senses, for this context, that the *NED* carries for ‘trammel’: ‘to bind up (a corpse)’.⁴⁰ It is unclear, in the case of these lines from *Macbeth*, whether Cunningham noted but rejected this particular sense, perhaps from reasons of date or grammar (although the *NED* does cite these lines from *Macbeth* in illustration of the fourth sense of ‘trammel’ (v.); the figurative extension of ‘To entangle or fasten up’). But Empson, who did not have his ‘reputation as a serious textual editor to consider’, and who was working within the more generous bounds of his first type of ambiguity, seems likely to have cited this sense had he known it. That he does not suggests that dictionary glossing here plays little part in Empson’s versions of explaining the meaning, or at least little direct part. In his introduction to the Arden (I) *Hamlet*, Edward Dowden states: ‘With the aid of the *New English Dictionary* I have perhaps removed any doubt as to the meaning of “mortal coil” (III.i.67), and given its correct sense (though this is doubtful) to “anchor’s cheer” (III. ii.231)’—and it is this kind of editorial digest of the *NED* that is likely to be involved in Empson’s sense of the multiple possible meanings of particular words.

Empson deviates from both models for annotation, the dictionary, and the glossary, in one of the more radical uses to which he puts the Arden material: to question whether we should think in ‘words’ at all when focusing on an editorial crux or a critical ambiguity. Empson, for example, highlights the following lines, which have given editors pause:

I am sick at heart [...] this push
Will *cheere* me ever, or *dis-eate* me now.⁴¹

On the sense of these lines, Cunningham had been characteristically firm:

Reading *chair*, as we ought beyond question to read, the meaning is: this present crisis of my fortunes will either seat me firmly for good (‘ever’) on the throne or else unseat me quite. If the essential antithesis is to be preserved, there is no choice between this reading and that of the Folio *cheere*, read with F2 *disease*. [...] It is true that Shakespeare does not elsewhere use ‘chair’ as a verb, nor does ‘disseat’ occur in the plays; but there are endless examples of his coinage and his powers in that direction.⁴²

Like the chain of negatives in the earlier example, the string of emphatic little phrases—‘beyond question’, ‘there is no choice’, ‘endless examples’—with which Cunningham supports his reading seems in excess of the analytical requirements, a symptom of strain. Empson’s handling of this crux is revealing in quite another way. After noting the textual variants and their possible grounds, he elects ‘*dis-eate*’ as the most likely word, not as

the opposite of 'eat', but rather as an almost non-word, a congregation of letters that does not enforce any obvious interpretation but leaves open a variety of possible senses, perhaps even a deliberate kind of non-sense:

you may say that Shakespeare actually intended, by putting down something a little removed from any of the approximate homonyms, to set the reader groping about their network [...] it is Shakespeare's normal method to use a newish, apparently irrelevant word, which spreads the attention thus attracted over a wide map of the ways in which it may be justified.⁴³

'It may be,' Empson admits in *Complex Words*, 'that the human mind can recognize actually incommensurable values, and that the chief human value is to stand up between them'.⁴⁴ The grammar leaves the argument unclear; is to 'stand up between' to 'stand up' for a particular choice from those available or is it instead to elect something that is 'between' any of the options? Or is a third reading even possible: that 'the thing is, humanly speaking, to try to maintain one's equilibrium while recognizing the various values'? In the case of the 'actually incommensurable' words these textual variants offer, Empson leaves the first route to the editors (standing up for a particular choice), while for himself following the second (admitting something between). A word, on this view, can work in a wide, expansive way rather than as the set form that fixes a single sense.⁴⁵ As he comments on this occasion: 'the Elizabethans minded very little about spelling and punctuation [...] only our snobbish oddity of spelling imposes on us the notion that one mechanical word, to be snapped up by the eye must have been intended'.⁴⁶ One critic commenting on this passage in *Ambiguity* suggests that, by such arguments, Empson presents Shakespeare as a 'modernist', the advance party in 'the revolution of the word', who 'deliberately wrote a meaningless word that fell between several meaningful words, as Joyce does in *Finnegans Wake*, to make the reader think of them all'.⁴⁷ So, his choice, 'dis-eate', acts like a portmanteau word, or like 'Eskimo' language, to borrow a term C.K. Ogden applied to the meaning-rich and meaning-efficient coinages of Joyce.⁴⁸ Empson does not share the concern of Riding and Graves to fashion explicit polemics about modernism from such instances of editorial decision making yet there is a discernible imprint from modernist experiment in his sense of just how difficult we might permit meanings to become, particularly in relation to the boundaries of 'the word'.

In this respect, Empson's willingness to hold word forms in tweezers has another powerful effect: it unsettles perhaps the most standard line of critical interpretation that exists for his ambiguity—that it is an overgrown theory of polysemy, exploring the capacity of 'words' for multiple meaning. This misreading is not confined to literary criticism: Empson even

makes a brief appearance in Charles Ruhl's *On Monosemy: A Study in Linguistic Semantics* as the champion of this mistaken notion of linguistic meaning: 'An extreme example of a maximalist is Empson (1953), exploring ambiguities in literature, and attributing them to words'.⁴⁹ There are evident grounds for this misreading: with a bias towards the small unit, the densely compacted piece of language, Empson can often seem to be focusing down towards the word, drawing rabbits out of the hat of resonant single words such as 'dust' (in the line, 'Dust hath closed Helen's eye'), or even quieter words such as 'peynted' (in the line, 'al this peynted proces'), to highlight just two typical word-based readings from his *Ambiguity*.⁵⁰ His ambiguity types seem to show this general polysemy taking different forms under the pressure of the type in question, to produce varied versions of what he calls 'equivocal words'.⁵¹ In his fifth type, for example, in which the mode is that of trembling 'on the brink of meaning', this equivocal texture of the words tends to arise from uncertainty about what constitutes the prototypical sense: a case in point is the line, 'Her winter weeds outworn' in Shelley's *Hellas*, in which 'Weeds' means both 'garments', especially those of widows, like the old and dried snake-skin, and 'vegetation', and it is not clear which sense would habitually take precedence.⁵² This unforced doubleness presents a very different mode of lexical ambiguity to that of Empson's third type, which covers more deliberate manipulations of word forms containing two or more distinct senses, including the exaggerated type of this phenomenon that is 'ambiguity unashamed of itself', the pun.⁵³ But for all Empson's openness to multiple meaning, to understand his criticism merely as based around the polysemic word is to distort it. Empson's readiness to accept the 'Joycean' non-word offers one impetus towards a more nuanced account; an account that pays attention to its modernist surroundings and to their accompanying possibilities for some more radical linguistic precepts for criticism—even the sense of 'a basic absence, in language, of an intrinsic, consistent, possession of meaning by words'.⁵⁴

It is again in relation to his turn to editorial annotations that it is possible to see grounds for another challenge to the picture of Empson as a champion of polysemy. Insofar as Empson remains a firm rationalist, keen to riddle out the gist or story, he generally proves eager to abandon the concentrated complexity of words for slighter larger 'units' of language that can be read according to the precepts of grammar. 'We think,' Empson writes, 'not in words but in directed phrases, and yet in accepting a syntax there is a preliminary stage of uncertainty; "the grammar may be of such or such a kind; the words are able to be connected in this way or in that"'.⁵⁵ Empsonian ambiguity might then be described as 'grammatical':

it works by elaborating a fuller sense of the context of decision making that certain equivocations of grammatical structure demand, typically because of a hinge in a sentence that allows it to work in more than one direction. Such moments bring the words sometimes called ‘empty’ (‘not’, ‘and’, ‘of’) to the fore, as catalysts for decisions about the direction of reading—an effect Empson explores again by way of argufying against the example of a textual crux in *Macbeth*. The lines in question are these: ‘But float upon a wilde and violent Sea | Each way, and move.’ In one of the more fiercely argued annotations of his text, Cunningham lists multiple variants for the last clause, ‘and move’, urging a new reading, ‘amoved’, in a lengthy note, which begins as follows:

Each way AMOVED, i.e. stirred, roused, excited, or agitated in every way, is, I believe, what Shakespeare wrote, and not the senseless corruption which appears in every text [...] No satisfactory emendation has ever been proposed for this difficult and obscure little crux of the Folio text, the suggested reading is, it is hoped, as nearly perfect as can be both in sense and form [...] Although now obsolete, the word *amove* (O. Fr. amov-er, amouv-oir) in the sense of ‘stir up’, ‘excite’, etc. (any action, any person to action, the heat, blood, emotions, etc.) is not uncommon in Early English literature [...] The only other passable readings are Cappell’s ‘and move each way’, which is very tame; Steevens’ conjecture, ‘and each way move’ which is also tame; and ‘each way and none’ of the Camb. Edd., who explain it thus: ‘we are floating in every direction upon a violent sea of uncertainty, and yet make no way.’

Empson’s attempt to navigate this ‘violent sea of uncertainty’ draws ‘the last word (which so many commentators have wished to alter)’, into his larger argument about how the conjunctions ‘and’ and ‘or’ operate in cases of second type ambiguity:

But cruel are the Times, when we are Traitors
And do not know ourselves; when we hold Rumour
From what we feare, yet know not what we feare,
But float upon a wilde and violent Sea
Each way, and move.

He has described, as one living through such a time, its blind agitation and disorder, and then, calmed by the effort of description, gazes out over the *Sea* with a hushed and equable understanding so that the whole description is called back into the mind, remembered as in stillness or as from a distance, by the last word. *And* here is being used, as so often, to connect two different ways of saying, two different attempts at saying, the same thing; but in this case one way takes over four lines of packed intensity and elaborate suggestion; the other takes one word, perhaps the flattest, most general, and least coloured in the English language.⁵⁶

Here, Empson favours the simple textual choice—‘and moved’—for the grammatical power that it concentrates. Although lacking ‘colour’ when considered as a word, considered grammatically, ‘and’ is a powerful pivot between alternatives, between the ‘packed intensity’ and the ‘hushed’ mood; it is the word that makes it possible to apprehend a rich, rather than merely puzzling, ambiguity.

But what is ‘ambiguity’ for Empson, and how does the editorial example sharpen its definition? Ambiguity would seem to be not quite a concept, quality, or poetic device, but rather a general interpretive possibility that adheres to all language; a possibility for its elucidation by a range of further (and perhaps conflicting) descriptions. Empson gives one stark definition—ambiguity as all analysable language—his critics commonly give another: ambiguity as a localized poetic device. To mediate between, a better preliminary description might seem to be this: ambiguities are ‘knots of complex meaning’, somewhere between a device and a hermeneutic occasion, that both elicit and resist critical pragmatics. What is interesting, in the context of Empson’s thefts from his Arden editions, is that this has some obvious affinity with the editor’s ‘crux’: ‘a difficulty which it torments or troubles one greatly to interpret or explain, a thing that puzzles the ingenuity’ (*OED*). A crux is formed when the uncertain status of a word or the availability of variant readings leads to the concentrated exercise of editorial attention around a particular detail, this cluster of attempted explanations then becomes more textured with each further edition, until the difficulty of the language and the density of its analysis are inseparable. These consensually difficult pieces of language, to which there have been alternative reactions, provide ready points of comparison with Empson’s ambiguities.

Yet Empson makes use of the Arden annotations in order to dispute this similarity: editorial decision making, he asserts, tends to proceed in some rather different ways to his own handling of ambiguities as ‘at once an indecision and a structure’.⁵⁷ In fact, ambiguity, Empson implies, is something that afflicts editors as they deal with cruces, rather than something that is harnessed by them. Empson identifies editors with ‘the conservative attitude to ambiguity’—the attitude that ‘allows a structure of associated meanings to be shown in a note, but not to be admitted’—to which he attaches the faintly ambivalent epithets ‘curious’, and ‘no doubt wise’.⁵⁸ ‘It is assumed,’ Empson writes of the typical editor, that ‘except when a double meaning is very conscious and almost a joke, that Shakespeare can only have meant one thing’.⁵⁹ This double assumption of editorial practice—that meanings are complex and multiple, but that this knowledge should not be acknowledged—is, Empson finds, ambiguous. It represents an attitude close to the seventh type of his

ambiguity: an irreconcilable division that cannot even be admitted to full consciousness. By some neat caricatures, he suggests the different kinds of psychological force that seem to have been at work in different periods to produce this kind of severe façade of the correct text, against the threat of multiple meanings. His eighteenth-century editor, for example, works from a rather over-hearty appearance of rationality about the possible meanings, aiming 'to unmix the metaphors as quickly as possible, and generally restore the text to a rational and shipshape condition'.⁶⁰ His nineteenth-century editor, on the other hand, stores away multiple meanings like a guilty indulgence or private hoard: 'I believe the nineteenth-century editor secretly believed in a great many of his alternatives at once'.⁶¹

For an example of the pathologies of the twentieth-century editor, Empson returns once again to Cunningham's annotations, where he discerns a symptomatic instance of editorial ambiguity regarding complex meaning: one note, he finds, 'might have been included in my seventh type among perversions of the negative'.⁶² The note in question attempts to account for the word 'rookie' as it appears in Macbeth's meditation, 'Light thickens, and the Crow | Makes Wing to th' Rookie Wood' (here, with Empson's typographic emphasis):

This somewhat obscure epithet, however spelt (and it should be spelt *rouky*), does NOT mean 'murky' or 'dusky' (Roderick, quote by Edward's *Canons of Criticism*, 1765); NOR 'damp', 'misty', 'steamy with exhalations' (Steevens, also Craig); NOR 'misty', 'gloomy' (Clar. Edd.); NOR 'where its fellows are already assembled' (Mitford), and has NOTHING to do with the dialectic word 'roke' meaning 'mist', 'steam', etc . . . the meaning here . . . I THINK, is simply the 'rouking' or perching wood, i.e. where the rook (or crow) perches for the night.⁶³

These meanings, Empson argues, cannot be re-covered once discovered, however thick the blanket of negatives with which the conservative editor attempts to drape them. In fact, for Empson, bearing multiple meanings in mind is 'the normal experience of readers', involving a considerably less strenuous kind of cognitive acrobatics than such editorial activity, which seeks only 'the straightforward meaning of the line', to the point of perversity.⁶⁴ Editing serves Empson as a bad example: by exhibiting the meanings it then must exclude; it presents a model for how decision making in criticism should not look.

But is this not, in view of Empson's general habits of criticism, a rather perilous argument for him to make? If editors are too fierce in deciding among possible meanings, then is Empson too lax? Seventh-type ambiguity might be an undesirable trait in scholarship but perhaps first is

still worse. Samuel Johnson, reflecting on the principles of editing Shakespeare, remarked that '[t]he collator's province is safe and easy, the conjecturer's perilous and difficult'—Empson, notably with his first-type ambiguity, which is defined by a generous scope that allows almost anything to be a possible sense, seems to be on this easier path of collating.⁶⁵ Stephen Booth, in the Preface to his edition of the *Sonnets*, admires Empson's 'solution' to certain practical problems with which editors have long struggled. On *Sonnets*, 16, for example ('So should the lines of life that life repair'), editors have 'worked and argued for many years over the precise meaning of lines of life. Finally, in 1930, William Empson in effect pointed out that all the suggested glosses for the phrase are right.' Booth is not notably ironic here, citing Empson in praise of a practice of reading that assumes 'multitudinous meanings', but it is hard to avoid a sense that this sudden 'solution' looks at best disingenuous, if not plain evasive.

Certainly it was the collator's excesses (if compounded by the conjecturer's fiat) of which Bateson found Empson guilty, in the analysis, previously mentioned, of the line: 'Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang'. The analysis—although described as 'much-quoted' as early as 1948—is worth setting out again for the full effect of its plenitude of possible meanings, and of the imperative with which Empson delivers them:

To take a famous example, there is no pun, double syntax, or dubiety of feeling in *Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang*, but the comparison holds for many reasons; because ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing, because they involve sitting in a row, because they are made of wood, are carved into knots and so forth, because they used to be surrounded by a sheltering building crystallized out of the likeness of a forest, and coloured with stained glass and painting like flowers and leaves, because they are now abandoned by all but the grey walls coloured like the skies of winter, because the cold and Narcissistic charm suggested by choir-boys suits well with Shakespeare's feeling for the object of the *Sonnets*, and for various sociological and historical reasons (the protestant destruction of monasteries; fear of puritanism), which it would be hard now to trace out in their proportions; these reasons, and many more relating the simile to its place in the Sonnet, must all combine to give the line its beauty, and there is a sort of ambiguity in not knowing which of them to hold most clearly in mind.⁶⁶

The main points of provocation are clear: the willingness to suggest but not substantiate 'various sociological and historical reasons' for this reading of the simile; the insistence that these many suggestions, however faint, 'must all' contribute to the line's power. Bateson concludes that Empson might as well remain at this level of vague dogmatism, since his ahistorical bias is so strong that when he gives more specific detail (for

example, the monastery reference) he falls into factual inaccuracies (the much stronger case is for parish churches). His analysis is, in these respects, typical of a misdirection of critical curiosity 'to what a poem *might* mean rather than to what it *does* mean or *did* mean'.⁶⁷

Bateson's charge, for all its truth, can still leave Empson, and his first type of ambiguity, relatively unscathed. In fact, in his response, Empson can fully consent to its terms—'I am not much attached to my choir boys, who were put in the list merely to show what a variety of ideas *might* belong to the comparison'⁶⁸—before using the opportunity to clarify how this conditional mode of analysis, richly non-dogmatic with regard to the circumstances that might grant particular meanings, is exactly what he intended by the label 'first type ambiguity':

My First Type is meant to be different from the other ones, and it is only about the first one that I would say what the words 'might' imply needs emphasizing; because what is in question is a general sense of richness of possible reference. I agree that it is doubtful whether the choirs were monastery ones (though their roofs could not have stood fifty years without lead, I would bet) but this doubt only makes my example illustrate better the process it was intended to illustrate.⁶⁹

With this exchange fresh in mind at the time of writing his prefatory 'Note' for the third edition of *Ambiguity* (1953), Empson could still only muster one real regret about his analysis of *Sonnets*, 73: his misleading use of the imperative mode in the sentence, 'these reasons [...] *must* all combine to give the line its beauty'. 'I now realize', Empson admitted, 'that my grammar was annoying'.⁷⁰ A similar concession, a retreat from the fierce 'must', is given directly to Bateson in the remark with which Empson concludes his part in the dispute: 'Of course I have no objection at all to his parish churches, and will in future think of them alongside my monasteries'.⁷¹ This show of magnanimity is, however, double-edged. It works as part of Empson's tactic to neutralize the charge of historical irresponsibility by pleading at worst a social faux pas in his critical register; an over-emphatic promotion of certain of the possible surrounding fictions: 'I think what [Bateson] really feels is that this kind of reference ought not to seem obtrusive in the poem, and that something in the tone of my writing makes it appear so; but I was only saying, however tactlessly, that it is present in the background'.⁷² However much this attempts to defuse the controversy as no more than a matter of 'tone', of a minor lapse in discretion over some rather parochial detail, it remains clear that important principles of critical practice are at stake. Empson's reading of the line aims to move beyond mere demonstration, in a frame of appropriate historical fact, towards persuasion through the amplitude of his

demonstration of what might be relevant to this particular line. While he acknowledges some failures to convince in this instance, he still holds to the wider principle that practical criticism involves a more expansive version of 'context' than Bateson admits with his notions of 'original context' and 'historical fact'. That Empson can join in the game of always being able to throw in more historical minutiae (his parenthetic 'bet' about lead-less roofs, for example) only confirms this: beyond the satisfaction of holding tenaciously to a point, these mere shards of fact achieve very little in the way of presenting the meaning of a complex verbal occasion. By contrast, the descriptions with which Empson surrounds his examples remain largely invulnerable to minor corrections because their focus is not on verifiable detail but rather on suggesting a grammar for the possible epistemological positions that open up around any verbal puzzle.

This capacity for his scheme of ambiguity types to absorb and neutralize criticism might seem to be a problem, a deterrent to its claim to represent a reasoned and reasonable set of critical frames. But this impression of a difficulty may itself rest on a common false assumption: that the first type stands for Empson's understanding of 'ambiguity' in general. On occasion, Empson's critical categories can seem to merit Laura Riding's condemnation, 'seven types of explanatory futility'. Not even Empson will own them: 'I claimed at the start', he reminds the reader, 'that I would use the term 'ambiguity' to mean anything I like'.⁷³ Yet the seven types do still have the merit of presenting a broader grammar of assent to various degrees and kinds of meaningfulness. Although the types are provisional, what Empson calls 'the total effect' of each is relatively distinctive, and so each can offer a shorthand by which to characterize a certain kind of verbal occasion and the kind of critical practice that it solicits.⁷⁴ Empson's own approach includes all seven and criticism that frames him as a first-type ambiguiest, a collator-critic, is reductive.

Further evidence that Empson is not just revelling in maximalism, and that his quarrel with Bateson represents a defence of one particular ambiguity 'type', the first, according to its particular 'rules', can be found in the contrast between the handling of a textual crux in *Hamlet* by Empson and by another close reader, R.P. Blackmur. Blackmur is not a critic who makes much explicit rhetorical play from textual scholarship, but his examples do sometimes return to the kinds of case in which 'the accident of the recorded variations in printing forces the attention upon the variety of meanings bedded down to sleep' in a word or phrase.⁷⁵ In the essay, 'Language as Gesture', for example, he considers a crux in *Hamlet*—'In the dead wast and middle of the night'—that, as he notes, featured in Empson's *Ambiguity*. Blackmur departs from the textual difficulties it presents:

Vast is of course the focal word, and it should be said at once that it appears in this form only in the first Quarto. In the second Quarto and the first Folio it was *wast*, and in the second, third and fourth folios it was *waste*.⁷⁶

Empson's own puzzling out of the line's possibilities had not acknowledged any textual variants, considering only 'wast', yet all the variants are implicitly covered as he ranges across the network of associated words and possible surrounding senses for the word: '*Wast*', he speculates, 'seems to be a pun on 'waste,' 'waist,' and 'vast'. A pun or half a hendiadys? Empson's concern is with the line's syntactical impetus; with the question of whether 'the pun on 'waist' is not so much a meaning as a force holding together *wast* and *middle*', and whether 'dead' and 'wast' are held together more as synonyms or as an oxymoron. Empson concludes, from these speculations around the word, that this seems to be a case of the kind of rhetorical trick he describes as 'two casual shots at saying the same thing', a characteristic way for Shakespeare to encourage his audience 'to adopt a poetical attitude to words'⁷⁷ that plays amongst the possible alternatives, while still exercising sharp logical faculties as to their mode of relation. Blackmur, despite initial appearances, gives a much less precise reading of the difficulty, subsuming any such syntactic or rhetorical discriminations into this kind of permissive vagary:

no matter which way the word is printed the effect of all three is evident and felt [...] a kind of undifferentiated meaning which is a product of all three, a gesture of meaning which can only be less defined the more deeply it is experienced.

This reading becomes, as Blackmur goes on, less like a 'borrowing' of an intricate example from Empson, more a case of selective hearing. It helps to clarify, by negative example, that Empson is not, in general, endlessly interested by further possibilities, further puzzles. As he states in his *Ambiguity*: 'a literary conundrum is tedious, and these meanings are only worth detaching in so far as they are dissolved into the single mood of the poem'.⁷⁸ The aim is not the scholarly collator's amassing of evidence but the critic's judgement of how rich the texture of understanding may have to be in order to comprehend what goes by the disguise of the simple word, 'mood'.

III. THE CHILD IN THE POEM

'Literary criticism is getting steadily more absurd', as Empson observed in a spectacularly rude review of John Carey's *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*.⁷⁹ Of Empson's own literary criticism, there has been a sense that, not

least in his response to textual scholarship, it became 'more absurd' by leaps and jolts. As one critic writes:

During the latter part of Empson's life, however, he was often dismissed as crotchety or eccentric, because of battles like the one over the revised text of Donne against the substantial body of modern textual scholarship. This sort of condemnation irritated him, and he protested strongly against it. Yet his failure to persuade more widely than he did remains to be explained.⁸⁰

Whether this tendency towards the 'farfetched' was a later development is questionable. Empson's work may have become increasingly cantankerous in tone, yet this sort of 'eccentric' conceptual manoeuvre, arguing on the bias between combative and 'zany', was—as a comment in one of Edmund Wilson's letters from the 1930s suggests—always characteristic. Wilson writes this of *Pastoral*:

I have just been reading Empson's new book. Some of the stuff about *Alice in Wonderland* is rather good, and a good deal of it rather farfetched. He has one of those untrustworthy minds which in their more uncontrollable forms prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare.⁸¹

That Bacon wrote Shakespeare was not one of Empson's crusades, though it is not difficult to imagine that it might have been. Those he did go on to adopt—a defence of Herbert Grierson's Donne against Helen Gardner's; a campaign against the marginal glosses to later editions of 'The Ancient Mariner', which show the older Coleridge had 'ratted on' the younger, and so on—have attracted criticism as the work of an intellect in its 'more uncontrollable forms'. But perhaps the textual details deployed in the later criticism only throw into relief the already precarious balance of common sense, precedent, and novelty, in the earlier criticism. The final part of my argument here, however, will be concerned not so much with whether there was a trajectory from a persuasive rhetoric of reasoned engagement with some editorial details, to later failures to convince, but rather with some of the distinctly different forms of critical argument Empson adopts at the points where he touches on such textual questions.

In referring to the Arden notes in his *Ambiguity*, Empson was happy to take from past editors the content of annotations, whether it comprised lexical or historical information, but found the basic form of textual scholarship (which might be termed, 'demonstrate in order to exclude') prone to radical ambiguity. Against this, he proposed a kind of critical calculus, his grammar of the seven types, to do what the editorial form could not. In his later engagements with textual criticism, Empson's complaint is rather different; it is not so much against the forms of editorial activity (speculating, for example, as to the probable circumstances of transmission;

plotting the likely 'story' of poems), as it is against the particular interpretations at which editors arrive—usually, Empson accuses, from distorting beliefs, or from a sense of literary history distorted by inattentiveness to beliefs. So Donne's editors and critics are in trouble not because they neglect some subsidiary senses of words in the line, 'There is no penance due to innocence', but rather because of their failure to perceive that the line is not 'dirty' but instead 'defiant', to the point of heresy. The focus of Empson's early efforts was towards working out what the lines meant (to author and first audience) while giving as rich, yet as decisive, an account of the meaning as the particular circumstances of the case required. Empson's later puzzlement with editorial choices increasingly reduces to an annoyance—based around his often over-simplified opposition between reading for aesthetic experience and reading for 'beliefs'—that editors adopt the role of mere silver polishers. In *Faustus and the Censor*, for example, Greg's 1950 parallel text of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is dismissed with this remark, 'Greg is an aesthete and appears surprised at the idea that Marlowe would care about the beliefs expressed in his plays'.⁸² One way in which this shift in mode of attention manifests itself is in Empson's increasing preoccupation with textual changes that are not the 'innocent' work of the self-revising author, or of the careless or inept copyist, but which are instead the markers of censorship, including self-censorship. In *Ambiguity*, his interests are in the kinds of revision and self-revision that are markers of poetic process, whether on the part of the author (improving a word or line), or on the part of the reader (who may make an error that, rather than merely careless, is symptomatic of the experience of reading). Later, this becomes a preoccupation with revisions as a symptom of coercive misreading, including the poet's own. 'An editor', he writes against some of Donne's, 'should not print a text censored by the author when under duress, or after having changed his beliefs so much as to be out of sympathy with it. The poem should appear as when geared up to its highest expressiveness and force'.⁸³

In between these forms of response is the happier balance of his sketch of editing as a version of pastoral, the chapter of *Some Versions* titled, 'Milton and Bentley'. Here, Empson is in the company of another inveterate re-creator, Bentley, whose 1732 edition of *Paradise Lost* 'as a work of philological scholarship is contradictory, inconsistent, and careless; as a creative act however, and an exercise in aspirational rethinking, [...] is a much more interesting proposition'.⁸⁴ Interesting, certainly, but often inelegant; there is no creatively acute sense of 'the grace of the construction' at work in Bentley as he makes the notorious emendation for Milton's 'darkness visible', 'transpicuous Gloom'. Against this more extreme example of Bentley's practices, it would seem that Empson's 'rather good' if 'untrustworthy' readings (to borrow Wilson's terms once

again) have not yet become eccentric and incredible. That his readings stay just this side of 'untrustworthy' owes in part to the kind of experience of meaning Empson understands Milton's style to permit. If the Arden notes were, for Empson, further evidence that Shakespeare had 'a wide rather than a sharp mind', with the material history of his texts only widening still further these possibilities for a rich miscellany of meanings, Milton's mind presents a different case.⁸⁵ This mind, Empson finds, is not open for the reader to watch 'in the process of deciding'; instead, the poems present the smoothness of an ambassadorial relation to his reader. Many of the small decisions that make up Milton's epic do require a re-creative understanding but this is not a re-creation primarily based around the moments at which words could have been otherwise, and so editorial annotations to *Paradise Lost* perform a different function to notes to Shakespeare.

Milton's editor is better placed as one version of 'the pastoral figure', mediating between outcast-poet and tribe by the exercise of common sense, the mindset typical of the child, perhaps; the literalist more concerned with confronting puzzles than with being tactful about beauty. This extends as far as not being afraid to be, as Empson writes of Bentley, 'the Man who said the Tactless Thing'. Such tactlessness is required of the editor on the occasions when Milton's ambassadorial front slips to reveal the kind of difficulty Empson terms, with some bathos—even from the not very certain heights of his term 'ambiguity'—'muddles'. Here, the editor must be decisive: 'Milton is wholly entitled to muddles when serious forces are at work in them, when they carry the complexity of his poetic material', Empson pronounces, but often, 'his mixture of pomposity and evasiveness makes him fair game as soon as they are not justified'. Empson's intention is not so much intimacy with, and fidelity to, the particularities of a mind as it is to hold engaged conversation, or quarrel, over what could (and should) have been said. The tenacious argufying such muddles require from the critic or editor is a rather different technique to that deployed around textual cruces or poetic ambiguities as nodes of ramifying significance, and Empson, in first admiring, then surpassing Bentley for such tenacity, begins to show signs of the less open critical manner that predominates once the 'queer realism' of his pastoral has hardened into its later forms of absurd common sense.

It is, however, still in a pastoral vein that Empson cites the following lines from *Paradise Lost*, along with Bentley's note:

iv.555. Thither came Uriel, gliding through the Eev'n | On a Sun beam.
I never heard but here, that the *Evening* was a Place or Space to *glide* through.
Evening implies Time, and he might with equal propriety say: Came gliding

through Six a clock. But it's the Printer's Language: the Author gave it, *gliding through the HEAVEN*.⁸⁶

Bentley here tries to explain away an appearance of excessive literalism. Empson, on the other hand embraces it, offering in explanation a blend of still greater literalism, defiant anachronism and nonsense, by way of an analogy from the looking-glass world that is another locus of his pastoral—an analogy that launches a grand arc of critical comment, more soaring than falling:

I am glad not to have to tell them what was evidently in Milton's mind; that the angel is sliding, choosing a safe gradient, down a nearly even sunbeam; like the White Knight on the poker. But as so often when Milton is on the face of it indefensible the line seems to absorb the harshness of its absurdity; the pun gives both Uriel and the sunset a vast and impermanent equilibrium; it is because of the inevitable Fall of our night that he falls to earth, in the hush and openness of evening, himself in a heroic calm.

With this image, Empson reaches a point of near nonsense from adhering to sheer sense; Milton means something as straightforward as an angel sliding, as though down a poker. Nonsense, in wonderland, is often the product of excessive literalism about sense and as such it hits the note of Empson's interventions, from *Pastoral* onwards, in questions of textual scholarship.⁸⁷ Here, for example, he presents a continually shifting comedy of literalism about 'sense': sometimes Milton's imagination has a moment of greater literalism than his critics realize, leading to misunderstandings that Empson endeavours to correct through his own exercise of bluff common sense. Sometimes Bentley is commended for insufficient literalism, while on other occasions he seems closer to being the butt of the irony for taking this towards excess. Citing one passage from Milton that Bentley felt the need to revise, Empson's comment is thick with a sense of the irony of literalism pushed towards the absurd, sense towards nonsense: 'To Bentley this was evidently not grammar, and he let in a couple of main verbs, like ferrets'.⁸⁸ Of a rather more substantial interpolation, Bentley's three extra lines in the bower scene of Book IV—'why may I not add one Verse to Milton, as well as his Editor add so many'—Empson again turns to the vivid comedy of animal analogy: Bentley acts here 'like dogs who cannot bear not to join in the singing'.⁸⁹ Although Empson pokes fun, it is comradely fun; tolerance of Bentley's missteps comes from a recognition that such emendation is an impulse towards conversation rather than crass correction.

This approval, undercut by irony, is a gesture typical of Empson as he explores the possibilities for adopting a pastoral attitude, '(I am in one way better, in another not so good)', in response to difficulties, whether of interpretation or text. It is again at work, for example, when he takes one of Milton's descriptions of Eve—'her Heav'nly Forme | Angelic, but more soft'—which meets with Bentley's practical riposte; since angels are already 'not manacled with joint or limb', 'if Eve had been more soft [...] than such were, she had been no Fit Mate for her Husband'.⁹⁰ While other editors, such as Pearce, have been tempted to find Bentley irrelevant or risible, while preferring the escape route that 'angelic' is mere metaphor, Empson first swings a blow for Bentley, who can be seen to 'shy rightly at Milton's evasive use of language', and then trumps Bentley's bluntness in remarking that if this is the case, at least 'we ought not to have been fobbed off when there are live walking metaphors just round the corner'.⁹¹ Milton's style, Empson concludes from this experience of riddling out the sense of a line against the efforts of editors, has a rather queasy relation of concrete and abstract, tending towards 'the squalid gelatinous effect of ectoplasm in a flashlight photograph'.⁹² To read it in the 'right' way, the critic would do well not only to adopt the general approach of the editor, who is, in a functional sense, charged with presenting and clarifying the sense for the reader, but also to adopt the particular attitude towards this task—the rationalist, 'honest man' approach—of an eighteenth-century editor such as Bentley, and perhaps even to surpass this by erecting 'the ignoring of 'tact' into a point of honour'.⁹³

These are strong terms and their risks are correspondingly great; the approach can prove grand or absurd. The passage about Uriel and the White Knight seems to 'absorb the harshness of its absurdity' in a series of clauses, which, in their descriptive tenor ('vast and impermanent', 'hush and openness'), still have the lilt of Empson's pastoral. But what of the cases where his prose does not seem to temper either harshness or absurdity? There is, in Empson's criticism, the kind of spectacle of disproportionate 'invective and contempt' over small critical details that causes Samuel Johnson, in his 'Preface to Shakespeare', some wonder: 'It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed [...] The various readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage, seem to be questions that might exercise the wit, without engaging the passions'.⁹⁴ Yet Empson, as one of his critics notes, again and again 'crosses the boundary that divides vehemence from virulence', with an idiolect of disgust ('nasty', 'filthy', 'loathsome', 'nauseating') that, when measured against the individual critics or lines that elicit it, can suggest 'brutal flippancy'.⁹⁵ As one of Empson's passing

targets in his crusade to 'rescue' Donne from his editors (and critics), reflects, whatever the matter of the disagreement, '[w]hat is extraordinary is the combative rancour of Empson's comments'.⁹⁶ These are not incidental misfires of tone, nor are they occasional instances of rhetorical spectacle in which an opponent is resoundingly insulted; the disproportion of Empson's tone is consistent.

Perhaps, then, there is method in this virulence? 'Controversy,' Empson writes, 'often strikes the observer as tedious, but the participant feels he is learning all the time. I now realize that I never really appreciated the poems until it became necessary to defend them'.⁹⁷ Certainly, this position on the edge of what Empson describes, in support of one contested reading, as 'a little frank absurdity' can sometimes make practical advances by way of its tricks of rhetoric; odd analogies, lateral images, demotic shocks, insults, anachronisms.⁹⁸ Such tricks are often put to work at points where Empson is impatient with critics or editors who, from hushed reverence, have failed to think. Empson, for example, begins a comment on a textual question in *The Tempest* with this startling remark: 'The pantomime tradition, I think, has a bearing on the vexed question whether Shakespeare wrote the words for these descents of gods'—reasoning that seems not only not obvious but also obviously farfetched. But what appears an odd diversion in fact rests on a sense of the availability of a straightforward explanation—a sense that leads Empson towards a possible, if not yet plausible answer.⁹⁹ Now that the lines in question have been shown, by bibliographic evidence, to be indisputably Shakespeare's, although 'frightfully bad', Empson casts around for a convincing analogy to make this deduction: 'Shakespeare simply thought that gods in plays ought to talk in bad rhymes, like the fairy queen in the panto'.¹⁰⁰ Read in one way, Empson could seem more guilty of bardolatry than the uncritical critics he targets, by going out of the path of probability to seek to explain away the badness of some lines from Shakespeare. On the other hand, the bold improbability of his explanatory gesture opens the difficulty to the imagination. Yet, even on the more generous reading, are such practical advances a relatively small gain for wide swathes of dogmatism, eccentricity, and offence?

Part of the problem here lies in what we might call, looking back to Uriel, Bentley, Alice and the White Knight, the paradoxical logic of wonderland: at the points where Empson's critical interests overlap with the problems of textual scholarship, it can be difficult to decide whether this is the absurdity of rationality gone too far, of over-stretched 'common sense', or whether Empson reaches absurdity from the opposite end of the spectrum, by means of an imagination that is too fantastical? If one set of critical values at work in Empson's judgement of individual cases would

place literalism and common sense above tact; the probable story beyond the local intricacy, there is also an indulgence of quite other qualities of the critical imagination; capacities for speculation, conjecture, intuition. Sometimes, an 'unfit reader', with little acquaintance with the usual lines of argument and historical accumulations of detail around a particular work would struggle to determine which kind of criticism dominated. Empson can present a reading as though minimalist, hedging no bets, involving only what is probable, and so on, when in fact it is a construction of unsteady conjecture, spiralling speculations, even pure fantasy. It is not possible to draw an abrupt contrast between, say, Gardner's sedulous attention to the detail of Donne's manuscripts and Empson's manner of wandering off into fancy; in many ways, both consider the same kinds of evidence and attempt similar kinds of re-narration of the contentious poems. 'A reader of "Going to Bed",' Empson writes, 'is expected to deduce the circumstances, as when reading a short story'.¹⁰¹ Both Gardner and Empson attempt this narrative deduction: what differs is their conclusion. The puzzle of Empson's readings is, then, not so much their method as their vulnerability: in the case of this elegy, for example, it needs only the clumsiest touches of mockery from Gardner—'I will not go into the question of the underwear of Elizabethan women on which Empson makes some original remarks'—to give a sense of the 'frank absurdity' of his detailed conjectures as to shifts, and as to whether 'Donne may have invented knickers, as a final obstacle' in the scene of undressing.¹⁰² It is, perhaps, the oxymoronic quality of that phrase, 'detailed conjecture' that best gives a sense of the strangeness of some of Empson's criticism on this front; it is strange in part by neglect of the usual rule that the line between fancy and common sense should be clearly visible and so that conjecture should be at least provisional and preferably vague.

This criticism *ad absurdum* is not, however, sleight of hand, trick or joke for its author—Empson responded crossly to suggestions that his works were, as some critics could only imagine them to be, large-scale ironies, even cosmic absurdities, knowing 'tricks' against the reader. To carry off such tricks of rhetoric would involve the kind of decision to persuade that Empson strides over (decidedly not the same kind of move as sidestepping), and he is rarely a 'persuasive' writer or otherwise, dealing instead in stronger measures, such as conviction or belief. Of course there are many moments in *Ambiguity* and elsewhere where he becomes conscious of a probable failure to be convincing and so where he marshals some pre-emptive resources of persuasion, if only in a negative key ('I'm likely to be found tactless here, but . . .'). Such rhetorical self-consciousness is, for example, one of the interests of the Arden references. But

Empson's more usual assumption is that he argues from presuppositions that are obvious and right. In the early criticism, his grammar of ambiguity types is generous, sometimes capacious, so there is less opportunity for readers to feel unconvinced; in the later criticism, he often works from a stricter premise about what a text should 'say' (in the singular), according to what the author believes—or ought to believe. If this still appears 'generous', it is only insofar as Empson strives to be open to the discovery that the author did really mean what he (Empson) holds to be the best meaning, whatever the textual indications to the contrary. There is here, one critic comments, 'a dilemma that Empson worried at—without being so vulgar as quite to express—for much of his life: what's a liberal pluralist to do when he knows that he knows best?'¹⁰³ For Empson, in his later ventures into textual criticism, the resolution increasingly seems to be to say so.

IV. OTHER MINDS

'Lies are the discipline of knowing that people are not you', Empson wrote in a poem that opens, 'I remember to have wept with a sense of the unnecessary'.¹⁰⁴ The disciplined liar has a certain imaginative generosity, working from the sustained imagination of another mind that can be deceived, while holding to the sense of separation between minds that makes one inviolable to the other. This is a strong version of the more usual hermeneutic scenario sketched by Empson; that the discipline of literary criticism is that of knowing, when facing a complex piece of language, that 'somebody might be puzzled, even if not yourself'.¹⁰⁵ Literary critics, unlike liars, generally seek to use this knowledge to bridge rather than maintain the gap, although the basic mode of thought remains the same. When the critic conjectures as to what the author meant, this involves some suspension of the sense that the author is 'not you' but, in an ideally tempered form of intentionalism, this is just enough suspension to allow for the necessary leap of sympathetic imagination, without violating the separateness of the other mind. Empson's sense of this can, however, seem increasingly precarious. He makes strenuous imaginative efforts on behalf of poets at the point of their 'highest expressiveness and force', as he perceives it, which can begin to stray from his touchstone for what this highest point involves: 'Poets, when they are writing well, usually believe what they say; though as a rule they also realize that certain other people would say the opposite very firmly'.¹⁰⁶ Poets, in other words, write best according to the principle, although not the performed conviction, of liars: that other minds think otherwise. This, then, is Empson's

basic criterion for judging textual difficulties; that the best style (and so the editor's desideratum) is a blend of conviction in spite, or because of, openness to other minds.

In this respect, 'emendation' offers a good descriptive term for Empson's critical practice with regard to textual difficulties, including those where no literal or even hypothetical form of change is under consideration. He presents a variety of ways of 'making a printed page mean something good'. The question is (or becomes) but how many good things? If, in his *Ambiguity*, we seem to learn that poems can have more than one meaning, against the grain of the editorial example, then Empson's later criticism can appear, by contrast, rather too ferociously instructive on the matter of 'the thing' that the printed page 'should' mean. The form of grammar characteristic of Empson's judgements is no longer that of 'must . . . all' (imperative and total) but rather that of 'should have' (which includes, 'should have . . . even if he did not'). This is a grammar that can be 'annoying' not just at the surface level of lacking 'tact' but also in the challenge it presents to the democratic persuasions of close-reading criticism. Empson, in his *Complex Words*, argued this:

The point about democracy is not that people all really have equally good judgement; no sane man believes this; the claim is that the government or the constitution has no right to presume that some group of citizens has better judgement than the rest. People with better judgement must try to convince their neighbors, and not over-rule them.¹⁰⁷

The question of his later 'textual criticism' is, then, whether his aim remains to convince or whether it shades towards a desire to over-rule. Does Empson abandon the sliding scale of what is probable and what is well-argued in critical readings for the stark logic of right or wrong, supported by the extreme logic of *ad absurdum* argument? Certainly another remark from *Complex Words* seems closer to the mark for his later work around the edges of editorial emendation: 'There is a sort of terror about the pathos of Lear, and it arises chiefly because he is always on the edge of absurdity'.¹⁰⁸

Decision, after all, can be a heroic endeavour, involving hubris and the possibility of a grand but precipitous fall, and this is the awkward position in which Empson's pluralism places him; while it 'lengthened the odds against sound decision making, it also heightened the splendor of the attempt'.¹⁰⁹ In his *Ambiguity*, Empson elaborates, with the splendour of excess, the circumstances in which choice is not necessary; in his *Pastoral*, he acknowledges choice but also the loss, 'the wastage of human powers' that goes with it; beyond this, the loss becomes of this sense of loss itself—there is a diminution of the pastoral sense of melancholic compromise,

and, with this, Empson's critical manner begins to risk the pathos of absurdity. Like Marlowe's Faustus—'Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please? | Resolve me of all ambiguities?'—Empson summons up textual histories and possible interpretive scenarios at will; sometimes invoking his notorious 'Middle Spirits', and often with confidence on the verge of overreaching.¹¹⁰ His later criticism prompts us to wonder whether this work of emendation no longer has the aim of revelling in, but rather of being resolved of, all ambiguities.

PART II

HOW NOT TO READ

- IV. Paraphrase: William Empson's cheerful heresies
- V. Circumlocution: R.P. Blackmur's failures of style
- VI. Parataxis: Marianne Moore's reticent sentences

IV

Paraphrase

William Empson's cheerful heresies

I. RECOGNIZING THE POEM

Of course, pain is what we all desire, and I am sure I hope you will be very unhappy. But if you go snatching at it before your time, my boy, you must expect the consequences; you will hardly get hurt at all.¹

You might recognize here Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy'—but only if recognition were to take unrecognizable form. When Kenneth Burke describes 'a viaticum that leads, by a series of transformations, into the oracle, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"', the description is dense with difficulty yet from it we still recognize 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.² The reader knows the poem again, with the kind of knowledge that, whether assent or dissent, is acknowledgement: 'to recognise is to confirm by second looks'.³ But in the former quotation nothing of the physiognomy of the 'Ode on Melancholy', its strident and its languorous negatives, survives to seem familiar: third or fourth looks would not be enough to confirm that this is Keats's evocation of Lethe, the 'death moth' and 'the green hill in an April shroud'. What might be more rapidly recognizable are the lineaments of a certain form of prose: brusque, summarizing, prosaic, and decidedly heretical—in other words, paraphrase. Keats's Ode is, according to William Empson, a 'parody, by contradiction, of the wise advice of uncles', and here it appears paraphrased as though by the strenuous tongue of such 'uncles'; Empson rewords it in an avuncular idiom of hard-edged familiarity.⁴

What can also be heard in Empson's voice is a heresy made familiar in New Critical polemic, according to which any paraphrase, let alone one so vigorously unlike its object, does violence to a poem by confusing its mode of meaning with, in Cleanth Brooks's phrase, 'a proposition that will say what the poem "says"'.⁵ 'What we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either', especially not so far out of tune.⁶ Kenneth Burke's

critical comment on the Ode is 'difficult'; its vocabulary recondite and its syntax involuted. Yet, by sequence and quotation, it leads to a familiar poetic scene. From Empson's bluff demotic, although on the surface much less 'difficult', the imaginative effort to reach Keats's verse feels much greater: against Burke's quietly sacral diction around the 'viaticum' or 'oracle', this is all too clearly the heretical practice of paraphrase. Of this argument, Brooks gave the best-known iteration in his essay, 'The Heresy of Paraphrase', published in *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). Brooks writes of 'the resistance which any good poem sets up against all attempts to paraphrase it' and argues 'it is highly important [...] that we see plainly that the paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem.'⁷ This argument was in few respects new but Brooks's articulation of it appeared to crystallize the terms of the turn away from humanist traditions of interpreting poems for meanings or morals, towards formalist practices and precepts. Its ramifications spread beyond the margins of the well wrought poem on the page, through a broader gamut of new-critical thinking and associated writing, both discursive and creative. Good short stories, for example, also resist paraphrase, according to the principles Brooks, writing with Robert Penn Warren, sets out in *Understanding Fiction* (1943). This anthology and handbook sets itself against any practice of reading or of writing that would count itself successful if it had 'reduced the 'story' to the simplest and thinnest illustration possible, and then relentlessly pounded home the moral'.⁸ This, the authors argue, would be paraphrase; stories must always be more than mere *story*.⁹ What we hear in the heresy of Empson's paraphrase of Keats is, then, the reverberation of some fierce debates not only about meaning and statement in poetry but also about moral and message in fiction; debates that had a particular force from the early to mid twentieth century, in a context of modernist formalism.

Yet this problem of paraphrase, and the challenge of Empson's heresy, has not disappeared. For all that literary criticism has claimed a move 'beyond formalism' and so beyond the models of interpretation that give the 'heresy of paraphrase' its rhetorical life, the associated orthodoxy—that poems cannot be paraphrased without loss—remains largely unshaken. Eliot remarked in 1942, that 'it is commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase', and this still holds true.¹⁰ 'We must not destroy the works we teach through paraphrase which dulls their performative force', says a recent author; 'we need to see what is lost if we paraphrase these lines', another; 'To me his poems are remarkable for the ways in which rhythm and style temper or mitigate or criticize what in bald paraphrase the poem would be saying', writes a third.¹¹ Paraphrase evidently remains a force of reduction or destruction,

loss or falsity: dull, generalist, blurring, bald. Although every other new-critical premise may have been discredited, on paraphrase Cleanth Brooks seems to have had the last word. It is against this persistent opposition, this orthodoxy that paraphrase is heretical, that we can read Empson's feats of chatty paraphrase. What they may provoke, by their bold refusal to occupy the only place the heresy argument has made available for paraphrase—that of straightforwardly hermeneutic reasoning at the expense of poetic thinking—is a new line of thought about the status of this critical technique.

Criticism such as Empson's 'rude take' on the 'Ode on Melancholy' might, however, appear something of a rare joke: does it have any bearing on the more neutral kinds of expository prose that more commonly serve for 'paraphrase'?¹² Certainly, for Empson, this parodic paraphrase for the ode is not just a momentary *jeu d'esprit* but rather a typical instance of his critical style. Paraphrase is, in fact, a good 'handle to take hold of the bundle' of Empson's distinctive techniques and tactics of writing, at the same time as it is a subject that offers an opportunity to put pressure on some particularly stubborn critical orthodoxies.¹³ Many critics have mentioned paraphrase as one of Empson's traits, even mannerisms. John Carey, for example, takes *Seven Types of Ambiguity* as the first and most emphatic example in his attack, *Wording and Rewording* (1977) on the paraphrastic heresy, describing it as 'probably the most important seminal work in English criticism this century, and one that is almost entirely composed of rewordings and re-rewordings of pieces of literature' and, as such, a vivid demonstration of the fact that, for poetry, 'to reword is to destroy'.¹⁴ Less entrenched in the 'heresy' thesis but similarly short of an analytical account are Christopher Norris, who finds that, when Empson explores a complex verbal occasion, he tries out 'a whole variety of paraphrastic hints and roundabout suggestions which may at least help to focus the reader's mind', and Terry Eagleton, who, with his own touch of parody, calls attention to 'Empson's outrageously rationalistic paraphrases of sacred literary documents'.¹⁵

This still leaves much to be said about the highly idiosyncratic forms of Empsonian paraphrase, and also about its implications for understanding Empson's sense of critical responsiveness. How, this chapter asks, might Empson's versions of paraphrase be reconsidered against a short history of literary-critical paraphrase in general, and in particular, against the history of arguments about its 'heresy'? Probing this also opens onto two important questions for models of critical practice: first, that of how the term 'paraphrase' came to stand for a whole set of disparate attitudes and practices towards poems and, second, how the 'heresy of paraphrase' argument may have depended on a flattened or unexamined sense of

'prose'. Whatever critics may say elsewhere about the inimitable style of a certain essayist, the linguistic innovations of a particular novelist, once paraphrase is the topic, it is nearly always the well wrought poem that is at threat, while prose becomes Orwell's windowpane. Can we, I inquire in this chapter, unsettle this stubborn orthodoxy by the example of Empson's practice, restoring both texture and technical possibility to prose and making space, within criticism, for paraphrase?

II. SOME VERSIONS OF PARAPHRASE

'Paraphrase' generally covers a spectrum of ways of re-presenting other words; activities of verbal substitution, which range from clarifying, to adapting, to appropriating, to free rendering. The meaning of the word may seem fairly familiar and stable, if broad, but complications are not far from the surface. Even one of the 'illustrative' quotations with which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) supports its entry for the word implies possibilities that seem other to those articulated in the definition: (1a) 'A rewording of something written or spoken by someone else, esp. with the aim of making the sense clearer; a free rendering of a passage.' The dictionary cites Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*: 'He felt that putting into plain words what the other had expressed in a paraphrase, he had been guilty of vulgarity'. But Maugham's sense of 'paraphrase' is quite the opposite of 'making the sense clearer'; it stands instead for being more elliptical, less vulgar; and, strikingly, he communicates this sense by opposing 'paraphrase' to what might normally be considered a fair paraphrase of 'paraphrase'—namely, 'putting into plain words'.

Critics have often seemed rather plainer-minded than that about paraphrase yet the term has remained elusive, with even the most vociferous objections showing traces of confusion about the target. Is the term better confined to direct attempts to reword poems or could it be a much more inclusive term (*para*-phrases; any phrases alongside) for everything a critic finds to say about the meaning of poems? Paul de Man, although resolved in favour of 'true reading, as opposed to paraphrase', claims that 'paraphrase is, of course, the mainstay of all critical writing'.¹⁶ Other more local descriptions of paraphrase might take a variety of forms: are paraphrases perhaps the literary-critical equivalents of recipes, sets of ingredients and instructions for the re-creation of the poetic event, or are they more like prosthetic instruments, increasing the reader's attunement to certain aspects of 'pieces of language' by focusing eye, ear, or mouth around moments of melody, lexical ambivalences, interpretative choices? Might paraphrase even be 'periphrase' in most uses; a term for forms of

amplification or circumlocution? Certainly, that is a possibility that John Crowe Ransom seems to imply in his mock-essay formula for Empson's mode of paraphrase:

It is as if he had prescribed to himself an exercise: Write several thousand words expanding the terms of the sixth stanza [...] The expansion would take place within the locus of Mr. Empson's own ideas, which is a large and fertile area, not within the set of ideas fairly attributable to the poet.¹⁷

This paraphraser is an over-ingenious schoolboy: the problem is not violent reductiveness or the paucity of 'the prose core', but rather the irrelevancies and extravagant extensions introduced by the critic, which begin to look like over-reading, or 'reading in'.

Part of the difficulty may be that, while paraphrase is a word with a pedagogic and practical life, the term has remained at an awkward angle to what Ransom called, on another occasion, 'the proper business of criticism', and so to any stable sense in academic critical prose. It has neither entries in dictionaries of critical terms, nor an easily traceable history of differently inflected uses by individual writers. It serves instead as a label for a low grade activity, barely worth practice let alone reflection, towards which Ransom directed this 'easiest' of sneers: 'the high-school classes and women's clubs delight in these procedures, which are the easiest of all the systematic exercises possible in the discussion of literary objects'.¹⁸

Paraphrase has not, however, been entirely confined to the undergrowth of literary activity in classes and clubs; some sections of a brief history of its use as a literary-critical term can be sketched. What began as a circumscribed term for a particular textual activity—the kind of exegesis by simplified rewording that accompanied biblical passages—progressed to something much wider in scope, a capacious synecdoche for 'all prose amplifications around poems', then to a label much narrower in emotive valence, reaching its current endpoint as a critical expletive. From its first prominent use in a more secular context, Dryden's 1680 *Preface* to his translations of Ovid's *Epistles*, until made famous by Cleanth Brooks's polemic, 'paraphrase' generally held only a bit part on the stage of literary-critical idiom. Yet it had gained a foothold as a practical term in pedagogic contexts, such as the lectures that formed I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929), as English Literature began to become a widely taught and examined degree and classroom subject.¹⁹ With this seems to come a slight grammatical realignment that prepares the ground for the incorporation of 'heretical' into the basic definition of 'paraphrase'. The main use of the word prior to Richards was in the transitive sense, to refer to the action of incorporating reworded passages of other poems, or of scripture, into the poet's own. A typical instance of this can be seen in another book

from a set of lectures from the early days of Cambridge English, Quiller-Couch's *On the Art of Reading* (1920), in which there is reference to 'the passages in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* which paraphrase the Scriptural narrative'.²⁰ This preference for 'paraphrase' as a verb then seems to be largely displaced by noun based constructions: 'a paraphrase of...'; or, 'a prose paraphrase'. With this comes some of the seeds or symptoms of the heresy argument, a hint of the likely *agon* between poem and paraphrase, when they are considered as parallel texts, vying for space on the collage of the heavily quotational new-critical page.

Still, at this point in its terminological history, the evaluative sense of 'paraphrase' is not irrevocably fixed: Empson can throw off the comment, 'but I have paraphrased only for my own pleasure', even without too much of his usual provocative élan.²¹ His Cambridge contemporary, E.E. Phare, writes calmly of 'satisfactory paraphrase', making casual, pedagogic, Ricardian use of the term in *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1933) to describe, for example, how 'it takes longer to disentangle the prose meaning of the *Wreck of the Deutschland* than it does to arrive at a satisfactory paraphrase of, say, *Lucy Gray*: though I am not certain that it takes longer to arrive at full enjoyment.'²² Still, the taint of the classroom exercise, of Richards's inept protocolists and of Ransom's sneer at 'women's clubs', never quite leaves 'paraphrase' before, in the context of the New Critics' virulent rejection, it becomes so thoroughly entangled with the charge of 'heresy' that a note of controversy is part of its fixed and public sense: the word comes to mean the rough handling of poetry in analytical prose. 'An heresy,' as T.S. Eliot remarked in *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1934), 'is apt to have a seductive simplicity, to make a direct and persuasive appeal to intellect and emotions, and to be altogether more plausible than the truth'.²³

Some more recent work has begun to offer fresh perspectives on paraphrase but primarily by considering it either as a problem for philosophical aesthetics or as a test for the limits of synonymy; for whether or not we can step in the same linguistic stream twice.²⁴ Some of this reasoning has been successfully extended to literary-critical paraphrase: Ernie Lepore, for example, explores how, in the 'heresy of paraphrase' argument, critics grant to poems the same status that philosophers grant to quotations in natural language—the status of being unalterable without falsity, of providing contexts that guard their meanings against rewording, or, in Lepore's terms, of being 'hyper intensional linguistic environments'.²⁵ This brings some useful conceptual apparatus to the discussion of 'paraphrase', demonstrating that there are other ways to frame the problem than as one of the relations of form and content—or, to borrow Ransom's terms, 'prose core' against 'residuary quality'.²⁶ But such work still

comes short of a more thickly textured account of literary-critical paraphrase and of its particular forms of rhetorical and analytical liveliness. A better route, then, might be the less travelled: that of attending to the practical detail of particular paraphrases as they work to 'sing alongside' poems.

For 'prose also can have its "song"'.²⁷ Although the 'paraphrase' argument is usually considered for what it may reveal about the particular qualities of poetry, it is just as interesting as a way to take stock of prose, and of certain kinds of violence that literary-critical orthodoxies inflict on it. The New Critics assert that paraphrase fails because it brings poetry into contact with, and implies that it can be reduced to, another kind of language-game: that of 'the plain prose sense'.²⁸ Prose, although ubiquitous in both strong and weak versions of the 'heresy' thesis, is not a necessary companion term, or criterion for paraphrase: rewording could, of course, take place within a poetic form or as dramatic verse, or dialogue. So, in its rather too assiduous accompaniment of 'paraphrase', this term 'prose' comes to suggest two problems for the heresy argument: first, that it risks opening onto a more general rejection of any close reading critical activities that (as most do) take the form of prose amplification; second, that it trades on a narrow and unreflective sense of 'prose'.

The seemingly clear phrase, 'prose sense' is, as it works through the rhetoric surrounding paraphrase, rather less than plain: at one level, it opposes prose to verse, with the implication that they are radically distinct orders of language; at another, it gives 'prose' the status of an adjective and so implies 'prosaic', implying the tedium of reading poems for the message or moral—as though the words of 'a prosing bore', to borrow a phrase from one of Richards's commentaries on the errors of his hapless protocollists:

If we supposed, for example, the *Poem I* should be read, not as a passage from an Epic, but as a piece of dramatic verse put in the mouth of either a prosing bore, or of a juvenile enthusiast, our apprehension of its tone and feeling would obviously be changed.²⁹

Richards's common sense point is also an incidental reminder that 'prose paraphrase' is not the same as the more literal minded exercise of 'putting a poem into prose', by removing lineation, although this is also an exercise that forfeits, in its attempt at clarity, the intricate form-complex by which the poem signifies. Unlike prose paraphrase, however, this activity does not aim for a summary of the 'sense', 'argument', or gist, and it is specifically this summary process—presenting the poem as though a sequence of clear argument or of propositional statements (with the attendant kinds of truth claim)—that forms the basis of many of the new-critical objections. The heresy of paraphrase, in other words, involves the handling of poetry as

prosaic (message-delivering, or propositional), rather than merely as *prose*. Poems are, of course, no more unrecognizable when reworded as prose summaries than when notated as phonological graphs of their performance, or by a barrage of the relevant etymological detail—and probably less. The particular vituperation that attaches itself to paraphrase, amongst all the partial ways of pointing towards the meaning of poems, suggests a different fear: that prose summary makes poems all too prosaically recognizable rather than insufficiently so—and that, by doing this, it may invite versions of the Ricardian ‘stock response’, foreclosing any richer possibilities for slow reading.

For ‘prose’ in both these senses, Empson’s free rendering of Keats’s ode (as a speech ‘in the mouth of [...] a prosing bore’) again seems the epitome, to the point of parody. It reminds us that, despite their widely different fates in critical idiom, paraphrase and parody can share a definition: reductive rewording. Paraphrase is thought to represent the negative illustration of this phrase, parody its vitality: it is by rewordings that achieve a reduction to the bare device that the mode has both its critical acuity and its comic brilliance. Parody declares its heresy and so escapes censure (if not always the constraints of the label, ‘light verse’); paraphrase, meanwhile, pleads a more humble role of labouring explication, only to draw to itself a degree of vitriol in inverse proportion to the humility of this plea. Empson plays on this cusp between paraphrase and parody in his ventriloquy for the ‘prosing bore’ and the effect is to remind us that it is not only rejections of paraphrase but also its basic definitions that tend to flatten ‘prose’, to make it the bald, plain, literal opposite to the more intricate, rich, complex workings of ‘poetry’. To flatten prose in this way requires certain kinds of thought about it, first as a medium of, the second as a possible object for, paraphrase. Regarding the first, prose must be considered an obvious, transparent, unproblematic, and labour-saving medium for the critic; regarding the second, prose must be considered itself so eminently paraphrasable that the critic has no need to complain that any paraphrase of prose commits a heresy. With the paraphrasability of one as much an assumption as the unparaphrasability of the other, the heresy thesis depends on a much starker opposition between poetry and prose than it can often sustain. To suggest some ways towards the dissolution of this harmful binary, I turn here to the paraphrastic practices of Empson: these point to how, by allowing paraphrase and parody, poetry and prose, to be closer companions, it may become conceivable to lift an old, unreflective constraint on the critic’s repertoire of techniques for knowing poems.

To remain first of all with the example with which I began—Empson transforming Keats—evident here are some of the complex critical tactics

by which Empson coordinates paraphrase and parody within his style. If a parody is an exaggerated imitation, an overblown mimesis of a particular style, then Empson's mock-avuncular rewording of the 'Ode' is not its parody; we recognize too little of Keats's distinctive traits for it to qualify. It has no obvious place on the scale of the imitation of style that one philosopher of paraphrase, Peter Lamarque, describes as stretching from parody to forgery; nor does it even seem quite at home in any of Lamarque's more capacious definitions, where 'style' becomes 'style of thought' and so 'the most successful parodies mimic stylistic features that lie at a deeper level than mere surface convention'.³⁰ Empson's prose comment may capture a certain force of ambivalently excessive emotion belonging to the poem, a certain tenacity to its 'story',³¹ but nothing of the technical traits, nor the nuance of its qualities and their unfolding form. To capture this sense of incongruity in imitation we would need to turn away from 'parody', towards some other term, such as 'burlesque'. Yet Empson's words, by their brusque tone and distance from the poem, do achieve another form of parody: that of their own form, paraphrase.

The traits taken to be definitive of paraphrase—rough handling, discrepancy between the language of the poem and the prose analysis, neglect of formal texture—are all 'laid bare'.³² The strength of Empson's paraphrase is, then, in implying a different kind of critical thinking, one within which recognition may be a false desideratum, at least in its more straightforward forms. A paraphrase such as this is a bold experiment in being 'wrong', flamboyantly wrong—and not merely, as critics have assumed, for a cheap effect of wit or a straightforward 'kind of shock-tactics against readerly distance'.³³ Its flamboyance instead provokes some sharper thought about the encounters of works, readers, and critics; about what we might call, with Empson, the 'pastoral' quality of critical judgement, with its ironies of self-knowledge about being, relative to the works it frames and the readers for whom it frames them, 'in one way better, in another not so good'.³⁴ Such rewordings in the key of parody suggest how paraphrase might even prove a device of irony rather than of rationality about 'meaning(s)' in poems—and so, one strong possibility for, rather than the firm marker of the impossibility of, the reader's encounter, by mediation of the critic, with a poem.

Empson's paraphrasing is, of course, varied, experimental, and it evolves with its particular occasions. At the same time, it has the surprising consistency of a set of techniques, taking certain characteristic forms. For example, what I will take here as the lowest common denominator for Empson's paraphrase is the use of inverted commas, or quotation marks, to suspend 'rewordings' within his critical prose. A slightly broader definition would be the presentation, between single (or, in *The Structure of*

Complex Words, double) quotation marks, of at least one prose sentence that amplifies the matter in question, most commonly, but not always, another 'piece of language'. This last qualification is an important one: Empson applies what I will call his 'paraphrase' format not just to distinct 'pieces of language' but also to the attitude, worldview, stance, or tone of authors, periods, possible audiences. Pastoral, for example, is defined in this way: 'a double attitude of the artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one ("I am in one way better, in another not so good")'.³⁵ Parody, meanwhile, conveys 'a certain bitterness': if the meaning is not 'This poem is absurd; it must be 'In my present mood of emotional sterility the poem will not work, or I am afraid to let it work, on me.'³⁶ So, 'paraphrase' not only describes some local, intralingual activities but also gestures out towards the dynamics of some other kinds of interpretive occasion, on which alternative phrases are presented, in inverted commas, for the purposes of explanation or amplification.

To present paraphrases in this form of the summary within quotation marks is not entirely novel, as a glance at editions of, or responses to, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* reveals. Nor is it an expository form entirely confined to literary-critical contexts: when, for example, J.L. Austin deconstructs Prichard's reading of Aristotle on happiness, he does so by turning to Wordsworth's 'The Happy Warrior' and offering this direct speech paraphrase for these lines:

'This is the happy warrior, this is He
That every Man at arms should wish to be.'

I do not think Wordsworth meant by that: 'This is the warrior who feels pleased.'³⁷

For Empson, however, the technique of 'quotational' paraphrase is of much more than incidental or tonal use. One first effect of this paraphrase format is to invite readers to understand the typographic marker (") with reference to a shift in function across its comparatively recent history, from highlighting pithy, notable remarks, with the general authority of aphorism but with no particular implied 'author' or occasion, to conferring ownership over a set of words, as voiced or written.³⁸ For considering Empson's paraphrase, both these functions seem immediately relevant. With regard to the first, his inverted commas sometimes identify stock responses, belonging to no particular voice or occasion of utterance but allowing him to represent the range of things that could be said, while holding all such possibilities at a slightly ironizing distance. To borrow another phrase that Empson likes almost as much as he does these diacritical marks, this punctuation is a small gesture by which he can 'leave room' for the play of possible reactions that defines ambiguity. On

other occasions, " signals an invitation not so much to imagine a voice as to remember to interpret with the subtlety of attention to nuance and social inflection that we might bring to intonation, indicating Empson's firm sense of 'what irrelevant problems arise if you do not interpret the poem in light of its social tone'.³⁹ Sometimes, and more strikingly, the inverted commas indicate a more specific (speech) occasion, attributing a degree of 'voice' to the phrases they frame, although this can involve a varied ventriloquy, ranging from the merest whisper to a relatively neutral register, which seems to imply, 'this is the closest approximation to the sense in colloquial prose', to a flagrantly demotic register that veers between sounding jaunty and hard-edged.

Since each of Empson's books of verbal analysis indicates a distinctive version of the basic interpretive scenario by which reader and critic encounter each other and the poem in question, each puts different pressures on the way in which paraphrase can be technically significant. Paraphrase, in *Seven Types*, takes place specifically in relation to Empson's 'theory' of ambiguity; multiple paraphrasing is the technical correlative for the book's interest in how many possible meanings there are, how they interact, and which can be supported. In *The Structure of Complex Words*, paraphrase can perform the kind of exposure that Empson calls 'blowing the gaff', putting what has been latent or half-concealed into intelligible form; truth-telling about the complexity of words. This phrase, 'blowing the gaff', which Empson uses frequently if not seriously, is a slang phrase of obscure origin, perhaps derived from an Old English word for blasphemous or ribald speech—certainly, it has a life in various dialects which continues this sense; for example, the Scots use: 'gaff; loud, rude talk'; the Jamaican: 'to gaff; to talk loudly and merrily' (*OED*). Rather than any of the grander modes of truth-telling—from visionary speech to verifiable objectivity—there remains a suggestion about this phrase of the slip-up; the French colloquialism, *une gaffe*, is not far away. When the truth-teller is not clumsily 'putting her foot in it', she may be speaking with a deliberate intent to reveal things that will expose others; the figurative expression 'to blow the gaff' can be defined as, 'to let out a secret; to reveal a plot, or give convicting evidence'. Paraphrase is, then, a technique of exposure, of uncovering verbal 'plots', and in doing so, situates itself always on the edge of 'a rude take' on the situation.

Some Versions of Pastoral anticipates this technique for truth-telling, for example, where Empson touches on a word analysed more fully in *Complex Words*, 'delicate', to offer this translation of its insinuation:

There is an obscure connection here with the belief of the period that a really nice girl is 'delicate' (the profound sentences implied by the combination of

meanings in this word are (a) 'you cannot get a woman to be refined unless you make her ill' and more darkly (b) 'she is desirable because corpse-like'.⁴⁰

It is, however, in *Pastoral* that Empson develops his fullest performance of paraphrase as a device for critical wit or for 'interpreting the poem in light of its social tone'. Carol Jacobs, in a study of Rilke's *Duino* elegies, glances to the etymology, 'paraphrazein: to point alongside', to make a rare claim for the possibilities of paraphrase as a form barely external to certain modes: 'the paraphrase, an assenting re-presentation of the poetical statement' is a 'critical analogon' that can be at home with certain modes, such as elegy.⁴¹ A stronger claim in the context of Empson's prose might be for an intimacy between the mode of 'pastoral' and the form of paraphrase. Several of the more memorable statements about his elusive version of pastoral, statements that have lent themselves to aphorism, in fact enter as 'paraphrases' of particular pieces of language. For example, when Empson writes: 'The albatross, tragic and alone like the poet, the figure of pastoral that corresponds to his position as hero, cleanses the cluttered world of civilisation by magical influence, and can do this because it is so completely cut off from it', this articulation of pastoral precepts comes in summary of a poem by Roy Campbell.⁴² Paraphrase puts the critic in the position of a rather different version of 'the pastoral figure' to the albatross; the paraphrasing critic is at once 'better and worse' than the outcast-poet, forfeiting, as he offers his 'prose bridge', a share in the position of 'hero', but gaining commonality with 'the cluttered world of civilisation' (perhaps not so much compromise as another version of sacrifice: the poet sacrifices the world, the critic sacrifices the sacrifice of the world). It is, then, a 'pastoral' tone or vantage point that Empson's paraphrases seem to have in common. Their return to certain kinds of statement about, or position towards, 'emotion', 'moral standing or uprightness', honesty, sincerity, fidelity, and the necessary social buffers of irony or politeness, suggests this brand of fervent common sense against a tinge of mild despair, which, to take a phrase of Empson's own, might best be described as the 'queer sort of realism' that is pastoral.⁴³

With these broad inflections in mind, I shall explore how, as with Empson's types of ambiguity, his own types of paraphrase have some distinct qualities, or rapidly recognizably lineaments, which make possible some taxonomy (albeit non-serious) of its 'seven types'. Empson writes, in a later preface to *Ambiguity*, I 'repeatedly told the reader that the distinctions between the Seven Types would not be worth the attention of a profounder thinker.'⁴⁴ The initial taxonomy I offer here for his varieties of paraphrase is in an equivalent spirit, serving more for demonstrable variety than for accurate formal account—and, after some brief samples, to be

dissolved into some looser descriptive categories. The seven types of paraphrase I identify cannot be matched to Empson's seven types of ambiguity point for point, but my samples attempt to follow something of the contour of feeling of these distinct types as Empson defines them, and for which a brief list in caricature might be this: first (richness); second (double grammar); third (coffee-house pun); fourth (psychological complexity); fifth (fortunate confusion); sixth (wandering irrelevancy); seventh ('something weird and lurid').⁴⁵

So, the first type of paraphrase (richness) takes a form that is closer to periphrasis, with Empson throwing in ever more possibilities, 'for fun'—a phrase from his first type paraphrase for a line from Chaucer, which includes the word 'lese':

Lese, among the absurd variety of its meaning, includes lies, a snare for rabbits, a quantity of thread, a net, a noose, a whip-lash, and the thong holding hunting-dogs . . . I have put down most of the meanings for fun; the only ones I feel sure of are: 'I am not entangled in the net of desire,' and 'I am disentangled like a colt in a meadow'.⁴⁶

The second type (double grammar) most characteristically falls into paraphrases around the hinge of an 'either/or' structure, for example, when he writes this of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*:

Sway'd, if verb, gives, 'I have ruled the country by merciful means'; if participle, 'my natural mercy has induced me either to delay or to dissemble, or both'.

Empson can also extend this format to cases where the decision is interpretive rather than grammatical, for example, in this paraphrase for these lines from Marvell's 'Garden':

Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade

Either 'reducing the whole material world to nothing material, i.e. to a green thought,' or 'considering the material world as of no value compared to a green thought'; either contemplating everything or shutting everything out.⁴⁷

The third type (the coffee-house pun), often involves a tension between different levels of discourse, between things said in a literary-critical register and cases where, as Empson writes, 'the thing can be said to your neighbours', as 'administrative', chatty prose.⁴⁸ The effect can be, when tight, zeugmatic. When looser, it can carry a quality of the mock-heroic; as, for example, in the following paraphrase of some lines from *Macbeth*:

Come what come may,
Time and the Houre, runs through the roughest Day.

Either, if he wants it to happen: 'Opportunity for crime, or the accomplished fact of crime, the crisis of action or of decision, will arrive whatever happens; however much, swamped in the horrors of the imagination, one feels as if one could never make up one's mind. I need not, therefore, worry about this at the moment'; or, if he does not want it to happen: 'This condition of horror has only lasted a few minutes; the clock has gone on ticking all this time; I have not yet killed him; there is nothing, therefore, for me to worry about yet.'⁴⁹

The fourth type (psychological complexity) can appear mimetic; Empson's syntax contorts or his rhetoric overreaches, in sympathy with what he paraphrases. We read this, for example, in his paraphrase for some lines from Donne's Holy Sonnets:

And burne me o Lord, with a fiery zeale
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.

'You, by our eating of you, heal me, and heal your house; your house, in eating you, heals itself; you, by eating with the fires of hell lust and envy, your house, by eating with the fires of Smithfield such heresies as are at the back of my mind, heal me.'⁵⁰

The fifth type (fortunate confusion) occurs when paraphrase teases out, and seems to discover in so doing, some compressed complexities of thought. For example, Empson's riff on the word 'sense' discovers some of the almost punning possibilities for what it can be made to imply:

'We could not know each other at all without sensations, therefore cannot know each other fully without sensuality, nor would it be sensible to try to do so.'⁵¹

The sixth type (wandering irrelevancy) is a variety of paraphrase Empson sometimes indulges, particularly where his material offers little clear argufying to grasp. For example, in his paraphrases for a line from Nash, 'Brightness falls from the air', Empson's implicit paraphrase throws in a sweeping list of possible reference points for 'falls' and 'brightness', which begins:

Evidently there are a variety of things the line might be about. The sun and moon pass under the earth after their period of shining, and there are stars falling at odd times; Icarus and the prey of hawks, having soared upwards towards heaven, *fall* exhausted or dead; the glittering turning things the sixteenth century put on the top of a building may have *fallen* too often. In another sense, hawks, lightning, and meteorites *fall* flashing from heaven upon their prey.⁵²

The seventh type ('something weird and lurid') is where Empson is at his most brash, colloquial and challenging to the expectation that expository prose will (attempt to) be in quiet sympathy with its objects. This is where the sense of paraphrase as a secular version of a scriptural practice is most in view, so that we feel the edge to Empson's description of his seventh type of ambiguity as 'at once an indecision and a structure, like the symbol of the Cross'.⁵³ To take one of the more arresting instances (as discussed in my second chapter), Empson offers the following glosses for some lines from Hopkins's 'The Windhover':

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here,
Buckle!

Buckle admits of two tenses and two meanings: 'they do *buckle* here,' or 'come and *buckle* yourself here'; *buckle* like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action, and *buckle* like a bicycle wheel, 'makes useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion.'⁵⁴

Here, Empson admits two contexts that could determine the meaning for 'buckle'—fasten (armour), bend (a bicycle wheel)—in rather strident conflict; what the paraphrase admits into the surroundings of the poem can seem on the verge of heretical.

As with Empson's own schema for ambiguity types, however, this taxonomy for seven varieties of paraphrase dissolves almost as soon as it forms. A more stable sense of Empson's paraphrase technique might come from considering his practices as on a spectrum of three broad kinds, according to the qualities of the three main literary modes, the narrative, the lyric, and the dramatic. So, the first of Empson's general varieties of paraphrase can be considered as an analytical or reductive mode, that 'tells the story' (narrative paraphrase); the second, a descriptive or expansive variety, that sings alongside its examples (lyric paraphrase); the third, and most distinctive, involves interpretation through the performance of a voice (dramatic paraphrase).

To begin with the first, when Empson analyses a statement into its constituent parts, reordering them so that the concealed logico-grammatical structures are apparent, he engages in a kind of paraphrase. His first example in *Seven Types* proceeds by the analytical rewording of 'The brown cat sat on the red mat' into a series of clarificatory statements, beginning: 'This is a statement about a cat. The cat the statement is about is brown,' and so forth.⁵⁵ This kind of disingenuous analysis is also at work in another of Empson's forms of paraphrase; his use of Basic English to reword a variety of poetry and prose. He demonstrates, for example, by way of the blunt tools of C.K. Ogden's 'International Auxiliary Language', how Wordsworth's later version of the Prelude, rather than 'giving the

lines a bit of polish', has perpetrated a damaging self-paraphrase that has an effect akin to 'turning the guns round from firing at the Germans and pointing them against the French'.⁵⁶ Harnessing Basic English to paraphrase in this way permits Empson some undeniably neat heuristic tricks but, in general, this kind of analysis by 'taking the cover off a machine' seems only prone to damage both the object analysed and the prose in which this analysis takes place.⁵⁷ Analytical paraphrase remains, then, largely peripheral to the forms of Empson's paraphrastic practice.

What is, however, more characteristic is a variety of short gloss, typically introduced by an either/or formulation, which lies on the cusp between this analytical or clarificatory mode and a more exploratory or descriptive manner of rewording. Such glosses prove well matched to poetic occasions where the complexity is logico-grammatical, for example, in determining how to read a word such as 'leaned' in Eliot's line, 'Leaned backward with a lipless grin'.⁵⁸ As a critical form, the paraphrastic gloss can be fairly tight about the possible meanings, with an explicit movement to one or two 'resultant' readings: 'I am being verbose here to show the complexity of the material; the resultant ideas from all these permutations are only two'.⁵⁹ But, of course, once Empson has been verbose, once the meanings have been allowed to ramify, the sum of the calculation often seems less relevant than the permutations on the way, and, in this way, such paraphrases tend to become more descriptive than analytical.

To give an expansive or exploratory description of the experience of reading might, in a tighter definition of the term, fall beyond 'paraphrase' yet in Empson's case such descriptions are entirely characteristic. The additive list, with items lightly strung together by semicolons, is, in fact, the general prose form taken by the majority of the paraphrases that he does not put into the blunter forms of direct speech. These lists sweep across a wide range of ideas, associations, and other words, including the words of others (by allusion, quotation, ventriloquy), as in this gloss for 'curious':

Curious could mean 'rich and strange' (nature), 'improved by care' (art) or 'inquisitive' (feeling towards me, since nature is a mirror, as I do towards her).⁶⁰

Paraphrase by allusion allows for economy while suggesting the powerful amplitude of experience possible in the reading of a word or line (here, 'rich and strange' summons a readymade world, that of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). Sometimes amplitude becomes obvious excess, either through Empson's sheer practical felicity or through a more deliberate demonstration of a point about poetry's achievement of 'the complex in the simple'. But in all cases, this kind of descriptive fullness invites us to ask, as Angela

Leighton suggests we must: 'Why should paraphrase be applied only to the finished thought-content of a poem and not to its thinking process?'⁶¹ Certainly, many of Empson's more descriptive-exploratory paraphrases invite consideration as forms of thinking, or even singing, alongside poems, rather than as failed attempts at wrenching poems into propositional summaries of their cores. Often evocative phrases, held off from the analytical bustle of the critical text by inverted commas, these descriptive paraphrases can seem like briefly lyric interludes, a respite from 'argufying'; a flight of rhythmic, crafted, even melodious prose that sings alongside the literary examples. Paraphrase, in music, means almost the opposite to reductive reworking; instead, brilliant amplifying, 'elaborating on a well-known tune, esp. from an opera, and used as a vehicle for virtuosity', 'melodic and sometimes rhythmic ornamentation' (*OED*)—and something of this sense could certainly also be in play for Empsonian paraphrase.

A still more characteristic form for Empson's paraphrastic activity might be termed 'speech form' paraphrase and involves the adoption of 'voice' in such a way as to imply a judgement of the lyric persona or projected character in question. In such speech form paraphrases, Empson is inviting, and delighting in, the risk of sounding like 'the prosing bore', with self-conscious wit about the homiletic manner—as, for example, in the following paraphrase of a line from *Measure for Measure*:

That you shall stifle in your own report,
And smell of calumnie.

'While determined, I do not wish to nag; I will stop talking now on the understanding that I have made my point sufficiently clear.'

In these cases, readers watch or participate in a process of decision making by measuring their responses against the attitudes typified in the paraphrases. Typified is not a casual word here; it is partly by tending towards caricature that the paraphrases make room around their edges for greater attunement, a principle of judgement-by-irony that Empson declared in his formula: 'I am an individual and he is a Type'. This can be seen at work in Empson's paraphrases for a line from Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, 94, 'They rightly do inherit heaven's graces'. Empson offers these options: 'Either "inherit, they alone, by right" or "inherit what all men inherit and use it rightly"; these correspond to the opposed views of W.H. as aristocrat and vulgar careerist', and it is the bald statement of these typified opposites that creates a space between for seeing the shades and nuances to the figure of 'W.H.'—the individual is thrown into relief by the types.⁶²

Even where there is no dramatic situation as such, no character to mimic or censure, it is usual for Empson's prose amplifications around his

literary examples to carry mild suggestions of a speech scenario. Abstract thought tends to be given the form of a conversational remark, structured around personal pronouns that imply speakers (although this is not always matched with consistency in the mimesis of spoken style). Colloquial paraphrase offers a way in which to explain poems without falling into the discursive traps of explanation, and without forfeiting the possibilities for nuance, tone (including stridency), and swift social judgement that are inherent in the voice. The two main kinds of speech form that are characteristic, with their different varieties of irony (a quieter kind of ventriloquy that mixes implied, indirect voices and a much more brash demotic, creating some 'direct speech' forms of paraphrase) are both evident in the long and virtuoso paraphrases for *Sonnets*, 94 that frame the chapter of Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* titled, 'They That Have Power, Twist of Heroic-Pastoral Ideas into an Ironical Acceptance of Aristocracy'.⁶³ Previous to Empson, there had already been some long prose summaries of this sonnet's sense: Edward Dowden's, for example, began:

'They who can hold their passions in check, who can refuse to wrath its outbreak, who can seem loving yet keep a cool heart, who move passion in others, yet are cold and unmoved themselves—they rightly inherit from heaven large gifts, for they husband them; whereas passionate intemperate natures squander their endowments.'⁶⁴

Dowden's paraphrase is, in one sense, relatively minimal rewording, using words and small phrases from the sonnet as anchors—'They . . . move . . . others . . . unmoved . . . they rightly . . . inherit . . . husband'—so as to sustain the tensions of the poem (for example, that between the capacity to move yet the will to invulnerability). There is, however, an attempt to deliver the gist—'passionate intemperate natures squander their endowments'—that seems rather to force a moral. Against this, Empson's two extended paraphrases of the sonnet find a distinctive mode of address by which to negotiate this problem of the prose sense and the moral. In the first of these, Empson follows Dowden in giving his version of the poem's argument as a mixture of homily and exhortatory address:

'The best people are indifferent to temptation and detached from the world; nor is this state selfish, because they do good by unconscious influence, like the flower. You must be good like them; you are quite like them already. But even the best people must be continually on their guard because they become the worst.'⁶⁵

This moves significantly away from word-for-word substitution, covering in swift clauses larger units of sense and the poem's general speech act

('You must be good like them'). The second of Empson's paraphrases shifts still further away:

'I am praising to you the contemptible things you admire, you little plotter; this is how the others try to betray you through flattery; yet it is your little generosity, though it show only as lewdness, which will betray you; for it is wise to be cold, both because you are too inflammable and because I have been so much hurt by you who are heartless.'⁶⁶

Although not quite as stark as the two-part paraphrase (for the sense and for the force) that Richards advocates in his *Practical Criticism*, there is a clear concentration of the emotive surcharge of the poem into the second of Empson's paraphrases, at the expense of the calmer ironies that persist, alongside the more straightforward summarizing of the sense, in his first version of the paraphrase. Empson's double paraphrase of *Sonnets*, 94 is, in this way, representative of these two distinct manners he adopts when rewording in speech form: his relatively neutral register and his flamboyant demotic.

These speech forms now require some more careful characterization. But first, it is worth noting that in their background are some persistent, if rather quieter, or more indirect hints of voice; traces (evaluative words, idiomatic expressions, deixis) of what a linguistic description might label 'free indirect style', which work at a low level of energy, much below that of direct speech, yet still with enough presence to unsettle the impression of a single voice. It is never quite clear, from Empson's paraphrastic vocabulary, who speaks, or perhaps, how many people are speaking. To take the case of his rewording of some stanzas from Eliot's 'Whispers of Immortality', it is hard to hear clearly whether the paraphrase, although anchored by direct or barely modified quotations from Eliot's poem (here highlighted in *italics*), draws most on an Eliotic, a Donnean, or an Empsonian idiom for its further amplifications:

Donne, I suppose, was such another
Who found no substitute for sense,
To seize and clutch and penetrate;
Expert beyond experience,
He knew the anguish of the marrow
The age of the skeleton;
No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.

'Donne *found no substitute for* desire and the world of obvious reality known through the *senses*, as a means of investigation, because the habits of the body, or its apprehension of reality, have always information still reserved from one who is *experienced* in them, and are more profound than any

individual who lives by them is aware.' This is the meaning if the first verse is a self-contained unit [...] Or, taking lines 3 and 4 with the next verse, 'Donne, who was *expert beyond the experience of sense* at *penetrating*, who could form ideas which *sense* could not have suggested, *knew* also those isolated and fundamental pains, *the anguish of the marrow* and *the ague of the skeleton*, which *sense* could not have *known*, and could not *allay*.' 'Value and a priori knowledge are not *known* through *sense*; and yet there is no other mode of knowledge. No human contact is possible to our isolation, and yet human contacts are known to be of absolute value.'⁶⁷

The poem is, of course, already an echo chamber of 'voices' and idioms; of Webster and Gautier, as well as Donne, whose idiom is paraphrased by Eliot's stanzas: 'all love is *fever*', 'in loves cold *ague* freeze'; 'He blood, and spirit, pith, and *marrow* spends,' 'Nor are drosse to us, but *allay*'; 'a bracelet of bright haire about the *bone*'.⁶⁸ And, while 'Whispers of Immortality' is the direct object of the paraphrase, certain concepts and turns of voice from Eliot's criticism are also implicated and made the amplifying context for the poem. If these echoes are heard, then Empson's paraphrase seems to reword Eliot rewording Donne both in poetry and critical comment and so to give its audible version of this literary 'tradition' that could yoke the metaphysicals and modernists. The conclusion from this double ventriloquy, at once Donnean and Eliotic is, however, a thoroughly Empsonian aphorism: 'No human contact is possible to our isolation, and yet human contacts are known to be of absolute value.'

Such 'paraphrases', belonging to no single text but instead working by a more general ventriloquy, are characteristic of Empson's general mannerism of apparently careless ease, with its tendency towards agentless statements, disdain for attributing sources, and consequent casual authority. While the formalist critic might aim for the illusion of 'speakerless' prose by which to remain transparent over the poem as a well wrought object, Empson, who is more 'the critic as ironist', seems to deploy these forms of free indirect speech to exert a subtle mastery over the different degrees of empathy and distance that situate the critic, poet, and reader relative to each other and to the text.⁶⁹ Free indirect style in novels achieves what has been termed 'close writing'; an 'impersonal intimacy', which 'grants us at one and the same time the experience of a character's inner life as she herself lives it, and an experience of the same inner life as she never could'.⁷⁰ Close reading, as Empson practises it, is another exercise of these stylistic and cognitive possibilities for double mastery, but with only a veneer of their self-confidence. It plays out, in its details, the necessary impossibility of seeking 'human contacts' across isolation.

Masking such solitudes well, it is also typical, to take my second category of Empson's speech form paraphrase, for his criticism to proceed

by paraphrasing lines of verse in colloquial, even trenchantly demotic, prose that imitates direct speech. The provocation or shock of this direct speech mode of paraphrase is several fold: if, as Geoffrey Hartman suggests, critical prose is a tradition of 'sublimated chatter', then it remains a tradition in which the emphasis has been on the sublimation rather than the chatter. Against this, Empson's antimandarin style appears 'reverse mock-heroic' (applying a low style to lofty occasions). It also carries the provocation of an apparent historical abandon: not only does Empson use a similar register, one with the particularly short lifespan of slang, for all his historically distant examples, he also announces this lack of deliberate carelessness: 'this is not an Elizabethan idiom and was certainly not intended, but its coarseness is hard to keep out of one's mind'.⁷¹ He writes in what we might call a boldly modernist vernacular.

III. A MODERNIST VERNACULAR

For all the explicit provocation of Empson's direct speech forms, he is not alone amongst his contemporaries in taking the measure of poetry against speech forms. Eliot, for example, described the years 1922–42 as 'a period of search for a proper modern colloquial idiom', clarifying the effects of this for poetry by way of his own version of 'spoken' paraphrase:

No poetry, of course, is ever exactly the same speech that the poet talks and hears: but it has to be in such a relation to the speech of his time that the listener or reader can say 'that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry'.⁷²

Nor was this kind of claim confined to the discussion of poetry; in his retrospective over the prose of the '30s, *Enemies of Promise* (1938), Cyril Connolly proposed a rather more garish version of this connection between contemporary style and speech. Connolly divides the decade's prose writers into two styles, the Mandarin and the Vernacular, with the former making 'the written word as unlike as possible to the spoken one', and the latter, achieving the opposite. The 'Vernacular'—the readable, argumentative and deflationary 'style of rebels, journalists, common sense-addicts and unromantic observers of human destiny'—was, Connolly argues, firmly in the ascendant.⁷³ Connolly's distinction evidently aims for bold colour rather than depth and to understand more fully what he sees to be this 'triumph' of the Vernacular would involve some much more detailed acoustic anthropology, considering, for example, the nervous comedies of voice that came about with the age of telephony, or the new possibilities for the ear to be informed, educated, and entertained by radio broadcast.⁷⁴

Still, despite its broad brushstrokes, the distinction does suggest one measure of particular interest for Empson's prose voice: the 'Vernacular', Connolly writes, 'may be described as *you*-writing from the fact that there is a constant tendency to harangue the reader in the second person. It is a buttonholing approach.'⁷⁵ Empson is certainly a proponent of the collar-ing second person address yet he is also, in some more subtle ways, one of Connolly's 'You-men', and it is in the handling of pronouns that his direct speech form paraphrases can seem most characteristic of his general critical and poetic preoccupations. With the exception of the more clotted poems, 'Plenum and Vacuum' or 'High Dive', for example, where an unusual absence of pronouns is partly constitutive of difficulty, the 'you' construction is entirely characteristic of Empson's verse grammar:

'You advise me coldly then . . . ' ('Two Songs')
 'You may not wish their sucking or our care' ('The Ants')
 'You can't beat English Lawns' ('Rolling the Lawn')
 'You were amazed to find you too could fear . . . ' ('Letter I')
 'Your chemic beauty burned my muscles through' ('Villanelle')
 'You are nomad yet' ('Legal Fiction')
 'You are a metaphor and they are lies' ('Letter V').

There is a sense, to paraphrase by way of some other lines of Empson's verse, that 'parched with the fear of solitude' ('UFA Nightmare'), pronouns represent a chance to 'tunnel through your noonday out to you' ('The Ants'). Certainly, the loss of the personal pronoun is a grammatical fate that appears, with all its darker implications, in Empson's poem, 'Reflection from Anita Loos', where Lorelei's trick of putting herself into the third person ('Fun is fun but no girl wants to laugh all of the time') becomes insistently sombre when paraphrased as the villanelle's refrain: '*A girl* can't go on laughing all the time'.⁷⁶

This last example of an impersonation of an impersonator may also provide one clue to the kinds of verbal mimesis that are in Empson's mental ear, in the ambient of his paraphrases. Anita Loos was one of the voices of what might be described as the 'urban-pastoral medium of the 1920s' a medium that Empson, as well as Eliot, drew from and helped to form.⁷⁷ Her skilful mimicry of the demotic (which, like that of Ring Lardner, crossed paths with some 'higher' versions of modernism), leaves a repository of the kinds of 'social tone' that Empson, both seriously and in parody, makes a constitutive aspect of critical judgement.⁷⁸ But the general deafness of readers of non-fiction prose to traces of speech forms means that such tones have proved easy to overhear wrongly; Barbara Everett, for example, has argued that Eliot's demotic has been misheard as that of the seedy London pub of the 1920s, when it should instead be

situated within this more pertinent context of the American drawl of Loos and Lardner. Yet Eliot's relation to what he called, in a review for the *TLS*, 'a peculiar American vocabulary of racy popular speech' ('American Prose', 1926), was not so straightforward as this might suggest.⁷⁹ To take this review, Eliot adopts his most English of voices, *TLS* style, to suggest that efforts of the Society for Pure English to prevent the corruption of English by American slang are misdirected; it is the more homegrown forms of demotic (not least phrasal verbs) that need to be recognized and resisted: 'We can strive against this tendency more competently if we recognize that it is indigenous.' One word he highlights as example is 'double-cross', decaying, in the magazines, from a 'useful and expressive word' for double betrayal to a mere synonym for betrayal. This seems particularly pertinent for an occasion on which his own strategic loyalties are doubly strained: he muffles Missouri in best Bloomsbury to take a sideswipe at America's 'racy popular speech', only to argue that US slang is a straw man; that English idiom is deteriorating from within. For all this complexity of tone within the modernist vernacular, even Everett's attentive re-hearing may struggle to correct to quite the right pitch.

Empson's voice, if we attempt to seek a particular context for its timbre, appears still more difficult than Eliot's double-crossed demotic. But what becomes apparent, from listening to his prose against the recovered sounds and written voices, the drawls, demotic, and colloquialisms of the '20s or '30s, is that the problem is not so much one of locating his voice correctly as one measuring how far it differs from a voice at all. What concerns Empson more than verisimilitude in speech representation seems to be the presentation of the general outline of any speech scenario; the implied situation in which a speaker and an auditor are brought into contact without undue formality or particular individuation. Colloquial paraphrase is a way in which to explain poems without falling into the discursive traps of explanation, and without forfeiting the possibilities for nuance, tone (including stridence), and swift social judgement inherent in the voice. So, what often seems most distinctive about Empson's voice is that it is generic, an effect that Empson brings to the point of caricature with frequent paraphrases that play at being 'the voice of convention'. Take his rewording of the speech of Lewis Carroll's Dormouse, who says of the girls in the treacle-well, 'So they were, very ill'; for this, Empson's parenthetical paraphrase is, at one level, an impersonation of the Dormouse, but also implied is the cadence of a more forcible, repressively generic 'voice' of Victorian conventions:

the remark stands both for the danger of taking as one's guide the natural desires ('this is the sort of thing little girls would do if they were left alone') and for a pathetic example of a martyrdom to the conventions.⁸⁰

On some occasions, there is an attempt at more direct mimicry of a voice of convention, by way of commonplaces, idiomatic fillers or a gossipy tone as, for example, in this paraphrase of some lines from Pope's 'Epistle, II, To a Lady':

you might think she was most distressed at losing her beauty; but no, it's her conscience that troubles the old woman, and well it may.⁸¹

Typical of this designedly 'typical' voice that Empson puts to use in his paraphrases is some degree of hyperbole or of overstated pomposity. The mannerism adopted is one of over-inflation in which words such as 'contemptible' or 'heartless' can be thrown off with relative lightness (although their potential for a darker tone persists). This tone, because it is not exact mimesis, could be pinned to various different social groupings, but with one thing in common: affluent ease, whether this is of the Yorkshire squire (so that we hear a patrician tone, as Terry Eagleton has urged), or instead of a twenties generation of party-goers, as George Watson has suggested with this recollection of Empson's idiom:

'The literary tastes of the 20s', [Empson] once remarked, 'are still encapsulated within me', and his turn of phrase often reminded you of some 20s novelist like Aldous Huxley or P.G. Wodehouse. Words like 'ripping' and 'plucky' come naturally to him.⁸²

Certainly, the phrases that recur and build up a small lexicon of Empson's paraphrastic terms have this quality; 'the best people do this', for example, is a formula he has in common with Huxley. As such, it forms part of the literary-historical texture of his style as well as of its modernist politics of how 'the best people' might read. Or, to take another example from this informal lexicon of terms, Empson's paraphrases can always wring a significant irony from 'boy', whether the note is the more avuncular 'my boy' of his paraphrase of Keats's Ode, or the more chummy 'boys' of one of his paraphrases of a parody, Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*:

Zuleika was not strictly beautiful.

'Do not suppose that she was anything so commonplace; do not suppose that you can easily imagine what she was like, or that she was not, probably, the rather out-of-the-way type that you particularly admire' [...]

Her eyes were a trifle large, and the lashes longer than they need have been.

Not knowing how large the trifle may be, the reader has no means of being certain whether he would be charmed or appalled. 'but me, from an academic point of view, this face is all wrong; To never mind me, boys; don't let me spoil your fun.'⁸³

The point of the tone here is to mimic the parodist's measured oscillation between bathos and hyperbole, all in the lively swing of a few wise words

from cynic to 'boys', with only a hint—'never mind me, *boys*; don't let me spoil your fun'—of what was to become a fiercer cadence, by the '30s:

Shall I pluck a flower, boys, shall I save or spend?
All turns sour, boys, waiting for the end. (Just a smack at Auden').

These lines come in a poem that is itself almost about paraphrasing ('Shall I make it clear, boys, for all to apprehend', 'Shall we make a tale, boys?')—a poem about the difficulties and comedies of 'summing things up in brief, reductive prose, propaganda, slogans, histories, hopes' and their accompanying modern forms ('Shall we send a cable, boys?'). Such modernist demotic, half-jaunty, yet edged by some very dark shadows of irony, did not necessarily have to be in competition with the cadences of verse in the critic's ear; perhaps, as Dadie Rylands suggested, in a passing comment in his *Words and Poetry* (1928), from the perspective of 'the literary tastes of the 20s', slang and poetry could be thought close allies:

When a generation labels everything 'superb' or 'divine', when a man says 'damn' or 'hell', the actual meaning of the word is secondary to its emotional value; the word becomes a symbol of pleasure or disgust. The use in poetry is extraordinarily similar.

One way, then, to read Empson's over-inflated register may be as a critical strategy, responding to a certain sense of the expletive quality of words in poetry and of its resemblance to the 'social tone' of the 'gay hurt rapid' '20s and the darkening valley of the '30s.⁸⁴ In any particular paraphrase, use of this tone can create some violent ironies, whether through collision or through this provocation that there is no real collision; that poetry, for all the apparent disparity, works more like this brash demotic than like sober, sensitive prose. In either case, Empson's manner is an encouragement to take the possibilities of paraphrase (and particularly paraphrase in this direct speech mode) 'seriously', or, rather, to embrace its paradoxes as a serious mode of critical 'wit'; a technique by which to *know* a poem, through 'the various colloquial forms which are near to it'.⁸⁵ Like parody, such paraphrase may look like 'Criticism Without Tears'.⁸⁶ But 'Criticism With Laughs' would be the more stronger formulation for a critic whose style even at its most pedagogic (when lecturing), has the following breezy earnestness and power of succinct, parodic paraphrase:

At other moments [Empson] would throw off an astonishing critical aperçu as if he were back in his local bar, and in an argot that took one back to the 1920s. Once, lecturing on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and earnestly doubting whether Titania had ever had sexual designs on Bottom, he suddenly remarked: 'If she was wanting to have it off with a hairy worker, why did she have all these kids around?'⁸⁷

IV. THE FINAL MEANING

For the final meaning of this play, whose glory it is to give itself so wholeheartedly to vulgarisation, I can only list a few approaches to its irony.⁸⁸

To reword the title of the chapter in which he analyses *Sonnets*, 94, Empson's critical technique might be summarized as 'Twist of Modernist-Metaphysical Ideas into an Ironical Acceptance of Paraphrase'. To understand paraphrase as a technique of irony, or at least its successful practice as the sign of an ironic consciousness about meaning, is to go against the grain of usual interpretations of this critical method as one premised on rationality, on the belief that anything can be converted into logically ordered, ordinary prose. Stephen Booth argues, in *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets*, that 'under usual critical conditions, the critic can assume that, when he looks at a poem and likes it, the essential statement of the poem will be capable of reduction into prose [...] That is a hard assumption for men who are rational by profession to give up.'⁸⁹ But, as seems clear from the 'heresy of paraphrase' argument, and its influence across current critical prose, the assumption that has proved still harder to give up has been the opposite: that poems can never be successfully characterized in prose.

One challenge to this orthodoxy might then be to consider whether, behind the rhetoric, the heresy of paraphrase owes less to an essential problem, more to the reductive versions of 'prose' from which its advocates work: perhaps from the version of 'prose' you elect, you get the sense of paraphrase that you deserve.⁹⁰ To reduce a poem to a statement of 'logical content', to its 'bald sense', or 'prosaic core', is no doubt undesirable but, in practice, when paraphrase is risked (or relished)—as, for example, in Empson's criticism—it looks very little like this.⁹¹ Paraphrase, it would seem, can be many things: a manner of critical play or wit; a mode of interpretive irony or of parody; a form of complex ventriloquy; a technique for the 'queer sort of realism' that shapes a pastoral consciousness of poetry, prose and their (im)possibilities of full encounter; a radical form of recognition, of knowing poems by 'second looks'. By demonstrating this in practice, Empson's versions of paraphrase suggest that apprehension of the 'extraordinary vistas of meaning' that can extend from and within complex pieces of language may be threatened less by heretical reductions to 'prose sense', more by hardy critical dogmas, which continue to distort, almost imperceptibly, our lines of sight.⁹² To recover some particular practices from the blank orthodoxy of denunciation is, then, to

begin to liberate paraphrase as a technique of wit. In an article on *Seven Types*, Graham Hough argued for an addition to Empson's taxonomy, 'An Eighth Type of Ambiguity'. If an eighth and final version of paraphrase were to be added to this account, then it would be paraphrase as a critical liberty, a form of mischief—and, for this, some further words from Hough suggest their own neat paraphrase:

Perhaps we ought never to paraphrase a poem, but as with many other things that we ought never to do, we ought also to be able to feel that we could do it.⁹³

V

Circumlocution

R.P. Blackmur's failures of style

Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving how not to do it.

[Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, I.x, 1855]

I. TWENTIETH-CENTURY CIRCUMLOCUTION OFFICE

'Saying too little, for too long, too teasingly', a dozen pages of his critical prose leaves readers 'longing for sex and politics'.¹ So R.P. Blackmur stands indicted for the frustrations of his style. This most sinuous of critics of what he termed 'the great expressionistic period between the wars', the 'anni mirabiles' of modernist poetry, cannot get to the point.² When he wants to tell us about a simple line from T.S. Eliot, 'The fog is in the fir trees', his prose is aptly but infuriatingly misty: 'It is all there is,' Blackmur writes, with seemingly disproportionate complexity, 'in fog that lowers, covers, silences, imperils, menaces and caresses; but in it, as it is in them; there is the slowed apparition, coming up under an island, of evergreen struggling tenacious life.' When he writes of the dissatisfactions of Laura Riding's poetry, sense struggles still more fiercely to come up to the surface of the style:

Certainly she does not not say every now and then unreproach unharshed unloving unsmooth unlove undeath unlife undazzle unmade unthought unlive unrebillion unbeautifuls unzoological unstrange unwild unprecious unbull unhurriedness unenthusiasm. Miss Riding is the star of un no not never nowhere.³

For much of this prose, the reader longs not just for 'sex and politics' but also for a mere noun. This critic, for whom Edward Said offers the

caricature, 'a Twentieth-century Circumlocution Office',⁴ surely presents a study in 'how not to do it' with words.

Yet, for all his 'involved style', 'tiresomely elaborated' essays, 'pinnulate writing', Blackmur's body of critical prose attracts some strong praise.⁵ First in his role as editor of the modernist little magazine, *Hound & Horn: A Harvard Miscellany* (1927–34), then as the author of collections such as *The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation* (1935), and *Language as Gesture: Essays in Poetry* (1952), he can claim a place as 'the man who established the genre of poetic English literature in his century, and who identified its chief exponents'; the critic whose essays amounted 'to a "poetics" as impressive as any of our time'.⁶ 'It would be pleasant,' as Hugh Kenner remarks in a review of *Language as Gesture*, 'to discern a trace of irony in Mr. John Crowe Ransom's description of the book as "the official classic, in exegesis of the poetry of an age"'—yet this kind of irony is little apparent.⁷ For his insights into the tyrannical force of 'ideas' in Thomas Hardy's poetry, his fierceness over E.E. Cummings's empty words, and his intimacy with the imagination of Wallace Stevens, Blackmur continues to hold 'a position of intransigent honour' in the history of twentieth-century literature; 'probably the subtlest and most distinguished close reader in American criticism'.⁸

So, apparent brilliance in the study of words and apparent carelessness in the use of words come together insistently in Blackmur's work. What does this strange conjunction tell us, both of Blackmur's idiosyncratic persuasions and of our general criteria, regarding style, for criticism? This chapter explores such questions in relation to the particular form of 'bad style' of which Blackmur has been convicted: circumlocution. Circumlocution tends to be embarrassing. For what Pope's *Scriblerus* satirized as 'the Periphrasis, which the Moderns call the Circumbendibus', there are many near equivalent terms—verbiage, shuffle, engrossment, prevarication, tergiversation, redundancy, detour, dodge—but few of praise.⁹ A neutral description might characterize circumlocution as a writer's attempt, when encountering an obstacle, to go around it with other words. This is still, however, a form of 'embarrassment', if we follow the semantic history of the word in its migration from its French origins, '*embarrasser*: to block or to obstruct,' to its transferred sense, 'to render difficult or intricate; to complicate'. Circumlocution, whether for stylist or writer of plain prose, remains awkward, undesirable—and yet, for Blackmur, it is a definitive quality of style.

This tenacious ambivalence surrounding Blackmur's critical prose also bears on some of the more profound embarrassments of twentieth-century close reading criticism, for which he presents one of the exemplary figures. His criticism remains ready shorthand for its powerful rejection of

abstractions, categories, and the other apparatus of theory-forming. This is his role, for example, in a brief footnote Geoffrey Hartman grants during his discussion, in *Criticism in the Wilderness*, of why critics might resist theory: 'For some good reasons see R.P. Blackmur'.¹⁰ His criticism also crystallizes some of the strains and challenges of more formalist modes of literary judgement. Theories of reading may be prolix but this prolixity can be attributed to, even excused by, the gains of generality. Close reading criticism, on the other hand, works in a radically circumlocutory fashion. The critic takes an 'object', typically a poem, and tries to find the best descriptive forms by which to surround it; this predisposes the responsive language to some degree of indirection and disproportion, relative to its object, whether the sense is 'this is too little about too much', or instead, 'this is too much about too little'. Blackmur's circumlocutory style may, then, only make a virtue (or a vice) out of necessity: perhaps part of the embarrassment of this prose is that it performs with great thoroughness the basic dynamic (and inevitable disproportion) of all criticism.

More specifically, Blackmur's criticism demonstrates this within, and against, a modernist context. The degree to which any further descriptions sound excessive, circumlocutory rather than elucidatory, is measurable against the scope of their author's doubt about the adequacy of other words. Modernism, for all its heterogeneous forms, tends towards some fierce slogans in favour of minimalism and non-substitution: 'use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation', it was urged; writing must be 'hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite'.¹¹ One of the voices behind such manifesto statements, Ezra Pound, was also strident in extending such proscriptions against circumlocution from poetry to critical prose. For example, he writes this of how the critic ought to balance argument and illustration in his prose:

The proportion between discussion and the exhibits the discussor dares show his reader is possibly a good, and probably a necessary, test of his purpose. In a matter of degree, I am for say 80 per cent exhibit and 20 per cent yatter.¹²

Pound did not have Blackmur in mind on this occasion but was often ready to apply such strictures to his prose, which he felt to have a quality so dismal it had become statistical. '24 depressing pages by Blackmur in Bitch and Bugle', Pound wrote of the essay, 'Masks of Ezra Pound', in which Blackmur attacked the Cantos, and the awfulness of this essay preoccupied Pound sufficiently for its pages to be tallied in a number of his letters. 'Anybody,' Pound writes, 'who is destined by natura naturans etc. to GIT any pleasure out of the poem, is scarcely likely to be wading thru' 24 pages of B:m / r'.¹³ 'R.P.B. Anti-Imagiste', Pound might well have signed the end of

an essay by Blackmur who emphatically does not follow 'the hygiene of Imagism, its clean words and its eschewal of reduplication'.¹⁴ Circumlocutory prose is the antithesis to Pound's formulations for good style: 'the laconic speech of the Imagistes [...] Objective [...] no slither—direct—no excess of adjectives, etc. No metaphors that won't permit examination.—It's straight talk—straight as the Greek!'¹⁵

Blackmur's prose is hardly 'straight talk' but, in its 'splendid failure' to be so, it suggests we might entertain fractions quite other to those Pound prescribes for prose: 80 per cent yatter may also have its point as a style of critical thinking. If Blackmur was merely a prevaricator, then Said's caricature, the 'Twentieth-century Circumlocution Office', would be sharp but shallow wit and Pound's strident rejections just another instance of his tendency to noisy if astute rant. But neither this circumlocutory form of critical prose, nor its yield for our understanding of modernism, is so easy to dismiss. It seems to be the case that Blackmur, as Empson argues in a review of *Language as Gesture*, 'has a reason for using the style' that so irritates Pound, among others. While he may write 'like the Transcendental Ladies in Martin Chuzzlewit', this may be because, Empson goes on to suggest, 'he has regularly discussed the recent, or in the case of Emily Dickinson, for instance, the recently fashionable, authors who were most worth discussing and hardest to discuss. As I have not done that myself,' Empson adds, 'I have certainly no business to complain that he regularly expresses a sense of linguistic difficulty, while nearly always reaching a firm critical conclusion'.¹⁶ What, at first glance, appears merely awkward in Blackmur's prose may only be evidence of his search for 'an answerable style' for the challenges of modernist experiment—a search that neither his contemporary, Empson, nor his predecessor, Eliot, braved in any very direct or substantial sense.

Of course, in seeking to find the critical possibilities of circumlocution, we first have to navigate the hurdle of mere bad style—something not hard to discern in some of Blackmur's prose. In the early critical essays, where his subject is the failures of modernist poetry, there are ungainly passages, circling their subjects with redundant clauses and surplus adjectives. In such passages, the circumlocutory forms—concatenation, repetition, near tautology—only amplify. Few critical comments about Blackmur's bad style can make their point quite as effectively as a direct quotation from one of his essays. Blackmur, for example, writes this of Ezra Pound:

The content of his work does not submit to analysis; it is not the kind of content that can be analyzed. Only in a very limited way can Mr. Pound be discussed as it is necessary to discuss, say, Yeats: with reference to what is implicit and still to be said under the surface of what has already been said. Mr. Pound is explicit; he is all surface and articulation.¹⁷

Even in this relatively compact example, the initial tautology is compounded by the further sentences in which Blackmur also relies on repetition, here of single words (discuss, said, surface), in order to concatenate sentences. This prose exhibits an uncomfortable strain towards emphasis, even extremity, at the expense of the qualities of style its author elsewhere praises; the 'susurrus of irony' and the 'atmosphere of wit'.¹⁸ Where another difficult critic such as Empson would throw lifebelts of humour—an insouciant or improbable judgement, a brusque phrase, a parody—Blackmur's prose is a rather less relenting sea of repeated or proximate words. ('What still remains', he writes, after reading, 'will be the essential impenetrability of words, the bottomlessness of knowledge. To these the reader, like the poet, must submit.'¹⁹) He has often, Yvor Winters writes, 'neglected the arts of syntax and of organization to the point that it is almost impossible to understand him'.²⁰ Even his more moderate critics, who allow circumlocution to be a valid expression of a 'dislike of too overt statement, of a subject matter that jumps too blithely from one skull into another', often find Blackmur too circumspect, too inconclusive, failing to justify his means by his end. He 'solemnly eviscerates himself' on the doorstep of his modernist subjects—yet still fails to advance far towards a precise or coherent description of them.²¹ After reading a passage of Blackmur's prose, we are, one critic concludes, always left with the deflating cry: 'Is *that* all?'²² Another critic draws this same conclusion from Blackmur's inconclusiveness in one of his essays on Eliot: 'These insights, however, overlaid by ruminations [...] amount to saying that a poem has a beginning and an end and is a sequence in time'.²³ In saying too much, Blackmur only says too little.

Many of the more specific objections to Blackmur's criticism have, however, tended to sound as arbitrary and off-the-point as the prose of their target. John Wain, for example, attempts to condemn this prose for evasiveness by quoting a sentence of Blackmur's about Yeats: 'The price is the price of a fundamental and deliberate surrender to magic as the ultimate mode for the apprehension of reality'. Ignoring the obvious stammer ('the price is the price'), Wain instead finds a culpable form of indirection here, in the second part of the sentence. 'By using the word 'surrender', Wain argues, 'Mr. Blackmur is avoiding the difficulty of saying whether or not Yeats actually believed in magic; he gave in to it, he admitted it, which is not exactly the same thing'.²⁴ The difficulty is real but Blackmur's 'evasion' less so. In the context of the phrase, '*fundamental and deliberate* surrender', this choice of word seems rather less shy of a statement about volition; it offers, instead, a balance of commitment with a hint of ambivalence, which seems if anything a success of style. The point may be small but Wain's failure to select a solid example where there

is supposed to be an over-abundance suggests something of the difficulty involved in constructing a well-considered case against Blackmur's circumlocutory style. Other typical criticisms of Blackmur for avoiding the 'responsibilities' of critical style seem to work from similarly unexamined premises. One critic, for example, argues that, in Blackmur's essays, it is often the case that, 'when you expect a comment to explain a quotation, you find that you must go back to the quotation to find an explanation for his comment'.²⁵ This, the critic suggests, betrays the logic of criticism's explanatory task. On another reading, however, this might be evidence of a style in which there is perfect sympathy between text and critical comment; a style intimate with its object, without subjecting it to the drastic reductiveness of explanation; any 'irresponsibility' would only be to the reader who seeks her ease. Past critics have thus struggled to pin down exactly what they feel must be wrong with this circumlocutory style, which only ends up looking stronger than its small corrections.

There is considerable ambivalence surrounding even the two accusations that recur with particular frequency with regard to Blackmur's style, and these accusations can seem to contradict each other. Alongside the most typical complaint—that Blackmur is too verbose, with too many empty words—we also encounter, in seeming counterpoint, the sense that Blackmur is too enigmatic or elliptical, taking too few words. A typical expression of this bewilderment as to whether there is too much or too little of Blackmur's prose relative to its objects comes from Wallace Stevens, who hovers between a diagnosis of excess and of deficiency in the following letter:

there is a serious defect in Blackmur, or so it seems to me, and that is that it takes him twenty-five pages to say what would be much better said if said in one. The result is that, after you have finished twenty-five pages of Blackmur, you haven't the faintest idea what he has been talking about. Either he has too many ideas or too few; it is hard to say which.²⁶

Edmund Wilson, in the role of one of Blackmur's early editors and mentors, was rather more emphatic in his verdict. 'I do feel,' Wilson wrote to Blackmur in 1930, while editing for *The New Republic* two of his earliest reviews, 'that you have never quite mastered a satisfactory expository style. I believe that the principal trouble is that you attempt to be too terse'.²⁷ 'I wish,' Wilson elaborated, 'that you would take more words and say what you mean more exactly. I think that you often take short cuts in expression when you ought to be a little more patient'—a vice that Wilson goes on to associate with a 'philosophic' style, copied from T.S. Eliot.

Nor is Wilson a lonely voice in encouraging Blackmur to 'take more words'. The difficulties of this prose have been felt by some to lie not just

in over-expansion but also in brevity; in what one critic calls 'the compressed and the oracular in Mr. Blackmur's style'.²⁸ Blackmur 'had a gift for encapsulating his perceptions in aphoristic form', one of his students recalls: 'one copied these sayings down only to find that they had become wholly enigmatic when divorced from their original context'.²⁹ From his lecture notes, this student recalls some of these 'Blackmurian dicta'; here on the subject of *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, 'This book is the fable of how the conscience creates itself', or, 'Fyodor, the unmotivated out of which motives are made'.³⁰ Even in the less fragmentary contexts of his essays, this movement of thought is still characteristic: first revelation, seemingly anchored to a succinct form of words, only for the words then to become enigmatic. Take Blackmur's comments about Wallace Stevens's 'The Comedian as the Letter C': of Crispin, Blackmur writes, 'He is the hypothesis of comedy'.³¹ This is a remark whose contours of sense seem to emerge with some strength and possibility, only then for these contours to be erased within the fluctuations of the passage in which this brief enigma occurs:

He is at various times a realist, a clown, a philosopher, a colonizer, a father, a faggot in the lunar fire, and so on. In sum, and any sum is hypothetical, he may be a comedian in both senses, but separately never. He is the hypothesis of comedy. He is a piece of rhetoric—a persona in words—exemplifying all these characters, and summing, or masking, in his persuasive style, the essential prose he reads. He is the poem's guise that the prose wears at last.

Blackmur, at such moments, can offer what one of his critics terms, 'a perfect little snatch of prose-poetry in the modern manner'.³² Fragments of his prose can become, for a moment, pellucid. They can possess a taut quality that is half-lyrical, only for their apparent fullness of significance to yield on any pressure, or to dissolve into Blackmur's own persistent qualifications. They are transient in their appeal; ultimately unsatisfactory in what they give us of the critic's object. Perhaps, then, rather than too much of Blackmur's prose for critical satisfaction, there is simply not quite enough.

However his admirers and detractors settle their quarrels as to quantity, it is clear that Blackmur's criticism presents an unavoidable challenge to readers of close reading. Responding to this challenge is no more simple than responding to its subject's style: any clear account of Blackmurean prose seems at once too easy and too difficult to achieve. Of circumlocution, Blackmur offers an appropriate embarrassment of riches, yet the bluster of his style, alongside his explicit refusal of systems, formulae, philosophies, and even 'ideas', obscures the view over what he describes as his very 'irregular metaphysics'.³³ With such difficulties in mind, this

chapter builds towards an account of some aspects of critical style as they unfold in the detail of Blackmur's essays, considering how their forms of circumlocution may enable a distinctive poetics for modernism. To lay the foundations for this, I first consider the problem of his 'irregular metaphysics': what kinds of thinking and influence shaped his style, and to what degree was their organization in Blackmur's prose marked by deliberate irregularity?

II. IRREGULAR METAPHYSICS

'Long before the end I knew a master had laid hands on me [...] nothing was any longer worthwhile and everything had become necessary.'³⁴ This is Blackmur's epiphanic description of his encounter with Henry James (reading, in this instance, *The Wings of the Dove*, in 1921). Henry James and T.S. Eliot occupy most often the position of 'masters' for Blackmur, as he shapes his own style and philosophy of critical prose. James teaches him a model—irregular but concerted—of form, and '[i]t has often been maintained that James's later style is the proximate cause of Blackmur's'.³⁵ 'Looseness of any description, whether of conception or of execution, he hated contemptuously', Blackmur writes of James, emulating such contempt in his own prose.³⁶ Blackmur explores the complex Jamesian vision of 'tight form'—where tightness is, against the grain of expectations, a matter of fine-drawn rendering, refinements, nuances, shades—in an intricately drifted introduction to a compilation of James's Prefaces under the title, *The Art of the Novel*.³⁷ In this introduction, Blackmur proposes a set of terms and headings under which to approach his subject ('The Indirect Approach', 'Intelligence as Receptive Lucidity'), and a set of meditations on his qualities and preoccupations ('On the Coercive Charm of Form', for example, or 'On Ficelles'). Nearly all of these terms and values could be drawn back onto Blackmur's own style. Through temperamental inclination and diligent apprenticeship, Blackmur comes to share the double conviction he finds in James: that it is above all interesting for the artist and the critic to meet 'the challenge of economic representation', to achieve 'the access of being that results from a perfected strict form', and yet to do so involves continual work of refinement and subtlety.³⁸

Blackmur describes this ideal achievement of form in an essay on another writer substantially influenced by James, Marianne Moore: it is a quality of 'deep and delicately adjusted attention'.³⁹ We can see what this quality of attention might mean more practically in Blackmur's particular descriptions of Moore's poetry, which it informs. He writes, for example, of how Moore 'resorts, or rises like a fish, continually to the

said thing, captures it, sets it apart, points and polishes it to bring out just the special quality she heard in it. Much of her verse has the peculiar, unassignable, indestructible authority of speech overheard—which often means so much precisely because we do not know what was its limiting, and dulling, context'.⁴⁰ At first glance, a description such as this might seem merely verbose but, taking the Jamesian principle of tight yet nuanced form, it is possible to see how all its words are, for Blackmur, necessary to the representation of the precise 'quality' of Moore's language—of its half despairing pragmatism ('resorts') and half splendid leap ('or rises like a fish'), which is partly a calculated move of the intellect, partly an instinctual gesture. Similarly, the trio, 'peculiar, unassignable, indestructible', is, if these principles of prose form are taken into account, not merely rhetorical elaboration but rather an intense compression of three distinct points about 'speech overheard', none of which could be excluded without significant loss. The opacity of Blackmur's style here owes, then, neither to terseness nor verbosity per se, but rather to this complex blend of circuitousness and concision, for which he found precedents in the formal economy of Henry James's prose.

For the still more substantial influence of Eliot, a rather different and more involved story needs to be told. 'I remember,' Muriel Bradbrook writes, 'the excitement of sitting under a willow tree on the Backs and reading R.P. Blackmur on Eliot in an early number of *Hound and Horn*'. This pastoral vignette of the late 1920s, early 1930s in Cambridge (England) recalls finding in Blackmur's criticism the kind of 'exciting strangeness' that F.R. Leavis was describing in a review of Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*:

It is an event to have the response of a younger generation to the problems envisaged by Mr. Eliot and Mr. Richards, for Mr. Empson is as alive as they to the exciting strangeness of the present phase of human history.⁴¹

Blackmur was part of this 'younger generation', in the other Cambridge, fresh in response, in books, essays and the university versions of the avant-garde little magazines, to the problems of criticism in the wake of modernism.⁴² The critical magazine under his editorship, *Hound & Horn* was, like *Experiment*, the magazine edited by Empson and Bronowski, promoted as an engaged and vibrant university publication. There was, however, a difference of emphasis. *Experiment* drew on a diversity of influences and energies but primarily 'the intellectual interests of undergraduates':

It has been our object to gather all and none but the not yet too ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy in the university. We did not wish so much that our articles should be sober and guarded as that they should be stimulating and lively and take a strong line.⁴³

Blackmur's quarterly had no equivalent fear of being 'littered with the Illustrious Dead and Dying', offering space to 'the entire scene of undergraduate and graduate activity', alumni, and, beyond this, to 'sympathetic subscribers, contributors, and critics', with a strong emphasis on Harvard luminaries—in particular, as 'elder and better' in the field of philosophical and practical criticism, T.S. Eliot. Santayana, C.S. Peirce, and Russell all had walk-on parts too but it was Eliot, as both poet and critic, who was the magazine's dominant figure (if not voice; he published only one piece of his own there, 'Second Thoughts About Humanism').⁴⁴ The 'house style', in so far as the quarterly possessed one (among its poetry reviewers in particular, there were strong affiliations of vocabulary) was not, in general, Eliotic, lacking the cool analytic authority that this would entail.⁴⁵ But the allegiance of principle was strong, outlined explicitly by the editors in their opening commentary to the third number:

Mr. Eliot has not only erected a solid edifice of critical standards which have been influential in moulding modern philosophical criticism, but under his guidance a great part of the important creative thinking of the last five years has been reflected.

This was echoed again in the commentary to the fourth number:

As a miscellany *The Hound & Horn* is not the organ for a clique, nor has it axes to grind. But since editors have entered into a spiritual alliance with the standards of a philosophical criticism already formulated by some of their elders and betters, they may be said to be working towards an end. That end is the establishment of a sound criterion of values in a time when there is great confusion of values.⁴⁶

Such notes of Eliotic solemnity were not quite the only forms of borrowing in *Hound & Horn*. To take one instance, with the swift recycling owed to slang, Eliot's demotic gloss to the second part of his 'Fragment of an Agon', published in *The Criterion* in January 1927—'From Wanna Go Home, Baby?'—resurfaced as the epigraph ('*Wanna go home, Baby?*') to Lincoln Kerstein's poem in four parts, 'Return Ticket Paid', published in the magazine's second issue in December 1927.⁴⁷ But the Eliot of *Hound & Horn* was in general a 'sober and guarded' figure, representing criteria, standards, values, and past achievements, rather than avant-garde risk. This reflected in part his own transition from literary critic to social and moral commentator. In view of this, Bradbrook's scene of transatlantic excitement, experiencing 'Blackmur on Eliot' as critical news, can sound somehow odd. Still, beyond the rather stiff rhetoric of influence by which Blackmur prefers to declare his connections to Eliot, there are some more intriguing dimensions to his response, and, for some of these, it may be

necessary to go much further back. Blackmur's sense of his 'spiritual alliance' with Eliot's version of 'philosophical criticism' seems to evoke a rather earlier Eliot; the Eliot of the Harvard philosophy seminars, and what germinated there—a radically indirect understanding of what it could mean to be 'philosophical' in literature and its criticism.

This 'philosophical' influence may surprise, as might Blackmur's admission, elsewhere in *Hound & Horn*, of what he prizes about Eliot: 'It is easy,' he writes, 'and no doubt irrelevant, to say that his chief contribution so far has been the nebula of doctrine around his concrete observations.'⁴⁸ This reads as unexpected if the emphasis falls on 'doctrine', drawn on a line of opposition with 'observations'. Blackmur was vehemently against 'ideas' and 'intellectual' ordering. He complains that some writers snarl their work with a 'thicket of ideas, formulas, obsessions,' (Hardy, his particular target in this phrase, is often Blackmur's 'great example of a sensibility violated by ideas'), and that this renders their writing 'permanently abstract and unknowable for the reader'.⁴⁹ In this he followed Eliot, whose 'true critic' is 'a scrupulous avoider of formulae; he refrains from statements which pretend to be literally true; he finds fact nowhere and approximation always.'⁵⁰ For both of these writers, the satisfactions of intelligent criticism do not lie in 'the feeling of explanation', the assuagement of 'facts' but instead in forms of approximation, impermanence, or, in Blackmur's terms, the 'provisional, speculative, dramatic' mode of thought.⁵¹ So where does this resistance to ideas leave philosophical criticism?

If, from Blackmur's phrase about Eliot, the word 'nebula' is allowed to carry the greater inflection, then a different sense emerges. What Blackmur values are the forms and feelings associated with Eliot's 'doctrine'. This opens up a new possibility: to be philosophical in criticism is not to be focused on ideas—an error neatly encapsulated by Auden when he gave the following definition of this critical type: 'The Philosophical. Study of the relation of the poet's ideas to his poetry.'⁵² Blackmur learns a very different definition, by analogy with Eliot's revisionary sense of what it might mean to be 'philosophical' in poetry. Eliot contends that most misunderstand the philosophical poet to be one who has 'a scheme of the universe, who embodies that scheme in verse'.⁵³ Yet this would, as Eliot demonstrates by an attack on Santayana's version of philosophical poetry, lead only to 'poetical philosophy'. Instead, to be 'philosophical' in poetry is to work by indirect and expressive collateral forms. Dante and Lucretius are, for Eliot, examples of such poets, 'who have presented us with the emotional and sense equivalent for a definite philosophical system constructed by a philosopher'.⁵⁴ Although Eliot doesn't make the extension, a similar judgement might be applied to philosophical criticism, which isn't

necessarily a process of embodying in (critical) prose a conception of the universe but rather of exploring, through some analogous forms at the level of critical writing, the 'emotional consequences' of certain uses of words, certain forms of thought. If so, the forms of indirection characteristic of Eliot's criticism would be those of irony and analogy, while, for Blackmur, the same impetus towards indirection, and away from 'the ecstasies of interpretation', adopts some more circumlocutory forms as a screen for any overly direct feelings or schemes of the universe.⁵⁵ To be 'philosophical' in criticism is not to present 'a scheme of the universe' but to work by indirect and expressive collateral forms.

Both terms, 'indirect' and 'expressive', matter here. Both have their roots and initial explorations in Eliot's earlier studies and writings. One of the greatest points of interest of reading Eliot for understanding Blackmur's circumlocutory style lies in Eliot's early attention to both sides of a chiasmus we might form as this: 'the explanation of feeling and the feeling of explanation'. If Eliot, by *The Sacred Wood*, experiments in new forms of critical sophistication in the explanation of 'feeling', then he was, in his earlier inquiries as a student of philosophy with Josiah Royce in Harvard, then with Harold Joachim in Oxford, much more a philosopher of the deep psychic effects of expository forms. We find, for example, in the records of the discussions of Royce's seminar on Comparative Methodology, a note of this aphorism: 'Eliot: Primitive consciousness luxuriates in the feeling of explanation.'⁵⁶ Such ideas are also explored in an early paper for the Philosophical Society of Harvard, of which Eliot was president from 1913–14. This paper, with its grand but rather arid title, 'The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics', describes the twentieth century's preponderance of 'philosophies which lend themselves, or at least offer themselves, with great facility to emotional consequences'.⁵⁷ Further seminar records testify to a strenuous philosophical concern with different forms of responsive, or secondary language and their failures. Eliot, for example, in a paper, 'Description and Explanation', finds that explanation is unsuccessful in its attempt to confine itself to one point of view, while description also fails, since the 'act of describing brings the alteration of the object described, and the case of pure contemplation is an ideal limit we never attain'.⁵⁸ But distinctions between these forms of expository language seem afflicted by the vanity of small differences against Eliot's overall feeling, first in these philosophical contexts, but then in relation to criticism, of how radically any such collateral or ulterior languages must 'fail'. Interpretation names where presentation disappoints. It is, then, the target for some of Eliot's moments of stridency: 'Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret'.⁵⁹ For Eliot, at first in his philosophical studies but continuing

into his criticism, this necessity yet impossibility of interpretation, this sense of the indescribable real, could be an affliction: 'We all recognize the world as the same "that"; it is when we attempt to describe it that our worlds fall apart'.⁶⁰

This affliction takes varied shape within his prose forms. In his doctoral thesis of 1914, Eliot considers the implications of the philosophies of Bergson and Bradley for our understanding of the immediacies of experience and the limits of their representation. As he does so, he writes of a circumlocutory predicament:

The fact is that we can to a certain extent make an object of [immediate experience], while at the same time it is not an object among others, not a term which can be in relation to anything else: *this throws our explanation into the greatest embarrassment*. We are forced to use terms drawn out of it, to handle it as an adjective of either subject or object side, as *my* experience, or as the experienced world.⁶¹

Such speculations on the difficulties of explanation may, however, seem far from the practices of Eliot's critical prose, which attracts the epithets lapidary, authoritative, distinct, analytical, but rarely embarrassed (and so, circumlocutory). Take, for example, the reading explored in my second chapter, in which Eliot gives his critical attention repeatedly to a line from Donne's 'The Relique':

Some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts: 'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone', where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of 'bright hair' and of 'bone'.⁶²

Yet if we look behind the smooth flow of the prose, what emerges is a sense of critical description thrown 'into the greatest embarrassment' by the inaccessibility of its object. There is at first an almost puzzlingly extreme rejection of circumlocution, of any further words; in comment on the quotation, Eliot seems 'forced to use terms drawn out of it', repeating both its main terms and those of his judgement: sudden contrasts, bright hair, bone. The 'perfect critic', as Eliot writes elsewhere, 'must not coerce, and he must not make judgements of worse or better. He must simply elucidate'.⁶³ At the same time as this deliberate poverty of descriptive language (elucidation not coercion), there is also redundancy by repetition: the sentence says the same thing, including the quotation, three times.

For all that we can see here some of the foundations for some of the puzzles of Blackmur's style, this 'embarrassment' of Eliot's criticism clearly has a very different quality to that of Blackmur. Eliot's style tends to hold

feeling at the remove of irony, mask or persona—taut forms of alienation and artificiality, derived more from Laforgue, Baudelaire, and the French symbolists—rather than to hide behind the intricate embroideries of a Jamesian style. Edmund Wilson chastised Blackmur for some other differences, warning him that, in approximating Eliot's 'philosophic' style, he veers too close to abstraction; that his Eliotic desire to avoid impressionism risks becoming so complete that, in his prose, 'there is a tendency entirely to eliminate any intimation of what the work under consideration looks, sounds, feels, or smells like'.⁶⁴ 'You will observe,' Wilson instructs, 'that Eliot, though his style is so precise and dry, does, nonetheless, as a rule, convey vividly the special quality of the author he is writing about.' Eliot's critical descriptions may have a quality of dry minimalism, capturing authors in single adjectives ('the "mossiness" of Mallarme or the "terrible clairvoyance" of Shakespeare'), but it does not suffer from the drastic loss of contact with the object that can afflict Blackmur.⁶⁵

Reflecting on this extreme indirection, René Wellek draws attention to one of Blackmur's critical touchstones—the following from Donne's third Satire:

On a high hill
Ragged and steep, Truth dwells, and he that will
Reach it, about must and about must go.

Wellek barely needs to draw the moral:

'Going about and about' seems an accurate description of Blackmur's critical method: the groping, painful struggle to describe, by circumlocution or metaphorical analogue, the experience of poetry which, he feels, is always beyond the reach of ordinary rational discourse.⁶⁶

Blackmur gives the critical 'fictions' that result from this 'going about and about' the role of a ladder, used for ascent, then kicked away. 'What we make,' he writes in an essay about Marianne Moore, 'is a fiction to school the urgency of reading; no more; for actually we must return to the verse itself in its own language'.⁶⁷ Yet for all his over-emphasis here—'the verse *itself* in its *own* language'—in much of Blackmur's critical prose it is more typical to find, as René Wellek does, that 'the loss of contact with the work is so extreme that one could read whole pages without knowing to what book they refer'.⁶⁸ Blackmur, another critic complains, 'will propose "models for our consideration," without telling us what they are models of. He talks about "parody," but not about what is being parodied. He bases an interpretation of Tolstoy upon a theory of "incarnation," but he is

careful not to confess what it is which is made flesh'.⁶⁹ His grammar, both at and beyond the local level of particular sentences, is persistently evasive—and strategically so, rejecting easy syntax for the empty predication or tangent. A comment later in this same essay about Moore, which urged a 'return to the verse itself', seems, then, a truer self-portrait of his style:

What we say now must be really as oblique as before, no matter what the immediacy of approach; there is no meeting Miss Moore face to face in the forest of her poems and saying This is she, this is what she means and is.⁷⁰

In another moment of sharply accidental self-description in an essay about Pound, Blackmur epitomizes the experience of his own style while remarking how Pound's reader may suffer from 'the feeling that he has traversed a great deal of material, without having at any time been quite certain what the material was about'.⁷¹ Once again, in describing Laura Riding's style of poetry, he caricatures his own: the 'end-product of abstraction without any trace of what it was extracted from'.⁷² Whether through vacuous verbosity or through enigmatic compression, Blackmur's style suffers from a lack of clarity as to its object—and, since criticism is above all a matter of being 'about', this tends towards a potential dead-end for critical prose.

Obliquity, for Blackmur, is, however, not just a problem; it is a passion. He possesses a conscious, ardent belief in indirect forms: in forms that are analogical, ulterior, collateral. Such forms are, for Blackmur, characteristic of all (good) literature: 'Poetry, if we understand it, is not in immediacy at all [. . .] Poetry is life at the remove of form and meaning; not life lived but life framed and identified.'⁷³ Such collateral, indirect forms Blackmur sets against the modernist heresy of 'spontaneity' (particularly in word meaning) and he seeks to cultivate their equivalents in criticism. Analogy, for example, he understands to be a profound movement of mind: it is 'the deep form of reminding that there is always something else going on'.⁷⁴ 'It is,' he affirms, 'by analogy that I believe the mind makes its richest movements and it is by analogy that I believe the mind makes its deepest use of what it has understood'.⁷⁵ With this value for what goes alongside and around, it becomes apparent how circumlocution might constitute a bold experiment in new-critical possibilities, rather than mere evidence of blustering impossibility. If, as Eliot's example suggests, philosophical criticism is a way of exploring, through some analogous forms at the level of critical writing, the 'emotional consequences' of certain uses of words, certain forms of thought, then Blackmur's analogous form is circumlocution, which expresses the awkwardness, the embarrassment of coming up against the words of poems. Circumlocution is expressive indirection. In the

context of modernist criticism in particular, circumlocution cuts on the bias between stylistic practice and epistemological principle, between a technique and model for aesthetic response.

Exploring some of the tangled detail of Blackmur's critical essays, as I shall now do, suggests that, for all this affinity and influence, Blackmur is not merely Eliot etherized, spread out against the cumulus forms of a circumlocutory style. He draws from Eliot a principle of collateral form but joins it to modernist subject matter, and then takes this conjunction to some of its logical conclusions for critical style. Circumlocution thus becomes a critical and philosophical aesthetic in essays that form a practical meditation on the epistemology of readers' responses to the challenges of modernist verbalism: on the difficulty of words around words after the revolution of the word. In this, he responds to a particular lack in Eliot's criticism: one of his rare but pointed criticisms of Eliot was that although he had prepared the ground for modernism in both his poetry and prose, he had then failed to engage with its particular conditions for meaning and its elucidation. If, by Eliot's own dictum, 'we criticize the past only in order to understand the present', then he has 'performed only half his job; he has made a present possible, but he has not yet put it in order'.⁷⁶ So, it is partly against the example of Eliot, that Blackmur is firmly 'a *Twentieth-century* Circumlocution Office'. More specifically, he is a critic of modernism, a critical subjectivity formed of his experiences of reading his contemporaries, as well as in open comment on their failures. Blackmur poses a rhetorical question in one of his late essays: 'how does criticism enlarge its aesthetics to go with the enlargement of aesthetic experience?'⁷⁷ Do the forms of his own essays suggest some practical answers for the enlargements of experience of modernist poetry?

III. VERBALISM IN EXTREMIS

It is most distinctively as a critic of modernist poetry that Blackmur is circumlocutory. His essays about 'the recent, or [...] the recently fashionable', show him to be most like the Circumlocution Office of Dickens's satire; beforehand 'in the art of perceiving how not to do it'. Modernism presents him with numerous examples to attack of the failure to achieve 'fact' in poetry; failures to which the critic's forms of inadequacy are the epistemological analogues and the emotional equivalents. Whether his criticisms of modernism have ramifications for our broader understanding of poetry and literary history, or whether this represents an exceptional case, remains undecided. 'What we have been talking about as the literature of the twenties [...] may very well', Blackmur admits, 'turn out to have been

an aberration, a mere intermittence in the great heart of literature'.⁷⁸ Distinctive about the Blackmurean sense of modernist failure is that it belongs principally to the poems, rather than being located in the gap between poems and readers, or between some readers and others ('the fit reader', say, and the partial or inept reader). Blackmur does sometimes remark on the margin of inevitable error and difference between poems and critical accounts: criticism 'never gets you to intimacy. It only at best orders your public behaviour until you get there. Or at worst, stops you off at some cheap substitute of exegesis'.⁷⁹ But his sense of failure is more than, and other to, this inadequacy of the critical account to the poem. It also involves something beyond just a sense of the space that opens between the poem and the reader, along a spectrum of variant readings and misreadings: by contrast with Richards and Empson, Blackmur is very little interested in varieties of response. It is, in part, for this reason that his style of close reading appears circumlocutory where Empson's, although often wordy, does not: Empson's verbal excess testifies to variousness, whereas Blackmur's is a single voice repeating, rephrasing or circling itself.

For Blackmur, failure lies in the poems themselves, which are always radically imperfect. Blackmur locates this radical imperfection in 'the poet's attitude toward language itself'. His criticism operates primarily at the level of diction, measuring the weight and force of individual words. He was, as one critic remarked, 'a botanist of the stanza, verse, phrase, even of the single word', shaping essays around, for example, the word 'profane' in W.B. Yeats' 'Under Ben Bulbin', or the word 'flower' in the poems of Cummings.⁸⁰ In this respect, Blackmur is himself an exemplary modernist in the sense Pound outlined when he claimed: 'The poetical reform between 1910 and 1920 coincided with the scrutiny of the word'.⁸¹ Given this intensity of verbal scrutiny, Blackmur's most characteristic subject is always the concentrated expression of poetry: he 'rarely writes textual or linguistic analysis of prose texts or discusses general problems of prose technique'.⁸² With regard to his modernist subjects, Blackmur determines that the base note of their attitude toward language can be identified as solipsism. What these poets share is a reluctance to share word meaning. Yet such solipsism regarding words appears, Blackmur shows us, under many different aspects. It is apparent, for example, in Cummings's unwitting 'success' at 'turning his words into empty shells'; in the belief in 'flat meaning' that constitutes Emily Dickinson's particular form of poetic eccentricity; in the insistent 'forms of the verbal negative' characterizing Laura Riding's poems.⁸³ As the slant of these judgements suggests, Blackmur is not only a critic *of* modernism but also a *critic* of modernism, objecting to how modernist poets make their words 'mean', or, more commonly, fail to do so. The best that could

be said of many of his subjects is that they are bad enough to be interesting. Laura Riding, for example, is worth attention because her work represents 'the most irresponsible body of poetry in our time'; she is not just 'derelict; she is jetsam: washed up; and just to the level that we are washed up she makes excellent reading'.⁸⁴

These objections to particular styles can appear largely occasional, concerned with idiosyncrasies and particular examples; Blackmur often acquires something of Eliot's *ad hominem* manner, notably in the case of Cummings, where his criticism is at its most virulently personal. At this level, such complaints about modernist verbal experiments were not particularly distinctive, nor often very impressive, in 'the "advanced" literary press' to which Blackmur contributed. Many reviewers, Robert Graves chides, made a point of 'knowing the "names" in fashion at the moment as the leaders of the advanced movements in poetry, and of discovering exactly at what price the stock of, say Gertrude Stein (rising), Edith Sitwell (steady), Marianne Moore (not very steady), Ezra Pound (sinking), and John Masefield (sunk), is being quoted in Bloomsbury, Paris and Greenwich Village'.⁸⁵ Blackmur does not, however, deal in these sorts of local fluctuation of the modernist marketplace; instead, he brings about a more general devaluation, in response to a perceived crisis of word meanings. For him, nearly all poets fail (although, for some, this is what he terms 'splendid failure'). Together, then, the judgements of Blackmur's essays and reviews build towards a forceful, singular sense of the failings of modernist poetry, considered as a set of related, although not homogeneous, practices. From these, he arrives at a strong negative aesthetic: modernist poetry, Blackmur concludes, is typically 'verbalism in extremis'.⁸⁶

The consistency of this diagnosis of exemplary failure would seem to entail some concerted, even if not explicit, account or philosophy of the workings of words. Such a philosophy would seem, from Blackmur, unexpected. Yet, as a confirmed essayist and opponent of theories, Blackmur seems not only to lack but also to feel disdain for any such reasoned account of the workings of modernist verbalism. What he writes of Emily Dickinson and her unregulated forms of signification can seem dangerously close to a description of his own criticism, with its curiously unguided mechanisms of judgement: 'With no criterion of achievement without there could be no criterion of completion within. Success was by accident, by the mere momentum of sensibility. Failure was by rule, although the rule was unknown.'⁸⁷ If we were to extrapolate a general rule for Blackmur's mode of critical judgement from his particular readings, then it might take the following surprising form: 'the least said the better'. Typically, when Blackmur has a positive verdict to deliver, he does so by fiat, while his negative judgements are circumlocutory (the latter,

of course, predominate). This difference of method already proves an implicit judgement, a formal comment on the lack of particularity, precision, or 'reality' of the words in the negative examples. So, with the most circumlocutory patches corresponding with the most severe judgements, it is the poem that obviates the need for descriptive excess that achieves Blackmur's insistently elusive sense of success: 'actual complete presentation'.⁸⁸ For such 'autoanalytic' poems, 'exhibition' is possible, 'yatter' unnecessary.⁸⁹ Poems of this kind are, of course, powerfully elusive, and so it is 'yatter' that continues to dominate in Blackmur's prose.

With such unusual criteria, the line between failure and achievement can be very fine. Of Hart Crane, for example, whose poems work (or fail to work) by 'an extreme mode of free association', Blackmur concludes that 'the quality of Crane's success is also the quality of his failure, and the distinction is perhaps by the hair of accident'.⁹⁰ A phrase of Crane's, formed by free association, can achieve 'a startling separate beauty of its own', becoming a 'permanent idiom'; or, it can remain a mere 'trick', its words falling short 'of the control and precision of impact necessary to vitalize them permanently'.⁹¹ So too Blackmur's criticism of Crane. Blackmur can be very interesting on why certain lines are bad but not so persuasive as to why certain lines are good, or on what constitutes the difference between. Perhaps only for Blackmur does one of Crane's phrases from *The Bridge*, 'Peonies with pony manes', possess, with complete self-evidence, the vital beauty of 'created observation', while another phrase, 'wine talons' (from 'The Wine Menagerie'), reads as demonstrably false.⁹² Blackmur begins to tease out this last phrase with a vibrancy of detail that suggests it constitutes a first-type ambiguity, such as Empson might relish:

So far as it refers back and expresses a seizing together, a clutching by a bird of prey, ['talons'] is an excellent word well-chosen and spliced in. The further notion, suggested by the word 'wine', of release, would also seem relevant. There is, too, an unidentifiable possibility—for Crane used words in very special sense indeed—of 'talons' in the sense of cards left after the deal; and there is even, to push matters to the limit, a bare chance that some element of the etymon—ankle, heel—has been pressed into service.⁹³

All this sounds promising; yet Blackmur, after ranging inventively across these details, makes them evidence that the phrase is a 'less significantly performed' example of association. It is an instance of a kind of associative style where, 'whichever [association] you choose for use, the dead weight of the others must be provisionally carried along, which is what makes the phrase slightly fuzzy'.⁹⁴ Of Crane's phrase, 'new thresholds, new anatomies', on the other hand, he writes this:

There was, for example, no logical or emotional connection between thresholds and anatomies until Crane verbally juxtaposed them and tied them together with the cohesive of meter. Yet so associated, they modify and act upon each other mutually and produce a fresh meaning of which the parts cannot be segregated. Some latent, unsuspected part of the cumulus of meaning in each word has excited, so to speak, and affected a corresponding part in the others.⁹⁵

The description of this powerful instance of verbal interanimation reads well, with an aura of conviction, yet its grounds seem slight: there is 'no logical or emotional connection' between most words and yet they 'modify and act upon each other'—what constitutes the intricacy of this particular occasion is left unclear. Blackmur's criteria for judgement remain difficult to determine with any precision. The minuteness of his material—single words or short associative phrases—and the grandness of his ambitions come together to form an unstable edifice. There is a risk, as one of Blackmur's correspondents warns him, associated with his 'overwhelming consciousness of the possibilities of meaning of single words which if it continues will make you end up like Samson dragging the temple of the whole English language down on your head'.⁹⁶ Sometimes by empty generalities, and on other occasions by more parochial particularities, Blackmur's criticism can fail to satisfy either kind of expository urge; that towards explanation (which, in Eliot's terms, tries 'to bring the particular under the universal') or that towards description (which 'tries to stay in the particular'), remaining instead in awkward limbo of circumlocution, which desires the particular but half hides, from embarrassment, in the general.⁹⁷

One of the rare explicit criteria that Blackmur does give for success in poetry is 'arduous fealty to facts'. But this is a characteristically enigmatic turn of phrase and of thought: it appears strenuous, even dogmatic, yet remains elusive. No account in terms of idealist, analytical, or pragmatist influences on Blackmur proves a reliable cipher for it. Take, for example, the idealist sense of the evasiveness of 'facts' arrived at by Eliot in his thesis: 'We have no direct (immediate) knowledge of anything,' Eliot writes: 'you cannot put your finger upon even the simplest datum and say 'this we know'.⁹⁸ This sense of impossibility might seem a fair guide to Blackmur's position yet, in practice, he still strives towards some version of 'the simplest datum', even seeking to elucidate Eliot's poetry by this term, 'fact'. For the lines from 'Whispers of Immortality' beginning, 'Donne, I suppose, was such another', he gives the following description:

These lines [...] are a train of facts, the passage of which stirs up certain feelings. Or if you like they are conceits about facts of observation. They are

almost concepts of facts, of an intrinsically abstract condition issuing in gestures of an abstract, conceptual character.⁹⁹

Little clarity, however, results from these reiterations and deferrals: 'a train of [...] conceits about [...] concepts of [...]'. Facts are, as he elsewhere comments without embarrassment, 'such as to be insusceptible to a frame of logic'.¹⁰⁰ What then, within Blackmur's rhetorical economy, might 'facts' mean for the critic elucidating a poem? As always with Blackmur, the best answer may come through analogous or collateral expressions. In his thinking here Blackmur is perhaps closer to a version of the aesthetic ontology implied by a manifesto statement from his more usual antagonist, Ezra Pound: that art 'means constation of fact. It presents. It does not comment'.¹⁰¹ In this vein, the properties to the fore of Blackmur's sense of the term 'facts' are those of non-substitutability and objectivity. The corresponding critical aim is for presentation, not commentary.

One of Blackmur's earliest essays against empty verbalism, 'Notes on E.E. Cummings' Language' (1930), presents with more than usual clarity the coordinates of his case for how poetic failure can arise as a result of neglecting the character of words as 'facts'. Thrilling, flowers, serious, absolute, sweet, unspeaking, utter, gradual, ultimate, final, serene, frail, grave, tremendous, slender: Cummings's poems are, Blackmur writes, made of such 'middling words'; 'none of them, taken alone, are very concrete words [...] many of them are the rather abstract, which is to say typical, names for precise qualities'.¹⁰² The word 'flower' is perhaps the worst of these nondescript favourites, occurring forty-eight times in *Tulips and Chimneys* alone, with the support of its semantic field ('petals', 'blooms', and so on). To Cummings, it is replete with meaning and possibility: there are 'flowers of reminding' and 'dissonant flowers'; it is possible to 'smile like a flower', or be described as 'riverly as a flower'. Yet, for all this scope, this variety, 'flower' barely means anything either to its readers or in the general, impersonal scheme that is language: 'The word has become an idea, and in the process has been deprived of its history, its qualities, and its meaning'.¹⁰³ In good poetry, Blackmur asserts, the poet admits that 'the reality of a word is anterior to, and greater than, his use of it can ever be'.¹⁰⁴ Words are facts, existing prior to the individual poet, and possessing greater capacities for precision of feeling than any individual can attain. Each individual instance of a word (the token) should, then, acknowledge the 'anterior and superior form of reality' that 'the word' possesses (the type). Cummings's forty-eight uses of 'flower' fail to establish a relation with the word 'flower' as it might mean elsewhere—in other words, a sound relation of token to type. So Cummings's verbal flowers fail to be facts.

With such judgements, Blackmur goes against the generally pragmatist tide of modernist poetics, in which the meanings of words emerge from the complex, immediate contexts of their use. For Blackmur, with his strenuous conservatism about verbal meaning, 'using words as if their meanings were spontaneous with use' is one of the disasters of modernism; a process by which words are turned into 'empty shells'.¹⁰⁵ Contexts can create the conditions for heightened attention; they can, as he writes in an essay on Wallace Stevens, be 'so delicately illuminated, or adumbrated, that the word must be looked up, or at least thought carefully about, before the precision can be seen'.¹⁰⁶ They are not, however, the main determinants of word meaning, which remains 'the word', in its anterior reality. This kind of reasoning evidently exerts great pressure on the word 'word', perhaps Blackmur's equivalent to Cummings's 'flower' in its recurrence and 'middling' quality between the vague and the concrete. Blackmur does not take up any particularly distinctive stand on what, for his critical essays, 'word' means, remaining uncommitted to any of the various possibilities to the fore of early-twentieth-century thought about these 'minimal free forms'.¹⁰⁷ He is not, for example, a serious etymologizer, nor does he adhere strictly to any linguistic or philosophical definition. In practice, he takes the ready-to-hand sense of the 'word' as 'that which has a dictionary entry', but this subsists with a more awkwardly abstract notion of the 'superior' word form, existing outside of use, so that it becomes possible (ideally) to say of a poet's practice that 'the meanings in the words themselves are superior to the use to which he put them'.¹⁰⁸

Of course, these two versions of the word already coexist within the model of the dictionary, which is ambivalently pragmatic in its presentation of meanings. On the one hand, words in the dictionary are 'facts', or existing states of affairs, available for slight contextual stretching but not open to any very substantial modification without incurring a new entry or subsense. Yet a dictionary with illustrative quotations, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, still works by the pragmatism of what Hugh Kenner calls its 'compendious illusion', that 'words are strangely inexplicit; they "mean" here, here, here'.¹⁰⁹ Although Blackmur's emphases are no more incompatible than those of the dictionary, in the workings of his critical practice, they can create an awkward sense of disjunction. His readings of the diction of particular poets unfold a rather 'cosy' sense of words as available to the autodidactic critic, with a concise dictionary to hand, while the surrounding rhetoric strains towards the presentation of words as ideal forms, beyond the vicissitudes of local use. It seems little surprise, then, that, for all his lexical diligence, his prose sometimes breaks free of the strain of his version of 'the word' into rhetoric celebrating forms of meaning 'beyond words and beyond the sense of words'.¹¹⁰ These

forms have their own array of Blackmurean terms, gesture, symbol, idiom: 'gesture' occurs when words 'leap beyond the load of meaning'; a 'symbol' is 'a cumulus of meaning', building significance to the point of collapse; and poems 'become genuine idioms—that is, have meaning and being beyond the verbal and logical values of the lines', when they make words mean more than the mere sum of their uses.¹¹¹

Blackmur's sweeping sense of the modernist poet's typical 'failure to maintain an objective feeling of responsibility toward language' is also accompanied by some detailing of more local varieties of failure in the use of words.¹¹² The result is a negative or shadow version of rhetorical criticism. If rhetoric provides a set of terms for techniques or tricks of style that produce concentrated meaning-effects (whether irony, or chiasmus, or syllepsis), then Blackmur's criticism offers a set of terms for the evacuation or disintegration of meaning. From Emily Dickinson's poetry, for example, Blackmur extracts three categories of stylistic failure: synonymy, 'flat meaning', and imprecise ambiguity. To take the first of these, meaningfulness fails on such verbal occasions because 'synonyms are accidental, superficial, and never genuine'.¹¹³ This defect Blackmur finds in the poem beginning, 'More Life—went out—when He went, | Than Ordinary Breath', in which Dickinson uses a barrage of verbs (quench, reduce, extinguish, obliterate) to represent the point of death. As a result, the poem fails:

The question is, are not these verbs pretty nearly interchangeable? Would not any other verb of destructive action do just as well? In short, is there any word in this poem which either fits or contributes to the association at all exactly? I think not—with the single exception of 'phosphor'.¹¹⁴

Here, Blackmur's analysis, although seemingly eccentric in its resistance to near synonyms, shares ground with the linguistic theories of one of his usual subjects for scorn, Laura Riding. Riding, in the *Dictionary of Rational Meaning* she began to assemble from the 1930s, was firm in the belief that 'the concept of synonyms must be discarded'. This concept, she argued, 'cheapens the linguistic essential of distinction of meaning—which goes to the logical heart of language [...] into an additive feature, a stylistic refinement, a rhetorical elaboration'.¹¹⁵ Such refinements, like the 'fancy flatulence' of poetic diction to which Blackmur objected, had little to do with the facticity of words well-used.¹¹⁶ Riding puts these principles into the practice of analysis in her readings of other modernists. She convicts Gertrude Stein of particular stylistic crimes; of using words 'barbarically' with regard to their meanings, conducting a 'sterilization of words until they are exhausted of history and meaning'.¹¹⁷ From this unexpected proximity to Riding's theories and forms of reading, it would

appear then that Blackmur's antimodernist rhetoric can betray some modernist extremity of its own.

What, then, of the other varieties of semantic failure that Blackmur identifies in Dickinson: imprecise ambiguity and fiat meaning? An example of how these can feed each other can be seen with his gloss for another word in this same poem by Dickinson, 'anthracite', which occurs in the lines, 'A Temperature just adequate | So Anthracite, to live—':

Here we have fiat meaning. The word *anthracite* is the crux of the trouble. Anthracite is coal, is hard, is black, gives heat, and has a rushing crisp sound; it has a connection with carbuncle and with a fly-borne disease of which one symptom resembles a carbuncle; it is stratified in the earth, is formed of organic matter as a consequence of enormous pressure through geologic time; etc. One or several of these senses may contribute to the poem; but because the context does not denominate it, it does not appear which. My own guess is that Emily Dickinson wanted the effect of something hard and cold and perhaps black and took *anthracite* off the edge of her vocabulary largely because she liked the sound.¹¹⁸

Blackmur finds that, in the profusion of possible senses and absence of any particular sense, 'anthracite' comes to mean very little in Dickinson's poem: it is both vague and emphatic. The intimacy of word-tokens to word-types that Blackmur celebrates by the term 'facts' has been abandoned here, reducing the word to mere sound; any meaning beyond this is a mere matter of assertion, by fiat.

If Cummings and Dickinson present Blackmur with studies in failure of fidelity to 'the superior impersonal reality' of words, then, on puzzlingly similar grounds, Stevens presents him with a rare opportunity for affirmative criticism.¹¹⁹ In part, this works through a particular proximity of styles that Kenneth Burke noted—'For nearly every typical poetic invention on Stevens's part, Blackmur had the corresponding critical intuition'—and Empson parodied: 'Indeed the way Blackmur praises [Stevens] faintly suggests those advertisements in which two comic representatives of a firm say to teach other, "How marvelous you are, Mr Wix." "How marvelous you are, Mr Bix," precisely like characters in Henry James'.¹²⁰ The tautology that could not snare Marianne Moore's qualities of poetry within the critic's prose is here at work between the poems of Stevens and the prose of Blackmur. Stevens, Blackmur affirms, perfects word use, with poetry 'of a substance so dense with being, that it resists paraphrase and can be truly perceived only in the form of words in which it was given'.

This should, in turn, lead to the end of critical circumlocution. Yet Stevens, like Blackmur, also goes beyond or around words, performing the

analogical or collateral movements Blackmur praises as 'gesture' or 'idiom'; 'a special and fresh saying,' which 'cannot for its life be said otherwise'.¹²¹ This seems easy to collapse into a standard rejection of paraphrase but to understand Blackmur more thoroughly means to try out the positive sense wherever the negative tempts: an idiom is, in addition to something not subject to rephrasing, also something 'so fresh, so concrete or quotidian in detail, so apt to the felt instance, that the response is its own meaning, and the poem has hence an objective being'. Stevens is Blackmur's most idiomatic poet, capable of creating new possibilities for poetic diction, alongside the drastic verbal solipsism of his contemporaries. Still, even in facing his example of the best poetry, Blackmur seems only to reach a style of splendidly circumlocutory failure in a different key; not as a necessary supplement to imperfect words, but instead as bluster before the spectacle of 'actual complete presentation', embarrassment at having to explain where tautology would suffice.

Across the spectrum of modernist poetry, from what Blackmur diagnoses to be its mere failures, to its great failures and its rare triumphs, circumlocution remains the form by which his criticism expresses an acute sense of the embarrassments of explanation—not least for the intimacy of this critical form with the indirect, collateral forms of modernism that it surrounds. There is, Blackmur discovers, more 'yatter' and less 'exhibit' to much of this poetry than some of its declarations of principle, and the surface of its practices, might imply. To diagnose this takes not only close reading, focusing on where words lose their quality of 'fact', but also a responsive critical style. Rather than being merely digression, indirection, or evasion, Blackmurean circumlocution thus proves a particularly close form of response to the challenges of verbalism. It is, this prose would suggest, for the critic of modernist poetry, 'an answerable style'.¹²²

IV. SALTATORY HEURISTICS

Early in his critical career, Blackmur declared that the 'critic's job of work' was destined always for 'splendid failure'.¹²³ On a rising arc from tempered pragmatism to fatalistic idealism, he concluded that, about any body or work of literature, there could be no conclusion: 'no observation, no collection of observations, ever tells the whole story; there is always room for more, and at the hypothetical limit of attention and interest there will always remain, quite untouched, the thing itself.'¹²⁴ With such pessimism about conclusion and circumlocution as a subject, there is a particularly acute problem of how best to exercise what Henry James described as 'that embarrassed effort to "finish", not ignobly, within my already exceeded

limits'.¹²⁵ If not with an explanation or conclusion, then perhaps with a story: a story about the feeling of words; a story of a felicitous meaning, produced by way of a misprint, in the proofs of one of Blackmur's essays, which is also exemplary of Blackmur's central preoccupations with failures of precision and lexical deformations. 'The word he had written was 'salutary,' Blackmur said,' in conversation, 'When the printer got it wrong, he thought he would let the printer have his way. It makes a good story.'¹²⁶

For 'salutary', 'saltatory', a much rarer adjective meaning 'abrupt movement, dancing, leaping; one mode of transmission along the nerves, jumping from node to node'.¹²⁷ The printer's error described here occurs in Blackmur's essay, 'A Feather-Bed for Critics' (1940), in a meditation on how to define the word 'responsible'. The author declared himself happy to let the error stand but it does more than just this: the slip turns out to be more like a parapraxis: the accidental meaning is one that the trajectory of his argument, his chain of images and arrangement of words may even (if unwittingly) have sought. The passage in which the error arises is this:

For the dictionary—that *palace of saltatory heuristics*—is quite on our side, with a jump: saying that he who is responsible may be called to account, may be made to reply, in short to respond; and to respond, if we jump back a little, is both to perform the answering or corresponding action, and to show sensitiveness to behaviour or change; and again, with another jump, this time into Skeat, we find invoked for further discovery the word sponsor: a surety, a godfather or godmother, one who promises, with a probable alliance with the Greek words for treaty or truce, and for pouring a libation, as when making a solemn treaty. The development is interesting: he who is responsible swears, and swears, and answers just the same.¹²⁸

So the error becomes iconic. It captures what has been described as '[t]he most alluring and problematic aspect of Blackmur's criticism': its 'dedication to the idea of failure'.¹²⁹ This incorporation of a fortuitous phrase, arrived at by a typographic 'leap', seems emblematic of the movement of meaning Blackmur seeks to elucidate: without being responsible for the metaphor ('he who is responsible may be called to account'), his 'jump' around some of the surrounding etymologies prepares the ground for what the printer's error then inserts into the prose. But beyond this moment of iconicity, Blackmur does, to some extent, become 'responsible for the metaphor' in his subsequent prose—and not only in the sense that his writing follows a saltatory rhythm rather than systematic structure of argument. Following the initial accident, the word 'saltatory' becomes for him almost a term, presenting a neat shorthand for some aspects of his address to words in poems and to the critical words around those words. For example, Blackmur made use of the term in a lecture titled 'My

Critical Perspective', which he delivered in Ngano, Japan, in the summer of 1956: 'I have a vicious, but I believe a very healthy belief that the mind proceeds by jumps. The mind is essentially saltatory', Blackmur argues, in an extension of the figure from a description of criticism as a matter of leaping from node to node of significant meaning, on the model of the serendipitous reading of a dictionary, to a model for the mind (however light his thinking may be here).¹³⁰ It is, then, an example of the movement of language, the identification of which in the works of others forms such a distinctive note in Blackmur's criticism: a word become 'idiom'.

Looking back thirteen years before 'A Feather-Bed for Critics' to *Hound & Horn*, however, it appears that, although it 'makes a good story', this anecdote of an error become an idiom may be just that: Blackmur, in 1929, reviewed *Him. A Play*, by E.E. Cummings, in these terms:

Think of words no longer as the trappings of things, but as trappings merely—with all sorts of neatly suggested interrelations, unfitted and fitted joints, cataracts, and *saltatory* sequences [...] In short a very fancy flatulence [...] Enormous, wonderful, accurate, huge, minute, clever, dream, death, flower, toy: all these, and any general, all-blanketing word, come pouring in vegetable profusion over the pumiced pages.¹³¹

This is no misprint: Blackmur finds Cummings's mere verbalism—his failure to establish what Blackmur counts as a sufficient link between his uses of words and 'their anterior reality'—anything but salutary. At this stage 'saltatory' is part of a profusion of different figures; very lightly used, not taken as model and so easily passing unnoticed among the circumlocutory forms. It does not stand out sufficiently to be remembered by Blackmur, or noted by his biographer here—or even as it occurs once again in the essay, 'Masks of Ezra Pound', where Blackmur writes that, for the measure of Pound's failure, 'the only test will be whether a passage put in question was or was not, by a saltatory action of the mind, an extension of the reader's own confusion'.¹³²

These earlier uses tell the truer story: the word 'saltatory' has a very exact sense and force for Blackmur's judgement of the 'radical imperfection' of modernism—it is, perhaps, an iconic word for his criticism. This word begins as a pointed term of rebuke, emerging from his distinctive perspective on the necessary 'lien to reality' that words must possess to form good poetry. It then becomes a lucky misprint. It is later affirmed as a description of the ideal vision of language presented by the dictionary, and that the critic seeks to emulate. It is, at once, malapropism and modernist neologism, error and invention: a Blackmurean splendid failure. For Blackmur's criticism, in its passage from Circumlocution Office to Saltatory Palace, this idiom tells 'a good story'.

VI

Parataxis

Marianne Moore's reticent sentences

Assets: power of observation

Inexhaustible perserverance

Gusto—a great amount of joy in the thing

[Marianne Moore, 'Poetry as Expression', 1962]

I. INTENSIVE UNFOLDING

Four years before her poetry collection, *Observations* (1924), confirmed her as a distinctive voice among the modernists, Marianne Moore contemplated some studies in prose. 'I, Moore writes in a letter to Bryher, 'should attempt observations in prose I think—nothing absolute'.¹ She speaks here, within the closed circuits of correspondence, from the unguarded pronoun, 'I', which makes few appearances in her published prose, where the reserved 'one' of earlier reviews modulates to a collective (but not collusive) 'we' in later essays. Lest this pronoun, this pronouncement, seem too bold, Moore also holds out to her reader a full wardrobe of disguises under which to conceal it: 'I shall like,' this same letter begins, 'any name you select for me; I am in my family, a weasel, a coach-dog, a water-rat, a basilisk and an alligator and could be an armadillo, a bull-frog or anything that seems suitable to you.' There is no fear in this fanciful bestiary of ridicule. If perspective by incongruity is the hallmark of modernist wit, then aesthetic reflections can lie adjacent to armadillos. What Moore does fear is the ridiculous exposure of verse. 'To put my remarks in verse form,' she continues, 'is like trying to dance the minuet in a bathing-suit.'

This sentence offers, with the typical visual precision of Moore's hilarity, a glimpse of how her prose works by 'humor, esprit, a sense of style'.² Also visible are some typical feints and parries of this style, its rhythm of emerging laughter, the oscillations of its anxiety, too. Moore's

sentence performs its ironically poised, self-mocking wit with less lyrical economy than Emily Dickinson's better-known phrase, 'Myself the only Kangaroo among the Beauty'.³ But there is considerable force in its blend of discomfort and comic panache, bathos, vulnerability, and laughter: Moore is flippant about appearing improper, an impostor, but she is also earnest. Her simile proved prescient; in 1921, a year after this letter, Bryher, alongside H.D., published Moore's *Poems* with the Egoist Press, without her consent and to her mortification. Even before this public uncovering, Moore figures verse by way of what she considers (bathing-suit or not) to be 'that most exposed form of self-expression, dancing'.⁴ The writer whose style Pound termed 'logopoeia', the 'dance of the intelligence among words and ideas', turned to dance to consider the aesthetics of grace and the risk of its absence.⁵ Anna Pavlova's slightly over-sized hands and Balanchine's improbable ballet of skirted elephants both give her subjects for essays in *Dance Index*. Here, the unfortunate minuet-dancer captures Moore's sense of verse as a feat of daring against self-exposure. While its forms held out the promise of impersonality ('a refuge for me | from egocentricity'), its skilful practice involved the necessary exactitude of writing 'unselfsparingly'.⁶

So, in her letter to Bryher, Moore looks to prose for escape. Prose, Moore felt, could—against the grain of its purported plainness—accommodate more guarded insights, more subtle intimations: 'nothing absolute'. Rather than unfailingly propositional, prose could be attractively provisional and, thus, 'less restrictive'.⁷ Such was its appeal to a writer who prized the qualities she terms 'natural reticence', 'uninsistence', and the 'fastidious compelling of form appropriate to thought'.⁸ Moore's hopes for prose were both strong and tenacious. At a much later stage of her self-fashioning, the compilation of pieces for publication in *Predilections: Literary Essays* (1955), half of the material she chose to represent her *oeuvre* was verse, the other half prose. Such hopes were often forlorn. In a letter to W.H. Auden in 1944, Moore describes how she sent to Macmillan's 'certain prose of mine—reviews of Wallace Stevens, E.E. Cummings, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, my review of *The Double Man*, and one or two other papers':

I submitted it, suggesting that it perhaps be issued together with this present verse of mine which the Company was about to publish. The prose was returned as not being a judicious companion piece for the verse; but also, I suspect, as not being of crucial interest.⁹

The same publishers had also rejected Moore's substantial attempt at a novel, *The Way We Live Now*, which she proposed to them in the late 1930s.¹⁰ Beyond these local rejections, the general critical predilection

remains for Moore as a writer of poems, while her prose remains an unobserved dance.

There is, however, a broad span of 'prose' by Moore that has 'crucial interest' for our understanding of her work, and of modernism: it includes her epistolary mode, her celebrity blurbs, record sleeve notes, her exchange with the Ford Motor Company, which began as letters, and was later reprinted in *The New Yorker*.¹¹ The focus of this chapter is a particular type of prose from within that miscellany: Moore's 'critical prose', in so far as that label can hold. Moore herself appears not to have relished 'criticism' as a term. Its cognates appear in negative contexts; 'the immovable critic', for example, 'twitching his skin like a horse | that feels a flea', who makes an odd cameo in the 1919 version of 'Poetry'—a poem that, several lines earlier also treats with disdain the practice of 'high-sounding interpretation'.¹² Still, 'criticism' remains a compelling category here: first it can give a pragmatic indication of the distinct body of Moore's prose pieces that are about the writing (or, sometimes, the pictures, films, or performances) of others; second, in so doing, it also registers some of the fierce difficulties of reading Moore reading others; of the peculiarly complex armoury of techniques and generous reticence with which she writes about them.

This reticence can become extreme, to the point at which it seems close to an infringement of intellectual property to talk of *Moore's* critical prose. The possessive construction reads awkwardly when, as she comments in one essay: 'My observations, as usual, are borrowed'—and, as with her poetry, quoting almost any section of the prose at any length involves quoting the words of others.¹³ Her prose cultivates 'contractility', retreating from the pages of her essays and allowing others to speak for themselves.¹⁴ Parataxis is one of her defining techniques; essays are pragmatist mosaics of facts, fragments, and short quotations, with minimal expository or grammatical cement between. Take this passage from Moore's review of Auden's *The Double Man*, for example, where she accounts for the collection almost exclusively in its own words:

'The great schismatic' 'hidden in his hocus-pocus,' has 'the gift of double focus,' but is here unmasked;

... torn between conflicting needs.

He's doomed to fail if he succeeds.¹⁵

Such paratactic writing can work to suggest a form of objectivity that is true to Auden's own, which followed Geoffrey Grigson's motto: 'Report well; begin with objects and events'.¹⁶ Still, for all this imitative fidelity, it seems surprising that Moore's only contributions to this sentence, beyond the collage arrangement of quotations, are one grammatical hinge ('has')

and one brief revelatory gesture ('but is here unmasked'). A reader could fairly ask, 'who is writing?'

Despite her exaggerated retreat from criticism in its more familiar forms, there was, Moore continued to feel, a particular impetus for the influential poet to 'say something' in prose. This was a view to which she gave clear expression when reviewing William Carlos Williams' *Collected Poems, 1921–1931*, with its preface by Wallace Stevens. Her admiration for 'Mr. Stevens' presentation of the book, 'only leaves her more dissatisfied; it 'refreshes a grievance—the scarcity of prose about verse from him, one of the few persons who should have something to say'.¹⁷ Ezra Pound, after admiring some of her early poetry in *The Dial*, felt there was a similar risk of scarcity with Moore and urged the magazine's editor, Scofield Thayer, to 'get some of her prose'.¹⁸ Thayer did so, and Moore also went on to assume significant editorial responsibilities at *The Dial* from January 1925. For the next seven years she wrote only prose. During this time, Moore produced a substantial body of work, composed of reviews, essays, and editor's 'comments'. Most pieces are short and occasional, although some of the essays about major contemporaries, and about poetics in general, still stand as significant documents of modernism. Nearly all are written with fastidious care, soliciting equally meticulous reading. As a critic, her 'effort knew no interlude'.¹⁹ Elizabeth Bishop, in her unfinished memoir of Moore, recalls this degree of care with one of the typically vivid images by which she fixed and catalogued her recollections of their encounters. At Moore's apartment, Bishop remembers:

a bushel basket, the kind used for apples or tomatoes, filled to overflowing with crumpled papers, some typed, some covered with Marianne's handwriting. This basketful of papers held the discarded drafts of one review, not a long review, of a new book of poems by Wallace Stevens. [...] so much hard work on a review running to two or two and a half pages.²⁰

Moore sustained the intensity of her critical and editorial interests beyond the immediate exigencies of work for *The Dial*. She continued to review, to provide prefaces, and to offer prose commentaries on particular occasions for other publications, after the magazine ceased publication in 1929 and alongside her return to verse. Yet prose, while not an unimportant term in commentary around her work, has figured there principally in relation to her poems, which are found to be 'prosaic', 'hybrids of a flagrantly prose origin'.²¹ F.O. Matthiessen's condescension, in *The Literary History of the United States* (1948)—as a poet, Moore is 'feminine in a very rewarding sense, in that she makes no effort to be major'—has seemed even easier to extend to her prose writings; 'graceful presentations

of observations and impressions', that do not strive towards any sustained work of exposition.²² Ignoring her notable public successes as editor, critics—both Moore's contemporaries and later writers—have been happy to concur that 'Miss Moore's real career was in poetry'.²³

'The prose. How closely it resembles the poetry.'²⁴ Little has been ventured beyond this by most writers about Moore. Even critics who show moments of more than usual sensitivity to Moore's interest as a prose writer still prove unwilling to examine the prose on its own terms. Laurence Stapleton, for example, suggests that Moore is an example of the poet-critic between whose two main modes of writing there is no very radical disjuncture. If 'from the critical essays of Eliot, we might infer what he thinks about some poets he has never discussed, but we could hardly imagine the kind of verse he has written', then Moore presents a rather easier speculative task: from her prose, 'we might be able to imagine what the poetry is like'.²⁵ This may, at some level, be a strong truth about Moore's writing. Moore was resistant to any marked disproportion between objects observed and the methods of observation: 'Why dissect destiny with instruments which | Are more highly specialized than the tissue of destiny itself?' ('Those Various Scalpels').²⁶ Yet the standard critical assumption that her prose resembles her poetry comes to present an obstacle to its more acute observation. Take this typical gesture of comparison: 'When Hugh Kenner described Moore's poetry as a "heavy system of nouns [...] without the syntactic lubricants that slide us past a comparison", he might well have been describing her essays'.²⁷ Although the aim here is praise for her innovative prose parataxis, the too-smooth segue inhibits our sense of Moore's distinctive capacities as a writer of prose. This critical shortcut of describing the prose only by way of the poetry means that we fail to rethink its particular innovations, so that, instead of a bold experiment in style, it becomes only an inconveniently complex appendage to her poetry.

For if Moore's prose resembles her poetry, then the logical implication is that it must fail as 'prose': it must be, within our usual horizons of expectation, too provisional, too paratactic, too densely difficult, and so too remiss in its critical duties to offer opinion, judgement, exposition. This backhanded blame can be traced in the following neat summary of supposed deficiencies from one of the rare defenders of Moore's prose works:

The liberties permitted the poems, the elements of style which give what she called her 'exercises in composition' their peculiar strengths, now become liabilities in the essays: centones substituting for logically developed paragraphs, apophthegms for arguments. Brilliant in detail, Moore the essayist is found to be deficient in Basic Rhetoric and remiss in her duty as critic. Her

deviations from conventional prose technique, particularly her lack of smooth transitions, have led critics to call these other exercises in composition 'impressionistic'.²⁸

How Moore might transmute these prose 'liabilities' into 'peculiar strengths' for criticism has not been thoroughly considered. Critics have neglected to explore how centones, apothegms, and abrupt transitions might achieve just the kind and quality of 'observations' that Moore seeks. Moore, it would seem, sets her style knowingly against common expectations for prose. 'Academic feeling, or prejudice possibly, in favour of continuity and completeness' dominates essay style, she remarks, before championing 'miscellany' as a 'highly satisfactory' alternative.²⁹ If we begin to observe Moore's prose on its own terms, then it has, this chapter argues, some distinctively strong forms; forms that enable this prose to be a bold register both of her own mode of modernism, and of the styles of her subjects and contemporaries. Beyond this, close attention to the prose also permits a view of its delight. Moments of luminous detail and critical perceptiveness continually emerge from its densely paratactic miscellany; sentences proceed 'with grammar that suddenly turns and shines | like flocks of sandpipers flying,' (Bishop, 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore').³⁰ The reader of such prose, for all its careful reticence, has little choice but to feel 'Gusto—a great amount of joy in the thing'; joy in the prose itself and renewed joy in its objects, the works or styles it is about.³¹

How, then, to approach such qualities of style so that they continue to turn, shine, and fly? About a writer's style, Moore urged, we must have some 'natural reticence'. 'Sir Francis Bacon was probably right when he said, "Hyperbole is comely only in love"', she notes, granting the aphorism, but not without the scrupulous 'probably'.³² Her own style presents a gentle shield against forms of excess, including that of what she terms 'expanded explanation'. Explanation, Moore remarks, is 'tawdry' and we find few of its more familiar forms in the reviews, essays, and correspondence that compose her published prose. Of the explanatory experiments of the 'new' criticism, she remained uncertain; Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* she liked but described as 'somewhat minute and vermicular to my eyes'.³³ Her own prose withholds from too much close reading—including of itself. Sometimes by vociferous statement but more often by the quieter forms of her writing, Moore was fiercely resistant to what she termed 'that blatantly self-analytical aggressiveness which is characteristic of certain modern contortionists', in their quest for new styles and new selves.³⁴ 'It is the explanations of things that we make to ourselves that disclose our character', Wallace Stevens writes in characteristically assertive mode.³⁵ For Moore, however, explanations are more prone to distort than to disclose.

For the reader attempting to disclose but not distort Moore's own prose style, starting points might be characteristic techniques such as parataxis and minor forms such as the sentence. Of course, although she held sentences to be of particular importance, Moore gives little direct help with how we might approach hers. When invited by '[o]ne of New York's more painstaking magazines' to analyse her sentence structure, Moore refused. Such forms say so much of their writer, she commented, that we can say very little of them: 'the rhythm is the person and the sentence but the radiograph of personality'.³⁶ The power of sentences is here both granted, raised above mere stylistics, and withheld: sentences concentrate such powers of revelation that analysis is too reductive. Moore's shield from detailed criticism can seem so smooth as to be impenetrable. But it is, as Moore notes, the effect of good writing to 'check the impact of precursory consent', and this fragment of a sentence discussing sentences is no exception: its well-crafted refusal of explanation itself invites attempts to make plain Moore's particular meaning and its wider implications.³⁷ What, it also encourages us to consider, do Moore's sentences reveal (and shield) of 'personality', both her own and that of the subjects of whom she writes?

Such questions guide this chapter as it takes the quieter 'techniques' and paratactic rhythms of Moore's prose sentences as a point of departure for considering the innovations and significance of her 'criticism'. It aims for a glimpse, but not an exposé, of what Moore's mother admired in style—'the privateness of the prose rhythm'—and to give ballast to the view Moore herself expressed in 1922: '[a]lthough verse rhythms and cadences are analyzed today with great particularity, prose rhythms are not less important'.³⁸ Moore's sentences are first explored as they unfold against some of the competing pressures of their modernist context: pressures both for reticence about the usual measures of prose, above all explanation, but also for new indices of objectivity and forms of 'straight writing'. This involves brief attention to some of the more vital influences behind Moore's thought: Ezra Pound, for example, but also, by way of an alternative, pragmatist genealogy for her style, William and Henry James. I then consider some particular and complex cases of Moore's 'radiography': her prose encounters with the poetics of Stevens, Eliot, and Bishop, and the innovative forms of criticism she achieves here by indirection, emblem, and parataxis. Sentences can, as Moore's 'radiograph' metaphor suggests, be an exposure; of oneself or of another. They can also expose one's (in)adequacy to that other: how far, they demand, can description be exact when sentences always also imprint their writer's own self? For Moore, this painstaking matter of style proves to be one of

her quiet and particular forms of asking the awkwardly general question of the function of criticism.

II. STRAIGHT WRITING

'The absolute mind thinks the whole sentence, while we, according to our rank as thinkers, think a clause, a word, a syllable, or a letter'—so William James paraphrases, with some scepticism, the grammatical outlook of 'our transcendentalist teachers' in 'A Pluralistic Universe' (1909).³⁹ Moore, who is considerably indebted to James's pragmatism, shares his circumspection about such units of prose. Sentences, for Moore, are less metaphors for the absolute mind than a suitably 'modest form' for potentially 'large truths'.⁴⁰ Part of her pleasure in them seems to come from their possession of that quality she terms 'natural reticence': 'A sentence is not emotional a paragraph is', Gertrude Stein suggested, in a formula that would have pleased Moore.⁴¹ Paragraphs accumulate discernible movements of feeling and thought; individual words concentrate an impression of immediate choice. Between these, sentences solicit a middling level of attention, alert but not intense. This sense of the sentence has a complex genealogy. It evolves in part through, and can be measured against, the styles of the other modernists in whom Moore sought her ideals of 'reticent candor and emphasis by understatement'.⁴² It also owes much to the pragmatist philosophy of James, one of Moore's strongest early influences, even as she diverges from the tenor of some of his explicit pronouncements on this subject.

Moore shared with James a sense of what these well-moderated units, sentences, should not contain. Sentences should not, James writes in his essay, 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings', be 'stuffed with abstract conceptions and glib with verbalities and verbosities'.⁴³ This phrase, itself on the edge of the rather over-stuffed 'verbality' it mocks, recalls a distinction from rhetoric between the two main categories of prose form, categories by which a definition of the sentence might be attempted: *figurae sententiae* (conceptual figures, intellectual enhancements) and *figurae verborum* (verbal figures, embellishments of expression). Neither, for Moore, provides the key to the definition of the sentence: ideal sentences are not neat presentations of a distinct, complete thought, nor are they miniature examples of decorative style. With regard to the former, Moore mounts a quiet but persistent opposition to equating the sentence to sententiousness. Aphorism might seem a neat way to avoid the tawdriness of explanation ('The aphorist does not argue or explain, he asserts', as Auden once proposed) but Moore prefers the view that prose is at its best

when it admits 'nothing absolute'.⁴⁴ With Steinian emphasis by repetition, she remarks that '[t]he summit of persuasiveness is in making a claim that seems not to be claiming more than could be claimed'.⁴⁵

Resistance to the other possible sense of the sentence, as the verbal flourish, comes into particular focus in Moore's frequent comments on seventeenth-century prose, which was, for her as for Eliot, an ambivalent model. Despite their mutual taste for understatement, Eliot and Moore shared a fascination for what George Saintsbury, in his *History of English Prose Rhythm* (1912), calls '[t]he charm of seventeenth-century ornateness'.⁴⁶ Both, in order to resist this charm, were preoccupied with drawing acute distinctions by which to salvage what he called its 'wit', she its 'gusto' or 'bravura', from its empty embellishments. So, Moore is careful to admire the period's 'gaudy phases less richly than the more shadowy ones'; Eliot, although open to 'the beauty of the cadence, the felicity and Latin sonority' of some of its most characteristic sentences, is still firm in his conclusion that these often fail to be true sentences, scorning phrases where 'only a commonplace sententiousness is decorated by reverberating language'.⁴⁷ A similar reluctance to equate sentences with instances of embellished style persists in Moore's address to more contemporary voices; in fact, one of Moore's most consistent critical positions is that of admiration for writing that had 'no creditable mannerisms'—a phrase she offers specifically in praise of Bishop's poetry but which has general descriptive force for her resistance to obtrusive style.⁴⁸ ('No mannerisms', Moore counsels once again in 'Poetry as Expression'; 'you are not seeking notoriety or a fortune | You are a student of art'.⁴⁹) Moore extends a version of this praise to Emily Dickinson, in the following oblique defence:

One resents the cavil that makes idiosyncrasy out of individuality, asking why Emily Dickinson should sit in the dim hall to listen to Mrs. Todd's music. Music coming from under a window has many times been enhanced by its separateness; and though to converse athwart a door is not usual, it seems more un-useful to discuss such a preference than it would be to analyze the beam of light that brings personality, even in death, out of seclusion.⁵⁰

In this riddling portrait, Moore's typically careful diction hints at the older sense of 'cavil', as 'jeer or gibe', to write against the common caricature of Dickinson's secluded eccentricity: Dickinson's choice to listen to music from 'the dim hall' can mark a distinctive trait of personality without marking a peculiar 'mannerism'. Moore herself has been described as '*the* poet of the particular—or, when she fails, of the peculiar'.⁵¹ Here, her prose observation of another agrees: to be particular is success in style, to be peculiar is to fail.

If the sentence is 'the radiograph of the personality', then the other unobtrusive marker for the particularity of 'the person' that Moore cites alongside the sentence is 'rhythm'—again no easy measure. Moore was herself 'possessed of a unique, involuntary sense of rhythm', Bishop notes, and this was also true of her prose, where the weighting of syllables and stresses is, if more irregular than in her highly measured verse, never careless: 'a musical inaudible abacus'.⁵² Moore's prose also possesses what we might call, with Saintsbury, who takes this as title to one of the chapters of *The History of English Prose Rhythm*, 'The rhythmical character of irony'. For this phrase, Saintsbury offers this carefully coordinated definition: 'The essence of irony, when irony itself is in quintessence, is quietness', continuing: 'If the ostensible expression attracts too much notice to itself by clangour of sound, or by flamboyance of colour, the inner meaning has no (or at least less) opportunity to slip its presence into the reader's mind, and its sting into the enemy's body'.⁵³ Irony, he asserts, must work by rhythmic and acoustic stealth. Moore can sometimes delight in 'clangour of sound' in her prose, in the aural energies of a phrase such as the following, which describes an Eliot poem: 'like the unanticipated florescence of fireworks as they expand with the felicitous momentum of "unbroken horses"'.⁵⁴ But more often, Moore is an ironist along the lines of Saintsbury's description, achieving this effect of tactical quietness in a range of ways but most typically by what could be described as her parataxis. Take this sentence about Stevens: 'A poet does not speak language but mediates it, as the lion's power lies in his paws; he knows what it is "to have the ant of the self changed to an ox," "young ox," "lion," "stout dog," "bow-legged bear"'.⁵⁵ Without sustaining throughout such sentences the background noise of conventional syntax, Moore's prose can contain many subdued moments of going 'quiet' between their separate parts. These pauses are not as strongly realized as, for example, those of aposiopesis, the rhetorical figure of 'becoming silent' (usually marked by a dash or an ellipsis, and characteristic of the rhythm of a prose stylist such as Walter Pater). They do, however, create a notable, if quiet, ironic cadence. The reader is invited to pause between the dense details of these parts and, into this space, Moore slides a possible judgement or implication, while drawing back from the rhythm of direct exposition or critique. Once again, 'contractility is a virtue'.⁵⁶

Reading such paratactic sentences reminds us that Moore's essays take place against the usual horizons of expectation for prose: coherent sentences, minimal parataxis. Poetry, meanwhile, retains a licence for (and, in the early twentieth century, developed a predisposition towards) markedly fragmentary or agrammatical sequences of words of a kind 'typically, unacceptable in most genres of English prose'. Poems may only have

pseudo-sentences, one commonplace argument runs; although 'the syntactical forms used in poetry may or may not be identical with those of prose [...] where they are identical, this identity of form masks an entirely different function'.⁵⁷ Tracing this line of thought in his *Articulate Energy* (1955), Donald Davie suggests how the poet may, for example, 'construct a complex sentence, not because the terms in the sentence are to be articulated subtly and closely, but just because he wants at that point a rhythmical unit unusually elaborate and sustained'.⁵⁸ Such distinctions between the 'real' sentences of prose and pseudo-sentence forms of poetry are easy to collapse yet, for understanding Moore, not to dispense with entirely: an account of her sentences gains its shape in part from how these distinctions formed, fixed, and were challenged by her contemporaries. Thus the pedantic magazine question about sentence structure, at which Moore demurred, inserts itself, however unwittingly, into the middle of the modernist revolutions of word relation.

So, too, does Moore's fragment of a sentence about sentences—'the rhythm is the person, the sentence *but* the radiograph of personality'—which bears an imprint of this modernist context in the word 'radiograph'. Introduced by a word from Moore's quiet grammatical armoury of reticence, 'but' (in the prepositional sense), 'radiograph' breaks with polysyllabic verve from the firm rhythm of the phrase and carries a force stronger than its possible synonyms; fingerprint, image, index. A radiograph is a form of 'shadow writing'; 'an image of an object produced on a sensitive plate, film, or screen by means of X-rays or other ionizing radiation, esp. by exploiting the property of such rays of passing through many substances that are opaque to visible light' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). For Moore, the term points to a new form of observation and representation at once fierce and elusive; to visible registrations of the invisible. It gestures to the quality of objectivity for which she admired the work of others; the black and white 'precisionist' photographs of Alfred Stieglitz, for example, who 'had no subterfuge' and 'was almost queer in his inability to approximate counterfeit'.⁵⁹ It marks her desire to, like a dancer in words, 'make visible, mentality'.⁶⁰ The term 'radiograph' thus sustains the negotiation between relentless accuracy and shielding reticence that runs through her prose and poetry; what is revealed can feel only tangentially 'objective' because it is not what we can see to be there.

Moore's diction also hints a debt to the poetics of Pound, and to the noun kernels of modernism; to the Bergsonian fear that explanation and syntax unfold, whereas poetry should be a matter of intensive manifolds.⁶¹ Pound took radiography both as 'a powerful new index of objectivity' and as a dynamic principle for form as radiating energy rather than arranged order.⁶² Such radiographic modernism was, on the one hand, a

determined break with past forms and, on the other, an extension of their growing tendencies: 'In the excessive elaborations found in late nineteenth century poetry, nouns gain "centrifugal force" until they become nearly independent units, foreshadowing later fragments built on a noun kernel'.⁶³ The most emphatic of these later fragments remains Pound's famous early-twentieth-century reduction:

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.⁶⁴

If sentences are radiographs, then the modernist converse is clearly that not all 'radiographs' are sentences. Although Pound described this poem as a 'hokku-like sentence', a 'sentence-like hokku' might have been more apt for these lines that preserve only the semblance of syntax.⁶⁵ For a gloss on this Poundian 'thinking by ideogram' rather than by sentence, Donald Davie turns to the essays of T.E. Hulme, which extended to literature Henri Bergson's concepts of intensive and extensive manifolds, in order to suggest how 'our ordinary methods of explanation distort reality', and the reality of literary forms in particular.⁶⁶ 'The process of explanation is always a process of unfolding', Hulme suggests.⁶⁷ The explanatory 'intellect can only deal with the extensive multiplicity', and cannot account for the vitality of 'intensive' forms, such as poetry, for which 'you must use intuition'.

Here, for Davie, are some of the roots of modernist wariness about the sentence: 'Syntax assists explanation, but explanation is unfolding, and intensive manifolds, which should be poetry's main concern, cannot be unfolded; hence it appears that syntax is out of place in poetry'.⁶⁸ Or, this is true at least in the varieties of modernist poetry that, in a phrase from William Carlos Williams, sought to 'breakaway from that paralyzing vulgarity of logic' to follow 'some unapparent sequence quite apart from the usual syntactical one'.⁶⁹ The strength of this 'breakaway' might be measured by some of the forms of resistance it elicited from those around its edges. The correspondence of Robert Frost, for example, at a time (1913 to 1916) when he was struggling against Imagism—striving for new styles without ceding to the styles of newness of Pound and Amy Lowell—becomes heavily preoccupied with what Frost names 'sentence sounds'. These, he argues, in a loaded contrast, 'are real cave things: they were before words were [...] as definitely things as any image of sight'.⁷⁰ Moore, as her dismissals of explanation and her paratactic forms of prose suggest, shares something of the Bergsonian drive against 'extensive' forms. But, like Frost, she also feels the pull of the larger rhythmic unit, the sentence sound, as a means for 'unfolding' what is particular. In a

generally obscure essay on the Spanish novelist, Miguel de Unamuno, she crafts a telling phrase that coordinates these supposed extremes: 'intensive yet impersonal unfolding'.⁷¹ To understand this apparent oxymoron involves some consideration of how the sequences 'quite apart from the usual syntactical one' that helped to shape Moore's style were not only those to be found in the vanguard of poetry but also those at the exploratory edge of prose—discursive, as well as imaginative.

We can see here, for example, the influence of one of the distinct threads of thought that weaves through Moore's intellectual life: pragmatism. The affinities of Moore's style with the principles and practices of pragmatist philosophy have received brief critical notice. Rachel Buxton, for example, suggests that, although until recently, 'Moore's adjacency to pragmatism has largely been overlooked', it is surely the case that 'we get the best critical purchase on Moore's writing, as we do on Stein's, by situating it alongside that of the American pragmatists'.⁷² Buxton's plural is important here; there are, as Richard Poirer reminds in *Poetry and Pragmatism*, 'as many pragmatisms as there are pragmatist philosophers', but among the varied 'American pragmatists' of interest for reading Moore it is William James in particular who takes centre stage.⁷³ 'He has convinced me that life is "worth living"', Moore wrote to her family of the philosopher, after her early acquaintance with his work (*The Will to Believe*, in this instance) at Bryn Mawr.⁷⁴ Although Bryn Mawr was not, like Harvard, a centre of pragmatist thought, the influence of this philosophy certainly extended to here during Moore's years of study (1905–9), in both personal and academic forms. Of the former, Peggy James, William's daughter, was one of Moore's close college friends; of the latter, 1908 saw both a course on 'Pragmatism' and a notable lecture by Theodore de Laguna on 'The Psychological Basis of Pragmatism', to which Moore responded warmly in a letter to her family.⁷⁵ It is in the same letter that she makes her unusually flamboyant remark about the force of her reading of *The Will to Believe*—albeit tempered with the more characteristic note of knowing caution: 'He would not be pleased at that remark being a pragmatist and an individualist.'⁷⁶ Still, James's prose could elicit near euphoria in Moore, who remarked to her mother in exasperated delight at her new discovery: 'The man has a sense for style, which is rather irritating in the face of all the raw sense he also seems to have.'⁷⁷

William's brother, Henry James, might seem at first blush a more ready model for sentence style. Sentences very evidently matter to Henry, Moore's 'characteristic American', constituting an art form; an exact, if unwitting radiograph.⁷⁸ Of the Princess Casamassima, for example, he writes that, for her listener, 'the pronunciation of her words and the very punctuation of her sentences were a kind of revelation of "society"'.⁷⁹

Occasionally, his characters even form as sentences. Merton Densher, after 'Kate had asked him to put her into a cab', stands reflecting, and, as he does so, James comments: 'His full parenthesis was closed, and he was once more but a sentence, of a sort, in the general text'.⁸⁰ Readers of James remain more than usually attuned to sentence forms by the absence, in his prose, of obvious connections between the parts and of any sense of inevitability about when the frequent parentheses may close. 'There! that sentence is worthy of one of your novels at its best!' William James follows an over-long, over-elaborated sentence of his own in a letter to Henry.⁸¹ The temptation to parody 'the rangy, convoluted sentences that bear so unmistakably the hallmark of James' has been felt by writers from Max Beerbohm, who titles his parody, 'A mote in the middle distance', to Virginia Woolf, who recalls being addressed by James in an interminable sentence that 'went on in the public street, while we all waited, as farmers wait for the hen to lay an egg—do they?—nervous, polite, and now on this foot now on that'.⁸²

The burden of these caricatures tends to be that the Jamesian sentence is immeasurably long and excessively complex. This reading is also advanced by rather less parodic attempts to characterize this prose manner; for example, in illustrating varied styles in *How to Write a Sentence and How to Read One* (2011) Stanley Fish takes Henry James as placeholder for the 'subordinating', or 'hypotactic' type of sentence.⁸³ Closer stylistic attention, however, reveals that these assumptions about the Jamesian sentence are not particularly accurate. One stylistic study of 'The Sentence Structure of Henry James', for example, debunks the illusion of extreme length, by demonstrating that, on average, '[t]he sentences of James, it seems, are considerably shorter than those of Johnson and hence rather well down in the scale of English prose'.⁸⁴ What the illusion of excessive length and excessive elaboration owes to is instead the typically loose and yet relentless construction of a Jamesian sentence, which is rarely grammatically periodic: 'the smaller word groups are loosely linked together, with many interjections and parentheses, to form a complexity that is not of idea, but of relationship between ideas', one critic writes, noting that, 'James habitually composed in small units, by patching together a succession of "brief" ideas' to form 'his almost agrammatical sentences'.⁸⁵ For this style, the following words might seem a useful summary: 'James's world is one in which [...] parataxis in language reflects a plurality in facts'.⁸⁶ This is not, however, a description of the 'brief' patches that accumulate to form Henry James's prose; the reference is instead to the style of thought and mode of writing of his brother, William. William James gives his own description for his pragmatist philosophy by way of the analogy of a mosaic: 'In actual mosaics the pieces are

held together by their bedding,' James writes, as other philosophies are by the bedding of 'Substances, transcendental Egos, or Absolutes'. In pragmatist thought, however, 'there is no bedding; it is as if the pieces clung together by their edges, the transitions experienced between them forming the cement'.⁸⁷

After reading *Pragmatism*, Henry James wrote to his brother to acknowledge an uncanny encounter, in its pages, with his own, unvoiced thought: 'I was lost in wonder of the extent to which all my life I have [...] unconsciously pragmatized'.⁸⁸ Yet if Henry felt the consonance, William had reservations. The mosaic mode of pragmatism did not, as he urged in a letter to Henry, necessitate an unclear or overly complicated style.

But why won't you, just to please Brother, sit down and write a new book, with no twilight or mustiness in the plot, with great vigor and decisiveness in the action, no fencing in the dialogue, no psychological commentaries, and absolute straightness in the style?⁸⁹

This, of course, plays to the caricatures—active, impatient William and supersubtle, impeded Henry—caricatures that both brothers seem themselves to have indulged but that are, at most, 'partial and highly strategic'.⁹⁰ Still, the above complaint from William to Henry does provide some good first coordinates for reading Moore's prose according to pragmatist outlines. Moore is, as she owned, more like William than Henry, admiring 'straight writing', which she defined as 'writing that is not mannered, overconscious, or at war with common sense'. 'Prizing Henry James,' she remarks in her foreword to the *Marianne Moore Reader*, 'I take his worries for the most part with detachment; those of William James to myself'.⁹¹ But, like both, her philosophy of composition is essentially paratactic or 'mosaic'. She expressed dislike, for example, for what she described as 'the detracting compulsory connective'.⁹² Words like 'and', 'but', 'or', were, for Moore, the blemishes rather than the nuts and bolts of style. This particular dislike took practical effect in the workings of her prose, where, as William Carlos Williams remarks, 'Marianne's words remain separate, each unwilling to group with the others [...]. She occupies the thought to its end, and goes on—without connectives'. 'To me,' Williams adds, 'this is thrilling'.⁹³ It shares in the same thrill as Jamesian pragmatism, for which it is a discovery that 'some parts of the world are connected so loosely with some other parts as to be strung along by nothing but the copula and'.⁹⁴

Moore's versions of the sentence sustained without connectives are varied and particular to her occasions. Of E.E. Cummings's *XLI Poems*, for example, Moore writes this:

We have, not a replica of the title, but a more potent thing, a replica of the rhythm—a kind of second tempo, uninterfering like a shadow, in the manner of the author's beautiful if somewhat self-centered, gigantic filiform ampersand of symbolical 'and by itself plus itself with itself.'⁹⁵

This sentence about secondary forms (replicas, shadows) appears to establish a grammar of fine distinctions ('not this, but this'), qualifications ('if') and careful indirections ('like', 'in the manner'), while still progressing according to a relatively straight syntax. This could so far be mistaken for conventional expository prose, albeit of a densely difficult kind. But towards its end, the sentence becomes a fiercely paratactic list—'gigantic filiform ampersand of symbolical "and by itself plus itself with itself"'—in which the 'thread' of the sentence is lost. Such rebarbative density is, however, only one of the characteristic forms for Moore's paratactic prose. The absence of clear verbal action can also lead to rather more 'Imagist' forms of the list, in which nominal forms, even 'squadrons of nouns', stand in greater space and separation—as here, for example, in a 'hokku-like' near sentence on the qualities of style of Emily Dickinson:

An element of the Chinese taste was part of this choiceness, in its driving associations of the prismatically true; the gamboge and pink and cochineal of the poems; the oleander blossom tied with black ribbon; the dandelion with scarlet; the rowan spray with white.⁹⁶

These adaptations of her paratactic-mosaic style to accommodate precise descriptive differences, forms varying with subjects, show another possible way in which it might be illuminating to consider Moore's prose under the aspect of pragmatism. At work here is a rich-textured version of a principle C.S. Peirce described in his seminal paper, 'How To Make Our Ideas Clear'.⁹⁷ The principle is that meanings must be made clear by detailed descriptions of practical contexts and consequences, rather than made distinct by verbal definition; for example, the meaning of 'hard' is best given by accumulating descriptions such as, 'will not be scratched by other substances'. Moore practises a version of this kind of pragmatist thinking—'How we make our poets clear'—in which clarification comes from further observations instead of from attempts at definitive explanation. Often, Moore's adherence to this principle takes a very minimalist form; while this prose suggests a belief in clarity, it also conveys dislike for too much of it. In this descriptive minimalism, vivid yet unexpanded, there is a residue of an ideogrammatic method: the quotation of a small detail, word or phrase (hyphenated adjectival phrases are a favourite) as self-evidently illuminating of the writer from whom it comes—'imaginal miniatures'.⁹⁸ From Elizabeth Bishop's sentence, 'The mangrove island with bright green leaves edged neatly with bird-droppings like illuminations in silver',

Moore highlights a single word for damning comment: 'Dignity has been sacrificed to exactness in the word "neatly"'.⁹⁹ 'One cannot gainsay "bees leg-laden," or "the rain clams her apron till it clings"', Moore writes in a review of Hardy. Here, pragmatism and modernism meet.¹⁰⁰

Moore further develops her modernist-pragmatist version of criticism that works by descriptive minimalism rather than by explanation in relation to Bishop, a writer whom she praises for 'verisimilitude that avoids embarrassingly direct descriptiveness', and whose prose elicits particularly clear examples of Moore's rhythmic, restrained suffixing and particularities of style.¹⁰¹ The truthful avoidance of 'direct descriptiveness' that Moore admires in Bishop does not entail an end to all description; in fact Moore lists 'enumerative description' as 'one of Miss Bishop's specialties'.¹⁰² It leads to a descriptive manner that is pleasingly indirect, in which subjects are 'objectified mysteriously well'. In describing these qualities of Bishop's writing, Moore's prose takes on some distinctive descriptive forms of its own. The main body of 'A Modest Expert' (1946), in which she reviews Bishop's *North and South*, appears to consist of conventional critical description, a commentary composed around short quotations, offered in illustration of 'the many musicianly strategies' of the work; 'the difficult rhyme-schemes', for example, and 'the reiterated word as a substitute for rhyme'.¹⁰³ Yet Moore never gets very 'vermicular'; the sentences detailing the technique of the poems tend to be no more than fleeting. Short phrases suffice to note that Bishop arranges 'an expert disposition of pauses; and the near-rhymes are impeccable'.¹⁰⁴ In the absence of more expanded explanation or exegesis, the adjectives and adverbs stand out with (Henry) Jamesian prominence, with the effect that they form a characteristic lexicon, both for Moore and for Bishop: a lexicon of restrained propriety, of what is 'expert', and 'impeccable'.

Reinforcing this is a recurrent grammatical form into which much of Moore's descriptive writing falls: suffixation, specifically the formation of abstract nouns from other parts of speech by the addition of '-ness'. Bishop's style is one of 'unwordiness', 'intentionalness', 'tentativeness', 'positiveness', 'proportionateness', 'selectiveness'. Moore's fondness for the form seems in part to be rhythmic; because '-ness' follows a word boundary (unlike '-ity', which follows a morpheme boundary), the stress pattern of the base tends to be preserved.¹⁰⁵ Beyond this, this suffix also makes possible forms of description that sound absolutely precise without being overbearingly direct. This suffix can have an effect like that of the superlative, straining for the essence or quality of the word to which it is appended, while retaining the sense that this might be resistant or nebulous. For the coinage 'unwordiness', for example, it would have been possible to achieve tauter description from a range of other existing

words (taciturn, minimal, unforthcoming, reserved) and Moore's choice has the unwieldy appearance of something in which all the working parts are visible: 'there are not too many words'. Yet, within the descriptive economies of her prose, this clumsy protraction seems to be strategic. To describe Bishop as taciturn would not convey the same degree of admiration for her deliberate restraint from being too 'wordy': the part-by-part attention Moore's mosaic word requires (un-wordi-ness) sharpens attention to the careful balance of particular praise and general principles at work in this term, as it measures out which qualities belong to Bishop's style and which qualities it gains from resisting. Such diction is too clumsy to seem like what Moore most dislikes, 'glib' prose, and, in this way, it pays tribute to its subject by avoiding, as Bishop does too, the excesses of anything too overt.¹⁰⁶

Moore's stylistic interest in the 'intensive yet impersonal unfolding of personality', through paratactic sentences and without 'embarrassingly direct descriptiveness', has exposed her to some wider fears about her critical capacities: 'she was too timid to state her own opinions and [...] her essays were merely impressionable'.¹⁰⁷ Yet 'impressionable' is, here, itself a timid word. It hovers between perhaps the most standard remark about Moore's prose—that it is 'impressionistic'—and the quite different suggestion that Moore's prose is susceptible, easily impressed, or influenced. After all, Moore wrote within a relatively close, if still transatlantic, circle of fellow modernists, and is 'affectionately predisposed' towards, or influenced, by many of her critical subjects, who were contemporaries and friends. What this fails to leave room for altogether is a stronger sense of the word's meaning, and so of Moore's prose; a sense in which the 'impressionable' essay could be that which, while retaining its own particular forms, bears the imprint of the subject. For Moore, 'substituting appreciation for criticism' is not weakness.¹⁰⁸ It is instead an extension of the critical position that Moore believes she discovers in Eliot: that sympathetic understanding does better critical duty than explanation, both to the subject and to the critic herself. 'If criticism is "the effect of the subjection of the product of one mind to the processes of another,"' she writes, 'is not the reviewer's own mind disparaged by him in resorting to an inconsequent and disrespectful *ruade*?'¹⁰⁹ Criticism involves such intersubjective closeness that there is no place for the brutality of the '*ruade*', or kick. Moore holds firm to the principle that criticism should be appreciative because 'grudges flower less well than gratuities', both for the author criticized and the critic.¹¹⁰

Moore is not shy of blows. She has buoyantly rhyming admiration for Cassius Clay: 'He fights and he writes. [...] He is a smiling pugilist.' But her stance is closer to that of the kindly editor: 'Solicitude for others, and

the wish that they may write as they please, are almost a mania with me'.¹¹¹ When she did exercise an editorial prerogative at *The Dial*, this preference for forms of responsive prose that are not, in the strong sense, 'critical', led her to certain policies of writing (and not writing), which her editorial colleague, Kenneth Burke, details here:

her ideal number, as regard the reviews and articles of criticism, would I think have been one in which all good books got long, favourable reviews, all middling books got short favourable reviews, and all books deserving of attack were allowed to go without mention.¹¹²

Critics are divided as to whether it is less or more insulting to the books disliked that Moore does not speak of them: Burke suggests the latter (quoting two lines from her 'Spenser's Ireland', 'Denunciations do not affect the culprit; nor blows, but it | is torture to him not to be spoken to'), whereas Hugh Kenner considers that 'the supreme insult we can offer to the other is to have, on too little acquaintance, something to say "about" it'.¹¹³ Moore also 'developed the strategy of damning with faint praise to an almost supersonic degree', holding much of her prose in balance between polite observation and denunciation.¹¹⁴

Moore's particular choices—whether to write, not to write, or to write with superlatively faint praise—have been considered a way to situate her criticism on a literary-historical map. 'What she chose not to write about is instructive', one critic concludes, listing fashionable contemporaries, Edna St. Vincent Millay, for example, who remained in the shadows while Moore 'spent her energies on Eliot's *The Sacred Wood*, George Moore, George Saintsbury, Thomas Hardy, E.E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein'.¹¹⁵ Moore emerges from such lists as a critic of the major late-nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century writers; male modernists particularly. Burke's proportions are, however, more accurate: while these modernists may get the longest commentaries, the most sustained and recurrent forms of response, what is more striking about Moore's prose considered as a body of work is the significant proportion composed of 'short favourable' reviews of 'middling books', of the minor and miscellaneous; C. Alison Scully's *The Course of the Silver Greyhound*, for example, or Mabel Simpson's *Poems*, and other such works that have otherwise left little trace.¹¹⁶ 'My value is miscellaneous', Moore wrote in an acute moment of self-description, and to consider her as primarily or only a critic of major authors is, then, to miss her particular tone, approach, its generosity and eclecticism.¹¹⁷ The subjects to which Moore chooses to return, and around whom her writing is at its most complex, are, however, some of her most significant contemporaries; Cummings, for example, Eliot, Bishop, and Stevens, all of

whom she approached with warmth but also with some strong aesthetic anxieties. The tension between these anxieties and her sustained desire for affectionately predisposed criticism leads Moore, as the next part of this chapter explores, towards still more complex techniques of critical prose than the reticently paratactic sentence by which to figure out the force and influence of these writers' styles.

III. THE MAN-OF-WAR-BIRD

Concluding a review of the 'verbal topiary-work' of *XLI Poems* for *The Dial*, Moore writes this:

There is in the art museum at Eighty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue, a late Minoan ivory leaper. Suspended by a thread, the man swims down with the classic aspect of the frog. As a frog startled, palpitating, and inconsequential, would seem in the ivory man to have become classic, so Mr. Cummings has in these poems, created from inconvenient emotion, what one is sure is poetry.¹¹⁸

With her 'late Minoan ivory leaper', Moore seems anything but reticent about analogy. 'As a frog [...], so Mr. Cummings': the grammar of the comparison swims down in a clean line through the prose. Yet this 'leaper' is not simply a man like a frog; he is a man like a frog transmuted into the 'classic' form of an 'ivory man'. Nor is the leaper quite 'Mr. Cummings', but rather the 'inconvenient emotion', of which Cummings is the sculptor. So this fleeting analogy works by a chiasmic pull that leaves us 'suspended by a thread' as to which aspect to see, man or frog, and whether to take this as praise or to hear the quiet jab of irony that lies in its grammar. This wears the typical aspect of analogy as it appears in Moore's prose. A Moorean analogy is rarely casual, uncrafted, yet for all the apparent deliberation in the connection between its terms, it cannot be said that 'one is sure' what compares with what, and to what end. This is analogy with the leaping, suspended quality of parataxis.

The palpitating frog analogy was a favourite in Moore's immediate circle. 'He is like a dead frog that keeps on striking out for hours', Scofield Thayer remarked of Pound, according to one of Moore's notebooks in which she recorded remarks and conversations.¹¹⁹ Wallace Stevens also uses this image in his essay on 'Effects of Analogy', borrowing it from Moore's editorial colleague, Kenneth Burke, who deployed it in a review of Rosemond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* in order to scorn 'the doctrines of those who would confine logic to science, rhetoric to propaganda or advertising, and thus leave for poetic a few spontaneous

sensations not much higher in the intellectual scale than the twitchings of a decerebrated frog'.¹²⁰ The recurrence of this particular analogy to the point where it becomes a motif offers a potential canvas against which to discern what is distinctive about Moore's analogical style and her sense of humour. Her version appears, against the measure of Thayer and Burke (and Stevens), not only gentler, more ambivalent, but also more buoyantly witty. 'Among animals,' as Moore writes in her poem, 'The Pangolin', 'one has a sense of humour'.¹²¹ The 'sense of humour' Moore has 'among animals' is not marked by the sharpness of satire, or the manipulations of ridicule but instead by gentle incongruities and perspectival shifts in conjunction with careful rhythms, comic timings. Auden, in his 'Notes on the Comic', remarks that, 'Not to know the time of day is to be governed, like animals and children, by the immediate mood of the self'.¹²² Moore's wit interlaces this non-conceptual immediacy with the knowingness and fine temporal control of the observer. Burke is clever with his version of the analogy, using some of its power, first of 'debunking', then of indirect ridicule, but, with her funny frog, who is and is not Cummings, Moore does something more: she crafts a miniature emblem or fable, which proffers instruction in a form that is both decorative and, by being readable in other ways, not dogmatic.

Moore's animal analogies, emblems, parables, and images amount to something close to a technique of writing, which could be termed her 'zoophrasis'; her indirect figuring of poetic styles and qualities of the imagination by way of images or emblems from the natural world. An emblem, as Francis Bacon defined it, is a device that 'reduceth conceits intellectuall to Images sensible', and typically 'consists of three parts—a 'lemma' or motto, a picture, and a following explanatory text'.¹²³ Tripartite structures of this kind occur throughout Moore's poetry, which enters into 'a long and varied tradition of emblematic literature in which images are juxtaposed to ideas or morals with which they have little natural but primarily an abstract connection'.¹²⁴ Moore's attraction to many of the sources on which she draws for her poems might also be explained in terms of this structure. 'The Plumet Basilisk', for example, departs from a photograph of this rare lizard in the hand of a London zookeeper, captioned 'Bird, Beast or Fish?', published in the *New York Herald Tribune*—a newspaper piece with an 'emblematic' form of its own: image, caption (the motto), and adjacent text.¹²⁵ This structural quality owes both to Moore's interest in seventeenth-century styles and also to the influence of the various strands of modernist thought, from Imagism to objectivism, that placed emphasis on the immediate visual presentation of objects, often in inorganic relation with what they accompany. But this style of thought also unfolds in Moore's prose, where there are both

incessant minor 'emblems' within particular descriptions and some wider emblematic dynamics at work in the figuring of other poetic voices.

Moore builds up a particular carapace of emblematic suggestion around the poetry of Wallace Stevens. This enables a form of knowing, loving, and criticizing, without trespassing or offending—to recycle some of the terms from Moore's translations from La Fontaine's fable, 'Le Lion amoureux'. Moore renders the lines, reflecting on the ambivalence of the knowledge that comes with love, or the love that comes with direct knowledge, as these:

If too personal and thus trespassing,
I'm saying what may seem to you an offense,
A fable could not offend your ear.¹²⁶

Moore's encounters with Stevens (who is often, for Moore, a lion) were characterized by such movements of trespass and retreat. Moore first 'met' Stevens on the page in 1916, when they appeared alongside each other in the *Others* anthology, and when Moore made admiring mention of Stevens's capacity to rhyme with naturalness in her essay, 'The Accented Syllable', published in *The Egoist* the same year.¹²⁷ Various anecdotes from this time misremember them as meeting in person, so natural would it have been, yet this did not occur until 1943. As Stevens recalls in a letter recounting his poetry reading at Mount Holyoake: 'Marianne Moore was there and although she and I have written to each other from time to time I had never really met her before'.¹²⁸ The small surplus here in the word 'really' (Stevens had, it seems, not met Moore at all) betrays a sense that the delay seemed at least slightly inexplicable. In this delay, there may be a mark of the difference between the initial communities to which these poets belonged; Moore was not, as she wrote (without self-reference, but with the potential for it), 'so enabled a man as the twentieth-century critic', for whom the universities, and Harvard in particular, were points of departure or grouping.¹²⁹ For Moore, communities were instead a matter of looser networks based around libraries and museums and correspondences, and there was a sense that her writing could seem, as Mina Loy wrote—not unkindly, but without a sense of real kinship—like the 'soliloquies of a library clock'.¹³⁰ Moore's long 'evasion' of Stevens is, however, still better figured as a form of Moore's temperamental 'celibacy', her preference for oblique and well-shielded relations—and, for this, an apt stylistic form is the fable.

Moore also believes fables to be suited to Stevens because he is himself a fabulist. She writes, while engaged on her own translations of La Fontaine's fables, that Stevens is 'the La Fontaine of our day', who 'embeds his secrets, inventing disguises which assure him freedom to

speak out'.¹³¹ 'With a metaphysician, an ogre, a grammarian, a nomad, an eel, as disguise for intensity,' Moore adds, Stevens 'is safe from 'harangue', 'ado', and the ambitious page'.¹³² But Moore is not always as certain as this particular comment might sound about whether Stevens's disguises in fact keep him entirely safe from 'the ambitious page' and she invents some 'fabulous' disguises of her own by which to explore these fears, without needing to resort to the forms of criticism she disdains, the direct *ruade* or kick. To take one example, in reviewing *Ideas of Order* for the *Criterion* in January 1936, Moore offers the following enigmatic comment, which appears to be ready to take sententious form, only to retreat into fable:

Poetry is an unintelligible unmistakable vernacular like the language of the animals—a system of communication whereby a fox with a turkey too heavy for it to carry, reappears shortly with another fox to share the booty, and Wallace Stevens is a practiced hand at this kind of open cypher.¹³³

This sentence turns on a typically Moorean 'and'; the semblance of a connective, which is in fact nearer to a grammatical pseudo-form. Like 'whereby' earlier in the sentence, it seems to overstate the relation, forgetting the analogical remove that makes poetry only '*like* the language of animals'. Moore's opening aphorism is joined, by a dash, to a 'picture' (the foxes with the turkey) in a manner that recalls the emblem: the dash makes the association but does not force the moral. The picture is a miniature of the fabled 'crafty' fox, like that of La Fontaine who wins the cheese from the vain crow by finding the intelligent, communicative solution to the puzzle of how to overcome the physical 'advantages' (flight, weight) of the bird he can successfully outwit but not necessarily outmanoeuvre. It joins Moore's catalogue of scenes in which animals, or often birds, are vulnerable to others ('Bird-Witted', for example, or 'The Fox and The Turkeys', in which, 'The poor things held to the perch so dizzily | That one by one the flock fell').¹³⁴ By this, Stevens is at once characterized, vividly pictured, and yet is held aloft from the fierceness of direct critical statement.

A still more striking instance of this comes with the role played by Moore's emblem of the frigate pelican, or man-of-war bird (a large sea bird named for its resemblance to a substantial military vessel) in her critical 'fight' with Stevens's aesthetic in, and around, her 1934 poem of this title, 'The Frigate Pelican'.¹³⁵ An earlier essay anticipates the struggle in its resistance to the charms of E.E. Cummings, of whom Moore remarks: 'Settling like a man-of-war bird or the retarded, somnambulistic athlete of the speedograph, he shapes the progress of poems as if it were substance'.¹³⁶ But what does it mean for a poet to be 'like a man-of-war bird'? The aspect of the comparison to which Moore directs attention in

this sentence about Cummings is the bird's size and its clumsiness on land, in contrast with its majesty on the wing. To settle like this bird is to struggle against awkward, recalcitrant material, with an effect similar to the reduction, by speedograph images, of athletes to an ungainly parade of movement that appears to be beyond their conscious control. The speedograph was itself something of an emblem for Moore, who found revelatory this technique of opening to observation the 'invisible' workings of movement.¹³⁷ Like the radiograph, it only revealed exactly what was there, with decorous minimalism, while at the same time, it was almost baroque in its revelation of detail beyond what was accessible to ordinary perception.

In the context of Moore's remark about Cummings, the man-of-war bird might seem too fleeting for an emblem, rapidly succeeded by the somnambulistic athlete; just another figure to emphasize the same point about an appearance of inhibited motion. Yet, in light of Moore's further criticisms in this same essay, the image of the frigate pelican comes to seem sufficiently rich with significance to be on the verge of an emblem. The bird is, for example, a pelagic or kleptoparasitic feeder, who harries other birds into giving up their catch; males have a red gular pouch that they inflate during the breeding season to attract a mate. Such details make the bird a potential emblem for showiness and ferocity, for traits opposed to Moore's celibate 'natural reticence', with its resistance to dominance or to intrusive display. These are traits she finds in Cummings's poems, which have more 'glamour' than 'love', and in which the 'touch of love perceived in allusions to unconscious things—horses' ears and mice's meals', is subdued to 'a more egotistic and less kind emotion which has the look of being in its author's eyes, his most certain self. One wishes it weren't'.¹³⁸ Birds in motion are not generally, for Moore, humble (although stationary birds can be touchingly vulnerable). 'Pride sits you well, so strut, colossal bird. | No barnyard makes you look absurd', she writes in ambivalent praise of George Bernard Shaw, in the short poem, 'To a Prize Bird'.¹³⁹ The 'colossal' Shaw is proud but also a figure for excessive style, as Moore demonstrates on another occasion by making an appropriately small point about his phrasing. 'When someone asked Bernard Shaw how he would spend his birthday he said, "I shall rise, dress, feed, undress and go to bed." I think that word feed is a little overemphatic', Moore concludes, in what is almost a self-parody of her natural reticence.¹⁴⁰ One's 'most certain self' is not, within Moore's critical horizons, one's best self.

For Moore, the figure most threatening to 'feed' on others, and to dominate with certainty and gaudy display remains Stevens, and her initial responses to his poetry, both in reading diaries and in published comments,

suggest an uncertain pleasure in his 'verbally beautiful, yet potentially monstrous and morally purposeless, fictions—the products of an imagination grown too grotesquely, violently, and self-indulgently assertive'.¹⁴¹ This is a style, Moore writes, characterized by a 'clash of pigment' as when, 'in a showman's display of orchids or gladiolas, one receives the effect of vials of picracarmine, magenta, gamboge, and violet mingled each at the highest point of intensity'.¹⁴² Stevens, commenting on his own poems, noted this showy quality on several occasions. For example, in a prose note published alongside 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream', he writes: 'This wears a deliberately commonplace costume, and yet seems to me to contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry; that is the reason why I like it'.¹⁴³ But Moore's barrage of syllables and rebarbative sounds in her list of 'picracarmine, magenta, gamboge', suggest a shade less approbation of such 'gaudiness', even as they seem to partake of it.

The title of her 1924 review of *Harmonium*, 'Well Moused, Lion'—Theseus's exclamation as the 'lion' tears and bloodies Phisbe's mantle in the play within the play of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—gently mocks Stevens for the paradox of his 'bellicose sensitiveness'.¹⁴⁴ This verb of praise, 'moused' is strange, meaning either: 'to tear in pieces as a cat would a mouse'; or, if following in sense from Demetrius's exclamation, 'Well roared lion', 'to nibble, like a quiet and tentative mouse'. It is a nod to an aspect of Stevens's style that Moore does admire: the feat, also observable in Shakespeare's language, of inventing or distorting word forms, without what Moore terms 'presumptuous egotism'.¹⁴⁵ A word such as 'moused', for example, she judges to have just this shade of the near egotism of invention, averted by being a sufficiently rich coinage to justify itself. In this same vein, 'Mr. Stevens's "junipers shagged with ice," is properly courageous', Moore finds, 'as are certain of his adjectives which have the force of verbs: "the spick torrent," "tidal skies," "loquacious columns"'.¹⁴⁶ Yet, for all that Moore strives, in this review, towards generosity, towards excusing any apparent verbal arrogance as 'proper', she is still caught in the net of this early resistance—even resentment—of the flourishes of Stevens's style:

One resents the temper of certain of these poems. Mr. Stevens is never inadvertently crude; one is conscious, however, of a deliberate bearishness—a shadow of acrimonious, unprovoked contumely. Despite the sweet-Clementine-will-you-be-mine nonchalance of the 'Apostrophe to Vincentine,' one feels oneself to be in danger of unearthing the ogre and in 'Last Looks at the Lilacs,' a pride in unserviceableness is suggested which makes it a microcosm of cannibalism.¹⁴⁷

Stevens suffers from too great a skill, Moore suggests. Her prose gloss is that, 'writers cannot excel at their work without being, like the dogs in

In 'The Frigate Pelican', first published in Eliot's *Criterion* in 1934, Moore returns to this same phrasing and moderates it into an aphorism: 'Pride in unserviceableness is not synonymous with the beauty of aloofness'.¹⁵¹ This aphorism still censures pride but rather differently; Stevens suffers from a misapprehension about standing apart, rather than a fierce and perverse desire to 'feed' on his own kind. Later versions of this poem seem to become still more sympathetic. In 1951 Moore returned to the poem and altered it significantly for publication, omitting around half of its lines in three substantial sections, the longest of which is marked by an ellipsis in the text. Some of the least sympathetic lines ('the dishonest pelican's ease', for example) are removed and the effect of these omissions, critics have suggested, is to rescue Stevens, whom she had not yet met in 1934, but counted, by 1951, as a friend.¹⁵² There may also be, behind these changes, greater self-critical acumen. Moore's own aim 'to be satisfactorily lucid; yet have enough implication in it to suit myself' can itself seem to amount to 'unsociability'. Her promise, 'we must be as clear as our natural reticence allows us to be', is always a very qualified one and Moore could be stark about its limits. To the question, 'Do you intend your poetry to be useful to yourself or others?', posed in a survey of poets for *New Verse*, October 1934, Moore responded, 'Myself'.¹⁵³ Had the question also been asked of her prose, it seems likely that Moore, who felt that 'we must have the courage of our peculiarities', and that we must always be ready to be 'sincerer than is convenient to the reader', would have answered the same.¹⁵⁴ The emblems by which Moore criticizes these traits in Stevens also offer some disguises, some fables, for her own style of poetry and prose.

When Stevens turns to discussing Moore's style, however, in an interestingly 'shielded' essay of his own, 'About one of Marianne Moore's Poems', he is much more gentle. This essay represents his second major encounter with Moore's poetry in his prose. The first came in March 1935 when Stevens reviewed, with fastidious care, Moore's *Selected Poems* for the *Westminster Magazine*.¹⁵⁵ 'Miss Moore's *emportements* are few', Stevens writes: 'Instead of being intentionally one of the most original of contemporary or modern poets, she is merely one of the most truthful. People with a passion for the truth are always original.'¹⁵⁶ Stevens's later essay gives a more complex sense of what it might mean for Moore to be a 'truthful' poet. Here, Stevens fuses close reading of her poem, 'He Digesteth Harde Yron', with quotations (often not fully attributed and lacking quotation marks) from an essay in philosophical aesthetics by H.D. Lewis, 'On Poetic Truth', published in the *Journal of the British Institute of Philosophy* in July 1946. Lewis, like Moore, finds truth in the resistance to explanation, writing, for example, that 'there is in reality, whether we

think of it as animate or inanimate, human or subhuman, an aspect of individuality at which every form of rational explanation stops short'. Stevens draws from such quotations a critical method in which truth is dissociated from 'the extraction of a meaning from a poem' and, at the point where he comes closest to giving a moral, copies Moore's own technique of indirection, the escape into animal or avian analogy. 'The gist of the poem,' Stevens remarks, 'is that the camel-sparrow [ostrich] has escaped the greed that has led to the extinction of other birds linked to it in size, by its solicitude for its own welfare and that of its chicks'.¹⁵⁷ 'The supreme virtue', Lewis writes, 'is humility, for the humble are they that move about the world with the lure of the real in their hearts'. Stevens, Moore's 'frigate pelican' and poet of 'proud harmonies', quotes this exactly, and concludes that the ostrich is Moore's emblem—or, at least, this bird as her own poems present it; reticent, well-guarded, and protective, rather than obdurate or foolish. Like the ostrich, the poet also thrives by her careful restraint and self-preserving humility: 'For she is not a proud spirit.'¹⁵⁸

IV. A VALUABLE SHELL

'A potent device in fiction or drama is that in which one character describes another to that other, unaware that he addresses the person of whom he speaks.'¹⁵⁹ Moore writes this in summary of the Oedipal story, adding that the effect of this is to bring about 'the recoil of awareness'. Her remark, in spite of its dramatic contexts, has force for other unwitting descriptive scenarios and could be extended to her own criticism; to the dynamic at work in her early reviews of contemporaries, which preceded fuller forms of direct exchange and correspondence, and in which various indirect forms of address hold the potential for surprise. Deferred encounter is one of the tropes structuring Moore's literary biography and with this come the conditions for dramatic occasions of 'recoil'. This 'recoil' is, then, Moore's strong version of *anagorisis*, or tragic 'recognition'—although she tends to tune such moments to the key of comedy or even farce.

When T.S. Eliot first wrote to Moore, following her review of *The Sacred Wood*, it was, appropriately enough, in the form of an apology for deferred encounter:

I am writing to thank you for your review of my essays in the *Dial*. It gave me pleasure, and still more pleasure to be reviewed by you, as I have long delayed writing to you, in fact since the 1917 *Others*, to tell you how much I admire your verse.¹⁶⁰

With this letter comes a version of 'the recoil of awareness'. Prior to its publication, Moore had written to Bryher of her review of Eliot's essays. In this letter, Moore hides behind one of her common disguises or emblems, half coy, half fierce: "The pterodactyl [...] is sending to *The Dial*, a stone tablet depicting T.S. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood*".¹⁶¹ Although, within one of her most comfortable correspondences, Moore can be jocular, she is also armouring herself against trepidation with these remarks. Against pride are set fears of presumption: perhaps the essay ('a stone tablet') will prove too 'absolute', a quality she most wished her prose to evade; perhaps it will be read in ways she does not anticipate or wish. On this occasion of Moore's review, Eliot, of course, errs on the side of being a possible, or even probable reader rather than an unexpected one, yet this is still different from being an expected or addressed reader (not to mention respondent); as she writes of Eliot, Moore does not 'know' that she describes him to himself. There is, then, something of the power of delayed recognition when Eliot's letter arrives in praise of the review. Moore hints at this in her response to Eliot, which is a mix of gratification and near apology: 'Your letter gives me great pleasure. In *The Sacred Wood*, I met so many enthusiasms of my own that I could not feel properly abashed to be "criticizing" a critic—at least not until it was too late to retreat'.¹⁶²

Still, over a decade later, Moore continued to experience some degree of 'the recoil of awareness' in her encounters with Eliot. Writing to him in 1934, as the Faber edition of her poems was in preparation, Moore had this to confess of her previous collection: 'Despite the extreme amount of conscience I seem to have shown, in preparing the 1924 book I think I was erratic, or somnambulistic; it looks to me, that is to say, as if I had "quoted" things that were my own, and as if I had taken from you the titles, *Observations*, and "Picking and Choosing"'.¹⁶³ Moore has indeed indirectly 'stolen' from Eliot, whose first notice of her poetry, as part of a general review of the 1917 number of *Others*, had been under the title 'Observations' (if also, under the parody of a disguise, T.S. Apteryx), and whose own poems came out under this term. Eliot produces in Moore a sense of uncertainty about the ownership of words, which becomes a characteristic aspect of her critical style: words about others carry the intimacy and the relief (if sometimes, as here with Eliot, and rather to her mild-mannered distress, only an imperfect relief) of being close enough to others for Moore to be at one remove from herself.

Moore's preference for observation-of-self-by-way-of-another becomes particularly acute around the subject of the function of criticism, on which Moore writes no extended prose but many sporadic comments that often take form through her reading of Eliot. Eliot represents, for Moore, an exemplary case of 'the critic's ability to separate the specious from the

sound', without delivering this in the form of a dogmatic verdict or forcible opinion:

One of the chief charms, however, of Mr. Eliot's criticism is that in his withholding of praise, an author would feel no pain. But when his praise is unmixed, the effect is completely brilliant as in the opening paragraphs of the essay on Ben Jonson.¹⁶⁴

Criticism is, this implies, directed towards the author as much as towards the readers; rather than an explanatory task, its function is perhaps closer to the editorial, bringing about self-criticism on the part of its subject (and often on the part of its author too). Eliot not only presents the model for this but encourages the experience of it for Moore, who found his judicious prose to 'intensively unfold' her own thought and style. 'To be elucidated is a spur both as regards rectitude and abandon', she wrote to Eliot, in a letter thanking him for his perceptive introduction to her *Selected Poems*, 'and I begin to find myself on a better level by being even in the Barrie *Dear Brutus* sense, understood'.¹⁶⁵ (Moore's deftly inserted allusion here—defusing the full intimacy of identification—refers to the character, Purdie, in this play by J.M. Barrie, whose frequent complaint is that his wife fails to grasp his 'finer points'.) Eliot offers Moore an example of criticism as enjoyment, exactitude, and the almost uncanny elucidation of the writer to herself. It is often against his measure that she achieves the balance of 'rectitude and abandon' that provides the distinctive tenor of her prose as it reveals and conceals her sense of 'self' through delineating her sense of others.

For a final study of Moore's prose techniques and preoccupations as they 'intensively unfold' the styles of others, her relations with Elizabeth Bishop present an interesting case, not least for complicating any trajectory that would suggest that her criticism moves towards a more confidently open sense of how technical beauty can avoid unsociable pride. The circumstances for this exchange are, of course, different to those with Eliot and Stevens: rather than a haunting influence or bold 'feeder', Bishop is a protégé, Moore her 'older mentor', and this form of relation configures rather differently the dynamics of giving, receiving (and 'stealing') influence, from which much of Moore's criticism grows. These dynamics play out in the forms of prose Bishop and Moore write about each other, against a background of some of the more persistent themes of Moore's prose: personality and reticence, embarrassment and description, 'deferences and vigilances'.¹⁶⁶ What one writer calls 'that difficult dance between self-assertion and self-consciousness that also drew Bishop to Moore' is, their respective prose would suggest, reciprocal; Moore is also drawn to Bishop for 'her methodically oblique, intent way of working', and presents this admiration with appropriate

indirection.¹⁶⁷ While she desires to show both the general and the specific aspects to Bishop's poetry, Moore's dislike of 'applied' prose makes her hesitant about a more standard expository process that would name and then illustrate particular qualities; this could appear too deductive or dogmatic as a mode of prose edification.

Moore, in the concluding sentences to her review-essay, 'A Modest Expert', admires Bishop for not being like this:

With poetry as with homiletics, tentativeness can be more positive than positiveness; and in *North & South*, a much instructed persuasiveness is emphasized by uninsistence. At last we have a prize book that has no creditable mannerisms. At last we have someone who knows, who is not didactic.¹⁶⁸

In such sentences, we find a characteristic pattern of frustrated expectations for aphorism and of oblique praise. With seemingly deliberate clumsiness, Moore restricts her descriptive vocabulary so that she tapers from 'more positive' to 'positiveness', which forms a balance to 'tentativeness' (near to prose rhyme even), yet is still rather under-emphatic. This thread of restrained terms for Bishop's quality of restraint persists, with admiration of her 'persuasiveness' and 'uninsistence' (which keeps, by affixing the negative, the four syllable descriptive rhythm). Where an aphorist would separate off this opening formula from its illustration with a full stop, Moore has a semicolon, a grammatical form she uses with great frequency in essays, and a marker of her paratactic mode. This is followed by a typically weak use of the connective, 'and', setting the general principle alongside the particular case in an unforced way that hints at Moore's retreat from the usual measures of deductive prose. The passage is an exemplary display of controlled parataxis. At the end, Moore returns to near aphoristic clarity of structure and firmness of judgement: 'At last we have a prize book that has no creditable mannerisms'. But again, this apparent firmness is undercut by the nature of the judgement offered; what is distinctive about Bishop is that nothing distinctive is courted. It takes a strong sense of Moore's style for the reader to hear this phrase as a compliment, to see that the worst fate for a writer would be 'mannerisms', because no mannerism could be truly 'creditable'. The last sentence repeats this construction, in what seems an unusually emphatic structural parallelism for Moore's uninsistent prose. But, again, Moore is only proclaiming what Bishop so admirably lacks—she 'is not didactic'—and an acute sense of Moore's distinctively reticent idiolect is necessary for these negatives to carry their high praise.

Bishop, in her turn, has some slanted strategies of writing about Moore's style and influence; strategies particularly apparent where the theme, as often, is that of the gift or debt. 'The Moore chinoiserie of

manners made giving presents complicated', Bishop recalls in 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore'.¹⁶⁹ The grammar of Bishop's phrase does not specify whether Moore's difficulty of 'giving' lay with offering or receiving but the strong emphasis throughout the memoir on her open, gracious manner suggests the latter. On the subject of her poems particularly, Moore was always keen to keep reticence from being rudeness, Bishop notes, with anecdotes such as the following:

'More than once after a reading,' she says, 'I have been asked with circum-spectly hesitant delicacy, "Your . . . poem, Marriage; would you care to . . . make a statement about it?" *Gladly*.' (My italics.) It is the word gladly that is typical of Miss Moore.¹⁷⁰

Sometimes, despite Moore's reticence, gifts proved a success—even a success with poetic consequences: Moore's poem, 'The Paper Nautilus', for example, is based on an object (a shell) given to her by Bishop and Louise Crane. The most frequent form of successful gift-exchange seems to have been one of phrases, fragments of sentences. Bishop recalls several occasions on which Moore found a stray sentence of hers, or a proposed rhyme, or a form of speech, felicitous and accepted it as though a 'gift'. For example, in translating La Fontaine's fables and looking for rhymes of an 'umpty-umpty-um' nature that were foreign to Moore's usual syllabic forms of verse, Moore turned to Bishop, who recalls this: 'If I'd suggest, say, that "flatter" rhymed with "matter," this to my embarrassment was hailed as a stroke of genius [. . .] Marianne would exclaim, "*Elizabeth*, thank you, you have saved my life!"'¹⁷¹ Sometimes, in the exchanges of these two writers, gift-exchange misfires. Bishop describes how she once shaped a phrase to herself, 'the bell-boy with the buoy-balls', and 'liked the sound of this so much that in my vanity I repeated the phrase to Marianne a day or so later'.¹⁷² It later appeared as a line in Moore's poem, 'Four Quartz Crystal Clocks'.¹⁷³ 'It was so thoroughly out of character for her to do this that I have never understood it', Bishop remarks, before generously restoring the balance: 'I am sometimes appalled to think how much I may have unconsciously stolen from her. Perhaps we are all magpies.'

If without quite the same ambivalence, Moore also understood her own admiration of Bishop in these terms of gift, debt, imitation—in particular, the gift of that awkward construct around which Moore expends so much of her critical energies, 'the self'. She celebrates 'Miss Bishop's ungrudged self-expenditure', and notes: '[t]oo much cannot be said for this phase of self-respect'.¹⁷⁴ These are enigmatic statements, with 'self' accumulating complexities rather than becoming pellucid with repetition. Yet, in them, we again see Moore's critical receptivity to a quality of writing in which the self is given freely, graciously, yet permitted to remain sheltered: 'there

is nothing,' Moore wrote, that 'I dislike more than the exposé'.¹⁷⁵ Wary about either extreme of giving or restraining the self, Moore is concerned about any traces of this in Bishop's poetry, for example, the marked imitation, in Bishop's early style, of others; 'the debt to Donne and Gerard Hopkins'.¹⁷⁶ While happy to concede the truism that we 'cannot ever be wholly original', Moore is also clear in stating that it is equally true that 'an indebted thing does not interest us unless there is originality underneath it'. Without going so far as to say that she discovers this rescuing originality in Bishop's work, Moore does, with suitable reserve, imply as much by extending this preposition into this simile: 'We look at imitation askance; but like the shell which the hermit-crab selects for itself, it has value—the avowed humility, and the protection'.¹⁷⁷ Bishop figures for Moore the self-restraint that she held, throughout her prose, to be one of the main virtues of style, as well as one of the principal challenges to the critic, whose task was to draw this out, without infringing either it or the critic's own self-restraint. Imitation means something rather different but equally potent when Bishop, in return, writes about Moore. In her essay, 'As We Like It: Miss Moore and the Delight of Imitation' (1948), Bishop defines 'imitation' as Moore's delightfully precise depiction of things, animals, sensations, states—a power of observation that gives rise to the 'immediacy of identification one feels' reading Moore. This, Bishop suggests with a rhetorical question, is Moore's gift of herself: 'Does it come simply from her gift of being able to give herself up entirely to the object under contemplation, to feel in all sincerity how it is to be *it*?'¹⁷⁸

If the great modernisms were 'predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your finger-print, as incomparable as your own body', then Moore's was one of the most private of styles, yet also one of the most hospitable.¹⁷⁹ When Moore revised her poem 'People's Surroundings' in September 1921 for publication in *The Dial*, she adds some lines, including a quotation from a recent article in *Vogue*, titled 'The Perfect Host in the Perfect Setting', an article that advises as to discreet yet personal style:

I know that your excellent taste will add little by little, and with discernment, the small personal touches which will constitute, as it were, your signature, discreet, but recognizable, on these charming, and essentially modernist pages.¹⁸⁰

Moore does not quote this particular sentence but does take from the article the following words urging disguised artifice: 'a setting must not have the air of being one'. These are well-chosen words. Marianne Moore, the prose writer who emerges from such encounters and reticent exchanges with the words of others, comes close to having 'no creditable

mannerisms' by which the reader might summarize her style. She is the 'perfect host' for other voices; her prose, with its 'small personal touches [...] discreet, but recognizable', is the 'perfect setting' for Stevens and Eliot, for frogs and ostriches, for elephants and ballerinas, and for all the other members of her miscellaneous menagerie.

On the quietest scales of prose—the choice of 'particularistic' words and their arrangement in meticulously restrained, paratactic sentences—these are essays of subdued individualism in both senses of this phrase: they contour the individualism of those 'under contemplation' and they bear the imprint of Moore's own distinctive style and critical position. They are not just 'charming' essays but also 'essentially modernist pages', signing their readings with rare acumen and gusto. If Moore's prose pieces barely appear to be 'criticism' in so far as they do not explain their subjects, by this very refusal to do so, they achieve an intensively impersonal unfolding of them, as well as of the well-shielded 'self' of their author.

Conclusion

Feedforward-feedback

To come at last to Circular and Feedback Mechanisms.

[I.A. Richards, *Speculative Instruments*]

In 1968, I.A. Richards, was invited to contribute to the *Saturday Review* series, 'What I Have Learned'. Richards, the perennial educator, had an opportunity to reflect on his own education in close reading, during what T.S. Eliot, in another retrospective, had called 'a brilliant period in literary criticism in both Britain and America'.¹ His answer was not, however, that he had learned 'how to read', or indeed 'how not to read'. It was not even that he had learned 'how to write poetry', although this had become one of Richards's chief practical pleasures, and one of the 'speculative instruments' by which he refined his sense of language and its interpretation. Publishing the collection, *Goodbye Earth*, in 1958, Richards had at last become, like the other subjects of this book, a poet-critic. In fact, again like Eliot, Empson, Blackmur, and Moore, Richards had become a self-critical poet-critic, whose poems were often accompanied by his own responsive prose.² Yet, for this particular exercise in self-contemplation for the *Saturday Review*, Richards chose to reveal that his experiences in early- to mid-twentieth-century criticism had taught him 'The Secret of "Feedforward"'. This concept Richards had already introduced in a talk titled, with tentative ambition, 'Toward a More Synoptic View' (1951), but feedforward had received minimal feedback. Here, in his usual spirit of undiminished optimism, he tries once again.³ So what was the sense, or secret, of this key term that Richards had learned yet struggled to teach?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) offers this definition: 'feedforward n. [*after* feedback]', with its first illustration derived from an address, to a conference on cybernetics, by Richards himself. Always susceptible to terminology, to an idiolect for poetics with the promise of managerial or scientific efficiency, Richards offers feedforward as one such semi-technical coinage. Feedback, the term on which it draws, describes a

circular mechanism in which an out-going signal returns, as input. A word of a wireless age, an exemplary debut for feedback is offered by the *OED*'s illustrative lists: it appears in an early journal of telecommunications under the Marconi Publishing Corporation in 1920, before becoming common currency, reaching the columns of the *Daily Mail* by 1923. As this modernist term gained an ordinary-language momentum, a transferred sense soon took hold and split into three. First, 'feedback' served as a bland word for 'information about the result of a process, experiment, etc.; a response'; second, it came to signal a more active sense of engagement or interference ('modification, adjustment, or control of a process or system'); third, it represented a general condition for knowing about our understanding—'Only by constant 'feed-back' from the receptor can one ascertain how far a message has been understood rightly', reads a sentence in *The Times*, 31 August 1955. Another notable sense of feedback is in reference to distortions of sound, typically to a screech or hum, whether as unpleasant accident or deliberate play with sonic possibility—the rasping interference of a microphone that competes with the speaker's voice, or, for later decades, the experimental soundscape of psychedelic blues. Across this spectrum of senses, the possibilities ramify for 'feedback' as a term through which to think about modernist criticism and about its internal currents of anticritical sentiment. The poet sends out words; the critic feeds back a response, if not to the poet, then to other readers and to her own reading self. Critical prose is 'information about the result of a process', reading, and, as a mode of judgement, it seeks to adjust other responses and other writing, while inspecting its own conditions for knowledge. It can, however, distort sound, or appear to do so, whether this is dismissed as noisy interference or praised as interpretive freedom.

In spite of the descriptive potential of 'feedback' for criticism—or perhaps because of such extreme analogical facility—Richards turns instead to 'feedforward'. This term describes 'the modification of the output signal of a circuit by a part of the input signal that has not passed through the circuit', or, in less technical phrasing, 'anticipatory control'. Knowing how to control our muscles, for example, when walking downstairs. Such knowledge is generally a routine matter of expectation, of habit, which, Richards remarks, leaves us with the capacity 'to deal appropriately with the exceptional'; 'a readiness to be surprised or disturbed' when the stairs are deep and uneven, say, or on a changing spiral.⁴ (As usual, Richards's example here is diluted Coleridge: reflecting on the experience of verse, Coleridge compared sudden breaks in metrical regularity as akin to 'leaping in the dark from the last step of a staircase, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four'.⁵) Feedforward thus names the responsive capacity that is the condition of possibility for

the experience of form and difficult language. It is operative both at a quiet, assumed level in ordinary verbal situations, and, perhaps more consciously, at moments of artifice or complexity. So, it is the taken-for-granted rhythm of grammar that makes new and meaningful sentences possible. It is also the kind of judicious foreknowledge embodied and imparted in Eliot's selection of Shakespeare's 'two plain words', 'Ah, soldier!', which are absent in a parallel passage from Dryden, by which to carry his point about the distinctiveness of these two styles: 'I could not myself put into words the difference I feel'.⁶ For Richards, feedforward can be summarized as a way of 'describing how language works', including the heightened type of responsiveness involved in critical encounters. As such, it is the secret at the heart of his endeavours in verbal and literary judgement. It is 'secret' because, like criticism, although 'it can be a highly articulate examinable process', when it works well, 'it may be hardly cognized or embodied at all'.⁷

Criticism, especially tactful, tactical close reading criticism, proceeds in this 'hardly cognized' fashion: its workings generally remain half-transparent to readers, even as it sets the circuits of response in particularly strenuous motion. By its immediate paraphrases, its language about language, such criticism adjusts, surrounds, interprets poems and other pieces of language for their readers as though 'before' they have 'passed through the circuit' of this broader readership; at the same time, it offers a display of possible response, which hesitates to 'crush all the particles down | into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them' (Marianne Moore, 'To a Steam Roller').⁸ It appears to stage 'pure' scenes of reading but these involve the critic in a complex performance of commentary (feedback) and, to vary on Eliot, of creating the taste by which to understand others, as well as by which to be understood as a critical sensibility (feedforward).

About such close reading criticism, it has been common to wonder, 'how do critics know when to stop?'—and, often, with the potential for idiosyncratic or even interminable glosses, 'why don't they know when to stop?'⁹ The modernist context, in which difficulty could represent 'a form of cultural capital', not only as a quality identified in lyric poems but also as a criterion for their prose amplifications, gave rise to particular anxieties about the limits of such un-ruled responsiveness to individual verbal occasions.¹⁰ But more acute still, for this book's radical empiricists, are the questions of 'how to begin?', and, 'how to proceed?' To begin to read involves attunement to 'feedforward', to what we already know and expect. It also requires some degree of anticipatory mastery of the anti-critical impulse that arises from the sense that any language will be imperfect relative to its object. To persist in reading and criticizing then

involves 'fertile interplay between what is looked for (feedforward) and what actually happens (feedback)'.¹¹ Without this reflective pliancy, critics become 'convicts', Richards's joke term for those who are dogmatically convinced and, thus, unlikely to convince others. This book has been concerned with some critics who not only achieve this cognitive choreography with rare skill but also disclose something of the 'secret' of the feedforward-feedback circuits of critical response by textures, tricks, and tones of prose style that invite readers to become more conscious, mindful, and critical of how (not) to read.

The improbable terms feedback and feedforward may, then, carry some descriptive force for the odd circular performance that is close reading criticism. Still, it is tempting to translate these labels back into 'ordinary language' versions of themselves; to convert Richards's cybernetics terminology to some more everyday analogies for the kinds of exchange, flow, and rhythm that constitute critical process. From the readings of five reading styles this book offers, it would seem that the weights and measures for modernist criticism are often those of tact and embarrassment, dazzling display and humility, boast and nuance, self-exposure and retreat—the skills and styles, in other words, of conversation. Why not, then, describe close reading criticism by analogy with, for example, the undulations of talk at a party?—fragments overheard, some bravura performances, some rapid-fire exchanges of wit, a background hum, occasional silences. To do so would, however, miss a certain additional force that the term 'feedback' gains by registering an anxiety from which modernist criticism suffers, the anxiety of not being like conversation: the critic is not, generally, a 'live' speaker, responding to listeners, nor do critical comments alter the text itself. Thus, within the near-closed circuit of the analytical essay, the energies of the critic must work towards handling the text with due care for it to remain 'live' (pliant, responsive, indeterminate) for its readers, and they for it. This constrained liveliness is, then, the difficult secret of feedforward—and for understanding its dynamics, the slight dissonance of the Ricardian terms offers some hope of perspective by incongruity.

For another route towards understanding the responsive circuits of close reading criticism, we might look to the occasions on which critics appear to promise to reveal their secrets directly through the seeming intimacy of self-criticism: the occasions on which they make 'feedforward' explicit by putting (shards of) prose material, miniature critical responses, alongside their own poems. Such self-critical attention may appear either to hold out the promise of the 'closest' kind of reading, or to risk 'closed' reading, which fails to relinquish to readers the opportunities for response and decision. *'The Ants'*. It is a love-poem with the author afraid of the woman—so Empson pretends to give the key to one of his lyrics, in the

sleeve notes for a 1959 recording.¹² ‘A phenomenon which I have often noticed’, Eliot unhelpfully assures us in the note accompanying the line of *The Waste Land* that hears St Mary Wolnoth chime, ‘With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine’.¹³ After such knowledge, what reading? All five poet-critics considered in this book—Eliot, Richards, Empson, Blackmur, and Moore—engage in such provocative ‘self-critical’ performances. Typically, they accompany their own poems with notes but they also experiment with a variety of other adjacent prose forms—‘provisos, detainments, and postscripts’, as Marianne Moore calls them—as well as with other forms of paratextual chattiness, such as preambles to performances of their poems.

Self-annotation was of course no more an absolutely ‘new’ practice than close reading criticism—its canon of past practitioners includes George Chapman, Ben Jonson, Coleridge—but, with the modernists, it became a significant technical possibility with which to experiment. Each of these poet-critics writes notes as distinctive in form and style as their poems and their criticism are various, nor can these notes be readily characterized either as a microcosm (or parody) of their usual critical practices, or as a sharp deviation from them. They may be closer instead to another form of expression of some of the discomforts of responsive reading ‘that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate’ within their other critical prose: an expression of the afflictions of writing about other words, and of keeping live the circuit of feedback and feedforward.¹⁴ It is these afflictions and these experiments to which I now glance in a brief coda to this study in the styles of five radical empiricists. What might these notes reveal of the poised tension required of modernist critics as they conduct their experiments in ‘how to read’ and ‘how not to read’?

* * *

Adding notes to poems is not an oracular activity, although many modernist poet-critics play with that expectation. Forms of resistance to this demand for a cipher are as varied and complex as the pressure for ‘Smoking Out The Meaning’ can be intense.¹⁵ Eliot is the master of playfulness with the promise of sense. For the final line of *The Waste Land*, ‘Shantih shantih shantih’, his annotation merely reads: ‘*Shantih*. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. “The Peace which passeth understanding” is a feeble translation of the conduct of this word.’¹⁶ Richards can also be guilty of the Eliotic note. To his poem, ‘Lighting fires in Snow’, for example, the complete annotation reads as follows: ‘This practical poem aims to teach a useful art.’¹⁷ Blackmur, although his critical temperament puts him more at risk of verbosity than reticence, is still quieter when it comes to notes, hardly venturing any self-annotation

at all. The single note in his *Collected Poems* reads as terse summary of the ornithological and literary coordinates by which to understand a word in 'Sea Island Miscellany': "great han" is the Maine coast familiar form for heron. *Hamlet* has "handsaw".¹⁸ The always-reticent Moore, whose sympathies lie with 'the unconversational animal', also stands accused of 'obscure and teasingly unhelpful notes'.¹⁹ If, as she writes, in 'To a Giraffe', 'it is unpermissible, in fact fatal | to be personal and undesirable || to be literal', then what remains for self-critical prose?²⁰

Moore attempts one answer in 'A Note On The Notes', which introduces her self-critical material with this confession: 'since in anything I have written, there have been lines in which the chief interest is borrowed [...] acknowledgements seem only honest'.²¹ One of her most heavily annotated poems, 'Marriage', follows this honest policy, acknowledging debts to many: Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Edmund Burke, Hazlitt, Trollope, Edward Thomas, Ezra Pound; the Bible, the *Fables of La Fontaine*; Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*; an inscription on a statue in Central Park.²² All the notes, bar the first ('Statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly'), merely identify the quotations or give a slightly fuller version of the sentence or passage in which they first appeared. There are no glosses. Moore's policy for self-annotation shares with her criticism of others a predilection for minimal descriptiveness, for paratactic collages of information. We learn, for example, that Moore takes some of her diction (feline, colubrine) from Philip Littell's review of Santayana's *Poems* for *The New Republic* (21 March 1923), but the sense of 'colubrine' remains a matter for the reader's recondite knowledge or ingenuity. For all these self-critical poets, we might adopt the motto about poets that Richards borrows from Zarathustra as epigraph to the end-notes to his poems: 'They all muddy the water that it | may seem deep...'.²³

Garrulous Empson, however, appears to present a different case. 'I enjoy the chatty reading of poetry', he writes, 'in the chatty exploratory frame of mind which could annotate its own works'.²⁴ Empson launches a nagging paraphrase against those who hold out the promise of notes, only to give unhelpful ones:

One must not try to put some more into the poem through the notes, like Mr. Eliot on *Shantih*—'I suspect you are not being as impressed as you ought to be by the depths of meaning to be found in this word.'²⁵

'Shantih', for Empson, is shorthand for annotation as obscurantism, when annotation as the relief from obscurity is what is desired. Eliot's note pretends to give information but in fact only informs the reader that they may not know enough.²⁶ Empson reads the tone of such notes as

somewhere between that of the schoolmaster (reprimanding the reader for missed allusions) and the 'snob' ('that delicious thing old Uncle Virgil said, you remember'²⁷)—both of which, he argues, are firmly anachronistic in the epistemic context of modernism, in which 'everybody's reading is miscellaneous and scrappy'.²⁸ In such a fraught context for feedforward, where much has to be brought to the overt level of information rather than left at the quieter pitch of presupposition, almost any detail that the poet imagines to be helpful and so, supplies in a note, is legitimate, if modest: it may fail to help some but will be likely to help others and so it cannot, in a democratic view of the informational economy of reading, be found superfluous. Poetry, after all, 'is not meant to be portentous'.²⁹

Yet, although he champions 'the note which would save further trouble', Empson is not immune from the charge of concentrating rather than diluting complexity through his own notes. Critics and reviewers have still found that he 'almost makes of poetry a cryptogram', and that, for all their pretence of usefulness, his notes seem to fail precisely where they make the strongest claim to intervene: in the provision of relevant further information for his densely difficult poems.³⁰ Since the poems are 'clotted' enough, without the further teasing of the notes: 'an intelligent reader may justifiably resent being further confounded by finding [...] in the notes erroneous or misleading explanations'.³¹ Such complaints, however, also seem unsatisfactory; mere accurate detail would never be sufficient for elucidating the 'difficulty' of the poems, despite what Empson's barrage of crossword puzzle notes might first indicate. More persuasive is the argument that Empson's notes fall short of their proclaimed helpfulness through an attitude and tone of enigmatic worldliness rather than through misinformation.³² There is a more elusive kind of difficulty than the 'puzzle' variety, and Empson achieves it through a dry, controlled exercise of the intelligence that continually suggests irony about any exchange of meaning. Empson's notes, and their surrounding rhetoric, are, then, something of trick: their role is in fact more that of a collateral form for his poems, expressing a feeling about reading. Sometimes, this is cheery clowning, enjoying the insouciance of indirect relations and breezily reductive formula ('It is extremely literal,' he introduces a reading of 'This Last Pain', 'I'm sorry to be obvious about this [...] very straightforward [...] these, you see, are going on the formula ["boy afraid of girl"]').³³ Sometimes the notes or comments register a sense of the painful imperfections of writing and the even fiercer discontents of writing-about-writing: the poet's prose, Empson describes in uneasy prosopopeia, marks where his poems are 'disfigured' by their difficulties.³⁴ Reading such notes is an exercise in remembering the truth of the aphorism: 'Form retreats before the appeal of information'.³⁵

Eliot's manner of shying away from information in the forms where it would be most expected—his notes—is not like that of Empson but it produces comparable interpretive difficulties for readers, confounding rather than resolving questions of sense. This we see with Richard Wollheim's struggles with an annotated section of *The Waste Land*:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key.

To this Eliot appended, as a note, a passage from F.H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, which was one of his touchstones:

My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.

This same passage Eliot had already glossed in an article for *The Monist*, where he gave this philosophically cogent paraphrase: 'The world for Bradley is simply the *intending* of a world by several souls or centers.'³⁶ Wollheim approves the conceptual grasp of this paraphrase in its philosophical setting but objects fiercely to the unspoken 'interpretation' of Bradley's passage that Eliot intimates when he offers it as a note to *The Waste Land*: 'this passage from Bradley has nothing to do with the thought that Eliot's lines express'.³⁷ He is, in some ways, right, although Eliot got there first, happily acknowledging that his annotations are 'bogus scholarship', mere extra pages. Yet Wollheim still struggles to forgive Eliot's note its spurious emotion; its philosophically dishonest imparting of an 'edge of melancholy' to Bradley's words. The complaint is not that Eliot has failed to find an objective correlative but rather that he appears to have done so; that he sublimates philosophical difficulty (solipsism) and attendant 'feelings' (melancholy) in poetic form. Eliot, or another reader, might counter that this annotation, however lightly made, achieves a practical instance of his criterion for philosophical poetry; by setting the poem in parallel to Bradley's prose, the lines become an 'emotional and sense equivalent for a definite philosophical system constructed by a philosopher'.³⁸ But for the critic of Eliot's own critical apparatus, the experience may be, as Wollheim's discontent suggests, only that of discovering that differences flourish in the spaces between lines and their surrounding or parallel language; that criticism, even self-criticism, runs the risk that 'every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it'.

When Richards makes an equivalent point about equivalents, it is predictably with more administrative optimism than elegantly fraught melancholy. 'The illustrative passages that might be put alongside a line by the literary analyst,' Richards suggests, are not the passages the poet had in mind, but rather passages in which, 'in the co-operations among its words, there is active something' that is also active in the line.³⁹ The poet's own notes to poems are just such 'illustrative passages'. Rather than a revelation of the poem's 'real sources', such passages 'alongside' are better considered as further elucidatory paraphrases, as points of activation for connections on the circuit of language.⁴⁰ It is this generalized, cooperative sense of para-language that guides Richards's own annotations and can be seen with particular clarity in the case of the poem, 'Harvard Yard in April: April in Harvard Yard', which he both annotates and writes about in a critical essay concerned with annotation.⁴¹ His retrospective notes trace a movement on the bias between formal analysis and intellectual biography for the poem, which begins:

To and fro
Across the fretted snow
Figures, footprints, shadows go.

Lines too simple for notes, it might seem, but Richards takes a self-critical turn to give detail of his decisions in composition, focusing on aspects that did not come 'into clear consciousness until the poem was almost finished', and on his dawning knowledge of intersections between these lines and his other writing: the realization, for example, that, in these lines was 'an echo from a lecture remark I had made: "The printed words of a poem are only its footprints on paper."' ⁴²

Two of Richards's most elaborate interpretations concentrate on single words, 'fretted' and 'shadow'; with both, he seeks to consider the widest possibilities of sense for these words by way of other phrases. Of 'fretted' and its senses ('eat; eat away; consume; torture by gnawing at; gnaw at . . .'), he writes this:

The illuminating Dictionary adds a comment on *gnaw at* which pleased me when I saw it. It says, 'Now only of small animals.' A mouse, I suppose, can fret a bit of cheese (as a fret saw does plywood); but when a grizzly bear chaws up a man, that isn't fretting. I liked that; it seemed to offer my line a spice of meaning I had not been aware of. It turned the people who had been leaving all those tracks on the snow into only small animals after all.⁴³

In such ways, as feedback on the poem, Richards traces the poem's becoming-known-to-itself, the poet's growing awareness of the kinds of knowledge that lay dormant in his words, waiting for activation—in other

words, the circuit of feedforward in which the poem takes place. The style in which Richards sets this out is characteristically almost too theoretical to share the vitality of practical criticism that belongs to the other subjects of this book, although it does share with all touchstones of their address to complex meaning: joy at the felicitous, saltatory movements of the dictionary, with Blackmur; comic intuition of the emblematically distinctive eating styles of animals, with Moore; a sense of words that communicate before they are understood, with Eliot; pleasure in almost any unexpected and additional 'spice of meaning', with Empson.

Yet even Richards's smooth pronouncements betray the disruptions inherent in an acute sense of what it means to read and criticize. For the word 'shadows', in line four of his poem, Richards's explanation reads that it looks forward to 'shade', in line six, but also that, 'afterward, as confirmation and support', his sense of this word drew on other lines, other 'illustrative passages', from Walter de la Mare, from Eliot (whose shadows are already stolen from Emerson), and, lastly, this from Bradley:

The shades nowhere speak without blood and the ghosts of Metaphysic accept no substitute. They reveal themselves only to that victim whose life they have drained and to converse with shadows he himself must become a shade.⁴⁴

What is visible here, in spite of Richards's serenity of style, is that such 'illustrative passages' are not just comments on the poem, with its literary and philosophical antecedents; they can also involve an awkwardly reflexive spiral of thought about the activity in which Richards is engaged, criticism. Critics, who are in the bloody, draining business of substitutes, paraphrases, and other words, occupy these shadows. The challenge is for the critic to turn this fear of becoming shades to shadows into formally productive anxiety—to a richly radical empiricism, in which lines and their surrounding prose sustain the vibrant 'to and fro' of conversation, the 'fretted' rhythms of literary judgement.

'Watch good tennis players,' Richards writes, 'and you see how exquisitely, how variously, and how ramifyingly feedforward and feedback are playing their game for them'—so, too, for good critics.⁴⁵ The language-game of criticism may work best when its own varied prose forms negotiate around their texts—and with, against, and alongside their readers—in such ways as to parallel 'the peculiar process of trying out alternates and submitting to outcomes by which a poem finds itself'.⁴⁶ Criticism is, in this sense, thoroughly 'practical' and 'close' to the texts that it is about. Modernist close reading, radical empiricism, experiments with a lively range of techniques and styles for the process of essaying then deciding that is literary judgement: annotations, protocols, emendations,

paraphrases, circumlocutions, reticent sentences. Such criticism includes aspects of feedback and feedforward in its ramifyingly difficult dynamics of response to the text and to the (im)possibilities of 'fit' responsiveness from other readers. It pronounces and retreats; it judges, demonstrates, labels, scrutinizes, then looks back with an arched eyebrow over its own style and forms of thought. 'This is so, isn't it?'⁴⁷

Notes

INTRODUCTION

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2. Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 2010; first published, 1934), p.18.
3. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained: an intimate account of the revolution in English studies at Cambridge* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958), p.84.
4. Augustus Stopford Brooke, *Studies in Poetry* (London: Duckworth, 1907), p.249.
5. I.A. Richards, 'Semantic Frontiersman', in *William Empson: The Man and His Work*, edited by Roma Gill (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p.99.
6. T.S. Eliot, 'Dante' [1929], *the in Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932). Cleanth Brooks, 'Keats's Sylvan Historian: History Without Footnotes' [1942], in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947), pp.139–52. I.A. Richards, *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1932), pp.116–17. William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), pp.371–2.
7. Ezra Pound gave the title 'Make It New' to his collected essays in 1934; the phrase also appears in his *Canto LIII*, as a translation from an inscription on an ancient Chinese bathtub.
8. Stephen Potter, *The Muse in Chains: A Study in Education* (London, 1937), pp.25–6.
9. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.38.
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12. René Wellek, 'The New Criticism: Pro and Contra', *Critical Inquiry*, 4.4 (Summer 1978), pp.611–62: 611.
13. Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.cxlili.
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15. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p.65.
 16. Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.198.
 17. Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism*, p.6.
 18. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longman Green and Co, 1912), p.41.
 19. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p.42.
 20. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained*, p.100.
 21. Jeremy Noel-Todd, 'A History of Difficulty: On Cambridge Poetry', *Cambridge Literary Review* 1.1 (2009), pp.97–105: 102.
 22. Detailed in Michael Warner, 'Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature, 1875–1900', *Criticism*, 27 (1985), pp.1–28.
 23. Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (October 1912), accompanying the poem inscribed 'H.D. Imagiste'. This is quoted in Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p.174. Laura Riding, 'To the Reader', *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1938).
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 25. The term 'autoanalytic' comes from Nicholas Dames, 'On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol', in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*, edited by Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp.11–26. The phrase 'actual complete presentation' comes from R.P. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture: Essays in Poetry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), p.310.
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 29. See 'Three Critics on One Poem' [1948], in Empson, *The Strengths of Shakespeare's Shrew: Essays, Memoirs and Reviews*, edited by John Haffenden (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).
 30. For context, see, for example, *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences*, edited by Dorothy Ross (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).
 31. Douglas Mao, 'The New Critics and the Text-Object', *ELH*, 63.1 (1996), pp.227–54: 227.
 32. Cleanth Brooks, 'I.A. Richards and Practical Criticism', in 'The Critics Who Made Us', *Sewanee Review*, 89.4 (Fall 1981), pp.586–95: 589.
 33. This is the subtitle of his essay on Keats in *The Well Wrought Urn*. For the widening gap between Empson and Brooks, see the latter's review of *The*

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 36. Graff, *Professing Literature*, p.161.
 37. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p.44.
 38. Graham Hough, 'An Eighth Type of Ambiguity', in Gill, *William Empson: The Man and His Work*, p.76.
 39. Andrew Ford, *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.1.
 40. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Pimlico, 2004; first published, 1930), pp.80–1.
 41. This anecdote about a class at Radcliffe was recounted by a member of a Harvard class of 1886. It is quoted in Michael Warner, 'Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature, 1875–1900', p.5.
 42. F.R. Leavis, 'How to teach reading' [1932], in *Education and the University*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; first published 1943), p.114.
 43. Ezra Pound, 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays*, edited by T.S. Eliot (London, Faber and Faber, 1954), p.25.
 44. W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp.3–18. Brooks, 'The Heresy of Paraphrase', in *The Well Wrought Urn*, pp.176–96.
 45. Victoria Welby, *Grains of Sense* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1897), p.32.
 46. C. van Spaendonck, reviewing Gustaf Stern's *Meaning and Change of Meaning* (1931), *English Studies*, 15.1 (1933), pp.21–37: 21.
 47. Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.158.
 48. John Dover Wilson, *The Meaning of The Tempest* (Newcastle: Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1936), p.1.
 49. Richard Aldington, *Artifex: Sketches and Ideas* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), p.20.
 50. Pound's argument is this: 'Any general statement is like a cheque drawn on a bank. Its value depends on what is there to meet it.' *ABC of Reading*, p.25.
 51. Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), pp.103–4n.
 52. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.39.
 53. F.H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922; first published 1883), p.8.

54. Foreword to A.J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, translated by Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (London: Pinter, 1987; first published, as *Du Sens: Essais Sémiotiques*, 1970).
55. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale; edited by Constantin V. Boundas (London: Continuum, 2001; first published 1990), p.28. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973; first published 1865), pp.311–12.
56. 'The Meaning of Meaning: A Symposium', *Mind*, 29.116 (October 1920), pp.385–6.
57. I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929), p.334.
58. I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, 8th edn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946; first published 1923), pp.186–7.
59. See, for example, Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, p.264.
60. Michael Polanyi, *Meaning* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p.66.
61. Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning', *Synthese* 17 (1967), pp.304–23: 307.
62. John Gibson, 'The Question of Poetic Meaning', *nonsite.org*, issue 4 (1 December, 2011).
63. Jonathan Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p.46.
64. See 'Form's Matter', Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.1–29.
65. Jeanine Johnson, *Why Write Poetry?: Modern Poets Defending Their Art* (New Jersey: FDU Press, 2007), p.40.
66. A.C. Bradley, 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p.32.
67. T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1964; first published 1933), p.151.
68. In his review of the poem for the *Athenaeum*, John Middleton Murry makes these lines representative of Eliot's position with regard to 'meaning'; see 'The Eternal Footman', 20 February 1920, reprinted in *T.S. Eliot, The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.25–6.
69. Quentin Skinner, 'Is it still possible to interpret texts?', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 89 (2008), pp.647–54: 647.
70. Skinner, 'Is it still possible to interpret texts?', p.647.
71. Joshua Gang, 'Behaviourism and the Beginnings of Close Reading', *ELH* 78 (2011), pp.1–25: 20.
72. Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review* 1 (2000), pp.73–81.
73. Polanyi, *Meaning*, p.83.

74. The terms and phrases come from the following texts: Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.13. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.xi; Laura (Riding) Jackson, 'The Word-Play of Gertrude Stein', in *Under the Mind's Watch: Concerning Issues of Language, Literature, Life of Contemporary Bearing*, edited by John Nolan and Alan J. Clark (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp.183–211. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.263, p.313. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).
75. Richards and Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p.173.
76. Richards and Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p.173.
77. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.223.
78. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.224.
79. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.314.
80. Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, p.139.
81. Andrew DuBois, 'Ethics, Critics, Close Reading', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (2007), pp.926–36: 930.
82. 'Introduction', *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol.7, *Modernism and the New Criticism*, edited by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.7.
83. René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*, vols 5 & 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.xxi.
84. W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959; first published 1957), p.636, pp.vii–viii, p.ix.
85. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, p.649, p.652.
86. Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'The Fate of Reading', in *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp.248–74.
87. Richard Shusterman, *Analytic Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.13.
88. These terms are from I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.19, and R.P. Blackmur, 'A Critic's Job of Work' [1935], in *Language as Gesture*, p.373.
89. See 'Introduction: Empson in the Round', in *Some Versions of Empson*, edited by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.4.
90. The remark is attributed to Alec Mace by Richards in *Complementarities*, p.111.
91. William E. Cain, 'Notes toward a History of Anti-Criticism', *New Literary History*, 20.1 (Autumn 1988), pp.33–48: 46.
92. Catherine Gallagher, 'Formalism and Time', *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000), pp.229–51: 247.
93. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 2nd edn (Los Altos: Hermes, 1953; first published 1931), p.127.
94. F.R. Leavis, *How To Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1932), p.12.
95. William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p.6.
96. Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism*, p.16.
97. Virginia Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book?' [January 1926], published in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1932).

98. For example, Arnold Haultain's 'How to Read', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 159 (February 1896), pp.249–65, or Laurie Magnus, *How to read English literature: Chaucer to Milton* (London: George Routledge, 1907). On the cusp of this change, Arthur Quiller-Couch delivered a series of wartime lectures, published as *On the Art of Reading* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920).
99. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.312–13.
100. I.A. Richards, *How to Read a Page: A Course in Effective Reading, with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1942), p.9.
101. Richards, *How to Read a Page*, p.12.
102. Leavis, *How To Teach Reading*, p.26.
103. Leavis, *How To Teach Reading*, p.27.
104. F.R. Leavis, 'Sketch for an English School', *Scrutiny*, IX.2 (September, 1940), pp.98–120: 98–9.
105. Cain, 'Notes toward a History of Anti-Criticism', pp.33–48.
106. See Gerald Graff, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (North Dakota: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
107. 'Missing Dates', in William Empson, *The Complete Poems*, edited by John Haffenden (London: Penguin, 2001), p.79.
108. Michael Wood, 'William Empson', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol.7, p.234.
109. The phrase is from Veronica Forrest-Thomson, who adopts a similar strategy in *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p.xiv.
110. Marianne Moore, 'Foreword' to *A Marianne Moore Reader* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), pp.xiii–xviii, p.xv. Moore's earlier use of this phrase comes in 'Isak Dinesen, A Memorial' (1964), in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, edited by Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp.657–8.
111. R.P. Blackmur, 'Technique in Criticism', *Hound and Horn*, 3/3 (April–June 1930), pp.451–3.
112. Wallace Stevens, letter to Henry Church (19 July 1945), in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, edited by Holly Stevens (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p.509.
113. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.396.
114. Quoted in Graff, *Professing Literature*, p.210.

CHAPTER I

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Donne in Our Time', in *A Garland for John Donne, 1631–1931*, edited by Theodor Spencer (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958; first published 1931), pp.1–19: 3.
2. Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T.S. Eliot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp.103–4.

3. T.S. Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Part II', *The Egoist*, 5.10 (Nov.–Dec. 1918), pp.131–3: 132.
4. Quoted in *The Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination*, edited by Paul K. Saint-Amour (New York: Cornell Press, 2003), p.47.
5. Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* (London: Methuen, 1965; first published 1960), p.119.
6. Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p.175.
7. For examples, see Jim McCue, 'Editing Eliot', *Essays in Criticism*, 56.1 (January 2006) pp.1–27.
8. T.S. Eliot, 'Disjecta Membra', *The Egoist*, 5.4 (April 1918), p.55. Eliot is reviewing Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917).
9. Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism', p.132.
10. Frank Kermode, 'Eliot and the Shudder', *LRB*, 32.9 (13 May 2010), pp.13–16. The lines are from Tennyson's 'Mariana' and 'In Memoriam' respectively.
11. M.J.C. Hodgart, 'Misquotation as Re-creation', *Essays in Criticism*, 3.1 (January 1952), pp.28–38. Hodgart discusses this particular example from Eliot, as does Kermode (without reference to Hodgart) in Kermode, 'Eliot and the Shudder'.
12. Pound's remark comes from his unpublished 'Collected Prose', 1929–1930, and is cited by Ira Nadel in 'Visualizing History: Pound and the Chinese Cantos', in *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos*, edited by Lawrence Rainey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.152.
13. T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, edited by Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p.15.
14. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, p.13, p.11.
15. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, p.31.
16. Eliot described this process in 'The Frontiers of Criticism: A Lecture', at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis in 1956; printed in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).
17. T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.76.
18. William Empson, 'Obscurity and Annotation', in *Argufying, Essays on Literature and Culture*, edited by John Haffenden, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), p.72.
19. The first and third quotations are from Eliot, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', in *On Poetry and Poets*, pp.108–18. The middle phrase is from Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet*, p.x.
20. For an account and an exhibition of Eliot's practice in editing a manuscript for Faber, see Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*, edited by Cheryl Plumb (Dalkey Archive Press, 1995).
21. T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction' to G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co, 1949), p.xv.

22. The first term is from William Arrowsmith, 'Eliot's Learning', *Literary Imagination*, 2.2 (Spring 2000), pp.153–70, *passim*. The second term is from F.W. Bateson, 'The Poetry of Learning', *Eliot in Perspective*, edited by Graham Martin (London, 1970), pp.31–44: 35.
23. Graham Hough, 'The Poet as Critic', *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays*, edited by David Newton-De Molina (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), pp.42–63: 47.
24. Hough, 'The Poet as Critic', p.55.
25. See D.W. Hamlyn's introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp.ix–xvi.
26. Kenner recalls hearing this anecdote from Pound in September 1952; see *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p.12. G.R.S. Mead was a writer and prominent member of Blavatsky's Theosophical Society from 1884 to 1909.
27. This characterization is of a previous society, the Metaphysical Society, which was distinct in many ways but alike in this general aim and form. See Alan Willard Brown, *The Metaphysical Society: Victorian Minds in Crisis, 1869–1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p.318.
28. Some critics suggest that Eliot's break from philosophy was a relief to him—Manju Jain, for example, writes: 'Eliot's thesis may be seen, however, as the culmination of his dissatisfaction with philosophical theories and metaphysical systems', *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.206.
29. Eliot's copy is the following: Aristotle, *De Anima*, Libri III, edited by Otto Apelt (Aedibus B.G. Teubneris Lipsiae, MCMXI).
30. In Eliot's copy, these comments are in the margins of pp.2, 28, and on the interleaf numbered 32. R.D. Hicks is the editor and translator of the 1907 Cambridge University Press edition of *De Anima*.
31. See Gerald C. Monsman, 'Old Mortality at Oxford', *Studies in Philology*, 67.3 (July 1970), pp.359–89.
32. On its founding, see M.R. Stopper, 'Greek Philosophy and the Victorians', *Phronesis*, 26.3 (1981), pp.267–85: 283, n.36. On its resurrection, see Robert B. Todd's review of Barrie Fleet's translation, *Simplicius on Aristotle's Physics 2*, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 97.9, p.24; also, H.W.B. Joseph, 'Harold Henry Joachim, 1868–1938', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 24 (1938), pp.396–422: 418. For further descriptions, see Joachim's preface to his translation of Aristotle's *On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away (De Generatione et Corruptione): A Revised Text, with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922).
33. J.A. Smith was Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy (1910–36), co-editor of the twelve volume Oxford Aristotle (1908–52), and translator of *De Anima*.
34. M.R. Stopper, 'Greek Philosophy and the Victorians', p.272.
35. Robert B. Todd, review of *Simplicius on Aristotle's Physics 2*.

36. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.74.
37. T.S. Eliot to J.H. Woods (9 November 1914), in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol.1: 1898–1922*, rev. edn, edited by Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p.74.
38. Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism T.S. Eliot and his Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.133.
39. T.S. Eliot to J.H. Woods (9 November 1914), in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol.1*, p.74.
40. Letter from Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell (27 March 1914), quoted in *Ottoline: The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*, edited by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.257.
41. T.S. Eliot to J.H. Woods (9 November 1914), and Eliot to William C. Greene (14 October 1914), in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol.1*, p.71.
42. The former phrase is from Collingwood's autobiography; the latter is from Eliot's letter to Woods, describing Collingwood's lectures, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol.1*, p.71.
43. T.S. Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Part I', *The Egoist*, 9.6 (Nov.-Dec. 1918), p.113.
44. T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems', *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920), p.88.
45. Frantisek Svejksky, 'Twentieth-Century Poetics', *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Alex Preminger, T.V.F. Brogan, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.1383.
46. Eliot used the phrase again in a tribute to Joachim: 'To his *explication de texte* of the *Posterior Analytics* I owe an appreciation of the importance of punctuation; to his criticism of my papers I owe an appreciation of the fact that good writing is impossible without clear and distinct ideas.' *The Times*, 4 August 1938. This is quoted in H.W.B. Joseph, 'Harold Henry Joachim, 1868–1938', pp.401–2. The wrappers for this, but not the paper itself, survive in the small collection of Eliot's books in the King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge (The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material—all future references, Hayward Bequest) and are inscribed with a dedication to Eliot.
47. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, p.41. On Eliot's repudiation of Pater, see John J. Conlon, 'Eliot and Pater: Criticism in Transition', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 25.3 (1982), pp.169–77: 169.
48. Eliot's annotated edition, in the Hayward Bequest, is the first edition of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1873).
49. Lord David Cecil, *Reading as one of the Fine Arts: an inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 28 May 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949). Eliot's annotated copy is in the Hayward Bequest.
50. Letter to Conrad Aiken (25 February 1915), in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol.1*, p.95. The reference in the letter is not specifically to Pater.
51. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry' [1942], in *On Poetry and Poets*, p.26. But, as Christopher Ricks points out, there must have been a gap here between

- principles and practice: 'how else, other than with the help of re-reading, could he possibly have revised so many of them, as he did?', *Decisions of Revisions in T.S. Eliot* (London: The British Library, 2004), p.6.
52. John Conlon notes the significant use by Eliot, in 'To Criticize the Critic', of this very Paterian word; 'Eliot and Pater: Criticism in Transition', p.175. For evidence of more traces of Pater's influence, see, for example, William Blissett, 'Pater and Eliot', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXIII:3 (April 1953), pp.261–8, and David J. DeLaura, 'Pater and Eliot; the Origin of the Objective Correlative', *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXVI (Summer 1965), pp.426–31.
 53. T.S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *TLS*, 958 (27 May 1920), p.325. The *TLS* review becomes, with two minor deletions, the first part of the essay, 'Philip Massinger', in *The Sacred Wood* to which Eliot adds a second part concerning Massinger's comedy.
 54. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', p.325.
 55. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', p.325.
 56. Harold Joachim, *The Nature of Truth: An Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p.56.
 57. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.115.
 58. Ezra Pound, 'Elizabethan Classicists', *The Egoist*, iv.9 (October 1917), pp.135–6.
 59. T.S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, edited by Ronald Schuchard (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.44.
 60. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.61.
 61. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.108–14.
 62. Letter from Praz to Eliot (31 January 1927), quoted in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.114, n.43.
 63. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.67, n.1. The review is in the *TLS* (17 Dec 1925), p.878.
 64. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.41.
 65. Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1913), pp.86–7.
 66. See, for example, Charles Bombaugh, *Gleanings from the Harvest-fields of Literature, Science and Art: A Melange of Excerpta*, 2nd edn (Baltimore: T.N. Kurtz, 1869; first published 1860); Frederick Saunders, *Salad for the Solitary: by an Epicure* (1853). The list of chapter headings is from the revised Bombaugh's book. Both are cited in *The Copywrights*, p.40.
 67. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.120.
 68. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.179–80.
 69. Walter Pater: 'the ornamental word, the figure, the accessory form or colour or reference, is rarely content to die to thought precisely at the right moment, but will inevitably linger awhile, stirring a long "brain-wave" behind it of perhaps quite alien associations'—'Style', in *Appreciations: with an essay on Style* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1890), pp.1–36: 15.

70. Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, I (London and Cambridge: Macmillan & Co, 1865), p.213. The lines are from Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey'.
71. Quoted in John Shepard Eells, Jr, *The Touchstones of Matthew Arnold* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955), p.18.
72. Matthew Arnold, 'A guide to English Literature' [1896], reprinted in *Mixed Essays: Irish Essays and Others* (London, Smith, Elder, & Co, 1879), pp.193–4.
73. Marius Hentea, 'The Silence of the Last Poet: Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, and the Value of the Classic', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 71.3 (2010), pp.297–328: 314.
74. Pater, 'Style', in *Appreciations*, *passim*.
75. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, *Second Series*, p.58.
76. Pater, 'Notes on Leonardo da Vinci' [1869, *Fortnightly Review*], reprinted in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p.118.
77. Christopher Ricks, 'Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold and Misquotation', *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.392–416: 394.
78. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* I, pp.80–1.
79. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, pp.134–5. This verse from Swinburne's 'Before the Mirror' was one of Eliot's touchstones. He quotes it correctly on this occasion but not in the Clark Lectures where it becomes, 'Violets that plead for pardon | Or pine for fright' (*The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.174).
80. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.134.
81. Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p.140.
82. Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*, p.394.
83. Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p.145 (my italics).
84. Pater, *Appreciations*, p.102.
85. Pater, *Appreciations*, p.97.
86. Thomas, *Walter Pater*, p.106.
87. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, pp.91–2.
88. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Muse in Chains, An Intimate Account of the Revolution in English Studies at Cambridge* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958), p.100.
89. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.129.
90. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.131.
91. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.127–8.
92. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.112.
93. See, for example, Eliot's reflections on Donne's apparently unfinished 'Progress of the Soul', in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.150.
94. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.98–9, p.119.
95. Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', *The Egoist*, 4.8 (Jan. 1918), pp.118–19.
96. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.108.
97. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.188–9.
98. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.136.
99. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.110.
100. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.27.

101. Empson reviewing Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'A Lecture on Lectures', in *Empson in Granta: The Book, Film and Theatre Reviews of William Empson, Originally Printed in the Cambridge magazine Granta, 1927–1929 and Now Collected For the Foundling Press* (Tunbridge Wells: Foundling Press, 1993), p.46.
102. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.84.
103. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.123.
104. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth*, p.56.
105. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, pp.133–4.
106. Geoffrey Hill, 'Dividing Legacies', in *Collected Critical Writings*, edited by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.373.
107. George Saintsbury in the *TLS* (27 October 1921), p.698.
108. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.62.
109. This is a term Eliot does use elsewhere, for example: *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.123.
110. Eliot's letter in reply to Saintsbury, printed in the *TLS* (3 November 1921), p.716.
111. Saintsbury's reply to Eliot's letter of 3 November 1921, printed in the *TLS* (10 November 1921), p.734.
112. Quoted in Steven Matthews, 'T.S. Eliot's Chapman, "Metaphysical" Poetry and Beyond', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29.4 (Summer 2006), pp.22–43: 26.
113. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.62.
114. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.87–9.
115. Eliot, *The Egoist*, 4.8 (September 1917), pp.118–19: p.118.
116. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp.125–6.
117. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p.125.
118. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1974; first published 1935), p.65.
119. Mario Praz, 'Chaucer and the Great Italian Writers of the Trecento', *The Monthly Criterion*, VI.ii (August 1927), p.131.
120. Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism, Part I', pp.113–14 and 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism, Part II', p.132.
121. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', p.325.

CHAPTER II

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe and Denis Paul, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p.43.
2. I.A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1938), p.60. I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London, 1970; first published 1929), p.317.

3. I.A. Richards, 'Literary Taste' (typescript probably from summer 1926, unpublished), in *I.A. Richards Selected Works, vol.ix, Collected Shorter Writings*, edited by John Constable (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.88–94: 93.
4. Nicholas Dames gives the following useful summary of the role 'protocol' can play within critical vocabulary: it can act as 'a bridge between the vast territory of "reading" and the instantiation provided by examples of past "readings".' Dames, 'On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol' in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, edited by Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp.11–26: 12.
5. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.139.
6. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.60.
7. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.330. W.K. Wimsatt, 'What to say about a poem', from *I.A. Richards: Essays in His Honour*, edited by Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler, John Hollander (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.101–18: 106–7.
8. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.81.
9. In *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards remarks: '[s]tupidity is an unduly harsh name for the misinterpretations and frustrations of expression with which we are concerned here' (p.75).
10. T.S. Eliot, 'Literature, Science, and Dogma', *The Dial*, 82.3 (March 1927), pp.239–42, reprinted in *I.A. Richards Selected Works, vol.x*, p.76. Empson offers his own version of this complaint about Richards ('He likes to pose a small definite problem and then bound high into the air, and from then on you only see him leaping round the horizon.') in his review of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric for The Criterion* (October 1937), also reprinted in *I.A. Richards Selected Works, vol.x*, p.434.
11. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London, 2004; first published, 1930), p.11.
12. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.72.
13. Geoffrey Hartman, 'A Short History of Practical Criticism', *New Literary History*, 10.3 (Spring, 1979), pp.495–509: 506.
14. John Sparrow, 'The New Criticism', *Farrago*, 1.1 (February 1930), reprinted in *I.A. Richards Selected Works, vol.x*, p.115.
15. T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*, 2nd edn (London, 1964; first published 1933), p.123.
16. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.349–51.
17. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.vii. I.A. Richards, 'Retrospect' to the 2nd edition of *Interpretation in Teaching* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.480. I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.27.
18. Letter to Tillyard, quoted in 'Introduction', *I.A. Richards, Selected Works, vol.v, Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition*, edited by John Constable (London: Routledge, 2001), p.xiv.

19. Richards did not cease to experiment. At Harvard (1939–74), he was ‘involved in numerous experimental projects using a range of different media for language teaching, including records, film, and (though he never owned a set himself) television’, projects under the auspices of the non-profit-making Language Research Inc. See Richard Storer, ‘Richards, Ivor Armstrong (1893–1979)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition October 2008): <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31603>, accessed 1 July 2014>.
20. I.A. Richards, *Speculative Instruments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p.71.
21. Stephen Spender, *World Within World: The Autobiography of Stephen Spender* (California: University of California Press, 1966; first published 1951), p.137.
22. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.169.
23. This is the title of Allen Tate’s article in the *New Republic*, 61.785 (18 December 1929), pp.111–13.
24. Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.203.
25. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.vii.
26. John Paul Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.51.
27. Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p.49.
28. This is the title Hartman takes for his contribution to *I.A. Richards: Essays in His Honour*. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, p.79. Richards’s letter to Dorothy Richards, 23 May 1935 (in response to a query about how he would like to feature in the promotional material for her *Climbing Days*), quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Writings, vol.viii, Interpretation in Teaching*, edited by John Constable (London: Routledge, 2001), p.xxi.
29. Richards quoted in Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p.50.
30. Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p.51.
31. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, pp.410–11.
32. E.E. Phare’s annotated copy of *Practical Criticism* makes this attribution, as John Constable notes in his introduction to *I.A. Richards Selected Works, vol.iv, Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Routledge, 2001).
33. David Pinsent, *A Portrait of Wittgenstein As a Young Man: From the Diary of David Hume Pinsent, 1912–14* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Pinsent records ‘rhythm-experiments’ with Wittgenstein on seven occasions between 13 May 1912 and 6 June 1912.
34. Myers’s other anthropological work on the experience of tone includes, ‘Individual Differences in Listening to Music’, *British Journal of Psychology*, 13 (1922), pp.52–71.
35. G.E. Moore’s letter to Friedrich von Hayek, 1953, quoted in Ivar Oxaar, *On the Trail to Wittgenstein’s Hut* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p.158, n.8. Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life: Young Ludwig, 1889–1921, vol.1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.125.

36. Bullough published three articles in the *British Journal of Psychology* on colour perception: in 1907 (II, 2), 1908 (II, 4), 1910 (III, 4).
37. Moore's letter to von Hayek, in Ivar Oxaar, *On the Trail to Wittgenstein's Hut*, p.158, n.8.
38. As Russell records in a letter to Ottoline Morrell of 15 July 1913, quoted in Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life: Young Ludwig 1889–1921*, p.128.
39. Letter from Wittgenstein, 1 July 1912, quoted in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Cape, 1991), pp.49–50.
40. Moore's letter to von Hayek, in Ivar Oxaar, *On the Trail to Wittgenstein's Hut*, p.158, n.8 (my italics).
41. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edn, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), p.197e.
42. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C.K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922), p.77.
43. Letter from Wittgenstein to Russell, 22 June 1912, quoted in McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life: Young Ludwig 1889–1921*, p.128.
44. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, rev. 2nd edn, translated by Peter Winch, edited by G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988; first published 1977), p.88.
45. Richards, *Speculative Instruments*, p.114.
46. Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism*, rev. edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p.287.
47. Part I, *British Journal of Psychology*, 21.4 (April 1931), pp.339–59: 358. Richards was also familiar with some methods with a greater emphasis on judgement, eg Margaret Bulley's *Art and Counterfeit*, which presented pairings of one artwork, one derivative piece of poor quality. 'It might be interesting to try the same thing with poems', Richards remarked of the book to his student, John Blackie, before his lectures in practical criticism; quoted in Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p.749.
48. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, p.306.
49. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.6 (my italics).
50. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.157.
51. See, for example, Allen Tate, 'Poetry in the Laboratory', *The New Republic*, 18 December 1929, p.91.
52. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.88–9.
53. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.83.
54. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.49.
55. John Gould Fletcher, 'Books of the Quarter', *Criterion*, 9.34 (October 1930), p.85.
56. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.18.
57. Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p.271, p.216.
58. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained: an intimate account of the revolution in English studies at Cambridge* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958), p.130.
59. F.R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1932).

60. Quoted by Hugh Carey in *Mansfield Forbes and his Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.62.
61. Empson's response to Sparrow, 'O Miselle Passer!' (May 1930), *Selected Letters of William Empson*, edited by John Haffenden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.129.
62. I.A. Richards, *Selected Writings, vol.iv, Practical Criticism*, p.xxviii.
63. I.A. Richards, *Selected Writings, vol.ix, Collected Shorter Writings*, p.103.
64. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.15.
65. I.A. Richards, 'Gerard Hopkins', *The Dial*, 81.3 (September 1926), pp.195–203.
66. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, preface to the 2nd edn of 1947, p.xi.
67. E.E. Phare, 'Valery and Gerard Hopkins', *Experiment*, no.1 (November 1928), pp.19–23.
68. Empson's letter to Phare, 14 September 1928, *Selected Letters of William Empson*, p.5.
69. William Empson 'The Hammer's Ring', in *I.A. Richards: Essays in His Honor*, edited by Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler and John Hollander (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.73–84: 73.
70. Phare, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Survey and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p.131.
71. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.225.
72. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.224.
73. Letter from Richards to Herbert Read, following Read's review of *Principles of Literary Criticism*; 20 April 1925, in *Selected Letters of I.A. Richards*, edited by John Constable and Richard Luckett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.39–40.
74. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.225.
75. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.vii.
76. I.A. Richards, *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1932), pp.110–11.
77. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.226.
78. Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London, 1958; first published 1951), p.31.
79. Quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Works, vol.v, Mencius on the Mind*, p.xiii.
80. Richards, *Mencius*, p.xii, p.7.
81. Richards, *Mencius*, p.111.
82. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.53.
83. Richards, *Mencius*, p.90.
84. William Empson in the *Criterion*, XVII. 66 (October 1937), reprinted in *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, edited by John Haffenden, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), pp.207–10: 208.
85. Richards, *Mencius*, p.100.
86. Richards, *Mencius*, p.103.
87. Richards, *Mencius*, p.117.
88. Richards, *Mencius*, p.116.

89. Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Dream of Communication', in *I.A. Richards: Essays in His Honour*, p.164.
90. Frank Kermode claims that 'Richards was much more a prophet than a scientist' in, 'Educating the Planet', *Bury Place Papers* (London: London Review of Books, 2009), pp.23–36: 24.
91. Quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Works, vol.v, Mencius on the Mind*, p.vii (my italics).
92. Letter from Empson to John Hayward (7 March 1933), in *Selected Letters of William Empson*, p.57.
93. Quoted in Rodney Koenke, *Empires of the mind: I.A. Richards and Basic English in China, 1929–1979* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.76.
94. Letter from Eliot to Richards (9 August 1930), quoted in *Empires of the Mind*, p.76.
95. Richards, *Mencius*, pp.86–7.
96. Richards's phrase from a letter to John Marshall, Assistant Director of Education at the Rockefeller Centre, detailing plans of his possible work, stamped as received 3 October 1934, quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Works, vol.viii, Interpretation in Teaching*, p.xi.
97. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, p.27.
98. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.479.
99. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.479.
100. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.45.
101. This narrowing in fact dates back to *Practical Criticism*—as John Constable notes, by 1928, Richards's 'Cambridge "Practical Criticism" lectures were now asking students for paraphrase rather than critical judgement, and in the course of discussions with Ogden in the late summer and autumn of 1928 he had even envisaged a book on "paraphrasing" to be written in collaboration'. Quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Works, vol.viii, Interpretation in Teaching*, p.vii.
102. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.37, p.39.
103. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.109, p.110.
104. Noted in W.H.N. Hotopf, *Language, Thought and Comprehension: A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p.5. This is Pamphlet no.26; the reference to Richards comes on p.154.
105. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.5. Richards to Dorothy Richards, 12 October 1942, *Selected Letters of I.A. Richards*, p.11.
106. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.v.
107. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.398.
108. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.397.
109. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.398.
110. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.304, p.315.
111. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.305.

112. Richards's letter (stamped as received 3 October 1934) to John Marshall, Assistant Director of Education at the Rockefeller Centre and one of the commissioning figures for the book, quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Works*, vol.viii, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.xi.
113. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, p.19.
114. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.303.
115. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, pp.94–5.
116. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.264.
117. Richards made this remark in his letter of support for Empson's application for a Professorship at Sheffield, quoted in John Haffenden, *William Empson: Volume II: Against the Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.319.
118. I.A. Richards, *How to Read a Page: A Course in Effective Reading with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1942), p.26.
119. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.300.
120. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.xi.
121. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.111.
122. Discovered in the Skinner papers in the Wren Library, Trinity, and currently being edited for publication by A. Gibson under the working title *Dictating Philosophy*. See Yasemin J. Erden, 'Wittgenstein on Simile as the "Best Thing" in Philosophy', *Philosophical Investigations*, published online: 13 July 2011.
123. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, p.94.
124. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.xi, p.15.
125. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.398.
126. Richards's comment on the protocols (for *Practical Criticism*) in a letter to Eliot, 2 July 1928, quoted in *I.A. Richards, Selected Writings*, vol.x, *I. A. Richards and His Critics*, p.xxxi. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.140.
127. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.8.
128. Richards, *How to Read a Page*, p.18 (my italics).
129. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.138.
130. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.138.
131. See, for example, Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.137, p.138, p.261, p.326, p.363, p.376, p.377.
132. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.413.
133. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.420.
134. Richards, *Selected Letters of I.A. Richards*, p.4.
135. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.72.
136. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p.v.

CHAPTER III

1. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Pimlico, 2004; first published 1930), pp.80–1. Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Armed Vision: a Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism*, rev. edn (New

- York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp.241–3, 241. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81.
2. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.82, p.18.
 3. Frank Kermode, 'Critical List', *NYRB* (13 August 1970).
 4. George Rylands, *Words and Poetry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p.121.
 5. Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725–1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
 6. T.S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *TLS*, 958 (27 May 1920), p.325.
 7. A phrase from Helen Gardner, in a much later skirmish on similar grounds: "'There Is No Penance Due to Innocence": An Exchange', *NYRB* (4 March 1982).
 8. Letter to Pirie, n.d. 1969, in *Selected Letters of William Empson*, edited by John Haffenden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.475.
 9. Charles Rosen, 'Isn't It Romantic?', *NYRB* (14 June 1973); a review of *Coleridge's Verse: A Selection*, edited by William Empson and David Pirie (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).
 10. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, p.253.
 11. William Empson, 'Donne and the Rhetorical Tradition', *The Kenyon Review*, 11. 4 (Autumn 1949), pp.571–87: 574.
 12. For example, Empson includes a substantial quotation from a note to the Arden text of *Macbeth*, verbatim except for one accidental substitution of 'perches' for 'settles': *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81, cf. *The Works of Shakespeare: Macbeth*, edited by Henry Cunningham (London: Arden, 1912), p.78, n.52.
 13. See John Jowett, 'Editing Shakespeare's Plays in the Twentieth Century', *Shakespeare Survey*, 59, edited by Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.1–19: 2.
 14. This claim comes from Ian Parsons, Empson's editor at Chatto and Windus, and is quoted in John Haffenden, *William Empson: Volume II: Against the Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.274.
 15. William Empson, *Milton's God* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1961), p.28.
 16. Empson, *Milton's God*, p.12.
 17. William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, edited by David Pirie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.157.
 18. William Empson, 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (II), *Essays in Criticism*, III.3 (1953), p.357.
 19. Stephen Greenblatt, 'Wild Bill', *LRB*, 16.20 (20 October 1994), pp.31–2.
 20. Empson to David Pirie n.d. 1969, in *Selected Letters of William Empson*, pp.473–6 and p.475.
 21. Empson, 'The narrative poems', in *Essays on Shakespeare*, pp.1–28: 11.
 22. William Empson, *Empson in Granta: The Book, Film and Theatre Reviews of William Empson, Originally Printed in the Cambridge magazine Granta, 1927–1929 and Now Collected For the Foundling Press* (Foundling Press, Tunbridge Wells, 1993), pp.55–6.

23. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.xiv.
24. Humphrey Jennings, Empson's Cambridge contemporary and friend, published an edition of *Venus and Adonis* in 1930. The preface admits a debt to Riding and Graves for its editorial principle of restoring original spelling and punctuation to achieve maximum 'difficulty' (richness) for the reader.
25. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry and A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, edited by Charles Mundye and Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002; first published 1927), p.31, p.30.
26. For example, as Stephen Booth notes in his edition of the Sonnets, Riding and Graves base one re-reading around the detail that 'the Elizabethans had no typographical "v"'; not only an error of fact (no medial 'v' would be correct), but also inconsistent with their reproduction, several lines below, of the 1609 quarto text, which includes the words 'very wo'. Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.450.
27. Booth, Preface to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.
28. W.W. Greg, 'Principles of Emendation in Shakespeare' (London, Humphrey Milford, 1928), p.130.
29. James Thorpe, 'The Aesthetics of Textual Criticism', *PMLA*, 80 (1965), pp.465–82, p.465.
30. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.241.
31. William Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature, vol.1: Donne and the New Philosophy*, edited by John Haffenden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.168.
32. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* p.82. The Arden (I) edition offers 'way' for this line, V.iii.22–3.
33. Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, vol.1, p.169.
34. I am using 'the Arden *Macbeth*' to refer to the 1912 Cunningham edition, known in bibliographic terms as one of the volumes in the series Arden I. The notes to this are by Henry Cunningham but he did not choose the text.
35. Arden (I) *Macbeth*, p.35.
36. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp.49–50.
37. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.50.
38. Elder Olson, 'William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction', *Modern Philology*, 47.4 (May 1950), pp.222–52: 225.
39. William Empson, 'The Verbal Analysis' [1950]; reprinted in *Argufying, Essays on Literature and Culture*, edited by John Haffenden (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1987), p.108.
40. This was a meaning strong in Tudor English but now obsolete. Editorial neglect of this sense is noted by Hilda Hulme, 'Shakespeare and the Oxford English Dictionary: Some Supplementary Glosses', *Review of English Studies* VI. 21 (1955), pp.128–40.
41. Empson's version, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.83. In the Arden, the line reference is V.iii.19–20.
42. Cunningham can, however, only assert this in a note: the Arden text reads, 'This push | Will cheer me ever, or disseat me now'.

43. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.83.
44. William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p.421.
45. Hyman (*The Armed Vision*, p.183) finds a rare consonance here between Empson's preferences and those of W.W. Greg in his 1928 British Academy lecture, 'Principles of Emendation in Shakespeare'.
46. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.83.
47. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, pp.241–2.
48. C.K. Ogden, 'Preface' to Joyce, *Tales of Shem and Shaun: Three Fragments from Work in Progress* (Paris: Black Sun Press, 1929). See Max Eastman's interview with Joyce, 'Poets Talking to Themselves', *Harper's Magazine* 977 (October 1931), pp.563–74; reprinted in *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, vol.2, 1928–41, edited by Robert H. Denning (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul), pp.418–19.
49. 1953 refers to the third edition of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. For a summary of some of the major flaws of Ruhl's polemic, see Fredric T. Dolezal's review, 'How do Words Mean?', *American Speech*, 66.2 (Summer 1991), pp.199–204.
50. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.27, pp.63–4.
51. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.54.
52. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.175, p.159.
53. A phrase of Derek Attridge's in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, edited by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.141. See for example, the following analyses: *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.65, pp.86–8, pp.102–12, p.199.
54. Laura Riding, 'On Ambiguity' [1975], reprinted in Laura (Riding) Jackson and Schuyler B. Jackson, *Rational meaning: a New Foundation for the Definition of Words* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1997), p.510.
55. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.239.
56. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.101.
57. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.192.
58. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81.
59. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81.
60. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81.
61. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.82.
62. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.222.
63. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.81.
64. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.82.
65. Samuel Johnson, *Preface to The Plays of William Shakespeare* [1765], in *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Frank Brady and W. K. Wimsatt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp.299–336: 331.
66. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, p.240. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp.2–3.
67. Empson, 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (II), p.359.
68. 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (I), *Essays in Criticism*, III.3 (1953), pp.357–8: 357.

69. 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (III), *Essays in Criticism*, III.3 (1953), pp.362–3: 362.
70. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*: prefatory note to the third edition.
71. 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (III), p.363.
72. 'Bare Ruined Choirs' (III), p.362.
73. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.viii.
74. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.192.
75. R.P. Blackmur, 'Language as Gesture' [1942], in *Language as Gesture: Essays in Poetry* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1953), pp.17–18.
76. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, pp.17–18.
77. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.90, p.94.
78. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.138.
79. William Empson, 'There Is No Penance Due to Innocence', *NYRB* (3 December 1981).
80. Robert M. Adams, 'Hero of the Word', *NYRB* (11 April 1985).
81. Letter from Edmund Wilson to Louise Bogan (13 April 1938), in Edmund Wilson, *Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912–1972*, edited by Elena Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p.303.
82. William Empson, *Faustus and the Censor: The English Faust Book and Marlowe's 'Dr. Faustus'*, edited by John Henry Jones (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.43.
83. Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, vol.1, p.145.
84. Sophie Read, 'Rhetoric and Rethinking in Bentley's *Paradise Lost*', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.2 (2012), pp.209–28: 227.
85. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.138.
86. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1974; first published 1935), pp.157–8.
87. P.M. Spacks, 'Logic and Language in Through the Looking-Glass', in *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as seen through the Critics' Looking-glasses, 1865–1971*, edited by R. Phillips (New York: Vanguard, 1971), pp.267–78.
88. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.160.
89. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.156.
90. Quoted by Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.154.
91. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.154.
92. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.154.
93. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, prefatory note to the second edition of 1947.
94. Samuel Johnson, *Preface to The Plays of William Shakespeare* [1765], in *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*, p.329.
95. This last phrase is from Henry James, in description of George Bernard Shaw, and is quoted in John Gross, 'Empson: Argufying Against Muffling', *NYRB* (25 October 2007).
96. Frank Kermode, 'On a Chinese Mountain', *LRB*, 8.20 (20 November 1986), pp.8–10.
97. Empson, *Essays in Renaissance Literature*, vol.1, p.199.

98. On 'whether to read grow or groan in 'Twicknam Garden', see Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, vol.1, p.165.
99. William Empson, 'Hunt the Symbol', in *Essays on Shakespeare*, edited by David B. Pirie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.236.
100. Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, p.236.
101. William Empson, "'There Is No Penance Due to Innocence": An Exchange', *NYRB* (4 March 1982).
102. Helen Gardner, "'There Is No Penance Due to Innocence": An Exchange'.
103. Jim McCue, 'William Empson and the Wykehamist Dilemma', *Literary Imagination*, 12.1 (2010), pp.30–44: 30.
104. William Empson, *The Complete Poems*, edited by John Haffenden (London: Penguin, 2001), pp.40–1: 41.
105. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.x.
106. Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, vol.1, p.145, p.134.
107. Quoted in McCue, 'William Empson and the Wykehamist Dilemma', p.38.
108. Greenblatt, 'Wild Bill', pp.31–2.
109. Mark Thompson, 'Versions of Pluralism: William Empson, Isaiah Berlin, and the Cold War', *Literary Imagination*, 8.1. (Winter 2006), pp.65–87: 66.
110. Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus from the Quarto of 1604* in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 2nd edn, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.164.

CHAPTER IV

1. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Pimlico, 2004; first published 1930), p.26.
2. Kenneth Burke, 'Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats', *A Grammar of Motives*, 2nd edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp.447–64: 447.
3. J.H. Prynne, 'Tintern Abbey, Once Again', *Glossator* 1 (Fall 2009), pp.81–8: 83.
4. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.215.
5. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, 2nd edn (London; Dobson, 1949), p.181.
6. This was Frank Ramsey's quip about the end of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in which Wittgenstein presents propositions yet concludes that they are technically nonsense. See 'General Propositions and Causality', in *F.P. Ramsey: The Foundations of Mathematics*, edited by R.B. Braithwaite (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931), p.238.
7. Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, 2nd edn, pp.196–7.
8. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1943), p.286. See also Kasia Boddy, 'How to

- Write Short Stories', in *The American Short Story Since 1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.19–36.
9. The word 'paraphrase' appears only once in the book, in the introduction to the chapter on 'theme' (another term the authors handle with care) but the concerns are comparable. Writers such as Flannery O'Connor—who gave her own version of the heresy of paraphrase argument in essays and lectures on the short story's principles of economy—brought these critical tenets into the practice of composition.
 10. T.S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry' [1942], in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp.107–14: 110–11.
 11. Steven Winspur, 'A Poem's Know-How (André Frenaud)', in *Understanding French Poetry: Essays for a New Millennium*, 2nd rev. edn, edited by Stamos Metzidakis (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 2001; first published 1994), pp.249–58: 258. Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.223. Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.163.
 12. The phrase (although not the reference, which is originally to Empson's manner in *Milton's God*) is from Angela Leighton, 'About About: On Poetry and Paraphrase', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 33.1 (September 2009), pp.167–76: 168.
 13. William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p.361.
 14. John Carey, *Wording and Rewording: Paraphrase in Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.5.
 15. Christopher Norris, 'Reason, Rhetoric, Theory: Empson and De Man', in *The British Critical Tradition: A Re-Evaluation*, edited by Gary Day (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p.154. Terry Eagleton, 'The Critic as Clown', in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975–1985* (London: Verso, 1986), p.151.
 16. Paul de Man, 'Foreword' to Carol Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony: The Image of Interpretation in Nietzsche, Rilke, Artaud, and Benjamin* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp.ix–x.
 17. John Crowe Ransom, 'Mr. Empson's Muddles', *The Southern Review*, 4 (1938–9), pp.322–39: 332–3.
 18. John Crowe Ransom, 'Criticism Inc', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XII (Autumn 1937), pp.586–602: 598.
 19. Dryden, *Essays of John Dryden*, I, edited by W.P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p.237.
 20. Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Reading* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920), p.170.
 21. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.215.
 22. E.E. Phare, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Survey and Commentary* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1933), p.94.
 23. T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p.24.

24. For example, Peter Lamarque, 'The Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning', *Ratio*, 22.4 (December 2009), pp.398–420.
25. Ernie Lepore, 'The Heresy of Paraphrase: When the Medium Really Is the Message', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, 33.1 (September 2009), pp.177–97.
26. Ransom, 'Criticism Inc', p.598.
27. Logan Pearsall Smith, 'Fine Writing', in *Reperusals and Re-collections* (London: Constable, 1936), p.329.
28. I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929), p.63. As John Holloway argues, the attack on paraphrase requires critics to write 'as if prose never had a texture, was never itself literature, was essentially bare science'. *The Charted Mirror: Literary and Critical Essays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.184.
29. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.205.
30. Peter Lamarque, 'Imitating Style', in *Work & Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.139–52: 144–5. Peter Lamarque, 'Style and Thought', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 21.1 (April 1992), pp.45–54: 49.
31. See Christopher Ricks, 'William Empson: The images and the story', in *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.179–243.
32. For this common trope see, for example, Linda Hutcheon, *A theory of parody: the teachings of twentieth-century art forms* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p.3, p.49.
33. Mark Thompson, 'Versions of Pluralism: William Empson, Isaiah Berlin, and the Cold War', *Literary Imagination*, 8.1. (Winter 2006), pp.65–87: 72.
34. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 2nd edn (New York: New Directions, 1974), p.14.
35. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.14.
36. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.263.
37. J.L. Austin, 'Agathon and eudaimonia in the Ethics of Aristotle', in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). See also Martha Nussbaum's discussion 'Who Is the Happy Warrior? Philosophy Poses Questions to Psychology', in *Law and Happiness*, edited by Eric A. Posner and Cass R. Sunstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp.81–104: 88–9.
38. See, for example, Margreta De Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
39. Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, pp.94–5.
40. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.280.
41. Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony*, p.26.
42. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, pp.208–9. Roy Campbell's better-known 'The Albatross' is a translation of Baudelaire's L'Albatros but the reference here is to another poem of the same title from *Adamastor: Poems by Roy Campbell*, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp.49–53. The quatrain that Empson paraphrases after slightly misquoting (perhaps with

- an infusion from his discussion of Marvell's versions of pastoral, Empson has 'mowed' for 'razed') is from p.50 of this edition.
43. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.114.
 44. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, preface to the 2nd edition, p.viii.
 45. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.222.
 46. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.66.
 47. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.119.
 48. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.252.
 49. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.201.
 50. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.76.
 51. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.134.
 52. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.26.
 53. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.192.
 54. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.225.
 55. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.1.
 56. William Empson, 'Basic English and Wordsworth', reprinted in *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, edited by John Haffenden (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), pp.232–8.
 57. Empson, 'Basic English and Wordsworth', p.235.
 58. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp.133–8.
 59. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.132.
 60. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.100.
 61. Leighton, 'About About', p.172.
 62. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.92.
 63. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.89.
 64. Quoted in Hilton Landry, *Interpretations in Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p.13.
 65. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.89.
 66. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.100.
 67. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.79.
 68. For T.S. Eliot's meditations on this line, see Chapter I of this book.
 69. On free indirect speech, see, for example, Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) and Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and The Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1993).
 70. D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p.58.
 71. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.136.
 72. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, p.112.
 73. Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1938), p.45.
 74. See, for example, David Trotter, 'e-Modernism: telephony in British fiction 1925–1940', *Critical Quarterly*, 51.1 (April 2009): pp.1–32.
 75. Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, pp.21–2.

76. William Empson, *The Complete Poems*, edited by John Haffenden (London: Penguin, 2001), p.85.
77. Barbara Everett, 'The New Style of *Sweeney Agonistes*', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 14 (1984) pp.243–63: 255.
78. As Everett records, Virginia Woolf described Lardner's writing as 'the best prose that has come our way' in her essay, 'American Fiction', in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 2 (1 August 1925), p.1.
79. T.S. Eliot, 'American Prose', *TLS* 1283 (2 September 1926), p.577.
80. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.279.
81. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp.149–51.
82. George Watson, *Never Ones for Theory: England and the War of Ideas* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2000), p.61.
83. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp.176–7.
84. This was Empson's phrase in reviewing Huxley for the *Granta*. *Empson in Granta: The Book, Film and Theatre Reviews of William Empson, Originally Printed in the Cambridge magazine Granta, 1927–1929 and Now Collected For the Foundling Press* (Tunbridge Wells: Foundling Press, 1993), p.27.
85. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.28.
86. J.G. Riewald, 'Parody as Criticism', *Neophilologus* 50.1 (January 1966), pp.125–48: 131.
87. Watson, *Never Ones for Theory*, p.63.
88. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p.249.
89. Stephen Booth, *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p.154.
90. To paraphrase David Antin, 'From the modernism you choose you get the postmodernism you deserve.' Quoted by Thom Gunn, 'The Postmodernism You Deserve', *The Threepenny Review*, 57 (Spring 1994), pp.6–8: 8.
91. Angela Leighton, 'About About', p.168: 'to paraphrase a poem is to risk or relish parody'.
92. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p.184.
93. Graham Hough, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London: Duckworth, 1960), p.28.

CHAPTER V

1. Wallace Stevens's letter to Henry Church, 19 July 1945, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, edited by Holly Stevens (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p.509.
2. R.P. Blackmur used this phrase in the title of a later set of lectures, *Anni Mirabiles, 1921–1925: Reason in the Madness of Letters, Four Lectures Presented Under the Auspices of the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1956).
3. R.P. Blackmur, 'Nine Poets: 1939', *The Partisan Review*, 6.2 (Winter 1939), pp.108–14; reprinted in *The Expense of Greatness* (New York: Arrow Editions, 1940), pp.225–6.

4. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.17.
5. These three short phrases are from: Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p.176; A.R. Humphreys, reviewing *The Lion and the Honeycomb* for the *Review of English Studies*, IX.36 (1958), pp.446–8; Hugh Kenner, 'Inside the Featherbed', *Poetry: a magazine of verse*, 83.4 (January 1954), pp.238–44: 239.
6. R.P. Blackmur was one of the editors of the magazine until the third number (October–December 1929). *Hound & Horn* continued publication until May 1934. R.W.B. Lewis, 'Trials of the Word', *The New Republic*, 132.18 (5 February 1955), pp.19–21, reviewing *The Lion and the Honeycomb*. Herbert Read, 'The Poet in the Dock', *The New Republic*, 127.21 (24 November 1952), pp.18–19, reviewing *Language as Gesture*.
7. Kenner, 'Inside the Featherbed', p.244.
8. The tributes are from Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p.247, and Stanley Edgar Hyman, 'R.P. Blackmur and the Expense of Criticism', in *The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism*, rev. edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp.197–236: 240.
9. The *OED* defines 'circumbendibus' as, 'A humorous formation' meaning 'A roundabout process or method; a twist, turn; circumlocution'.
10. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, p.297.
11. Ezra Pound, 'Imagisme' [1913] and *Preface to Some Imagist Poets* [1915], both included in *Imagist Poetry*, edited by Peter Jones (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p.129, p.135.
12. Ezra Pound, 'Prefatio Aut Camicium Tumulus' [1933], included in *Selected Prose, 1090–1965*, edited by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.366.
13. Pound's letter to James Laughlin, 29 January 1934, in *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, edited by David Gordon (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1994), p.19. Twenty-four seems to have been something of a magic number for Blackmur's critics; from the opposite perspective, Hugh Kenner describes his essay on Cummings as 'twenty-four pages of scrupulous sentences in which we never lose confidence'; 'Inside the Featherbed', p.239.
14. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p.159.
15. Ezra Pound's letter to Harriet Monroe, October 1912, accompanying the poem inscribed 'H.D. Imagiste'; quoted in *The Pound Era*, p.174.
16. William Empson, 'Still the Strange Necessity' [1955], reprinted in *Argufying, Essays on Literature and Culture*, edited by John Haffenden, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), pp.126–7.
17. R.P. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture: Essays in Poetry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), p.125.
18. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.230.
19. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.241.

20. Yvor Winters, *The Function of Criticism: Problems and Exercises* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1957), p.17.
21. Harry Levin, 'If We Had Some Eggs', *The New Republic*, 103.27 (30 December 1940), pp.905–6.
22. John Wain, *Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p.147.
23. René Wellek, 'R.P. Blackmur Re-Examined', *The Southern Review*, VII.3 (Summer 1971), pp.825–45: 839.
24. Wain, *Essays on Literature and Ideas*, p.148.
25. Levin, 'If We Had Some Eggs', pp.905–6.
26. Wallace Stevens's letter to José Roderíguez Feo (26 January 1945), in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, p.484.
27. Edmund Wilson's letter to Blackmur (25 April 1930), in *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912–1972*, edited by Elena Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).
28. R.W.B. Lewis, 'Homages to Blackmur', *The Legacy of R.P. Blackmur: Essays, Memoirs, Texts*, edited by Edward T. Cone and Joseph Frank (New York: Ecco Press, 1987), pp.44–61.
29. E.D.H. Johnson, 'Seminars under R.P. Blackmur', *The Legacy of R.P. Blackmur*, pp.152–5: 155.
30. Johnson, 'Seminars under R.P. Blackmur', p.155.
31. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.249.
32. This phrase shadows Blackmur's sentence about Yeats: 'We are all, without conscience, magicians in the dark'; see Wain, *Essays on Literature and Ideas*, p.155.
33. This is the title of the third of the lectures composing *Anni Mirabiles, 1921–1925*, pp.26–40.
34. R.P. Blackmur, *Studies in Henry James* (New York: New Directions, 1983), p.16.
35. Denis Donoghue, 'Blackmur on Henry James', *The Legacy of R.P. Blackmur*, pp.21–43: 23.
36. R.P. Blackmur, 'Introduction', in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp.vii–xxxix: xxviii.
37. Blackmur, 'Introduction', in *The Art of the Novel*, p.xvi.
38. Henry James, 'Preface to *The Tragic Muse*', reprinted in *The Art of the Novel*, p.87. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.291.
39. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.280.
40. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.274.
41. F.R. Leavis, 'William Empson: Intelligence and sensibility', reprinted in *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, edited by G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.26–8: 28.
42. For Blackmur, this was at a slightly further remove from the university context; he was not, unlike the majority of his circle of friends and collaborators, enrolled at Harvard.

43. William Empson and Jacob Bronowski, 'Editorial', *Experiment*, no.1 (November 1928), p.1.
44. 'Announcement', *Hound & Horn: A Harvard Miscellany* 1.1. (September 1927), p.5. By the third issue, 1.3 (Spring 1928), W. Heffers, Cambridge, U.K., was listed as a stockist. Santayana and Peirce were Harvard philosophers; Russell was a visiting professor at Harvard in 1914. T.S. Eliot, 'Second Thoughts About Humanism', 2.4 (July–September, 1929), pp.339–50; reprinted in Eliot, *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932).
45. Philip Wheelwright, in particular, might be characterized as a reduced version of Blackmur.
46. Editorial Comment, *Hound & Horn*, 1.3 (Spring 1928), p.186 and 1.4 (Summer 1928), p.289.
47. Lincoln Kerstein in *Hound & Horn*, 1.2 (December 1927), pp.103–6, and T.S. Eliot, 'Fragment of an Agon', in the *Criterion*, 4 (January 1927), pp.74–80.
48. R.P. Blackmur, 'T.S. Eliot', in *Outsider at the Heart of Things: essays By Richard P. Blackmur*, edited by James T. Jones (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p.71.
49. Blackmur, 'The Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy' [1940], in *Language as Gesture*, pp.51–79: 79 and 52, and 'Notes on E.E. Cummings' Language', pp.317–40: 324.
50. T.S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.164.
51. Blackmur, 'A Critic's Job of Work' [1935], in *Language as Gesture*, p.373.
52. W.H. Auden, 'A Review of *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, by Elsie Elizabeth Phare' [1934], in *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Prose*, vol.1, edited by Edward Mendelson (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), p.67.
53. T.S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, edited by Ronald Schuchard (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p.251.
54. T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction' to G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co, 1949), p.xiii.
55. R.P. Blackmur, 'A Portrait of Cowper', *The New Republic* (10 September 1930), pp.105–6.
56. T.S. Eliot in *Josiah Royce's Seminar, 1913–1914: as recorded in the notebooks of Harry T. Costello*, edited by Grover Smith (New Brunswick, 1963), p.119. Eliot's words are not verbatim but as summarized by the seminar's recording secretary, H.T. Costello. Comparison with the surviving drafts and notes suggests Costello's summaries present a compact but accurate record.
57. Quoted in Manju Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.23.
58. Eliot's paper is summarized in *Josiah Royce's Seminar*, p.121.
59. T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920), p.88.
60. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience*, pp.163–4.
61. Eliot, *Knowledge & Experience*, p.19 (my italics).

62. T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' [1921], in *Selected Essays, 1917–1932*, 3rd edn (London, 1951; first published 1932), p.283.
63. Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', in *The Sacred Wood*, p.10.
64. Edmund Wilson's letter to Blackmur, in *Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912–1972*, edited by Elena Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p.170.
65. Wilson to Blackmur, *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912–1972*, p.171.
66. Wellek, 'R.P. Blackmur Re-Examined', p.825.
67. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.260.
68. Wellek, 'R.P. Blackmur Re-Examined', p.841.
69. Lewis, 'Homages to Blackmur', p.51.
70. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.279.
71. Blackmur, 'Masks of Ezra Pound' [1934], *Language as Gesture*, p.143.
72. RPB's 'Nine Poets: 1939', pp.225–6.
73. Blackmur quoted in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol.7, *Modernism and the New Criticism*, edited by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.236.
74. Blackmur, *Anni Mirabiles*, p.28.
75. R.P. Blackmur, 'The Lion and the Honeycomb' [1950], in *The Lion and the Honeycomb: Essays in Solicitude and Critique* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), pp.176–97: 179–80.
76. Blackmur, 'T.S. Eliot', in *Outsider at the Heart of Things*, p.71.
77. Blackmur, *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, p.208.
78. Blackmur, *Anni Mirabiles*, p.41.
79. R.P. Blackmur, *New Criticism in the United States* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1959), pp.1–16, pp.10–11.
80. W.T. Scott's review of *Language as Gesture*, in *Saturday Review*, 21 March 1953.
81. Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909–1965*, edited by William Cookson (London, Faber and Faber, 1973), p.291.
82. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, p.206.
83. R.P. Blackmur, *The Expense of Greatness* (New York: Arrow Editions, 1940), pp.225–6.
84. Blackmur, *The Expense of Greatness*, p.226.
85. Robert Graves, correspondence in the *Monthly Criterion*, VI.iv (Oct. 1927), p.357.
86. Blackmur, *The Expense of Greatness*, p.226.
87. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.39.
88. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.310.
89. The term 'autoanalytic' comes from Nicholas Dames, 'On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol', in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*, edited by Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp.11–26.
90. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.314.
91. Blackmur, 'New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text of Hart Crane', in *Language as Gesture*, p.315.

92. Blackmur, 'New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text of Hart Crane', pp.301–16.
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99. Blackmur, 'T.S. Eliot', in *Outsider at the Heart of Things*, p.51.
100. Blackmur, 'T.S. Eliot', in *Outsider at the Heart of Things*, p.69.
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102. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.322.
103. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.324.
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108. This phrase comes in Blackmur's discussion of Hart Crane in *Language as Gesture*, p.314.
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118. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.42.
119. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.243.
120. Kenneth Burke, 'Notes on a Hypothetical Blackmur Anthology', *The Legacy of R.P. Blackmur*, p.5.
121. Blackmur, quoted in James T. Jones, *Wayward Skeptic: The Theories of R.P. Blackmur* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p.48.
122. This phrase is taken from Milton by way of Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p.101.
123. Blackmur, 'New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text of Hart Crane', p.316.
124. Blackmur, 'A Critic's Job of Work' [1935], in *Language as Gesture*, p.378.
125. Henry James, 'Preface to *The Tragic Muse*', in *The Art of the Novel*, p.87.
126. Russell Fraser, 'R.P. Blackmur: America's Best Critic', *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 57 (Autumn 1981), pp.569–93.
127. The error is noted in Russell Fraser, 'R.P. Blackmur: America's Best Critic', pp.569–93.
128. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.415.
129. Michael Wood, 'R.P. Blackmur', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol.7, pp.235–47: 241.
130. Blackmur, 'My Critical Perspective', in *New Criticism in the United States*, pp.17–48: 18–19.
131. R.P. Blackmur, *Hound & Horn*, 1.2 (December 1927), p.173.
132. Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, p.145.

CHAPTER VI

1. Marianne Moore's letter to Bryher, 13 December 1920, in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, edited by Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller (London: Faber, 1998), pp.137–8.
2. Moore, 'Anna Pavolva', in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, edited by Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.390.
3. Emily Dickinson's letter to T.W. Higginson, July 1862, in *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.176. This is a phrase Moore quotes in one of her essays; see *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.292.
4. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.388.
5. Ezra Pound, 'Others', *The Little Review*, 4 (March 1918), pp.56–8.
6. Marianne Moore, 'Tell me, Tell me', in *Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p.231. Moore's letter to Auden, 12 October 1944, in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.450.
7. This phrase comes from Moore's piece, 'My Crow, Pluto—A Fantasy', which embeds verse in prose to test their respective potencies: 'It occurred to me one day to try a two-syllable-line, two-line-stanza piece about a crow—My crow / Pluto // the true / Plato // adagio—but I am changing to prose as less restrictive than verse.' *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.556. See

- also Moore, 'To Victor Hugo Of My Crow Pluto', *Complete Poems*, pp.224–6.
8. These phrases come from *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.435, p.243, p.408, p.137.
 9. Moore's letter to Auden, 12 October 1944 in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.450.
 10. See Linda Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), pp.294–7: 'the novel lays bare Moore's idiosyncrasies. The reader winces in embarrassment—and yearns for the emotional honesty of her poems'.
 11. See Fiona Green, 'Marianne Moore and the Hidden Persuaders', in *Writing for 'The New Yorker': critical essays on an American periodical*, edited by Fiona Green (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2015).
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 14. Moore, 'To a Snail', in *Complete Poems*, p.85.
 15. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.365.
 16. Quoted by Seamus Heaney in 'Sounding Auden', *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971–2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).
 17. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.327.
 18. Laurence Stapleton notes this in *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.53.
 19. Moore, 'The Fox and the Turkeys', translation from La Fontaine, in *A Marianne Moore Reader* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p.119.
 20. Elizabeth Bishop, 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, edited by Lloyd Schwartz (London: Chatto & Windus), pp.117–40: 128.
 21. Pearl Andelson, quoted in Harriet Monroe, 'A Symposium on Marianne Moore', *Poetry*, 19.4 (January 1922), pp.208–15: 210.
 22. Quoted in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, vol.5: Poetry and Criticism, 1900–1950*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.553. Bernard Engel, quoted in Taffy Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.33.
 23. Engel, quoted in Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist*, p.33.
 24. Marilyn Krysl, review of *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, *The Iowa Review*, 17.3 (Fall 1987), pp.168–77: 168.
 25. Stapleton, *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance*, p.67.
 26. Moore, 'Those Various Scalpels', in *Complete Poems*, pp.51–2.
 27. Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist*, p.30.

28. Joseph Parisi, ‘“Determination with Resistance”: On the Prose of Marianne Moore’, in *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), pp.125–66: 125.
29. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.182.
30. Bishop, ‘Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore’, in *The Complete Poems: 1927–1979* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), pp.82–3.
31. Moore, ‘Poetry as Expression’, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.657.
32. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.401.
33. Moore, letter to Bishop, 14 March 1936, in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.362.
34. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.62.
35. Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, rev. edn, edited by Milton J. Bates (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.191.
36. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.396.
37. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.151.
38. Moore’s letter to Auden, 12 October 1944, in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.450. The phrase comes from Moore’s mother, who used it, Moore reports, in praise of Auden’s book. *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.77.
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45. Moore’s letter to T.S. Eliot, 23 October 1934, in *Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.330.
46. This is the title of Chapter 7 in George Saintsbury’s *The History of English Prose Rhythm* (London: Macmillan, 1912).
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48. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.48.
49. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.657.
50. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.291.
51. Randall Jarrell, ‘Thoughts about Marianne Moore’, *Partisan Review*, 19 (November–December 1952), pp.687–700: 691.

52. Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, p.129. Line from Bishop's 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore'.
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58. Davie, *Articulate Energy*, p.10.
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61. On Moore's 'noun kernels', see Kenneth Burke, 'Likings of an Observation-ist', *Poetry*, 87.4 (January 1956), pp.239–47: 241. See also Marie Borroff's studies in Moore's 'extended complex noun phrases' in *Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp.80–135.
62. Daniel Tiffany, *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.227.
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65. Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1974; first published 1916), p.89.
66. Davie, *Articulate Energy*, p.40; T.E. Hulme, *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, edited by Karen Csegeneri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.171.
67. Hulme, *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, p.172.
68. Davie, *Articulate Energy*, p.9.
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91. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.553.
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98. Burke, 'Likings of an Observationist', p.241.
99. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.408.
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 131. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, pp.427–30.
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 135. The link has been made by a number of critics; see, for example, Robin Schulze in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, edited by Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p.122.
 136. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.125.
 137. See also Moore's letter to H.D. and Bryher, 10 November 1921, in *Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.184.
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 141. Schulze, *Web of Friendship*, p.28.
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 149. Marianne Moore's notes for Cassius Clay, *I am the Greatest!* (New York: Columbia Records, 1963).
 150. Quoted in Schulze, *Web of Friendship*, p.71.
 151. Quoted in Schulze, *Web of Friendship*, p.91.
 152. See Dickie and Travisano, *Gendered Modernisms*, p.133.
 153. Quoted in Schulze, *Web of Friendship*, p.128.
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 155. See Wallace Stevens's letter to T.C. Wilson, 25 March 1935, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, p.279, p.281, p.282. On Stevens and aphorism see Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens* (London: Faber, 1989; first published 1960), pp.73–86.
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165. Moore's letter to T.S. Eliot, 23 October 1934, in *Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, p.329.
166. Moore, 'Archaically New' [1935], in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, pp.327–9: 328.
167. Kirstin Hotelling Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p.51. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.329.
168. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.408.
169. Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, p.125.
170. Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, p.337.
171. Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, p.130.
172. Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: Prose*, p.130.
173. See Elizabeth Bishop's letter to Moore, 23 October 1941, in *One Art: Letters*, edited by Robert Giroux (London: Pimlico, 1996), p.104.
174. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.328.
175. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, p.504.
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CONCLUSION

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4. I.A. Richards, 'The Secret of "Feedforward"', *Saturday Review* (3 February 1968), pp.14–17; reprinted in *Complementarities: Uncollected Essays*, edited by John Paul Russo (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977), pp.246–53: 247.
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6. T.S. Eliot, 'Dryden the Dramatist' [1931], reprinted in *John Dryden: the poet, the dramatist, the critic* (New York: T. & E. Holliday, 1932), pp.29–31.
7. Richards, 'The Secret of "Feedforward"', in *Complementarities*, p.250 and p.247 respectively.
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10. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.168.
11. Richards, 'The Secret of "Feedforward"', in *Complementarities*, p.249.
12. For John Wain on this, see *Professing Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.289.
13. T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.81.
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19. Elisabeth Joyce discusses Moore's method in 'Anthology of Words: Marianne Moore's Collage', *Cultural Critique and Abstraction: Marianne Moore and the Avant-Garde* (Associated University Presses, Cranbury, New Jersey, 1998), p.71.
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28. Empson, *Argufying*, p.71.
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30. John Crowe Ransom, 'Mr. Empson's Muddles', *The Southern Review*, 4 (1938–1939), pp.322–39: 324.
31. John Hayward, 'Teasing Tricks—and True Poetry', *Sunday Times*, 16 October 1955, p.4.
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33. Empson's preamble to a recording of 'This Last Pain' from the British Library Sound Archives (my transcription).
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