

words and picturables

image and perlocution in English verse

Ezra Pound famously demanded that the image in poetry constitute *an instantaneous emotional and intellectual complex*: the phrase is difficult to improvingly gloss, and I assume a reader whom it does not overly trouble. I shall not trouble myself, either, to rehearse the assertion of *modernisme* compressed there; and readers who sufficiently possess the past of English poetry will easily recall whom the demand targets. The literary past is possessed through a canon of course; and I assume that the modernist canon has been substantially determined. The formation of a canon is a political process of sorts, no doubt, however remotely. But the juridical questions that circumstance raises need not detain us; unless we suppose that the purpose of a poetic canon is to represent: rather than to filter, say, and so make of an unwieldy past a serviceable history.¹ A word, finally, regarding what is to count as a verbal image. Any sequence of words that invites the reader to picture something or other will be regarded as one; and no further definition or criterion will be essayed. But I shall assume that I am addressing readers who will readily identify sequences of words as such; and I shall suppose that there will be considerable agreement between such readers over any putative image.²

Now whatever emotional and intellectual complexes may be, Pound cannot have intended that the verbal image merely call up a picture: a poem should do more, surely, than exercise our imaginal powers in elementary ways. The singular 'things' that the Imagists were enjoined to 'directly treat' may have particularly manifested themselves to the eye; but the direct treatment recommended cannot have been the detailing, merely, of such *epiphainomena*. The reader might object now that no verbal detailing is ever *merely* that. Our capacity for projection can certainly endow with some 'voice' or other even the plainest declarative statement; and is more than apt to do so in the sparse informational environment of a poem. To convict a verbal image of merely detailing its referents we shall have to argue,

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hans varghese mathews

1. The summary pragmatism that demands a *serviceable* history will no doubt offend; and its crudity is excused only by the surplus of verse circulating: but for which the canon would be implicit in how poets themselves invoke their predecessors.

2. I use the word "image" more literally than some writers on these matters do: for whom an image is a collocation of words that *anyhow* enlists our sensory powers. It might be prudent to emphasize that the word "image" here always names some *sequence of words*: which may or may not, in their containing context, *together constitute* the sort of 'complex' Pound demands.

Any definition of verbal images that is at all close, or any substantive criteria for such, could almost certainly be trumped by examples: as readily as any definition or criterion for jokes would be. But the analogy illustrates why the lack of definition or criteria does not outface the fact of the verbal image.

then, that whatever more the words might do is of no account: that the *perlocution* they exhibit, considered formally, is superfluous. I should now register my entirely *utilitarian* understanding of the storied word “form”. I take a poem to mean just what it says; but to *do* a great deal *by* so saying; and to consider a poem formally is to consider just how it might do what it specially does: neither more nor less.³

Considered in the large, the means of poetry are diction and syntax and rhythm. Samples of poetry may be reliably distinguished from samples of prose by attending to how these means are coordinated when these literary modes are read against each other; and everything a poem does can be considered as doings with or through these formal *genera*. But the image is not formally comprehended thus: what a poem does through a verbal image cannot be resolved into doings through the lexical means, let us call them, of diction and syntax and rhythm. The reader might wonder why so obvious a circumstance should be noted even: a verbal image makes a picture for us after all, he might say, and such picturing is evidently not a lexical doing. Now I shall maintain, against such robust common sense, that the pictorial content of a *successful* verbal image is, in fact, very much conditioned by its diction and syntax and rhythm: that a working image makes us picture as we do *is* a lexical doing. But the proper formal work of the image *is not*, all the same, to make us picture anything: what a poem specially does or gets done with or through an image is not, I shall maintain, any sort of picturing at all.⁴ The peculiarly mediate role that picturing plays in the work they do is, in fact, what makes verbal images the potent formal means they are for poetry: or so I shall claim, and in what follows I shall try to make good that claim.⁵

I shall proceed through examples; and I begin with the celebrated *Oread*, by the poet who announced herself as *H.D. Imagiste*, and who was later famous as *H.D.* simply. The poem is reproduced across.⁶ What *Oread* specially does is telegraph a singular desire: whose contour can be traced in the semantic modulation of what grammarians call the imperative mood. I shall

3. Since a poem does what it does *by* saying what it says, one has neither ‘form’ nor ‘content’ without the other: to that extent form here is an ‘organic’ affair.

Perlocution here is not quite what analytic philosophers like John Searle anatomize; the perlocution that matters in a poem is what words do *to or with each other* there. Consider, for a striking example, how “thing” stands to “beauty” in

*Whereon I wrote and wrought
And now, being gray,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
The coming time will say
He shadowed in a glass
What thing her beauty was :*

from Yeats’s *A Woman Homer Sung*.

4. The transcription of *visibilia* from world to mind, however vividly effected, was not for Pound the special virtue of the verbal image. His *luminous detail* is not prized for illuminating itself: and “amygisme” seems to have been his epithet for images that *terminate* in picturing.

5. The formally mediate character of picturing is implicit in all the demands Pound makes. That picturing is so mediate there seems to distinguish the Poundian image from the *objective correlative* Eliot sought: which may well *terminate* in a picture that summons its correlated ‘subjective’. The sensuous apprehension of thought was Eliot’s formula for poetry. But that *sensuous apprehension is poetic thought* seems to be Pound’s axiom. The sensuous apprehension of *natural order* seems to be what his mature *poiesis* aims at; and such order is *not* picturable.

6. *Whirl up, sea —
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks
Hurl your green over us
Cover us with your pools of fir.*

attempt to to elicit the quality of that desire by tracing this modulation: whose semantic character may be exhibited by schematizing the poem's sentences as I have done below. The circles in first two lines mark a syntactic position which the later sentences fill with their indirect objects. Whether taking these initial imperatives so is appropriate or not is a question I must deflect for the moment; and I ask the reader to indulge me first.

whirl up : sea : •
 whirl : your pointed pines : •
 splash : your great pines : on our rocks
 hurl : your green : over us
 cover with : your pools of fir : us

Diagrammed so, that the break in line 3 does a deal of work is evident: and that the indirect object thus isolated names a natural thing, while the succeeding syntactic objects name the human, is a matter of considerable formal consequence. Coupled with the absence of an indirect object for the preceding imperative, the lineal isolation of these **our rocks** serves to *subject* the human referent of the succeeding **us**, already intimated by **our**, to the natural agent of **hurl** in some oblique way. The **us** succeeding this last is the direct object of the verb of the next and final line; and the *semantic migration* of the preposition from indirect object to principal verb, through the last three lines, lets this **us** become a direct object one might say.⁷ The subtle delay induced thereby assists the *curtailing of force* that **cover|with** effects, coming after **splash|on** and **hurl|over** as it does: which so modulates the prior subjecting of the human to the natural as to render **cover** as much invitation as invocation now.⁸

I trust I have excused my diagramming of the first two sentences. We must next consider how the verbal image inflects the process of semantic modulation, which has only been posted above; and point somehow at the formal work done by the sequence

pointed pines great pines green
 pools of fir

7. The syntactic movement of the preposition from indirect object to principal verb — from **on|our rocks** and **over|us** to **us cover|with** — is a semantic migration as well on account of the curiously *apotropaic* character **over** acquires here, interposed as it is after **hurl** between **on** and **with**.

In what follows I trust that typography and context will indicate, as I hope they have above, when a word is being *mentioned*, only, rather than *used*.

8. A primary determinant of this curtailing of force is an increase in *the duration intrinsic to action* through the progression **splash hurl cover**. Of course, such increase is as much a matter of word as of world: which is to say that the *typical* uses of these words has induced differing 'intrinsic durations' as connoted *differentiae* between them.

The singular quality of the desire *Oread* articulates should be evident by now: one token of which is that its invocation of the sea does not anthropomorphize it: that *self-subjecting* invocation does not endow the sea with any human character. But the usual suspicion that *H.D.* lived more among brute *onta* than human persons may be mistaken: the scrutability of *Oread* demonstrates, after all, that the way she *sets* her bodied self toward *hyle formed by phusis* is a shareable mode, however strange, of being human.

That the imaginal passage from **pointed pines** to **pools of fir** goes through **green** is crucial: and that **green** names a 'continuous' visual quality rather than any 'discrete' visible object is the pertinent circumstance here. Why that is so may be seen by considering how one might picture being *covered with pools of fir* after picturing the *whirl of pointed pines*. The tossing of waves in a rough sea is picturable as a whirl of pointed pines: and there seems to be some relation akin to metaphor between what this verbal image makes one picture and what one might actually see. But there seems to be no comparable natural 'tenor' for the imaginal 'vehicle' that **pools of fir** might be.⁹ The nearest visual datum here is the sheeting of water in the backwash of a wave. But the poem does not seem to direct our picturing toward that; the intervening of **green** before **pools of fir** seems to deflect, actually, the demand for a complete picture or tableau; and coming after the *hurl of green*, the visual quiet of **pools** is formally spread, rather, by the forenoted curtailing by **cover | with** of the force gathered in **hurl**, coupling now with a dictive contrast between **pines** and **fir** that is imaginally keyed by the visual 'continuity' of green: which is what effects this coupling of curtailment and contrast.

The formal contrast between **pines** and **fir** here remains a matter of diction because so much depends on their being different exemplars of one kind; and because of the prominence of the verb in the visual doings of the poem. But this dictive contrast may be keyed by **green** because it is maintained, however remotely, by visual experience: by the circumstance that firs are not spiky as pines generally are, for instance.¹⁰ So, though any picturing of *pools of fir* is formally deflected, the picturables that pools and firs are considerably condition the marked quietus of the last line: which deepens wish to strange desire: and to produce which quiet is the proper work of this verbal image.

I hope I have sufficiently indicated, and detailed in the adverting notes, how such picturing as the verbal images of *Oread* induce is a mediate lexical doing.¹¹ The 'instantaneity' Pound had demanded of images

9. I employ the technical terms of Richards and Ogden as a convenience merely.

10. A pertinent consequence here is that fir may serve for topiary in gardens as pine cannot. That will seem a leap; but I shall hazard claiming that the formal contrast between **pines** and **fir** in *Oread* involves, by some obscure and extended working of what linguists call *implicature*, the dictional contrast between "forest" and "garden".

11. Diction is the dominant lexical factor here. But the work that rhythm does is not at all negligible: we hear the falling cadence of the last line against the long plosive movement of the preceding one.

I should note that understanding a lyric poem *does not* consist in such anatomizing of doing as has just been offered; that is a matter, rather, of recognising such doing. An attentive 'surface reading' of *Oread* should be able to follow the articulation of desire there without plotting that out as I have; and I trust that my detailing of lyric doing here does not contradict the literate reader's understanding of the poem.

consists, I venture to say now, in the formally mediate character of the picturing they induce: in how picturing will slant or propel the properly 'emotional and intellectual' doings of the image. I pause now to take stock; and to articulate my larger intent.

I wish to attend to picturing as a *perlocutionary moment* of the verbal image; and I intend the word "moment" to echo its uses in physics. The moments of a system of masses dispersed in a spatial region, for example, are vectors computable with respect to any point in that region; and, considered most generally, a moment is an index to how that system of masses will behave when it is subjected to some external force.¹² But I do not mean to theorise picturing thus. My elementary glossing of "moment" was meant to suggest, only, how picturing stands to the verbal image; and readers impatient with the reference to Mechanics may suppose me to be improvising with the sense that the word ordinarily has when, for example, they dismiss something as *being of no moment*.¹³

The formal anatomizing of *Oread* just essayed should have brought out how picturing varies as perlocutionary moment through the poem. In what follows I shall be particularly concerned with the question, already broached there, of whether and where picturing assembles distinct picturables into ready pictures: or into *natural impressions*, let me say: which we might take for imaginal counterparts of what daily parlance calls "artists' impressions." The suggestion above was that the picturables **whirl** and **pin**es do indeed assemble so in *Oread*, while the picturables **pool** and **fir** do not; and I now hazard the claim that the deepening of wish to singular desire depends crucially on this momental contrast.

I should now attempt to more plainly display picturing as perlocutionary moment: and I shall recruit Pound's famous *In a station of the Metro* to that purpose. Here is the poem:

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
petals on a wet black bough.*

The last line here is a verbal image which certainly induces the reader to assemble the discrete picturables

12. The center of mass of the system is that point with respect to which the moment is null; and the motion of the system in a field of uniform force may be regarded as the motion of a mass summing the constituent masses and concentrated at their center of mass.

13. Readers acquainted with Mechanics may ask after *just what* the image has moment *about*. One ready answer would be that verbal images have moments about the formal *axes* of diction and syntax and rhythm, and about the formal *planes* that these lexical dimensions make in pairs, within the formal *space* these dimensions together constitute.

One would need some analogues of distance and mass to extend this geometric conceit. If we could, somehow or other, assign to each picturable in a verbal image some 'imaginal mass' and some imaginally pertinent 'distance' from some sort of 'dictional centre' in the text around the image, and pertinent distances from ambient syntactic and rhythmic 'centres' likewise, then one could gather in a matrix the moments that the image has about our axes and planes: which might serve us as the *inertia tensor* serves Classical Mechanics.

No such 'distance' or 'mass' lies ready to hand, of course. But let me note again that I am not attempting here to theorise such picturing as verbal images may induce. Such an operation could be carried out with any success, if at all, only on the entire and displayed corpus of poetry in a dead language. I trust, however, that the word "moment" does suggest how picturing actually inflects the particular movement of sensuous apprehension for which a lyric poem, considered as collocation of words, may be supposed a *score*.

petals wet black bough

into a ready picture. But before I point at its momental character I must say what I take the poem to be specially doing: which is to perfect as *poise*, through the verbal image, the particular emotional and intellectual *stance* towards the owners of *these faces* that **apparition** declares. The readiest way to proceed now is to set down two simple variants of the last line:

b *petals on a wet black branch*

f *flowers on a wet black bough*

The substitution in **b** of **branch** for **bough** loses what was gained through the assonantal reprise, in the old and conspicuously 'poetic' word **bough**, of the then conspicuously new **Metro**: a reprise effected through the vocalic openness that **bough** has when it is heard against the **crowd** it otherwise fully rhymes with. Pound's image gains perlocutionary moment here through a prevailing dictional contrast. Putting **flowers** for **petals** in **f** confines to **these faces** the *detached* character that **apparition** imputes to them; and Pound's image gains moment here through the operation of implicature, already pointed to in the notes, which lets the *apparition of these faces* sharpen into detached *petals* strewn along a *wet black bough*.¹⁴ Finally, that the picturables of the image assemble themselves in a natural impression seems a condition of stance perfecting itself as *poise*: that imaginal tableau suitably distances the eye that had found itself among *these* apparitional faces.¹⁵

The two examples we have examined so far are unusually successful verbal images; but I hope I have given the reader some vantage on the general conditions of their success. That Pound was less than happy with the productions of most declared *imagistes* is a matter of record; and verbal images only seldom shape lyric doing so deftly once the image becomes common coin in modernist English verse.¹⁶ Such picturings as verbal images induce there all too often produce natural impressions possessing no perlocutionary moment. Such formal defeat is particularly conspicuous in

14. Implicature is also what makes us picture the **petals** as *strewn*: because **these** are faces *in a crowd*.

Picturing seems momental mainly about the formal axis of diction here: but attending to rhythm may matter as well. Consider **wet**: its work seems primarily imaginal: because blacks are generally more vivid wet than dry, and the **petals** show more distinctly now. But how the sonic rap of **wet** arrests the extended falling foot the first four syllables make may well matter to picturing here, given how syllabic length increases through **black** and **bough**.

Let me note again that, in the course of examining my two examples of the verbal image, I have assumed that context will distinguish use from mention.

15. Lyric doing so construed seems to complement that 'darting of a thing outward into a thing inward' which Pound wanted to record in such 'hokku'. But the intralineal spacing in the version first published, had it been preserved, would have complicated matters for me; and the *shock* of industrial modernity which is supposed to have been recorded thereby seems entirely absorbed by the 'perfecting of stance as *poise*' limned here. Those who understand early modernist form as a continual *agon* with an alien modernity may balk at how 'resolved' and 'acontextual' I have made lyric doing seem.

16. The 'amygisme' Pound had deplored in his contemporaries seemed to consolidate and entrench itself as modernist tactics became conventions of verse in English: a circumstance noted in Lawrence Rainey's recent *Pound or Eliot: whose era?*

translations into English; and the appendix considers an unexpected instance, which betrays the formal poverty of such verisimilitude as the verbal image comes to commonly pursue English verse.

An excursus on the imaginal tableaux I have called “natural impressions” seems in order now: and linking them to what is called illusionist painting — or miscalled so, rather — is the readiest way to proceed. The latter mode of the visual image may be counterfactually characterised thus:

S the image places its beholders at a particular position within a pictorial space, which usually recreates the volume of some recognizable *place*, and assures them that what they are being shown is *what they would see were they actually looking at whatever is pictured from just such a vantage.*

The phrase “whatever is pictured” here refers, of course, to what the picture’s images are *images of*: to the putative referents of those images. Satisfying the condition **S** is what endows illusionist paintings with the verisimilitude or *likeness to life* they possess.¹⁷ Now verbal images may be said to produce natural impressions when their readers stand toward what they themselves picture, within the imaginal space their picturings of picturables inhabit, *just as* beholders of an illusionist painting stand toward whatever it pictures; and the circumstance that the imaginal contents of natural impressions are produced from the reader’s *own* visual memory is what completes the ‘likeness to life’ or ‘truth of semblance’ that such imaginal tableaux seem to possess.¹⁸

Considered in itself, verisimilitude is neither virtue nor vice in visual images; and must be as various as the eyes it blandishes. That illusionist painting places and counterfactually assures its beholders as it does cannot, *in itself*, be a formal flaw; and *In a station of the Metro* has illustrated for us the formal utility that natural impressions may have. But when verbal images induce ready pictures that possess no formal moment, such ‘truth of semblance’ as they exhibit is only gratuitous: if not invidious. Now in anglophone verse or prose today,

17. The extent to which the satisfying of **S** is determined by the physiology of vision is a vexed question; and the naivetés in Gombrich’s account of the development of illusionist painting, itself inspired by a Popperian picture of the development of natural science, were long ago picked out in Goodman’s *Languages of Art*.

18. Such relations of ‘inner eye’ to imaginal object as constitute ‘standing toward’ in these imaginal tableaux are homologous, one might say, to those relations of eye to image that constitute the expected or normal experience of illusionist painting.

when that is considered largely, the verisimilitude of natural impressions is almost always formally gratuitous; and the verbal image seems to have been generally compromised there by how verisimilitude has evolved in popular cinema: by a praxis of verisimilitude as *saturating likeness to life*, I shall venture to say, in the hypertrophy of Wagnerian *gesammte Kunst* that Hollywood has latterly come to display. The character of this praxis, so formally damaging to fiction and poetry if not to popular cinema itself, would be sufficiently exhibited, one supposes, by the evolution of a 'maestro' like Spielberg: the impresario of verisimilitude who concocts *Jurassic Park* is an almost unrecognisable caricature of the cinematic intelligence that had directed *Sugarland Express* and *Jaws*.

Detailing how popular cinema has compromised the verbal image would be difficult: and an Augean labour very probably, considering how rapidly the technology of imaging mutates cinema now. But that anglophone beholders of popular cinema have largely become *consumers of verisimilitude* is a defensible thesis; and that they should retain precisely that character as readers of poetry or fiction will not surprise when one considers that they are so much *placed* by popular cinema, as it were, in the natural and social worlds they inhabit.¹⁹

That the ascent of the image in anglophone poetry followed upon the mass advent of the photograph cannot, of course, be coincidence. The normal operation of the single-lens-reflex camera produces images that satisfy the condition *S*. The photograph's becoming a daily source of visual experience would promote, one may suppose, the inducing of natural impressions by the verbal image; and readers of verse would have been increasingly able and ready to ingest the image so as the assimilation of experiment into formal routine, through the first half of the last century, standardized modernist versing. But the facility so gained would not by itself corrupt writing; and the circumstance that the verbal image should so often induce formally inert natural impressions, and so much more so latterly, surely requires some explanation.²⁰ But such explanation must wait upon readers of poetry who have sufficiently

19. The essay in the current issue of **PHALANX** on digital animation in popular cinema touches on these matters.

20. A recent essay on Pound by the poet Clive James, published in *Poetry*, takes the *The Cantos* to task for their images: and the gravamen seems to be that *actual perception* seldom informs them. Picking out from the first of the *Pisan Cantos* what he takes for a telling example —

*To build the city of Dioce whose/
terraces are the colour of stars*
— James avers that **bright** rather **colour** would better record the facts of perception here: for *unless we are looking through a telescope, what colour are the stars*, he asks, and *doesn't the line just mean that the terraces are as bright as stars?*

Casting the matter over in our terms, the implication seems to be that putting **as bright as** in for **the colour of** will not materially change whatever the words make us picture here. Perhaps so. But put the phrase back in its setting, and the work that **colour** does comes clear: *yet say this to Possum: a bang/
not a whimper,*

*with a bang not a whimper,
To build the city of Dioce whose/
terraces are the colour of stars.*
colour of is heard as a dactyl; and as such lengthens the vocable **stars**; and so imparts to the line a rhythm which complements **with a bang ... To build**: as the iambic **as bright as stars** would not.

Picturing would be momental about the axis of rhythm now, if it is at all, and in that way abet 'emotional and intellectual' doing. James, however, seems everywhere to ask of the verbal image only that it induce a natural impression; and he seems to fault Pound here for not using a word that would better describe the picture that the words have *anyway* called up for him.

mastered the phenomenology of popular cinema: and I gratefully leave the task to such adepts.

One might ask if some distinctive perlocution of the image formally distinguishes successful modernist verse, once experiment becomes routine, from both preceding and succeeding practice. The question could be usefully addressed, again, only by viewing the verbal image against ambient public modes of the visual image. And I shall hazard claiming now that magazine photography and popular cinema, which were the dominant public modes of the visual image through the last century, did indeed *direct* standard or institutionalised modernist versing in distinctive ways: in ways that earlier modes of the visual image could not have directed preceding practice; and in ways that succeeding practice seems to either resist or deflect, or simply ignore.²¹

That past versing in English was not directed by any public mode of the visual image may not be contested; but it might be useful, all the same, to consider what sort of formal relation might have obtained between verse and visual image before The Age of Mechanical Reproduction.²² I shall proceed by summary example, again, and my intent is only to suggest.

Looking in some unlikely place might serve us best now; so consider in Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* the suddenly sharp

*then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity.*

One cannot tell if his intended readers would have pictured anything at all upon reading this. The wit they had been savouring would flash newly in the steel of that **try** | **That** : as a keener power of *lexis*, one might say, than **my vegetable love** had announced. The physical sense of **try** might have sufficed, through some bodily memory of cognate effort, to make the line sensuous enough for his mentor Milton.²³ But one might ask if the imaginal powers of Marvell's readers were recruited to that task as well; and had they been, then **worms shall try** would have engaged those

21. Marking off mature modernist poetry that is *not* standard or institutional, formally considered, would not be easy; but the practice of an Objectivist poet like George Oppen would serve as a good example now. And 'perfect' examples of institutional practice would have been more easily found on the formerly colonial margins of the anglophone literary world, I shall hazard saying, than at its metropolitan centres: consider *The Striders* by A.K.Ramanujan.

Its dealings with the verbal image would only be one formal aspect, of course, of institutional modernist practice; but our considerations here should serve to usefully colour any *eidolon* of Modernism: such as the dicta of the New Critics, say, might be employed to assemble.

Fastidious historians might object that institutionalised modernism contradicts properly modernist impulses: as Marjorie Perloff seems to in *21st Century Modernisms*. But nothing proposed here will really contradict them.

22. I do not know if Benjamin ever turned his penetrating attention to formal relations between photographs and verbal images: Georg Trakl's verse, for instance, might have invited him to. But the revelatory power he ascribes to the photograph, in *A Short History of Photography* particularly, might well have been claimed by Pound for the successful image in poetry.

23. Poetry is *simple, sensuous and passionate* for Milton. The word "simple" in this formula bears the sense of 'unit' that the Latin "simplex" does; while the concluding "passionate" insists upon, and makes primary, the *advent* of poetry upon the poet.

powers, I venture to say, somewhat as *graphic* modes like the wood-cut and the engraving would have.

How the wood-cut or the engraving, considered as public modes of the visual image, would have engaged the imaginal powers of literate Europeans in the seventeenth century is obscured for us, necessarily almost, by the visual modes our eyes have been trained to. The keying of visual memory these graphic modes rely on, which is evident in their caricatural uses for instance, might then have depended on theatrical performance, and on mime and puppetry, in ways that photography and cinema have long since undone. But the conspicuously *schematic* character that such modes of the visual image *generally* exhibit, which material and seemingly exogenous constraints on production impose on them, would be the factor of formal importance now; and the claim I have just hazarded might be elaborated thus: had Marvell's readers pictured

worms shall try | That ... virginity

at all, the telegraphing of visual incident in the graphic modes they commonly encountered would have schematised in some cognate way the imaginal contents, supplied by visual memory, of such picturings. Such schematising might have abetted the conspicuous mimesis of reasoning through which *To His Coy Mistress* exhibits its author's wit; and picturing there would have been momental only thus, I think, had it occurred at all.²⁴

The picturised *emblem*, still very present to Marvell's intended readers and conveyed to them through common graphic modes, could have served to relay formal pressure between the visual and the verbal image now: and the telegraphic character of the emblem itself would be a determinant, one supposes, of the schematising just hypothesised.²⁵ But I cannot further defend my claim: and must abandon the words "schematised" and "relay" to the reader's mercy. The reader might wonder why such pressure may not also be a 'directing' of verse by the visual image. The countervailing consideration here is that the telegraphing of visual incident in common graphic modes would already depend on how words isolate

24. I remain persuaded by J.V.Cunningham's *Logic and Lyric* that the conceits in *To His Coy Mistress* are very seldom, if ever, such images as his modernist admirers prized; but he seems to neglect how the poem might once have enlisted the senses.

25. Imaginal energy in Milton, for instance, seems channelled entirely through the emblem: consider his Eden, *whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balms*; or the tremendous imprecation of *blind mouths* from *Lycidas*.

But I should note that common graphic media are not *materially* prevented from meeting condition S: the dubious pleasures of Escher's images, for instance, often arise from their not satisfying S 'globally' even as they do so 'locally'.

common *visibilia*: and be constrained thereby in ways that the camera escapes.

I trust the example above has managed to point, at least, toward the sorts of formal relation verse might have borne to the visual image before its 'mechanical' avatar. Of course, no consideration of this matter can ignore what has come to be called Picturesque verse from the later eighteenth century: which is often decried for lying so slackly between Augustan decorum and Romantic enthusiasm. The usual charge against Picturesque verse is that it merely described landscape that is already *picturesque*: landscape ready to be painted, as it were, by some received master of the genre like Claude or Salvator Rosa or Poussin — or the latter's then famous brother-in-law Gaspard Dughet, also called Poussin — whose works were increasingly available to the eyes of the public that English verse was gaining through the eighteenth century.²⁶

Whether or not their memory of painted landscape supplied imaginal content to the readers of Picturesque verse — or how such memory might have otherwise buoyed their picturing, so to say, of the distinctive picturables named there — is the matter of moment now; and there is reason enough to suppose, from Cowper's versing certainly, that their memory of painting would have actively informed reading.²⁷ But considering how painting might have shaped picturing as perlocutionary moment in Picturesque verse would require far more attention to the writing than inclination permits me; and without such attending one could not, of course, say whether or not Picturesque versing was *directed* by painted landscape.²⁸

Readers who share the modernists' disdain for Romantic poetry, and find in it the dissociation of sensibility from thought advertised by Eliot, will not look for very much from the verbal image there.²⁹ But it might be well, before we move on, to consider an illustrative example: which seems to underwrite the charge by soliciting our imaginal powers in a disconcertingly incongruous way. In a sonnet titled *On Fame* Keats asks *How fever'd is the man* who, craving fame,

26. The *Laokoon* of Lessing had deprecated *pictorialism* in verse as an egregious *confusion of arts*; and his platonizing American successor Irving Babbitt had anatomized, in *The New Laokoon*, the ramifying of that alleged confusion through the nineteenth century: toward what he took, writing at the inception of anglophone literary modernism almost, for a deleterious coupling of *sentimental and scientific naturalism*.

27. Consider from the first book of *The Task* the lines

Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain / Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkeld o'er, / Conducts the eye along its sinuous course / Delighted. There, fast-rooted in his bank, / Stand, never overlook'd, our fav'rite elms, / That screen the herdsman's solitary hut; / While far beyond, and o'erthwart the stream / That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale, / The sloping land recedes into the clouds.

28. *The New Laokoon* seems to fault pictorialism in verse mainly for producing the poetical diction that Wordsworth and Coleridge famously deplored. One might ask if Picturesque verse is a mode of *ekphrasis* now, and as such a genre formally determined by rhetorical constraints; or whether some feature of its assembly reflects composition in landscape painting: in some manner inverse to how Albertian composition in History Painting, say, reflects the *balanced period* of Ciceronian prose. Michael Baxandall's *Giotto and the Orators* has explored the latter phenomenon.

29. Had such dissociation indeed afflicted the Romantic poets, the *hyperaesthesia* that *The New Laokoon* imputes to them, which makes *the other senses thrill sympathetically when one sense receives a vivid impression*, may well have been an inducing factor.

*vexes all the leaves of his life's book,
And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom.*

The actions of these last two lines cannot be readily pictured, of course. But even though the counterfactual **as if** forestalls such imaginal tableaux as I have called natural impressions, it looks as if we are being asked to sensuously link the propositional thoughts

**man robs fair name of maidenhood
rose plucks herself
ripe plum fingers its misty bloom**

by picturing, somehow, the bloom of plums. For, as against the *fever'd man* craving fame, we soon see that

*the rose leaves herself upon the briar
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire;*

and the maintaining here of any sensuous contrast between the propositional thoughts

f **ripe plum fingers its misty bloom**
w **ripe plum wears its dim attire**

would seem to require some picturing or other of the picturable **bloom of ripe plums**; and this is so simply because our sensory purchase on the bloom of ripe plums appears to be *entirely* visual. The formal incongruity now is that such picturing is forestalled by **fingers** in *f* but encouraged, seemingly, by *w*.

But considering how risible it would be to *anyhow* picture a plum finger itself, in reading just such a poem, should warn us now.³⁰ And considering how singular it is that the craving for fame should be felt to *rob a fair name of its maidenhood*, we should cast about for some bodily purchase on lyric doing here. Recalling the manual effort of plucking seems required now; and the memory or imagining of fingers smearing the bloom when ripe plums are picked.³¹ Such recall should allow us to receive in a more bodily than imaginal way the rose *leaving itself* upon briar for winds to *kiss* and bees to *feed upon*; and to receive so a ripe plum *wearing* its

30. We must assume that Keats would have found such picturing risible as well: unless we are willing to suppose that his 'inner eye' customarily inhabited a Disney cartoon.

31. Whether or not the memory or imagining of fingers smearing bloom could have had a vivid enough kinaesthetic or tactile aspect, besides the surely dominant visual one, would depend on how pervasive Romantic hyperaesthesia was: and on its general immunity to how *varyingly* vivid, seemingly, are the 'impressions' we receive through our several senses.

bloom as well.³² But sensoria formed under the tutelage of the camera, just as ours have now been at least, may well prove unequal to such tasks: and perhaps only such debility will acquaint us, remotely perforce, with *how* the camera steered modernist versing toward the formal standards of its institutional mode.³³

I turn finally to consider, very summarily again, the verbal image in English verse after modernism; but I want to quickly look back, before proceeding, at what has got said so far. The term “modernist” and its cognates have been employed in an ostensive way here. I have regarded anglophone modernist poetry as a largely known corpus first of all, which has been endowed with feature by a canon; and I have supposed myself to be addressing readers to whom the lineaments of that textual body are not strange. Now such a reader might ask if there is, in fact, a formally standard mode of modernist versing: considering, especially, the decidedly utilitarian dealings with the word “formal” he has encountered here. I regard this as an empirical question: it may well be that institutional modernist verse, formally considered, has a nominal unity only. I think not, of course; but as I have not attempted to theorise the formal identity of modernist verse, I must now supply the reader some means of purchase on the formally standard and institutional mode I have postulated of it. I venture to say that the most likely locus now would be the magazine *Poetry*: and the contours of this formal standard would be exhibited by what was *generally* published in *Poetry* through the middle third or so of the last century.³⁴ I have claimed that, through magazine photography and popular cinema, the camera directed this standard mode of modernist versing; and suggested as the definitive mark of such directing the invariable inducing, by the verbal image, of the imaginal tableaux I have called natural impressions. I trust that a scrutiny of the texts pointed at just now will bear out the latter of these claims, whether or not the term “directed” can be glossed in any explanatorily satisfying way; and I claim now that in institutional modernist verse sensuous apprehension is usually oriented toward *terminal* natural impressions.³⁵

32. To receive the picturable **ripe plum** in a more bodily than imaginal way our somatic reception of **wears** and **fingers** would have to dominate our imaginal reception of **dim** and **misty**; and the circumstance that kinaesthetic *contrast* is coupled with visual *complementarity* here — as we go from the regarding the plum **as if** with *f*, so to say, to taking it in *as it is* with *w* — may be the pertinent factor now.

33. It seems pertinent to note now that the William Carlos Williams is weaned away from Keats by Pound’s dicta on the image; and to note the juvenile Eliot’s submission to Shelley’s example.

34. I assume now that the phrase “very likely to have been published in *Poetry* through the middle third of the last century” will indeed identify a formal *sort* for attentive readers of modernist verse: in that there would be considerable agreement between them over whether or not a given sample of verse is such.

35. From the dissatisfaction with the images of *The Cantos* voiced by Clive James above one can gather a definitive expectation, which would have been prevalent among producers and consumers of the formal sort provisionally identified by the formula “verse very likely to have been published in *Poetry* through the middle third of the last century,” and which may be condensed thus: the verbal image should record *actual perception* as *immediately* — with as little intervention, seemingly — as the camera records visual incident.

Coming to practice ‘after modernism’ now: I shall remain indifferent to whether or not the doings in verse so identified here are *postmodernist* at all.³⁶ But I shall assume that I am addressing readers who will largely agree on whether some piece of English verse, from the latter decades of the last century, should be called “institutionally modernist” or not. Putting things so implies that institutional modernist versing continued even as succeeding practices emerged; but that formal habits should largely persist even as the adventurous break with them is no surprise.

My claim above was that practice after modernism — or practice that breaks with institutional modernism, rather — seems to resist or deflect, or simply ignore, the camera’s directing of the standard modernist image toward the inducing of some natural impression or other; and the reader will not be too much surprised now, I trust, to find such formal departure beginning in the later work of the archmodernist Pound himself. We have already looked, in the notes, at an image of the standard sort from the first of *The Pisan Cantos*; now consider from that first canto again the passage

Light tensile immaculata
the sun’s cord unspotted
“sunt lumina” said the Oirishman to King Carolus,
“OMNIA,
all things that are are lights”

of tremendous assertion from *a man on whom*, we very soon find, *the sun has gone down*. Poetic success here, on modernist terms at least, seems to require that the invocations **tensile immaculata** and **the sun’s cord unspotted** induce a sensuous apprehending of light as *umbilically joining, without spot, all things that are* to the sun. Such apprehending surely depends on our visual experience of light: which would underwrite the aptness of **tensile** and **unspotted** here. But though **the sun’s cord unspotted** invites picturing, there seems to be no appropriate imaginal complex that the picturables **sun** and **cord** could *in concert* induce: and picturing a ‘spotless’ umbilical cord going toward the sun would defeat sensuous apprehension here.³⁷

36. A practice becomes postmodernist, I assume, when practitioners respond to their allegedly *postmodern* situation by adversarially interrogating some modernist norm they have inherited.

37. It seems safe to say that the camera’s directive is simply ignored here; and I shall hazard saying that the sensuous apprehending of light as *umbilical without spot* must happen in some finally somatic and *all over* way that is congruent with the plenary **all things that are**. Now **the sun’s cord unspotted** would be a verbal image to the extent that it induces some picturing which is momental with regard to apprehending light so; and how induced picturing comes to be momental would depend on the lexical mediation of such apprehending.

One really should ask if apprehending light thusly need be *sensuous* at all; but answering that question would require us to generally consider the *ligature* of parataxis, so to say, in *The Cantos*; and that even Pound thought they failed to cohere is a considerable complication now.

One may now wonder if **the sun's cord unspotted** is a verbal image at all; but if it is, it certainly does not do its work by inducing any natural impression.

Consider next a passage from Pound's seemingly natural legatee Charles Olson.³⁸ In his *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* from the collection *The Distances* we find

*In hell it is not easy
to know the tracteries, the markings*

*(the canals, the pits, the mountings by which space
declares herself, arched, as she is, the sister,
awkward stars drawn for teats to pleasure him, the brother
who lies in stasis under her, at ease as any monarch or
a happy man*

and **awkward stars drawn for teats** seems a verbal image which is underwritten, again, by common visual experience: of the night sky without any moon. The more emergent points of light that stars would now show as make **drawn for teats** sensuously apt here. But such picturings of **drawn** and **teats** as would go on now could not become momental through the image itself inducing any natural impression: if only because stars can hardly be pictured as *awkward*.³⁹

To follow picturing as perlocutionary moment in these passages from Pound and Olson would not be easy; because saying what the poems they are found in specially do is unusually difficult. But it seems worth noting that in both the verbal image is *underwritten* by visual experience that is decidedly *generic*: experience that lacks such conspicuous visual incident as would render distinctive and 'individual' the perceiving of discrete particulars.⁴⁰

I take my next example from an early poem by Geoffrey Hill, *To The (Supposed) Patron*, from his first collection *For The Unfallen*:

*That no mirage
Irritate his mild gaze, the lewd noonday
Is housed in cool places, and fountains
Salt the sparse haze. His flesh is made clean.
For the unfallen — the firstborn or wise
Councillor — prepared vistas extend*

38. Olson seems to declare himself Pound's inheritor with

*The word
is image, and the reverend reverse is
Eliot*

*Pound
Is verse*

which we find in *ABCs* from his *The Distances*.

39. Though stars might be so picturable, again, in a Disney cartoon. Having to apprehend stars as *awkward* and *drawn* seems to actively deflect the camera's directive here.

A fastidious reader will note the bracket opening the third line of the quoted passage, and left unclosed. That seems a formal licence which Olson's *projective* imperative exacts. A closing bracket must come after either **pits** or **mountings**; but it seems impossible to choose between these positions; perhaps because **mountings** is both as specific as **canals** or **pits** and as generic, compared to these, as **markings**.

40. Institutional modernist verse very often seems intent on imaginally *exhibiting* the 'minute particulars' that Blake had *seen* as 'jewels'.

*As far as harvest; and idyllic death
Where fish at dawn ignite the powdery lake.*

Here **fountains** | **salt the sparse haze** is a verbal image which seems to induce a natural impression; but **prepared vistas** | **extend as far as harvest** is kept from readily doing so, even though it invites picturing initially, by that final **harvest**. Readers trained to poetry by institutional modernist practice might balk at that; but Hill is exceptionally able to make imaginal power subserve discursive energy, and even such readers would, I trust, strain themselves to ingest this quasi-image. At any rate, while the word **salt** in the first image might exercise our imaginal powers in unusual ways, it would be some generic *schema* of visual experience — using the word somewhat as exegetes of Kant might — which underwrites picturing in what I have called a quasi-image: should picturing go on there at all.⁴¹ The word **ignite** in the final line above might exercise our imaginal powers in unwonted ways, again, as the image there induces a natural impression. But it seems more apt, actually, to regard **salt** and **ignite** as making momental picturings with generic imaginal content, because the poem does what it specially does through diction and syntax.

Specifying what *To The (Supposed) Patron* specially does is not easy; but I shall hazard saying that it is a mimesis of *considering*, in a singular discursive situation: the poem may be read as an *apologuing* coda, so to say, to a forensic exercise in theodicy which has urged that

There is no substitute for a rich man.

Saying how **salt** or **ignite** make picturing momental is not easy, again, because that depends on how perlocution has been building before them; but one can get some sense of how they might from the opening lines of the poem, which bring the indispensable *rich man* before us thus:

*Prodigal of loves and barbecues,
Expert in the strangest faunas, at home
He considers the lilies, the rewards.*

41. Here are some instances, from *For The Unfallen*, of imaginal power subserving discursive energy:

*Sea-preserved, heaped with sea-spoils,
Ribs, keels, coral sores,
Detached faces, ephemeral oils
Discharged on the world's outer shores*

*A dumb child-king
Arrives at his right place; rests,
Undisturbed, among slack serpents; beasts
With claws flesh-battered*

from *Picture Of A Nativity*; and, much more evidently,

*Thriving against facades the ignorant sea
Souses our public baths, statues /
waste ground:
Arctic earth-shaker, fresh enemy
(‘The tables of exchange being /
overturned’);*

Drowns Babel in upheaval and display;
from the fifth in the sequence *Of Commerce And Society*, titled *Ode On The Loss Of The ‘Titanic’*.

I should note that *For The Unfallen* appeared in 1959, a year after Frank Kermode, in *The Romantic Image*, had looked forward to a poetry in which discursive muscle was not cramped by the exactions of the *symbol*: of which the Poundian image was a particular mutation, in his view. The rehabilitation of Milton, whose verse joins sensuous apprehension to discursive energy without strain, was Kermode’s wish. I have claimed that imaginal power serves discursive energy in Hill’s poetry. But that seems to scant his considerable formal power: which encourages hyperbole: and tempts one to claim that Hill’s powers of lexis *are* sensuous. Consider

*A beast is slain, a beast thrives.
Fat blood squeaks on the sand*

from *Dr. Faustus* in *For The Unfallen* again, where diction maintains sensuous thought through sonic texture: which, by somehow prompting tactile and kinaesthetic memory, effects here an aural mimesis of bodily affect.

For a very different example, of how picturing subserves discursive invention now, one could look to John Ashbery: to the earlier work particularly. The conspicuous *copia* his versing depends on makes it difficult to quote Ashbery with effect: but I shall try nonetheless to exhibit the imaginal glancing, as it were, which inflects the singular movement of thought *across* feeling that his poetry displays. Consider the opening passage

These decibels
 Are a kind of flagellation, an entity of sound
 Into which their being enters, and is apart.
 Their colors on a warm February day
 Make for masses of inertia, and hips
 Prod out of the violet-seeming into a new kind
 Of demand that stumps the absolute because not new
 In the sense of the next one in an infinite series
 But, as it were, pre-existing or pre-seeming in
 Such a way as to contrast funnily with the unexpectedness
 And somehow push us all into perdition

of *The Skaters* from the collection *Rivers And Mountains*: where **hips | prod out the violet-seeming** will be pictured glancingly, only, on account of how the image is folded into the ambient play of lexis.⁴² This can hardly be happenstance in a poet so alert to painting; and it seems pertinent to mention now that *Rivers And Mountains* appeared just when Pop Art was coming into its own in the American artworld.⁴³ Now and again *The Skaters* tempts one, actually, to suppose that it takes for *materiel* the often precious *imagisme* that institutional modernism exhibits: consider

So much has passed through my mind this morning
 That I can give you but a dim account of it:
 It is already after lunch, the men are returning to their
 positions around the cement mixer
 And I try to sort out what has happened to me. The bundle
 of Gerard's letters,
 And that awful bit of news buried on the back page of
 yesterday's paper.
 Then the news of you this morning, in the snow.
 Sometimes the interval
 Of bad news is so brisk that. . . And the human brain, with its
 tray of images
 Seems a sorcerer's magic lantern, projecting black and orange
 cellophane shadows
 On the distance of my hand. . . The very reaction's puny.
 And when we seek to move around, wondering what our position
 is now, and what the arm of that chair.

42. I have replicated as best as Microsoft Word seems to allow the *sans serif* font of the book: which seems peculiarly apposite to lyric doing there.

43. Toward the end of the first section of *The Skaters* we find

This, thus is a portion of the subject of
 this poem / Which is in the form of
 falling snow: / That is, the individual
 flakes are not essential to the
 importance of the whole's
 becoming so much of a truism / That
 their importance is again called in
 question, to be denied further out,
 and again and again like this. / Hence
 neither the importance of the
 individual flake, / Nor the importance
 of the storm, if it has any, is what it
 is, / But the rhythm of the series of
 repeated jumps, from abstract into
 positive and back to a slightly less
 diluted abstract.

Mild effects are the result.

I have tried to reproduce what I take to be the intended lineation and spacing. The passage points at a notion of form that seems to complement, somehow, the pictorial strategy of Warhol's *Color By Number* pictures: which must have provoked, as a hyperbolic and deflating 'illustration' of Greenberg's dictum, such votaries of Postpainterly Abstraction as had trained their eyes to savour there *optical experience unrevised by tactile association*.

The mixing of sensation and perception, which Harold Bloom had postulated as peculiarly productive of modernist sensibility, seems to almost *domesticate* epiphany in Ashbery: who as much as his modernist forebears inhabits a 'continuum haunted by intimations of mortality' — but a 'continuum' daily lit by a changeable and angling light now, rather than 'punctuated by brief bursts of radiance' whose 'peculiar vividness gives the illusion of redeeming life'. The quoted text here comes from Bloom's preface to the series titled *Prophets of Sensibility: Precursors of Modern Cultural Thought*.

The images from this *tray* do not everywhere point the 'inner eye' toward generic visual experience here. But the poem gestures toward an *ars poetica* of 'negative capability' doubling, one might say, upon such 'produce' as 'the common day' affords; and that is important to keep in mind when its images produce imaginal content that is decidedly not generic.⁴⁴

Our last example has brought us very near the temporal boundary usually assigned to anglophone modernism, when the matter is considered largely. An example from a popular and seemingly more accessible poet, something written a little after as well, seems in order now: and

*Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May*

taken from Philip Larkin's *The Trees*, from the collection *High Windows*, will more than serve us. Faced with such an evocation of trees in early summer — which were just now *coming into leaf/Like something almost being said*, and whose *greenness* had seemed *a kind of grief* — one imagines Dr. Leavis demanding, as he might have of Shelley, to be told *in what sense* trees are like castles. In no pertinent sense are they particularly so, needless to say. But however suddenly **castles** comes at us here, **unresting castles thresh** succeeds; and that success surely depends on our visual experience, generic again, of certain sorts of foliage caught in wind.⁴⁵ These lines would not ordinarily induce any natural impression; but picturing of some sort seems momental to what they do; and how lexically governed that picturing is may be gauged by trying to substitute **restless** for **unresting**.

I shall end with a celebrated example, of what is often taken to be Late Modernist poiesis, *The Glacial Question, Unsolved* by Jeremy Prynne. Rather much must get said, however, before considering the image there: before one can attend to how the exercise of imaginal power is underwritten there by generic schemas, again, of visual experience. One must first properly characterise what the poem specially does. Here is how it ends:

44. Consider the passage below, which one finds towards the end of the first section:

As balloons are to the poet, so to the ground / Its varied assortment of trees. The more assorted they are, the / Vaster his experience. Sometimes / You catch sight of them on a level with a top storey of a house, / Strung up there for publicity purposes. Or those bubbles / Children make with a kind of ring, not a pipe, and probably using some detergent / Rather than plain everyday soap and water. Where was I? The balloons / Drift thoughtfully over the land, not exactly commenting on it; / These are the range of the poet's experience. He can hide in trees / Like a hamadryad, but wisely prefers not to, letting the balloons / Idle him out of existence, as a car idles. Traveling faster / And more furiously across unknown horizons, belted into the night / Wishing more and more to be unlike someone, getting the whole thing / (So he believes) out of his system, thinks he, just as the sun is part of / The solar system. Trees brake his approach. And he seems to be wearing but / Half a coat, viewed from one side. A "half-man" look inspiring the disgust of honest folk / Returning from chores, the milk frozen, the pump heaped high with a chapeau of snow. / The "No Skating" sign as well. But it is here he is best. / Face to face with the unsmiling alternatives of his nerve-racking existence. / Placed squarely in front of his dilemma, on all fours before the lamentable spectacle of the unknown. / Yet knowing where men **are** coming from. It is this, to hold the candle up to the album.

I have tried, again, to reproduce the intended lineation and spacing of the passage. The word "are" is just so emphasized, by a heavier font, in the poem.

45. The fluent massing, in a high wind, of an elm or oak in full leaf, would be a common example of the *visibilia* that underwrite the image here. The lines simply would not work with someone whose experience of trees was limited, for instance, to tropical palms.

As one of the Movement poets Larkin might well have been hostile to Poundian dicta; but the image we are considering does not seem a programmatic expression, at all, of formal antipathy.

As the dew recedes from the grass
toward noon the line of recession
slips back. We know where the north
is, the ice is an evening whiteness.
We know this, we are what it leaves:
the Pleistocene is our current sense, and
what in sentiment we are, we
are, the coast, a line or sequence, the
cut back down, to the shore.

The poem postulates a sensibility, one might now claim:
a sensibility which, moving along *the roads that run
dripping across this* ongoing 'geo-logos' of the
Pleistocene that its versing annotates, is able to receive
the rhythm as the declension of history, and apprehend as
succession such facts as are given *in succession*: because
its shaping *limits are not time but ridges/and thermal delays*
— *plus or minus* the indices, merely, of *whatever/carbon
dates we have as we are*, within our daily selves, *rocked/in
this hollow, in the ladle by which/the sky, less cloudy now,
rests on our foreheads*.

To parse *syntax* here just so is to impute a
divergence of what one can only call *mood* beneath the
grammatical surface: and to hear optative assertion
above compresent indicative report. The immediate cue
here is diction: that **plus or minus whatever | we
have**.⁴⁶ But our ears have been pointed from the start
toward such doublings: consider the sequence of tenses
in the opening

*In the matter of ice, the invasions
were partial, so that the frost
was a beautiful head*
the sky cloudy
*and the day packed into the crystal
as the thrust slowed and we come to
a stand, along the coast of Norfolk.*

On such a reading, with its lexical licence seconded
so, the poem can succeed only by *intimating* the
sensibility it posits: only by inflecting sensuous
apprehension thus *anagogically*, how briefly ever, as we
read. That is to demand much: but however agnostic
one may remain about its ultimate success, that the

46. Pressed to do so, I would
defend my taking *whatever carbon
dates we have* for 'mere' indices by
noting the ordering of the
technical references that follow
the poem: where a sequence of
broad *topoi* ends with the
elaborated minutiae of "*The
Glaciations of East Anglia and the
East Midlands: a differentiation
based on stone-orientation
measurements of the tills.*"

poem can at all sustain such a demand testifies to its value. We must now, and lastly, consider how the verbal image might serve anagogy here. I shall do so only by exhibiting certain passages, as evidence: these are reproduced across.⁴⁷ Direct or frank verbal imaging in these passages is clipped, one might say, by a pointed use-and-mention of everyday words: such as a geologist in his professional mask might resort to: and I shall leave the reader to decide for himself whether or not the oblique imaginal effort thus solicited is, as I have claimed, indeed underwritten by generic schemas of visual experience. One might abbreviate the formal character of the images in *The Glacial Question, Unsolved* by saying that they induce picturings momental to anagogic perlocution; and I shall claim now that they are made to do so by powers of lexis rounding, as it were, upon the ground of the imaginal tableaux I have called “natural impressions”.

I stop my assay of the image in English verse well short of the present, some little way past the second third of the last century: at a juncture in the history of imaging, where a seeming lull in the advance of technical means was about to end: to be followed by rapid mutation, producing the hybrid *flora* we now see, where the ‘natural’ produce of the camera competes with all manner of synthetic *visibilia*: which may be produced and exchanged and consumed effortlessly, along the Worldwide Web, among individuals collecting or clustering, one is tempted to say, in a distributed sentience whose component brains are condensers and relays of some strangely charged optic flow.⁴⁸

That the verbal image inducing a natural impression persisted well past this juncture, in American versing at least, is attested by an admired critic and celebrated reader of poetry: in the course of exploring poetic experiment toward the end of the last century, in her *Radical Artifice: Writing in the Age of Media*, Marjorie Perloff seems to admonish such persistence amid the seemingly vitiating efflorescence of synthetic *visibilia*. That proliferation has not slackened, and has very likely accelerated, in the two decades or so since her notice; and one wonders if the poets she celebrated then

47. The progression **coast** | **line or sequence** | **the cut back down** | **shore** that ends the poem should be noticed again now. The singular knowing the poem ends by claiming is prefaced by

Our climate is maritime, and | “it is questionable whether there has yet been | sufficient change in the marine faunas | to justify the claim that the Pleistocene Epoch itself | as come to an end.” We live in that | question, it is a condition of fact: as we | move it adjusts the horizon: belts of forest, | the Chilterns, up into the Wolds of Yorkshire.

Preceding the lines divided in order to articulate lyric doing above we find

And the curving spine of the cretaceous | ridge, masked as it is by the drift, is wedged up to the thrust: the ice fronting | the earlier marine, so that the sentiment | of “cliffs” is the weathered stump of a feeling into the worst climate of all.

Or if that’s | too violent, then it’s the closest balance that | holds the tilt: land/sea to icecap from | parkland, not more than 2° - 3° F. The | oscillation must have been so delicate, almost | each contour on the rock spine is a weather | limit the ice smoothing the humps off, | filling the hollows with sandy clay | as the litter of “surface” ;

and just this before we had

The striations are part of the heart’s | desire, the parkland of what is coast | inwards from which, rather than the reverse. | And as the caps melted, the eustatic rise | in the sea-levels curls around the clay, the basal rise, of what we hope to call “land”.

The italics in the original have been underlined above.

48. The characterisation of ‘distributed sentience’ here may seem perverse. I shall point at Gerhard Richter’s later painting now — at the curiously generic look of the series simply titled *Abstract Painting*, in particular — as evidence that collective *visual* sentience had come to be so, among Occidental beholders of Painting at least, by the close of the last century.

have by now abjured imaginal doings altogether. The question affords me a convenient exit: and I shall close by asking if the continuing elaboration of *techne* prosthetic to picturing will not eventually neuter the exercise of our imaginal powers, entirely, in poiesis.

appendix

I had claimed that translation would exhibit the formal poverty of such verisimilitude as the verbal image comes, under the aegis of an institutionalised modernism, to commonly pursue in English verse. I present as evidence an ‘official’ translation of a famous poem by Borges, *El oro de los tigres*, found in the *Selected Poems* published by Viking in 1999. The translation itself is dated to 1972; and is the work of a noted *traductor* of Borges’ poetry.

El oro de los tigres

Hasta la hora del ocaso amarillo
Cuantás veces habré mirado
Al poderoso tigre de Bengala
Ir y venir por el predestinado camino
Detrás de los barrotes de hierro,
Sin sospechar que eran su cárcel.
Después vendrían otros tigres
El tigre de fuego de Blake;
Después vendrían otros oros,
El metal amoroso que era Zeus,
El anillo que cada nueve noches
Engendra nueve anillos y éstos, nueve,
Y no hay fin.
Con los años fueron dejandome
Los otros hermosos colores
Y ahora sólo me quedan
La vaga luz, la inextricable sombra
Y el oro del principio.
Oh ponientes, oh tigres, oh fulgores
Del mito y de la épica,
Oh un oro más precioso, tu cabello
Que ansian estas manos.

The Gold of the Tigers

Up to the moment of the yellow sunset,
how many times will I have cast my eyes on
the sinewy-bodied tiger of Bengal
to-ing and fro-ing on its paced-out path
behind labyrinthine iron bars,
never suspecting them to be a prison.
Afterwards, other tigers will appear:
the blazing tiger of Blake, burning bright;
and after that will come other golds —
the amorous gold shower disguising Zeus,
the gold ring which, on every ninth night,
gives light to nine rings more, and these, nine more,
and there is never an end.
All the other overwhelming colors,
in company with the years, kept leaving me,
and now alone remains
the amorphous light, the inextricable shadow
and the gold of the beginning.
O sunsets, O tigers, O wonders
of myth and epic,
O gold more dear to me, gold of your hair
which these hands long to touch.

The reader who has some Spanish will notice unusual liberties. That interposed “labyrinthine” and that “overwhelming” for “hermosos” are the egregious choices; but “sinewy-bodied” for “poderoso” is scarcely less so. These choices seem to have been forced on the translator by his pursuit of *experiential immediacy*: an immediacy pursued

through the image, and through the plotting of action 'up close' begun with the first line. Such immediacy is what delivers verisimilitude here. The formal cost now is that the 'plain' manner in which Borges brings his many golds before us — which sets the key, as it were, for the movement of feeling here — becomes uncharacteristically florid: to the detriment of the poem only, I must say, and I shall press that charge by attempting my own translation.

The gold of the tigers

Till the hour of yellow sunset
how many times will I have looked
upon the kingly tiger of Bengal
coming and going his appointed way
behind the imprisoning iron
of bars he never takes for his prison.
Afterwards other tigers will come,
the tigers burning at Blake,
and other golds then,
the amorous metal that was Zeus,
the ring that every ninth night
begets nine rings, and these nine more,
and those, without end.
With the years they have been leaving me,
the other handsome colours,
and now to meet me there is only
vagrant light, the involvéd shadow and gold
of beginnings.
O downed suns, tigers, splendours
Of myth and epic O
 and gold more dear, your hair
for which these hands hanker.

Hans Varghese Mathews is an editor of Phalanx.