

"AN UNPREDICTED TERRAIN":
THE POETRY OF CHARLES TOMLINSON

by

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ABSTRACT

To some extent, Charles Tomlinson has been the victim-- and continues to be--of two general trends in criticism. On the one hand, in America, as a post-war British poet, he suffers from the scant attention accorded to this group by American critics. On the other hand, in Britain, as a post-war British poet with strong American influences, he suffers a similar neglect at the hands of British critics. Tomlinson himself, both as a poet and as a critic, has sought to break down the British barriers to outside cultural influence. More than many poets, he has developed a poetic which is bound up with the idea of influence. The idea of influence is related to a number of important issues both in Tomlinson's poetry and poetic and to modern poetry generally: to the idea of modernist internationalism, to the strained relations between modern British and American poets, to translation, and, perhaps most importantly for his work, to the idea of chance and the poetic self.

This thesis examines the problem of the self in the poetry of Charles Tomlinson by reading it within the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility which he describes in the Preface to his Collected Poems (1985). My first chapter considers Tomlinson's approach to these issues in relation to Harold Bloom's theory of influence

and to recent theories of literary entitling and metaphor. After examining a number of ways by which Tomlinson endeavours to defend his poetic space of possibility, the chapter concludes by showing how pervasive and important is his poetic of misperception or chance.

My second chapter considers the influence of Wallace Stevens's poetry and poetics on Tomlinson and tries to set that relationship in the more general context of the British reception of--more often, resistance to--Stevens's writing. Tomlinson was most indebted to Stevens in his early volume, The Necklace. Since that time, he has sought to distance himself from his American mentor's rhetoric and theory. However, Tomlinson maintains a strong interest in his poetry and, to some extent, Tomlinson may derive a poetic of misperception from his work.

Each of the subsequent chapters discusses a different aspect of possessiveness and possibility. Chapters three and four look at both the ideal, Edenic facet of locality, and at the most significant features, for Tomlinson's poetry, of actual places. His attack on cultural insularity is bound up with his aesthetic of giving the thing its due: to go outward to things is akin to going out to other cultures. My final chapter examines the broadest implications of Tomlinson's dialectic, in his travel and political poems: the centre of his poetic concerns.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Space of Possibility	
1. Dissatisfied with a Metaphor	14
2. Authorizing Value: of Genre and Title	29
3. "Poem" and the Space of Possibility	41
4. Poetry by Misperception	53
Chapter Two: An American Presence: The Influence of Wallace Stevens.	
1. Charles Tomlinson and Wallace Stevens	68
2. "A Carving Not a Kiss"	88
3. A Way Out of Stevens: Toward a New Fiction	109
Chapter Three: Space and its Eden	
1. "The Measure of All Eden"	124
2. A Metamorphosis of Eden	138
3. "Those Toys of Arden"	149
4. "The Perpetuity of Eden"	163
Chapter Four: "A Reign of Outwardness": The Elements of Place	
1. Written on Water: "Such Solid Vacancies"	175
2. "So Much Certainty of Stone"	188
3. "A Peopled Landscape"	198
4. "Look with the ears"	210
Chapter Five: Travel and Politics: Some Relations and Contraries	
1. Bodying Forth: Questions of Travel	221
2. "To Become the Face of Space"	234
3. Poetry and Politics	256
Conclusion	287
Works Cited	294

Gesang

Ist Dasein? Song is the measure, rather,
Of being's spread and height, the moonrise
That tips and touches, recovering from the night
The lost hill-lines, the sleeping prospects:
It is the will to exchange the graph of pain
Acknowledged, charted and repeated, for the range
Of an unpredicted terrain.

--"Melody" (CP 270)

Introduction

*To take chances, as to make rhymes
Is human* (CP 194)

Throughout his forty or so years of writing poetry, Charles Tomlinson has been concerned in his poems with achieving a discipline of the self. From the beginning, he has understood how tempting, yet how self-defeating, are the claims of the self on the world around it. As he remarked to two interviewers, Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, in 1975, "we are good fixers of the contents of our consciousness and hence great fixers of our egos; we'll have it all on our own terms" ("Charles Tomlinson" 407). Something has always made Tomlinson want to make of his poetry a means of knowing first the world and only then the self that world discloses. To put the matter reductively, the fear which lies behind such an endeavour is solipsism: the fear that nothing exists to be known beyond the self. In theory, such an enterprise runs the risk of foundering on any of the failed disproofs of solipsism or of drifting away into equally futile searches for the new, final proof that there is a world for the self to discover. To reduce Tomlinson's poetry to this level, though, is surely amiss: the problem of the self tends towards solipsism, but the actual evil of this tendency is that it devalues the world in overvaluing the self.

The problem is not that the world does not exist, or is feared not to exist, but that the self in its pursuit of all the things it pursues wants most of the time, almost as a law of experience, a dependably stable, known, unsurprising world, and works in many ways to fabricate that stability. This self, no less than the self of the solipsistic extreme, creates a world, but that world is too much with us, and, for Tomlinson, is too obviously the product of self-delusion and self-aggrandizement: "Consciousness that becomes merely a disease of prying, a bullying assertion of its own dear self, can be not merely obtrusive but comic--I think of some of Proust's more excessive moments" ("Charles Tomlinson" 412). In fact, it is consciousness's "bullying assertion of its own dear self" which wants and makes its opposite term, the world, so solid and so obdurate. The irony of the title of his first major volume, Seeing is Believing--a title, incidentally, which Tomlinson appropriated from a review of his preceding volume, The Necklace--is that the eye of consciousness imposes a powerful rule over cognition and belief, for good or ill. Arguably, the most common metaphor for understanding takes one or other variation of the root: Seeing is understanding.

The skeptic's motto proclaimed in the title, Seeing is Believing, itself contains a hint of a yet more radical doubt: if the skeptic withholds his belief until he has tested hearsay with his eyes, the radical skeptic despairs at that very nexus which bestows such power on the eye:

appearances are deceiving, and the eye can err. Tomlinson's aesthetic is grounded in the eye, but it questions the authority of sight to the point that it gives over the authority to second sight, or, more accurately, second looks. We learn by erring and we err when we look, but erring is rich with possibility.

As two of Tomlinson's other volume titles--The Way In and The Shaft--make clear, his task is both to break through the world that we take for granted, the world which generations of selves have bequeathed as the real world, and also to outflank the bullying self of one's own, which, first of all, would accept unquestioningly that inheritance and, secondly, would continue to assert that same domination over all it surveys. If these two titles suggest a world to be broken through and into, and thus a noble task for the poet, the title of his first pamphlet, Relations and Contraries, suggests that he recognizes that the self, even the self of the poet, is to some degree compromised, despite all its good intentions. The self may see itself as in many ways contrary to the world as given, but it also sees itself as tied to that world by many relations.

The self, in fact, is possessive towards its world, and that provides my major metaphor and one half of a dialectic for investigating how Tomlinson has dealt with the self's inevitable implicatedness with the world. The space of possibility is the other half of this dialectic: the belief, perhaps his supreme fiction, that the self can achieve a

balanced relation with the object world, that possessiveness can be gotten round. In short, the space of possibility is his figure--both temporal and spatial--for the poetic imagination. Both halves of the dialectic appear in the Preface to his Collected Poems (CP). There Tomlinson describes the first clear impression, on writing "Poem," of his artistic goal: "I realized, when I wrote it, that I was approaching the sort of thing I wanted to do, where space represented possibility and where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully, putting aside the more possessive and violent claims of personality" (CP vii).

The metaphor of possessiveness is a subject of his poetry: to enable him to discipline the self's possessiveness towards the world, his poems take cognizance of that problem. In a sense, his preoccupation with physical description--borders and outlines, container and contained--reflects his foregrounding of possessiveness. Indeed, possessiveness may be traced back to the individuating process of perception itself, our mental process of seeing a thing as a thing-in-itself, independent, isolatable, nameable. Much of his "descriptive" poetry constitutes a meditation on individuation or differentiation. His prose poem, "A Process," in The Way of the World (1969), reflects on the self in the midst of this process:

To process: to walk the bounds to lay claim to them,
knowing all they exclude. . . .

. . . . One accords the process its reality, one does
not deify it; inserted among it, one distinguishes and

even transfigures, so that the quality of vision is never a prisoner of the thing seen. (CP 193-94)

My thesis begins by outlining the dialectic of relations and contraries in terms of possessiveness and the space of possibility, and my first chapter will try to show that one way in which Tomlinson seeks to escape possessiveness is through a poetry of misperception. Perceptual errors bring their own poetic rewards. Misprints and tricks of light and distance can open up fresh new worlds. As he admonishes the reader in his poem, "Mushrooms," from The Shaft(1978):

"waste/ None of the sleights of seeing: taste the sight/ You gaze unsure of"(CP 293). Misperceptions make space--the space of possibility--for poetry. Error, "the pure surprise of seeing"(CP 309), allows the poet to escape, however briefly, the possessiveness of the self. The remaining four chapters will look at other ways in which this dialectic presents itself in his poetry. My last chapter will focus on his travel poems and political poems to show how they display yet another way by which he has sought to discipline the possessive self.

Tomlinson does not explain precisely what he means by "possessiveness," either in the Preface or anywhere else in his writings. However, its negative connotations appear to derive from the romantic poet's search for a transcendence of ordinary consciousness. Ordinary consciousness may be deemed too painful to endure, or simply insufficiently interesting. For either reason, the impulse to escape from the rational and ordinary leads to a devaluing of the normal range of

human experience. The search for the new is seen by Tomlinson as merely one more manifestation of the possessive personality. In this regard, he is in agreement with Yvor Winters. As Grosvenor Powell remarks in his book on Winters, "The romantic error [for Winters] is the divorce of ordinary consciousness from the natural so that the natural world exists only as a stimulus to revery" (Powell 148).

The poet driven to escape through poetry is on a continual search for the new: it is in the end a possessive search, which merely reintroduces the dominance of the self over whatever it finds. In a sense, the problem of possessiveness becomes possessiveness of the self, and, for poets, possessiveness of originality. My first chapter begins by considering how Tomlinson seeks to avoid undue possessiveness both towards the object world and towards his own creativity or originality. Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence narrowly focusses attention on how poets influence poets, as though poets' debts were all to one another. I will argue for a broader sense of influence: the poet may feel possessive about his originality towards both his culture and his society. This chapter will argue that Relations and Contraries shows him beginning to break free of a dependence on genre, in particular on satire, as a way of defending his poetic originality.

If Tomlinson rejects satire as a way of defending his originality and establishing the value of his poetry, we may take another measure of possessiveness through his poem

titles. The next part of this chapter will examine his use of titles in the light of some recent theories about the relations between title and poem. In the relationship between title and poem, a poet might be expected to reveal something fundamental about the way he possesses his poem. The poem represents his originality but also his means of communicating his imagination. Bloom has shown how anxious is a poet's sense of his own originality--at least in respect to those poets to whom he feels most indebted. The counterbalancing impetus may be seen generously as the poet's desire to communicate his imagination to his audience or, less generously, as simply the need to impose his words over the words of all other poets. In either case, the relation between the title and the poem may be read as a gauge of the poet's possessiveness towards his own originality.

The third part of this chapter will look at "Poem" as it exemplifies the space of possibility. Interestingly, the title, "Poem," itself may be interpreted as an unpossessive statement. "Poem" will be considered both in its original context, in Relations and Contraries, and its later context, in the Collected Poems, as a measure of its continuing importance to his poetry for over thirty years. The last part of the first chapter will examine one way in which he has sought to achieve the space of possibility which "Poem" represents. By cultivating a poetry of chance or misperception, Tomlinson, in effect, takes Bloom's theory of misreading to its logical conclusion. Bloom argues that

poets misread strong predecessor poets to escape their influence; Tomlinson recognizes that "misreading," or perceptual error, is an everyday occurrence--restricted neither to reading nor to poets.

Although my thesis is not primarily concerned with Tomlinson as a translator of poetry, nevertheless both because translation has for many years been an important concern of his and also because he sees the history of translation as an important and continuing stimulus to poetry written in English, it is appropriate in beginning an examination of his poetry to notice that he sees translation as itself a special instance of chance. Translation seems to appeal to Tomlinson not only as an exercise in rendering one tongue in another, but also as it allows the element of chance to enter the translator's work. As C.H. Sisson remarks in his review of Tomlinson's The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation:

It is certainly not motive enough for a translator to wish to enable people to read in English what they cannot read in the original, for it is only so far as something new is not only perceived but in some sort realized by the translator that anything more than a crude subject-matter, which is the least part of poetry, can be transmitted. (1094)

Rather, as Sisson further remarks, "There is a sense in which perceiving a gap, and a possible way of bridging it, is of the very nature of verse translation, even though all the bridges that were, of this kind, neither start from a terra absolutely firma nor end exactly at the point that was intended" (1094). In other words, the bridge of translation

is constructed to some degree by chance. In Translations, Tomlinson himself quotes Henry Gifford's description of the process of translation:

Every real poem starts from a given ground and carries the reader to an unforeseen vantage-point, where he views differently the landscape over which he has passed. What the translator must do is to recognize these two terminal points, and to connect them by a coherent flight. This will not be exactly the flight of his original but no essential reach of the journey will have been left out Translation is resurrection but not of the body. (11)

Tomlinson comments, "This formulation has always stayed at the back of my mind in all subsequent undertakings" (11).

Gifford's formulation does seem to have captured for Tomlinson something of the nature of translation and perhaps also, and more generally, of poetry. He quotes it in the introductions both to Translations and to The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation. In the latter he goes on to add: "So, in the end, for any live translator, it is not a question of approaching a text with a defined method, but of eliciting definition from, and restoring to clarity that chaos which occurs, as, line by line, the sounds and patterns of the original crumble to pieces in the mind of the translator" (xii).

Misreading is not restricted to poetry, neither to the misreading of one English poet by another, nor to the misreading of a foreign poet by an English one; yet none the less the influence of Wallace Stevens on Tomlinson presents an interesting variation on the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. My second chapter will consider the early,

strong, and continuing influence of Stevens on Tomlinson's poetry. In a sense, Tomlinson's response to Stevens's poetic influence presents a clear instance of just how strong the possessive impulse can be--and how complicated. A new poetry, like a new land, promises possibility, and so it seems to have been for Tomlinson in relation to Stevens's poetry. But Tomlinson quickly attempted to distance himself from Stevens, perhaps feeling the older poet's poetry taking possession of his. What seems to have initially attracted Tomlinson was Stevens's rhetoric, yet in his various comments on Stevens what he maintains was influential is not so much rhetoric as the element of chance. Thus, Tomlinson, on the one hand, judges Stevens to have been too immersed in words to see the physical world. But on the other hand, he has virtually mythologized a quite different aspect of Stevens's work as his main interest in that poet. What Tomlinson pays homage to owes more to this mythologizing of Stevens, including his influence, than to Stevens's own creation.

My third chapter develops the idea that "Poem" is the seedbed for a body of related poems. The Eden poems will be read as variations on "Poem," which his Preface recognizes as his first poetic success. This chapter asks, after Harold Bloom, "What happens to a poem after it has succeeded in clearing a space for itself?" (Poetry and Repression 28). In a recent interview, Tomlinson has noted that "'Eden' is involved in an argument with romanticism," and he expands on his interest in the myth of Eden:

My poetry began with a certain distrust of myth. I wanted the newness of fresh perceptions, and the one myth which seemed to embrace that without getting in the way was the myth of Eden. You don't choose such things with a completely conscious awareness of all the implications, of course--they choose you, in a sense.

("Human Balance" n. pag.)

The way in which Tomlinson here describes the myth of Eden--as though it chose him--is characteristic of his bearing towards the world of things. His phrasing suggests the element of chance, discussed in chapter one, by which he has sought to discipline the self. Eden is part of his mythologizing of "Poem" into a belief in the possibility of "fresh perceptions" and poetic creation.

The idea of Eden is also central to Tomlinson's consciousness of being a post-Christian poet. Of his latest work he has remarked: "In my next book, Annunciations . . . I shall go on with this attempt to redefine Christian concepts, something I've been doing for a long time" ("Charles Tomlinson at Sixty" 61). In fact, to rescue "Eden" from the footnotes of Biblical scholarship is a task closely related to Stevens's project to find a replacement for the idea of God--and to situate that replacement in the human imagination. Yet, characteristically, Tomlinson parts from his mentor by the choice of his vehicle: Eden is a place, first of all, not, as in Stevens, a fiction or abstraction first and foremost--"It Must Be Abstract."

Tomlinson's redefinition of "Eden" does not exhaust his interest in place and the poetry of locality. Chapter four

will attempt to determine some major and common elements of the places that hold a central position in his poetry, especially through a reading of his Stoke poems. In many poems, water, stone, man, and music underlie his meditation on the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. In his great poem, "The Flood," the poet confronts a remarkable challenge to his long-held notion of the "constancy of stone." The element of music reintroduces the peculiarly subversive quality of the aural sense--that is, subversive to the world created by the eye. Indeed, in describing the significance of music in Isaac Rosenberg's poetry, Tomlinson may be describing something of its importance in his own work: "Music seems to stand in Rosenberg's poetry for a kind of attitude of mind which can hear, as it were, the true melody of its own being and to which it had previously been deaf because insufficiently alive" (Isaac Rosenberg 6). Tomlinson's poem, "Words for the Madrigalist," suggests the need to accord the ear its own metaphoric domain in a world now dominated by the visual metaphor of seeing-is-understanding. That poem and others, notably "Hearing the Ways," draw attention to the difficulty of ever escaping that dominant metaphor even by error.

Finally, chapter five will argue that Tomlinson's poetry demonstrates a special relationship between travel and politics--a final complication to the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. The first part of the chapter will examine how Tomlinson's travels, especially in

the American Southwest, have influenced his poetry. For a poet so conscious of space as possibility--and so long indebted to Lawrence as well--the first-hand experience of New Mexico, that "unfencable kingdom of desert and mountains" (Return 29), was in some ways the embodiment of his metaphor for poetic creation.

As the last part of this chapter will argue, the experience of foreign cultures also seems to call up and call forth Tomlinson's meditations on political themes. His series of poems on the French Revolution, his poems on Trotsky, and, perhaps above all, his poem "Over Elizabeth Bridge," meditate on the parallels between extremism--the impulse to perfection--in politics and in poetry. These political poems seem to show that the poet can only avoid the dangers to which extremism can lead by recognizing that poems and politics occupy the same landscape. In terms of his long-time endeavour to redefine Christian concepts, his aesthetic of giving the thing its due may be seen as a redefining of the sin of pride and the virtue of humility. Seen in this light, his discipline of the self before the object is the practice of that humility before both the world of things and the world of his fellow man.

Chapter One

The Space of Possibility

Anaxagoras

If you are right, since you are not me you cannot be truly right, O Socrates. I therefore must further reflect. Taking up the thread of what you have said to me, and setting out from the state into which you have put my thought, after having first opposed and overcome it, I needs must discover a final reason in myself which at one and the same time contains your own and yet justifies my previous opinion. And that at the risk of my death. For how would my existence otherwise make sense?

Socrates

What pride! Anaxagoras Pride is the feeling of being born for something which we alone can conceive, and this a thing greater and more important than any other. Nothing ought to be greater than the thing I would do (and cannot).

The thing which I wish must always be superior to that which anyone else wishes. Such is pride. It does not emanate from things already done nor from that which one is. But my ideal is infinitely above yours, since it is mine--solely because it is mine
--Paul Valéry, "Pride for Pride" (13).

1. Dissatisfied with a Metaphor: "the more possessive and violent claims of personality"

*Blessed the man whose faith is different
from possessiveness--of a kind not framed
by 'things which do appear'--
who will not visualize defect, too intent to cower;
whose illumined eye has seen the shaft
that gilds the sultan's tower.
--Marianne Moore, "Blessed is the Man" (174).*

In the Preface to his Collected Poems (1985), Charles Tomlinson explains what he wishes to "rescue" from his first

pamphlet, Relations and Contraries (1951):

there is little I wish to rescue from that collection. "Poem" stands in the present volume as a kind of prelude to what follows. I realized, when I wrote it, that I was approaching the sort of thing I wanted to do, where space represented possibility and where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully, putting aside the more possessive and violent claims of personality. The embrace was, all the same, a passionate one, or so it seemed to me. The title Relations and Contraries proved to contain a dialectic very fundamental for subsequent poems.

In this chapter, I wish to examine how this self-assessment relates to his poetry. For "Poem" is, as he says, "a kind of prelude" to his work, and the Preface suggests by its reference to a dialectic of relations and contraries a continuity from his first poems to his most recent. However, the language of the Preface demands immediate consideration: What does "space as possibility" mean? And what do these words and phrases mean: "self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully," "self," "the more possessive and violent claims of personality"? Perhaps the first point to make is that this brief Preface demonstrates so well precisely how fundamental the dialectic of relations and contraries is to his work. Its language displays forces and passions so strong as to be barely containable: "rescue," "prelude," "embrace," "self-forgetfully," "putting aside," "a passionate one," "possessive and violent claims." Although these terms will be discussed shortly, simply listing them shows the powerful emotions aroused in him by this brief retrospective and points up the creative tensions that lie behind his poetry.

Set over against the metaphor of possessiveness is a metaphor for originality and creativity, space as possibility. One of the ways in which he attacks possessiveness is by cultivating a poetic of error or misperception. Misperceptions offer the space of possibility necessary to artistic creation or simply to a full apprehension of the world. Misperceptions are one way of allowing "the according of things their own life" ("Author's Preface" n.pag.). In the course of an interview in 1964, Ian Hamilton asked Tomlinson whether he felt there was "a danger of too much influence" in his work. Tomlinson replied that "You can't have too much influence if you know what to do with it. . . . The trouble with most critics is that they have shallow notions of originality. A measure of the real artist is his capacity for discipleship" ("Charles Tomlinson" 84). In making his answer he may have had in mind T.S. Eliot's dictum on originality: "The poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad; it is, in the bad sense, 'subjective' with no relation to the world to which it appeals" (Eliot 10). Tomlinson's sense of originality seems close to that described by W.S. Merwin in a recent interview: "True originality has to do not with trying to be new but trying to come from the place from which all renewal comes. The meaning of originality has to do with origin, the place where something comes from, not the fact that it is different from everything else. You can't be different from everything else. It's like saying life must do something quite new. It

is doing something quite new all the time" ("An Interview" 18).

After examining Tomlinson's Preface and the first poem of his Collected Poems in relation to his first volume, Relations and Contraries, I shall discuss how his substitute metaphor of space as possibility appears in his poetry of misperception. This later discussion draws upon the recent work of conceptual-metaphor theorists, Mark Turner, George Lakoff, Michael Reddy, and Mark Johnson. These theorists argue that "A metaphor, in general, provides a way of seeing one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain" (Turner 17). By "conceptual domain" Turner refers to the cognitive models which he claims form the basis of human knowing. Turner gives as an example of his theory the model of the kinship metaphor:

We have a model that men and women couple to produce offspring who are similar to their parents, and this model is grounded in genetics, and the semantics of kinship metaphor is grounded in this model. Mothers have a different role than fathers in this model, and thus there is a reason why "Death is the father of beauty" fails poetically while "Death is the mother of beauty" succeeds. The meanings of kinship words are not free to connote away from these anchoring basic models and basic processes without some tension, friction, and resistance.

(Turner 7-8)

The relevance of this theory to my thesis is that it helps to explain Tomlinson's dialectic of relations and contraries in his use of metaphor.

In the Preface, Tomlinson attempts to regulate the economy of poetry, or, at least, to raise the problems of

that regulation. "Economy" belongs to the same metaphoric domain as his "possessiveness." He is saying, in effect, that to write a poem, to be confident in one's originality in writing poems, one must in some way renounce (put aside) possessiveness. The verb he chooses to describe the preferred poetic act is itself a verb of possession; moreover, in the same way that the impulse to possess is intensified by conjoining "possessiveness"--already an excessive form of possession--with "violent," he goes on to intensify the nature of the substituted act, "embrace," by the adjective "passionate." Can a passionate embrace avoid the problem of violent possession? The substituted phrase seems to change the metaphor from one of rape, violent possession, to love, passionate relationship; yet it seems that a vestige of possessiveness adheres even in the rephrasing.

In light of Tomlinson's substantial body of travel poetry, it is interesting to find that a geographical metaphor, almost a version of the frontier myth, inheres in his characterization of the preferred poem: "where space represented possibility." He conceives of originality, in other words, as space, as though to remove the poem from the domain of history, possession, and influence. Space is virgin territory, free land, unclaimed, awaiting the poet's arrival. The same formulation recurs in his predilection for the Eden myth: Eden as an ur-space, anterior to economic laws. Notably, though, in both versions of this formulation

of poetic creation, the basic metaphor of possession is not entirely removed: Eden gives way to Arden; space becomes place. If the poet is anxiously possessive about his poem--that intangible mix of originality, imagination, and experience--Harold Bloom has argued that he is equally anxious about the claims of earlier poets upon his work.

Through the 1970s Bloom developed a theory of the anxiety of influence which claimed that new poets struggle to overcome those earlier poets who most influence them in an oedipal battle of poet fathers and sons. In The Anxiety of Influence (1973), he summarized his theory: "Poetic history . . . is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (5). The language of influence is the language of possessiveness--note Bloom's recourse to "space"--we speak, for example, of one writer's debt to another, or of what one poem owes to a previous one. The crux of Bloom's theory is the possession of the poem: Who possesses, creatively, the new poem? Who is its creator? Originality is the supreme value being fought over. Thus, although Bloom couches his theory in terms of kinship metaphors, what he calls the anxiety of influence might be seen more accurately as an anxiety of possession. In Poetry and Repression, he states, "There is no textual authority without an act of imposition, a declaration of property that is made figuratively rather than properly or literally"(6). One problem with Bloom's

theory may lie in his inability to choose between two metaphors: that of kinship and that of possession. In any case, to recognize the importance of possession allows us to move away from seeing anxiety strictly in terms of the cultural (poetic) tradition, and to move towards the admission that the poet may be in the position of having other fathers than poets with whom he must do battle.

Elizabeth W. Bruss, who has written one of the most thorough critiques of Bloom's theory, criticizes Bloom for the narrowness of his definition of "influence," yet grants the importance of his key terms: "Clearly there are still other ways to conceive of influence, based on different permutations and redefinitions of debt, identification, anxiety, and desire--which merely shows how fertile and how teasing Bloom's key notions are" (Bruss 294). Robert Weisbuch in Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson, takes Bloom's theory as a sign of a fundamental shift in the prevailing idea of literary tradition:

By the 1970s. . . T.S. Eliot's image of the literary tradition as an agent of strenuous nurturing had been challenged and successfully overthrown by an idea of literary tradition as burdensome, preventive, anxiety-arousing. . . . What happened was the partial overthrow of the important belief that literature offers an alternative to the values of official society, replete with an elevated and bloodless history. . . . we believed in the romantic idea of culture against society. Now increasingly, we do not believe in the separated elevation of literature, much less in its effective opposition. We speak of literary production and assert the power of history and the unconscious on a newly resultant, powerless or struggling literature. (xvi)

This thesis tries to broaden Bloom's notion of influence by applying to it, in Elizabeth Bruss's words, "different permutations and redefinitions." At the same time, I hope to show how Tomlinson's poetry over the last forty years in some ways demonstrates the tensions and stresses reflective of the cultural upheaval which Weisbuch describes. Possibly, in a capitalist economy, a more complete metaphor than that of literary influence is that of property and production. The anxiety suffered by the poet then becomes a problem of ownership or possession of his poem. The competing claims of ownership, therefore, come not only from the poetic tradition, in particular from those poets to whom he feels most indebted, but also from his society, whose claim, like that of Bloom's precursor poets, is ambivalent: the poet both wants the recognition of that society, its acknowledgement of his authorship of the poem, and yet resists that acknowledgement insofar as it represents, just as the poetic tradition does, a further claim on the poem which undermines his ownership and originality. Simply for the poem to be recognized as a thing of value is to enter the market and to risk acquisition; simply to take that chance is to forfeit some degree of psychological possession over the poem. The act of risking acquisition is a loss of possession. But it is also an impairment of originality. In other words, it is significant that Tomlinson casts his Preface in terms of possessiveness when, in fact, he is referring to originality, at least as

much as to possession. It is significant because it defines his attitude toward originality as one of possessiveness and by so doing introduces a broad metaphoric domain: we kill the things we love; the bad servant buries his talents; the rich man must give up his possessions to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and so on. If possession is nine tenths of the law, then, in the case of poetry, originality may lie in the residual ten percent. But the controlling percentage of ownership may well threaten that one percent; in effect, possession deprives originality of authority, of power, of meaning.

Any poem's departure into the world is fraught with anxiety for its author, not over what remuneration may or may not be forthcoming, but over how the poem will be received--not anxiety because it will be reviewed or criticized, but because it will be possessed by others. The poet may feel anxiety about sending forth his poems not into the closed-off world of culture, but into the wider world of socio-economic reality. Indeed the struggle with his poet fathers may precede that with his society. The struggle with his poet fathers is fought during composition of his poems; that with his society begins when the balance shifts, in the poet's mind, from culture to audience and the time when he will publish--in the sense of making public--his poems. Although publication, in this general sense, is the cause of his anxiety, the anxiety can precede publication. In making them public, the poet is caught between his desire to find

recognition for his originality and his fear at the loss of some measure of possession, which is also a fear of losing possession of his claim to originality in writing them.

Although the poet's fight with his poetic fathers may precede that with his society, the writing of a poem begins its emergence into the economy. The anticipation of this entry may affect the creation of the poem. The poet may wish for his poem a particular economic role: he may wish that his poem would play a larger economic role than that of, say, its book sales. He may wish to re-define his poem's economic value--which is another way of saying its value to his society and potential audience. The poet values his poem in a non-monetary, that is non-quantifiable, way. Nevertheless, the poet is sending forth his poem into an econometric world, an economy that values by quantification. The poet's anxiety, then, arises from rejecting that economy and from trying to imagine a fictional economy, an economy in which his poems provide intangible and non-quantifiable benefits for intangible and non-quantifiable returns. Anxiety may arise at this point. Every economy, even that of poetry, depends on an exchange of equal value: nothing comes from nothing. Money is a convenient medium of exchange in large part because it is a medium of exchange with an agreed-upon value. Without that common unit of value for his poems, the poet must either reject the exchange economy or conceive of some other economic system. Yet because the exchange economy is the dominant, powerful economy, whatever substitute

economy he conceives will stand in subordinate and hostile relation to the exchange economy.

One area that may show signs of stress is the basic economic notion of possession. In the exchange economy, we give up our ownership of a thing for an agreed price. But the poet is fundamentally opposed to forfeiting all rights in his poem. The anxiety is not subdued simply because by its nature the poem can be reduced to words on a page and indefinitely duplicated. The real poem is still in his mind, still growing; the poem on the page is a concession to his society; but by merely making that concession, the poet makes public that which is still private and submits to the valuation of the market exchange economy.

The problem of possession manifests itself in the poems themselves. To argue that Tomlinson's poetry reveals an anxiety of possession is not to divert attention away from his poems as aesthetic objects, nor to substitute psychology for critical understanding. Rather it is to argue that by seeing his poems as the products of this anxiety we can better understand how each poem is put together and how each relates to each. In order to prevent the loss of possession, the poet takes precautions to ensure that the poem is a well-marked space. In his poetry, especially in his early poems, he tries to insure his possession of the poem by invoking what might be called laws of ownership. In Relations and Contraries, he appeals to the tradition of poetry as language superior in its morality to other discourses. In particular,

in poem after poem, he appeals to the authority of satire. By appealing to these cultural traditions, especially in concluding his poems, Tomlinson attempts to guard against all threats to his possession of the poem. If possession is safest within clearly defined boundaries--marking what belongs to whom--then the appeal to the moral authority of tradition, of cultural wisdom, is tantamount to an appeal to the final authority.

In this way, the moral element of his poetry becomes identified with the need to complete, to end, to give final form to his poems, and thus to mark them as his own. By invoking the moral authority of poetry he attempts to counter both the cultural and the societal threats to his originality. The morality of his poems is a way of asserting property rights, a way of demarcating what is his space. In part this method of guarding his rights tends towards the de-aestheticising of his poetry: that is, by emphasizing the moral dimension he implicitly discounts the aesthetic (creative) element of his poem. To put this strategy another way, in these first poems Tomlinson is a conservative investor, reducing the risk to his originality by deliberately diminishing the poetic product itself: by definition, an unattractive property will receive little attention. The Necklace displays a different tactic of protecting originality: the extreme stasis of its poems shows Tomlinson attempting to take objectification of the poem to the limit. My third chapter will examine this

tendency in the context of Stevens's poetry. The static character of these poems there acts as a way of defending against the powerful influence of Stevens's poetic.

There seems to be a strong connection between the idea of an anxiety of possession--that he would defend his originality against both predecessor poets and his society--and the idea, which he repeatedly insists upon, of the need to achieve a relationship with the object of contemplation, to see and feel what is really out there in the world. His insistence on this idea is so great as to make one wonder if it is not bound up with his sense of originality: that is, the idea of the relationship with the object may well be seen as the strongest frame or defense around his originality. In his 1975 interview with Rasula and Erwin, he expands on this necessary relationship with the object, and in doing so touches on some of the same issues raised in the Preface:

In my own case, I should add that the particular rather than existing in its own isolate intensity, means first of all the demands of a relationship--you are forced to look, feel, find words for something not yourself--and it means like all relationships, a certain forgetfulness of self, so that in contemplating something, you are drawn out of yourself towards that and towards other people--other people, because, though the words you use are your words, they are also their words: you are learning about the world by using the common inheritance of language. And once you are moving on into your poem, rather than "isolate intensity," you are aware of belonging among objects and among human beings and it is a great stay for the mind, this awareness. And a great chastener in that you realize that you in your own isolate intensity would be an egotist and a bore.

("Charles Tomlinson in Conversation" 406)

Tomlinson is quite open about the influences he sees in his poetry, and, indeed, the core originality that lies behind the anxiety of possession does not depend on the containment or denial of literary influences: he can afford to be open, despite Bloom's theory, towards his predecessors. The poet's strongest defense may lie in the idea of a relationship between the self and the object, because possession is dissolved in this relationship, at least ideally. If subject and object no longer obtain, the most important consequence is that possessiveness no longer obtains--neither between subject and object nor between subject and originality. To be original is to be the creator of something, and a strong mimetic prejudice persists in the notion that the poem creates the outside world. But if the self and the object are merged, then the poet can no longer see himself as the creator of the world through and by his poems, and his god-like position will vanish.

In a glancing remark on Whitman and Hart Crane, Tomlinson seems explicitly to reject this romantic ideal of the merging of subject and object: "He [Crane] dreamed of some understanding only to be felt in 'the vortex of our grave' or 'the seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.' This paradise seemed to be reached, as in Whitman, by a surrender of self, a violation of the limits of the self, in a communion with impersonal forces, and must involve not just the death of the self, but the death of that sense of individual responsibility which conscience bids us never to

violate even for the most obsessive idea or the most spiritual ideal" (Some Americans 7-8). In this respect, Tomlinson is in agreement with Yvor Winters' objection to romantic poetry. As Grosvenor Powell points out,

[Winters'] principal objection to a large part of romantic poetry is that it is poetry written in a void. Poets had lost a belief in the reality of sense experience and had substituted for it a world of visionary and transcendent experience. Romantics characteristically feel that human consciousness, or at least normal human consciousness, is somehow unnatural; and they feel that consciousness, to become natural or a part of nature or of supernature, must transcend itself. It all comes down once again to the question of the reality of the everyday, real world-- which means the reality of sense experience.

(Powell 147-48)

2. Authorizing Value: of Genre and Title

To invoke the authority of literary tradition in closing a poem is an assertion of possession over the poem and, in this way, over a poet's claim to originality. The problem is that such a strategy is partly real and partly fictive. There may be a realistic probability that a reader will respect Tomlinson's authority as a poet because he recognizes in the poem the voice of tradition and responds as Tomlinson would wish him to. However, in another way, such a strategy is fictive, an acting out in art of the poet's desire to retain his originality; it is an acting out, rather than an act, by default. The poet "acts out" rather than acts because he can see no way in which he can at the same time both formulate his poem and retain full control over his claim to originality. This section examines how Tomlinson's appeal to poetic tradition, in particular to the genre of satire, relates to his use of entitling as a means of staking claim to his poetic space.

Tomlinson's first collection, Relations and Contraries, has a moralizing tone, indicative of his attempt to transform beauty (the poem) into moral engagement. He judges his age a leaden one. The taunting ending of its first poem, "Etruscan Shades," sets the tone: "The lion's unsated appetite/ Shall older gods than yours requite" (Relations 263). The sense of one who knows too much--"Your cause of woe is knowledge"--to bear the present and who must therefore

somehow take leave of his society and set forth on a voyage of self-discovery characterizes both the poem, "The Conscious Lover," and the volume as a whole:

For you who have outworn a jaded sun
 Nothing remains
 Your Eros lies in chains
 And, unarmed, you have rebegun
 Where love began,
 A thoughtless and God-naked man.

Your cause of woe is knowledge, the effect
 That from your blood (which lacks all red)
 You cannot paint the godhead
 Of a risen sun,
 Nor resurrect
 A once declining one.

Some unmapped course must point you to your east--
 That is, your pole,
 At which you take direction, and grow whole;
 Like clockwork ships on over-freighted seas,
 Lap up (a sleek Leviathan)
 Atlantic distances.

Your soul's sole course requires a sea
 Unfathomed and which flows
 Between uncharted archipelagos:
 The more the sea takes toll the more you're free
 (Your soul and you) to float
 To port your shell-encrusted boat.

(Relations 270-71)

And the closing lines of the volume's longest poem, "Monuments," reveals that most characteristic feature of poetry since Baudelaire, the division between the artist and his society:

Blind nature we may trick,
 But art reveals
 And, as the vision pales,
 The line grows thick;

Commerce blunts comity at last,
 But from out past
 These roofs, harmonious to the sight
 As music to the ear,
 Lie ranked in symmetry, withstanding night

And time beneath this spire.

(Relations 278)

The artist's harsh judgement on his society, evident throughout, should be distinguished from his later and much more fundamental moral conviction that poetry must give the object world its due. Despite the formalism of these poems, the strongest urge evident in them is an anti-poetic one: to turn the beautiful, or at any rate, the poem, to a moral purpose. In an uncollected poem, "Art and Chaos," published in the same year as Relations and Contraries, Tomlinson's Blakean persona intones: "All living art is temporal, even fragmentary," and the specific target of his invective is the temptation for art to pretend to "permanency":

All living art is temporal, even fragmentary.

Art which pretends ultimacy or permanency should be suspect,

For the reign of ultimates is tyranny. Greek art pretends to an ultimacy of Proportions, all things Roman to an ultimacy of power, and Gothic things to an ultimacy of Spirit.

Gothic cathedrals, along with the skyscraper, should be consigned to the graveyard of giants. The cities of the West are full of monstrous tombstones.

Let us beware of imposing Forms: of the pyramids at Gizeh, of Corinthian temples, of the arch and the basilica.

Beware of petrified Forms. For all life flowers on the edge of chaos.

Hence the effectiveness of unfinished statuary, as in certain carvings of Michelangelo and of Rodin. For all life flowers on the edge of chaos.

Hence the enlivening union of art and primal things, as when the bushman paints on bark or on rock or shells.

Hence the beauty of weathered stone and lichen stains.

Hence the nostalgia of old walls and decaying houses.

For all life returns to chaos.

And hence the falsity of Christs and ideal Madonnas and the eternality of the pietà. These symbols are the tyranny of ultimates that freeze men into an eternal subjection. Subject to immortal ghosts. Defying the

breath of chaos.

For all life returns to chaos.

One of the main problems, at least as far as the anxiety of possession is concerned, with Relations and Contraries is that the authorities to which it appeals, the genre of satire and the poetic tradition, are not in fact, in 1951, the powerful protectors of originality that he wishes. He wishes they were an authority higher than society's laws but one that society recognizes and obeys. The satiric thrust of these poems shows a contradictory and subversive tendency in his defense of poetic property.

Satire, in general, is the most officially sanctioned--all-licensed--genre for criticizing the mores of society. By beginning in the satiric mode, he chose the poetic genre which perhaps more than any other defines the relationship between the artist and society. As David Nokes remarks,

satire is pre-eminently a social genre. Unlike the novel which is an autonomous entity, creating and sustaining its own fictional world, satire always has its object and validation in external reality. Satire must always have an object to satirise and hence exists in a direct critical relationship with the society which produces it. As a genre it is teleological rather than ontological, finding its own full meaning only in relation to meanings outside itself. (Nokes 2)

Yet while Tomlinson draws on this sanctioned form of social criticism, the poems of Relations and Contraries overstep the genre's bounds by echoing the poetic iconoclasts, Blake and Nietzsche, and giving utterance to ideas which ask no societal endorsement. His pamphlet shows the uneasy double birth of a satirist and iconoclast. The poems in Relations

and Contraries are ambivalent: it is not clear how violently the poet disagrees with his society. The satirist rejects specific ills he detects in his society but, as Nokes points out, the satirist is firmly tied to the society he ridicules; he seeks to mend and restore. For the iconoclast, society is beyond repair. The iconoclast is basically a solipsist, driven to a total break with his society by his need to remake the world from the beginning. The sweeping gestures of "Art and Chaos" and to some extent of the poems in Relations and Contraries suggest the renunciations of an iconoclast, though other poems take a less extreme view.

If satire and iconoclasm constitute his contrary beginnings, his later poetry may be read as an attempt to reconcile himself with his society without compromising his radical ideals. Nokes goes on to remark that post-war British literature has been "characterized by a revival of interest in satire of all kinds"(8). One reason for Tomlinson's long exclusion from the centre of the British poetry scene and for the criticism he has drawn for writing of things, not people, lies in his early abandonment of satire, at least as his predominant mode, just at a time when satire was in the ascendant. But in Relations and Contraries satire is the law of poetic ownership to which he appeals. However, the invocation of this cultural tradition as a means of declaring both value and ownership proves unsatisfactory, not only because the modern world increasingly fails to recognize the authority and power of that tradition, but more especially

because the very invocation itself means some percentage of ownership is lost to the poet.

To assert ownership of the poem is to assert ownership of what the poem is, that is, to assert originality. To put it another way, to assert possession of the poem is to assert authorship, and to assert authorship is to assert originality. There are two contraries to consider. On the one hand, the presumed moral authority of the poetic tradition will, as it were, impress on his poem a legitimacy borrowed from his predecessors and peers in the tradition. On the other hand, by merely appealing to that tradition, he recognizes its authority, and by recognizing its authority, he (unwillingly) cedes some degree of personal authority, originality, and ownership.

In other words, to possess the poem vis-à-vis his society he must claim legitimacy by appealing to the tradition of poetry as morally superior to the laws of the land. He asserts ownership by asserting that the poem has value: to give value to the poem is to enter it into the political economy: to say, in other words, this poem, like any other good or service, has value. The origin and originality of the poem in the political economy is as a thing of value. The poem does not exist there until it is a thing of value. Such an appeal constitutes possession in the following way: it makes the poem a poem. Lacking this affiliation with a tradition the poet's words would be ignored, or so he feels, an 0 without a figure, a valueless

utterance at worst, a non-poetic utterance at best. His discourse would not be elevated above that of his society but rather merged with it. Thus, to possess the poem in his own right, he struggles to free it from that very tradition to which he appeals for authority. If he is to retain the fiction of originality (possibility), then he must invent other ways of denoting ownership--or redefining "ownership"--than that by appeal to the traditional authority of the poet and the poem. For to define his ownership by such an appeal is not what he wishes to do, and hence his pride and satisfaction in the achievement of "Poem."

If we include "Sea Poem," "Small Action Poem," "Prose Poem," and "Nature Poem," Tomlinson has written ten poems, counting those from Relations and Contraries and the Collected Poems, basically entitled "Poem." By entitling a poem "Poem" the poet gives at least the appearance of subordinating the proprietary nature of the title to its commonality with other poems. As a synecdoche standing for the poem-to-follow, "Poem," the title, tries to point to nothing more than the whole poem; it avoids over-determining the poem's meaning, the tendency to pre-select a key component of the poem for highlighting. Thus, though the first poem in Relations and Contraries, "Etruscan Shades," seems to announce a satiric concern for the volume--the rule of nature lies behind all civilizations, British, Roman, Etruscan--the second poem, "Poem," revokes the whole satiric enterprise and refocuses attention on the poem itself, a

focus re-endorsed by the Preface thirty -four years later. The title, "Poem," seeks to make the poem common property by erasing the poet's control over the power of the title to target meaning.

What Tomlinson tries to do in his interviews and other published comments on his poems--those statements in which he overtly injects value into his poems--is to shed the notion of possession. To impress the political economy with the value of the poem amounts to a declaration of ownership. The poem apes a thing of value: it has an author; it has a title; as an asset, it is both tangible and intangible. But what it lacks in tangibility may be more to the point than might at first appear, especially given Tomlinson's concern with the poet--and the poem's--relation to the objects of the physical world.

Related to these commentaries on his own poems are his titles. S.J. Wilsmore notes the essential nature of titles to our cultural tradition: "Titles are the means by which an individualist tradition makes clear its literary wares, their owners, and their resulting nature. As such, titles play a vital part in our individuating practices"(Wilsmore 404). Jerrold Levinson argues that "the title slot for a work of art is never devoid of aesthetic potential; how it is filled, or that it is not filled, is always aesthetically relevant. (A work differently titled will invariably be aesthetically different.)" (Levinson 29). Concurring with Levinson, Hazard Adams suggests that the relation between a title and its work

is a synecdochic one and emphasizes that it is the title's "relation to the rest of the text that must be read." Furthermore, Adams raises an important point about Wilsmore's idea of the proprietary nature of the title: "It is a matter of some interest whether literary titles, because they may have significance as perhaps the only direct utterances of the text's authority, possess a special status that titles of other works of art do not. Insofar as they are somehow beyond the narration, or surrounding it, or containing it, they seem to" (Adams 19). Adams distinguishes literary titles from non-literary titles of artworks by pointing out that all titles, for all artworks--of music, painting, and so forth--are always in words; literary works, then, unlike other artworks, necessarily blend title and work in their common verbal medium and because of this blending hold an ambivalent position: "beyond the narration, or surrounding it, or containing it." How do Tomlinson's titles relate to the problem of possessiveness?

One would think that the title of a poem would have special significance as a means of asserting possession. Together with the poet's name, the title is, par excellence, the sign of the economic law intruding into the domain of the poem. Like the author's signature, the title indicates possession, stakes territory, against both society and culture. Yet the territory he is laying claim to is a difficult one to stake out. If the poetic origin is figured as "space" for Tomlinson, a zero, a nothingness, then

something must be done to effect the transition or metamorphosis from the unreal domain of nothingness to reality: something has come from nothing. In a sense, his titles are the means of making that transition: they are the physical token, the printed money, which stand in for the "space" of the poem.

The title is referentially simple compared to the poem-to-follow. Tomlinson's titles frequently act in such a way as to protect the poetic space of possibility. Either they refer to a part of the poem's reference system, for example, to an object upon which the poet meditates, or they refer by allusion to a specific context beyond the poem. In both cases, they protect the space of the poem by pointing the reader to some thing. As Brian Rotman points out in Signifying Nothing, nothing or zero signifies the non-existence of origins. By situating "Poem," his original poem, in the space of nothingness, Tomlinson paradoxically both gives it an origin and denies all origins.

Many of his titles fall into one or other of two categories, either into those which Levinson terms "neutral" or into those which he terms "allusive" (34). Both types of title seem to reject the synecdochic function, which Adams sees in all titles. After The Necklace, which imports, along with other elegancies of Wallace Stevens, his ironies of entitling, Tomlinson's titles are mostly "neutral." They disclaim, for the most part, any purpose in relation to the poem-to-follow other than that of mere label. Many of his

titles denote as briefly, yet as precisely, as possible (note the frequency of prepositions and definite articles) a place ("At Holwell Farm"), an object ("The Door"), a season ("In April"), or an event ("Swimming Chenango Lake").

The other common category of titles, his allusive titles, seems to indicate a desire to extend the communicative potential of the title. As John Fisher points out, "Titling permits discourse about artworks" (289), and as he goes on to explain, "A title is not the only way to identify a work. It is not always the most precise way. It is a way to identify a work in order to talk about it; and, in the strict sense of titling, when I speak of a work by referring to it by title, I leave no doubt about the referent" (290). By alluding to other works of art, to artists, and to friends, family, and neighbours, his titles prepare a context of dialogue in which to read their poems. This method is expanded and particularized if we include inscriptions, dedications, and epigraphs in our concept of "title."

Tomlinson's pervasive imagery of boundaries, borders, and outlines, relates to the same issues of possessiveness and openness which his entitling raises. Entitling is a way of enclosing and possessing the object, of focussing and thereby of controlling meaning. His concern with these other frames or containers, although it certainly indicates his precise art of discrimination, may also be taken as a sign of his struggle with possessiveness. By carefully demarcating

the boundary between objects, he dramatizes his anxiety while at the same time displacing the anxiety onto the object world. The self is the possessor of the poem. The rhetoric of the controlled self would divest the self of claims of possession over things, but this rhetoric, and the doctrine for which it speaks, is ambivalent about the possession of the poem. The show of divestment of claims to things in part is a mask for the poet's most closely guarded space: the space of possibility, the poem. What he terms a "space" in the Preface and elsewhere is already metaphorically transformed into geographical language, and is already tending toward even further objectification where "space" becomes "place."

The threat to originality is the cause of Tomlinson's anxiety about possession of the poem. His need to declare and defend his poetic relations with the object world, indeed the high value he attaches to the object world, may similarly be seen as the prevention of a perceived infringement of his originality, the enactment of his fear of possession. Thus in various places, for instance in his Preface, he morally upbraids himself for his desire to possess the object world and sternly admonishes himself that possessiveness is forbidden.

3. "Poem" and the Space of Possibility

One important aspect of "Poem" is that Tomlinson sees it as his first successful poem. The kind of poem that he wanted to write, it became a standard for subsequent poems. In retrospect it may have become the particular Eden of his craft, which he tries to return to again and again: hence, for example, his Eden poems; hence also his late judgement on his birthplace, Stoke. In his Stoke poems he celebrates Stoke, even as a source of his artistic vision, and by so doing he converts Stoke into more materia poetica for duplicating that first poem, "Poem."

By placing "Poem" at the beginning of his Collected Poems, he makes it both an entrance, a gloss or map to the way he wishes us to read the poems that follow, but also something of an impediment, something that he cannot get around, something of a prelude in the Wordsworthian sense of an unfinished and unfinishable poem. If the word "prelude" in the Preface does suggest an allusion to The Prelude, then it may provide good reason for attending to all of Relations and Contraries--that excluded and original volume, both to "Poem" and to its companion poems. If we follow Bloom's theory of anxiety for a moment, the allusion might be interpreted to be both a gesture of defiance at the powerful predecessor poet, Wordsworth--in effect saying: "Look how I succeed where you failed: I was able to complete my Prelude and create beyond it"--and a gesture of defeat--in effect:

"Nor was I able to get beyond my first true poem." Read as a successful first poem, the ephebe throws off the burden of the past; but read as an empty gesture, it becomes a confession of failure. In either case, the issue brings us to Relations and Contraries as a starting point. To understand the relations and contraries in his work we need to see both what he wished to rescue and what he would abandon. That which he would abandon may be seen as merely juvenilia or it may be seen as providing insight into the special value he places on "Poem"--a value so great that it might itself become more of a hindrance to creation than those excluded poems which it attempts to stop up.

In a sense to proceed to a reading of all of Relations and Contraries is to part company with the poet. He would argue that what "Poem" and the rest of his Collected Poems have to offer is available by reading them and them alone. What he asks, then, is that he be allowed to determine the contexts that are relevant to his poems. To part company with Tomlinson at this point means seeing the key phrase, "relations and contraries," as something more than his Preface would have it be. The Preface implies that he controls even his contradictions; by pointing to the dialectic that the title suggests he diminishes the idea of relations and contraries to merely one more poetic device. This gesture at diminishment would distance the idea of relations and contraries from the centre, from the essence of his poetry, from the cherished

heart of originality, even as he appears to recognize, and have us recognize, its centrality. Thus there are relations and contraries worth examining in both the rescued parts of his first pamphlet and the abandoned ones.

When he states in the Preface that "Poem" is what he wanted to do, he means that "Poem" was, more than anything he had previously written, original: having no liens, mortgages, or other claims on his creativity or originality. "Poem" shows the poet awakening to possibility, to the plenitude of fact and to the recognition that in our world of imperfect knowledge any act is subject to error. His persona listens but does not directly see the outside world and recreates that world through sound and imagination.

"Poem" stands out from the rest of Relations and Contraries because in it Tomlinson breaks free of the need to moralize his poetry, and thus attempts a different defense of his originality than by appeal to the cultural tradition. "Poem" means that there is, in fact, space, possibility, for creation. That space is a believed-in and believable fiction: a space, that is, free of influences, where the self can be original. The problem is that this space of possible pure originality is subject to disbelief; at times it can shrink to nothingness. To understand "Poem" one needs to examine it both in its late context and form, as the prelude to The Collected Poems, and in its original context and form, as the second, not the first, poem of Relations and Contraries, and as the first part of a two-part poem, "Poem,"

which appeared there as follows:

"Poem"

I

Wakening with the window over fields,
To the coin-clear harness-jingle as a float
Clips by, and each succeeding hoof fall, now remote,
Breaks clean and frost-sharp on the unstopped ear.

The hooves describe an arabesque on space,
A dotted line in sound that falls and rises
As the cart goes by, recedes, turns to retrace
Its way back through the unawakened village.

And space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;
Though space is soundless, yet creates
From very soundlessness a ground
To counterstress the lilting hoof fall as it breaks.

II

Wakening to the burden of slow chimes. . .
The city air lifts, furred and crass,
On joists of steel and intersecting wires,
Piles fog against the window glass.

Space, grown narrow and confined
By all the walls that crowd it out,
Attests and deadens each succeeding stroke
That country-space would, counterpointing, flout.

And space grown small on each succeeding hill
Grants exodus to neither ear nor sight,
Awaits, in muffled, feckless ignorance
The frog, the locust-swarm, the blight.

(Relations 263-64)

If the poem Tomlinson rescues from his first pamphlet celebrates the discovery of poetic possibility, the recognition of poetic power and potential, its brother, which he abandons to its little pamphlet, expresses the fear of possession as the fear of the curtailment of space, possibility, creativity, and originality. "Poem" stood neither as the "prelude" to Relations and Contraries nor as an independent poem. Tomlinson suppresses its twin, both in body and by name, in his Collected Poems, and, furthermore,

gives its rescued half clear title to its title. The original twinning of these poems indicates the division in his mind about the direction in which he wanted his poetry to go.

The implicit parallel between the waker of "Poem" I and its poet is absent from "Poem" II. Whereas the first suggests the presence of a (poetic) consciousness from the start-- "Wakening with the window over fields"--the second elides such reference--"Wakening to the burden of slow chimes. . ." -- in effect, echoing the sense of constriction to oblivion which the poem expresses: "Space, grown narrow and confined/ By all the walls that crowd it out," "And space grown small on each succeeding hill/ Grants exodus to neither ear nor sight." Moreover, the rescued "Poem" suggests an aesthetic: "possibility" means that the poet creates the world: the world lies uncreated and remains to be created and recreated afresh by his interaction with it. Thus "Poem" recognizes artistic purpose: in it, he sees himself as creator, as originator, by virtue of seeing the world as waiting to be created by him. "Poem," unlike the other poems in his pamphlet, is self-reflexive: listening to the passage of horse and cart, he apperceives his creativity as he recreates their progress through the street.

What is perhaps most important about "Poem" I as a "prelude" to Tomlinson's work is that it celebrates the poet's voice, the sound of words shaped by the poet to create value. Tomlinson is known as a poet of the eye, for his

detailed and careful renderings of things seen; but "Poem" I subordinates the eye to the sense of hearing. It is sound which fathers, both on the sleeping consciousness and on the similarly dormant external world, form and meaning. The awakening poet does not begin to see before he has heard "the coin-clear harness-jingle" and the hooves breaking "clean and frost-sharp on the unstopped ear." In a sense, the rivalry between poet and society is here dramatized as a contest between ear and eye, where reality, the seen-world, is deliberately left off-stage by the poet, unperceived and unintruding, beyond the walls of his dwelling. The sound of the harness bells and hooves does not signify the intrusion of that world, but rather the creativity of the poet's imagination. The outside world only gains admission through the sound of the poet's words as he recreates that world in his mind: "The hooves describe an arabesque on space,/ A dotted line in sound that falls and rises/ As the cart goes by."

Another way to measure the shift in Tomlinson's thinking about his work is to compare the first poem of his Collected Poems with the poem he chose to begin Relations and Contraries, "Etruscan Shades:

Earth was our element; we drew
 From earth-life all we, feeling, knew,
 For knowing did but tip our sense
 After the experience.

Between the lion and the doe
 We moved as calm and passion flow,
 Rebirth and death within the blood,
 Hunter and hunted through the wood.

Between the lion and the doe
 All life is duly portioned so;
 Account not such division cruel,
 Where mind is lacking in the duel.

Whatever kills, and kills in blood
 Bears neither judgment, ill nor good:
 The lion's unsated appetite
 Shall older gods than yours requite. (Relations 263)

Why did he give primacy to "Etruscan Shades"? The poem admonishes its audience by pointing to our common beginnings with the beasts: before he evolved a mind, man, like the lion and the doe, obeyed the same elemental law. It might also be read as an admonishment not to blame the gods for the way things are. The appeal at the end of the poem is to the authority of the law of the jungle: "The lion's unsated appetite/ Shall older gods than yours requite." He outflanks the human mind by appealing to a law anterior to that of mind and all mind's fictions and beliefs. We begin to see here the emergence of a dualism between the human self and the non-human world, and his reluctance to judge that inhuman world: "Account not such division cruel,/ Where mind is lacking in the duel." The non-human world beyond the self is to be neither possessed nor judged: "Whatever kills, and kills in blood/ Bears neither judgment, ill nor good."

This poem may or may not have a specific source, but its last verse is reminiscent of the sentiments and even the language of a passage from Lawrence's "Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine":

In nature, one creature devours another, and this is an essential part of all existence and of all being. It is not something to lament over, nor something to

try to reform. The Buddhist who refuses to take life is really ridiculous, since if he eats only two grains of rice per day, it is two grains of life. We did not make creation, we are not the authors of the universe. And if we see that the whole of the universe is established upon the fact that one life devours another life, one cycle of existence can only come into existence through the subjugating of another cycle of existence, then what is the good of trying to pretend that it is not so? The only thing to do is to realize what is higher, and what is lower, in the cycles of existence. (Lawrence 467)

Lawrence's essay is admittedly not an obvious direct source for Tomlinson's poem. (In another passage, in "The Crown," also on the death of animals, Lawrence echoes the same sentiment: "In the world of twilight as in the world of light, one beast shall devour another" (408).)

The poems of Relations and Contraries are marked by their prejudice against the modern world, their preoccupation with the relationship between life and death, and their assertion of the impossibility of knowing the other. Of these, the most prevalent is the Blakean notion of the continuum of life and death, as in "Poem of the Neighbours":

Cat neighbours the bird in death,
Lion neighbours the doe in death,
Snake neighbours the hidden toad,
Hidden toad neighbours the fly: .

That life shall know increase. (Relations 265)

The theme of the presence of death in life is again seen in "Signs, Scenes. . . .," with its epigraph from Thus Spake Zarathustra: "Some die too early, some too late: strange as yet soundeth this doctrine, die at the right time," and its final line: "Behind each human act each human's end." Poems such as these, exhibiting infelicities of style and tone,

can be easily dismissed as juvenilia. Their tone does not convince us that the feelings expressed are more than exercises. Their personae, a little gloomily, note the relationship of life and death, stoically accepting it with no sense of joy or despair. However, what is interesting is the way that again and again Tomlinson uses the elemental fact of death as the means by which to try to get the attention of his society. He bids for that attention by seeming to place the originality of what he has to say in terms of the elemental. In other words, the moral stamp which shows his need to possess his originality and defend it against usurpation by his society lies in this reiteration of the fact of death. He plays the prophet, lamenting that man in modern society has forgotten the most elemental facts of nature. Part of the iconoclasm, and part of the morbidity, of these poems arises from his rejection of the gods. As a modernist, the pronouncement for him is almost a mandatory part of clearing his poetic territory.

The poem which most fully explores the paradox underlying this volume's many dualities is "Peace Between Us, William Blake." The solution to the problem of the apparent relation between apparent opposites seems to lie in the hypothesis of a third term which knits them together: "knits the single heart." Without believing in that "ghostly third" being, the self will unravel: "God is two: I may yet doubt/
Either half--I'm uncreated/ If I doubt the ghostly third/
Wherein they are related" (Relations 274). Several other

poems also demonstrate this need to see the self as merged with the rest of the world. "Images" puts the matter as a paradox: "what is not thus shows us what we are,/ Both blood and bone, earth, river-course and sea" (Relations 275). The longest poem in the volume is "Monuments (A variation on a theme of Yeats)", in which possession is a central element. What was lost with the end of the age of belief, with the death of the gods, is that wholeness of being, that "ghostly third" which "knits the single heart." As the high vision fades there is a falling off in art, and nature reasserts herself. Once again the cause of the decline appears to be an overly possessive attitude: "Commerce blunts comity at last" (Relations 278), the shift from an organic model to a mechanical one. The "Origin of the Species" is more explicit and more satiric about the cause of the falling off:

"Victoria hatched her brood of engineers/ Who built an iron future for their seed,/ Where leatherette shall lap us in our need/ And springs of comfort countervail our fears"(Relations 279).

Perhaps the most basic contradiction of Relations and Contraries is its mixing of the Nietzschean, apocalyptic strain with that of Augustan satire. The first pulls towards the romantic extreme of the artist irreparably separated from his society; the second towards the integration of the artist with his society. Moreover, each strain posits a different evil. In terms of possessiveness, the Nietzschean reduces all to the elemental, man against death the possessor, while

the satiric replaces this duality with the more complicated one of man against a possessive society. To some degree Relations and Contraries attempts to play the one against the other, using the more elemental duality of man against death to chastise society for its shallowness and intolerance. Like the suppressed half of "Poem" and "Etruscan Shades," many of the other poems in the pamphlet display a prejudice against the modern world, and in various ways portray that world as antithetical to the artist's creativity. Like these poems in another way, many of the poems express the artist's dissatisfaction in rhetoric of extreme violence and disgust. The anxiety implicit in the satirical poem, "The Successful Artist Speaks," is for the creative possibility that society denies:

"Unmake my battery like a lisping girl's,
Have finished, then, where satire's speaking tongue
Is greased to smooth to mellow cadences
A voice that's barbed against unspoken wrong.

"I will perform your tight-rope etiquette
Poised on a keen knife's edge between two plates,
On which mine host has heaped most anxiously
His pleasing, cloying, tantalising meats.

"Why should the beast do wrong when it is fed
And saucered milk from rich men's flowing tables,
Nor needs to lap the slops nor beg for crumbs
When he is foddered fat and lain on sables?"

See how the women stretch their lacquered nails
To scratch an ear or furnish one more lack,
And he is weakened, yet seems not to miss
The power they rob and never render back.

He purrs and writhes elastic round their feet,
And plays the harmless eunuch to delight
Those who have plattered head and genitals
To pass among a few this honeyed night.

(Relations 269-79)

Success in the ironic title of this poem is success by society's standards, and for the artist to achieve that success he must forfeit his voice, his intellect, and his manhood. The extreme disgust expressed in the poem is directed against the threat of complete possession by the artist's audience, society.

What he reacts most vehemently against, as in "The Successful Artist Speaks," is that the artist is no longer recognized as the spokesman for a morality superior to his society's. What his poem half-realizes is that although one consequence is that satire is robbed of its point--even as he satirizes this fact--another consequence is that he can no longer invoke the privilege of satire with all its moral weight as a way of claiming and defending his creative originality. Implicitly, the poem rejects the notion that the poet needs society as his audience; implicitly the poem prepares the way for his abandonment of satire as the chief mode of his poetry.

4. Poetry by Misperception: "waste/ None of the sleights
of seeing" (CP 293)

Although the volumes which follow Relations and Contraries contain satiric poems, for the most part satire becomes increasingly subordinated to other poetic forms and procedures. Perhaps the main procedure that replaces satire is what might be called Tomlinson's poetry of error or misperception. Tomlinson cultivates an aesthetic of misperception as a way of resisting possession of the object and of registering a disclaimer of possession. His problem is to claim and maintain his originality without being possessive about originality. Yet because any claim to originality involves some degree of possessiveness, he seeks ways to minimize the appearance of possessiveness without forfeiting possession altogether. If he had continued in the way of Relations and Contraries, or of "Art and Chaos," he might have written himself out of poetry and into moral philosophy or social criticism. Misperception offers a way of writing about the object while at the same time casting the poem's possession of the object into doubt.

This section will demonstrate that his poetry of misperception constitutes a way of challenging and unsettling the powerful metaphor of seeing is understanding. He seizes upon misperceptions as a release from the mechanical routines of perception--they are his wings of poesie, and hence his celebration of them in his poems. Some preliminary examples

from his prose will demonstrate his fascination with chance and error. A more detailed reading of his three poems, "Sight and Flight," "Mushrooms," and "The Fox," will show how misperception lies at the heart of his poetry: his dialectic of possessiveness/possibility.

One of the ways in which Tomlinson's fascination with misperception makes itself manifest is in his anecdotal style. In The Sense of the Past, he relishes the recollection of his confusion, as a child, of two senses of the word "don," the Dons of Cambridge in Newbolt's poem, "He Fell Among Thieves," and the Spanish Dons of his poem "Drake's Drum." (In passing, it is interesting to notice the tenacity of Newbolt's patriotic verse. Writing to Edmund Gosse at the end of January 1898, Arthur Symons predicted an early demise for Newbolt's verse: "Soon Newbolt's drum-taps will die away like the Salvation Army brass band as it turns the corner. . . ." (Symons 124). Despite Symons's prediction, Newbolt's "drum-taps" were still around some thirty years later to provide one of the very first poetic influences on English poets of Tomlinson's generation):

I even used to imagine (and this I've never confessed before) that "The Dons on the dais serene" [of "He Fell Among Thieves"] . . . had something to do with those dons that Drake threatened to drum up the channel "as we drummed them long ago." Were they perhaps prisoners from that famous sea-fight? Was the dais "serene" because they were gloomy at having been captured? I kept quiet about all this, aware of my own ignorance and also of the fact that the British Empire, which still solidly existed, was probably large enough and mysterious enough to accommodate these gloomy

foreigners somewhere on its serene dais.
 (Sense of the Past 4)

More telling, perhaps, is Tomlinson's account (given in his interview with Rasula and Erwin) of coming upon Merleau-Ponty's The Primacy of Perception: "I'd always wanted to find some way of explaining how we build our structures on the sensed and the given. Then one day, in a friend's flat in New York, I *turned up* Merleau-Ponty's The Primacy of Perception and the little essay in that seemed to say all I'd wanted to say. It says it for poetry and much more, and it makes one see how poetry is of a piece with other human activities" (416; my italics). (My emphasis, as in my other examples, is on his rhetoric of error, not on the particulars of the event.) By chance ("turned up"), he finds a validation, source, and expression of "all [he'd] wanted to say." A final example from his prose will suffice to demonstrate this mental habit. In describing his beginnings as a poet at Cambridge, he recounts how he followed the example of Stevens before that of Williams: "The next step was Wallace Stevens. It should have been Stevens and William Carlos Williams . . . I muffed the thing badly"(my italics):

One evening, late in 1947, my new tutor. . . read to me, in a pub in Trumpington, Williams's "Tract" from Oscar Williams's Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, English and American. I thought it delightful. He handed me the book to reread it and, as he did so, the pages fell open at Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." I gazed through this rapidly then moved back to "Tract." It was "Thirteen Ways" that stayed in mind. . . . The Williams sank from recollection. (Some Americans 5; my italics)

Partly because of the chance way the pages of the book "fell open," Tomlinson here recognizes, he inadvertently came under the influence of Wallace Stevens. An irony of this anecdote lies in the coincidence of chance events: Tomlinson happens upon Stevens by accident; but also the particular poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," in some measure displays an aesthetic of chance.

My introduction noted that chance is also an important aspect of translation for Tomlinson. In introducing Translations, he declares that, like Octavio Paz, his attraction to translation is "the result of passion and chance" (11). The way that he there goes on to describe the operation of "passion and chance" as they bring him into contact with non-English poetries is interestingly similar to the way he describes his first encounters with the poetry of Williams and Stevens:

For me these two [passion and chance] have often combined where I found that I had something in common with my original, or when I could learn something from him for my own poetic practice. On at least one occasion, the chance of coming upon a poet I wanted to translate grew into the passion to do so, because of the very distance and difference of his work from anything I could have conceived of writing. (11-12)

The point all these accounts have in common is that Tomlinson delights in chance events, accidents, and errors.

Jackson MacLow, perhaps the pre-eminent and most venerable practitioner of a poetics of chance in America--and a poet in almost every way different from Tomlinson--gives a perceptive account of his own experiments:

At first one thinks one can avoid the ego, make works that are egoless, by chance. This illusion passes after you work this way a while. You realize that making a chance system is as egoic, in some ways, or even as emotional, as writing a poem spontaneously. But at the same time you realize there is something more than just yourself doing it. & by interacting in that way with chance or the world or the environment or other people, one sees and produces possibilities that one's habitual associations--what we usually draw on in the course of spontaneous or intuitive composition--would have precluded, for our so-called intuition or taste is always involved with our biographies and habits, and you know that in Buddhism, the ego includes the Unconscious, in the Freudian sense; all the layers of mind as dealt with in modern psychology are still within the bounds of the ego, and this includes the deep Unconscious. (viii)

Different as his poetry is from MacLow's, in his essay, "To Begin: Note on Graphics", Tomlinson expresses much the same feelings, desiring "To begin beyond the self" and "To return through materials to origins" (20). What he seems to be describing here and in his companion essay, "Poet as Painter," where he refers to ". . . the element of meeting something you didn't expect, something that isn't yourself,"(17), is a procedure for "putting aside the more possessive and violent claims of personality." Indeed, his reflection on the origins of his skull drawings and his poem, "To be Engraved on the Skull of a Cormorant" (CP 187), explicitly dismisses the option of merely safe-guarding the objet trouvé: "You could put it in a glass cabinet or forget it in a safe place, but instead you draw it"(17). Possessiveness seems to be very much at issue in this statement. Possessiveness may be inescapable, but it would seem that its cruder, less desirable manifestations, at

least, can be put aside for more enlightened and more efficient forms, like simply drawing the object.

The sort of "chance" here being referred to is a controlled one. Error or misperception provides an occasion for poetry, a disturbance which can, at least momentarily, distract the self from itself. More than that, however, he recognizes that we learn by erring and that erring itself is rich with possibility, that possibility or "space" to which he refers in the Preface. Unlike Freud, Tomlinson does not construe misperceptions as signs of psychic illness. Rather, he sees them as ways into--The Way In, The Shaft--things, otherwise closed off to us by conventional ways of seeing and speaking of the world. Errors introduce the new. They introduce themselves as metaphors, new ways of describing the world. The poet cultivates misperception in his poems. Misperceptions are incipient metaphors which can lead us from one metaphoric domain to another.

Tomlinson's sense of misperception informs his use of metaphor. Because of his concern with error, we read his use of "like," "as," "as if," and "seems," for instance, differently from that of other poets. In "Sight and Flight," the prose poem which concludes Notes from New York, he tells two more anecdotes of misperception, occasioned by a flight over America:

Sight becomes a double mystery up here, because so frequently one cannot make out what precisely it is that one is looking at. Again, this merely intensifies a daily experience. Indeed, before embarking, and while driving into the airport this

morning, I caught sight of what seemed to be an injured gull struggling on the tarmac: a second later, beaked, bent and rocking in the wind, it resolved itself into a scrap of twisted paper. In flight, we climb above hill-folds, then mountains: a white smoke over their highest point solidifies into snow hooding a peak. It is an exact replica of snow until the eye distinguishes a faint movement in it: cloud! It is the perfect cloak to this mountain inaccessibility, closing off one of the Bible's "high places," a sierra Sinai, under the purest fleece.

(Notes from New York 63)

The lesson of Tomlinson's anecdotes is similar to that taught by Ruskin in Modern Painters when he declares that "WE NEVER SEE ANYTHING CLEARLY." Indeed, even the details of Ruskin's illustration recall Tomlinson's:

What we call seeing a thing clearly, is only seeing enough of it to make out what it is; this point of intelligibility varying in distance for different magnitudes and kinds of things, while the appointed quantity of mystery remains nearly the same for all. Thus: throwing an open book and an embroidered handkerchief on a lawn, at a distance of a quarter of a mile we cannot tell which is which; that is the point of mystery for the whole of those things. They are then merely white spots of indistinct shape. We approach them and perceive that one is a book, the other a handkerchief, but cannot read the one, nor trace the embroidery of the other. The mystery has ceased to be in the whole things, and has gone into their details. We go nearer, and can now read the text and trace the embroidery, but cannot see the fibres of the paper, nor the threads of the stuff. The mystery has gone into a third place. We take both up and look closely at them; we see the watermark and the threads, but not the hills and dales in the paper's surface, nor the fine fibres which shoot off from every thread. The mystery has gone into a fourth place, where it must stay, till we take a microscope, which will send it into a fifth, sixth, hundredth, or thousandth place, according to the power we use. When, therefore, we say, we see the book clearly, we mean only that we know it is a book. (Ruskin 172-73)

To mistake a piece of paper for a gull is to make the gull a metaphor for a piece of paper, a provisional metaphor, but a

metaphor all the same. All metaphors have a provisionality to them, but metaphors conceived in error seem to accentuate that element. Before he identified the "gull" as a piece of paper, in the space of the instant it took him to correct his first impression, it had sprouted wings, acquired feathers, grown very like a gull. Ruskin's comment in fact does point back to Hamlet's ironic interrogation of Polonius, as a kind of literary archetype for the unreliability of our senses. As Tomlinson phrases it in one poem, "our eyes (our lies)" (CP 217); but, as he remarks in another poem, "The Mediterranean": "The imagination cannot lie. It bites brick;/ Says: 'This is steel'--I will taste steel"(CP 21). What we call the imagination has the benefit of the whole process of cognition; the eye's first impressions omit the resipiscent, error-correcting, stage.

His poetry takes stock of error's role in our experience. Learning depends on our willingness to try different hypotheses. It depends on our acceptance of the possibility that we will be wrong. To restrict this notion to the activity of seeing: we make guesses about the nature of things imperfectly perceived, and in doing so, we accept the possibility that we may be in error. The process of hypothesizing never stops. We may declare a truce, as, for example, when Tomlinson ceases his speculation about the object on the tarmac by declaring it to be a "twisted piece of paper." But neither Tomlinson nor any other authority confirms this identification: it retains its mystery, and a

"twisted piece of paper" remains a make-shift conclusion, a fiction with no more status in reality than the initial misidentification of the object as a bird.

Tomlinson's poem, "Mushrooms," raises the same observation of "Sight and Flight" to a higher aesthetic plane:

Eyeing the grass for mushrooms, you will find
 A stone or stain, a dandelion puff
 Deceive your eyes--their colour is enough
 To plump the image out to mushroom size
 And lead you through illusion to a rind
 That's true--flint, fleck or feather. With no haste
 Scent-out the earthy musk, the firm moist white,
 And, played-with rather than deluded, waste
 None of the sleights of seeing: taste the sight
 You gaze unsure of--a resemblance, too,
 Is real and all its likes and links stay true
 To the weft of seeing. You, to begin with,
 May be taken in, taken beyond, that is,
 This place of chiaroscuro that seemed clear,
 For realer than a myth of clarities
 Are the meanings that you read and are not there:
 Soon, in the twilight coolness, you will come
 To the circle that you seek and, one by one,
 Stooping into their fragrance, break and gather,
 Your way a winding where the rest lead on
 Like stepping stones across a grass of water.
 (CP 293-94)

Here Tomlinson rescues and revives the word "taste" from its lapse into the vagueness of cultural euphemism--good taste and bad--as if only society, not the individual, stood behind our engagement with the aesthetic. Rather, he is in agreement with Pound's rebuke: "Damn your taste, I would like if possible to sharpen your perceptions, after which your taste can take care of itself" (Pound 136). It is this primary sense of taste as perception that the poem propounds, "taste the sight/ You gaze unsure of." Haste makes waste:

if, that is, we ignore those basic aesthetic moments of perception which, valuable in themselves, can also, as Pound declares, shape our judgements and thus make us free, to some extent, from socially determined canons of taste, or, more generally, from previously "analyzed" reality. Ever to hasten after the mushroom itself is to acquiesce in an abstraction, "a myth of clarities"---"For realer than a myth of clarities/ Are the meanings that you read and are not there"---and to forgo those meanings is to waste one's life, as his recent poem, "At Chimayó," in fact, points out. The final lines of "Mushrooms" point up the sadness of that waste; their elegiac tones and images broaden out from the particulars of this mushroom-hunt at twilight to everyman's inevitable conclusion: "Soon, in the twilight coolness, you will come/ Stooping into their fragrance, break and gather,/ Your way a winding where the rest lead on/ Like stepping-stones across a grass of water."

Metaphor performs a function similar to such acts as looking at the earth from the window of an airplane or searching the grass for mushrooms. The poet lives with the knowledge of the error of his fictions and metaphors, and the knowledge emerges in the figures themselves. Tomlinson reinstates the idea of error in the process of aesthetic creation. Error is merely trivial if it is exhausted of its moral weight, if we dismiss it as the result of a physical obstacle---a speck of dust in the eye, a trick of distance or fatigue. Like Freud, Tomlinson theorizes that apparently innocent errors have a

different cause and purpose. But unlike Freud, he points to the mind's need to make sense of its surroundings as the source, not to a struggle within the mind or subconscious.

The act of writing a poem is a way of possessing the world. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out, one of our basic conceptual metaphors is the "container metaphor," a metaphor which seems to have its origin in our physical experience of the world:

We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside. . . . But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries--marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface--whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane. There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such defining of a territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification.

(Lakoff and Johnson 29)

If the act of writing a poem is another instance of the container metaphor, then the poet risks becoming overly possessive whenever he writes a poem. ("Overly possessive" may be redundant; my point is to emphasize, again, the negative connotations which Tomlinson's Preface gives the word, especially by its pairing: "violent and possessive.") To possess the object is to reduce the world to the self; to be possessed by the object is to allow the self to be reduced to inanimateness. Neither position is acceptable to Tomlinson. "Resistance" is another metaphor closely related to the

container metaphor and one which Tomlinson has used to explain the relationship between subject and object: the poet must feel the resistance of the object in order to be attracted to it, and yet the poet must resist both overpowering the object and allowing the object to overpower the self.

The deep-rootedness of the container metaphor in our language contributes to the problem of striking the right poetic balance between subject and object. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, "it is by no means an easy matter to change the metaphors we live by" (145), especially when they are as ingrained as those of the container-metaphor family. Thus, if Tomlinson is engaged in resisting possessiveness and in attempting to introduce new metaphors to counteract the way that our language's prevailing, possessive metaphors define reality, then his task is both difficult and valuable. Citing an observation by Charlotte Linde, Lakoff and Johnson remark that "whether in national politics or in everyday interaction, people in power get to impose their metaphors" (157); and they go on to note: "In all aspects of life. . . we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor" (158).

If "Mushrooms" and "Sight and Flight" are somewhat self-reflexive and didactic about the importance of misperception

in the birth of new metaphors, "The Fox" is a kind of parable of possession and misperception. It begins with the confession of two possible errors: "When I saw the fox, it was kneeling/ in snow: there was nothing to confess/ that, tipped on its broken forepaws/ the thing was dead--save for its stillness" (CP 109). The first error relates to the order of events described here; the second to his choice of words. The final phrase, "save for its stillness," might or might not have been the first detail noticed by the speaker; that is, either he was momentarily fooled into thinking the fox alive or else, from the first instant he saw it, he recognized that it was dead. The "living" fox stands to the dead fox as the "gull" to the twisted paper.

Secondly, the reader does not know whether the words "kneeling," "confess," and "save," of the opening lines, are to be understood as the words of the speaker on encountering the fox or the words of the poet in describing that encounter. The experience a poem refers to is beyond discerning, but, when a poem adopts an anecdotal form, questions about the difference between the language of its persona and the language of the poem about that persona's experience are of critical interest. These words are deployed in close conjunction in the opening lines. Their potential gestalt, connoting the confession of sins (errors) and absolution (redemption), is re-enforced and probably prompted, on a first reading, by the connotatively related word, "temples." They therefore constitute a relevant

semantic structure and are of critical importance.

The rest of the poem recounts a disorderly retreat from this misperception: the landscape has been changed by the snow and wind, disguising the hill and blocking his way forward. Even his own tracks are disappearing: "already a million blown snow-motes were flowing/ and filling them in." Nature's power over form, shape, and life mocks the comparative powerlessness of his mind: "the drift still mocked/ my mind." And the mockery takes the shape of his initial error: "as if the whole/ fox-infested hill were the skull of a fox." Several features combine here: the drift has acquired a few anthropomorphic features. The phrase "A drift, confronting me, leaned down," perhaps begins them, and the potential for accenting the anthropomorphic metaphor in the italicized words is given authority when we reach "mocked." Secondly, the drift, which both conceals and magnifies the hill, seems to him to have transformed it into a rival brain, the monstrously large skull of a fox, connoting both brain--intelligence, wit--and death--a skull which contains, or at least dwarfs, him.

The second last verse reveals the speaker's third error. His exclamation at the hill-top's beauty is immediately undercut by the fact of the dead fox in the landscape: "Scallops and dips/ of pure pile rippled and shone, but what/ should I do with such beauty/ eyed by that?" The "that" seems to refer to the metaphoric creation in his mind, the hill transformed into the skull of a fox. His

imagination and his desire for beauty are frustrated by the fact of the dead fox: like the hill, it cannot be gotten round. The final verse ends in a complete rout:

It was like clambering between its white temples
as the crosswind tore
at one's knees, and each
missed step was a plunge at the hill's blinding
interior.

Here the poet is caught up in his metaphoric errors. The experience recounted is ambivalent: its ending approaches a tone of metaphysical horror not often found in Tomlinson's generally urbane poetic voice, a tone perhaps more characteristic of Robert Frost's poetry.

These three poems show how important error and chance are to his poetry, and further examples from his work could be adduced. For example, in The Return, his most recent volume, important examples of misperception appear in "Graziella," "The Unpainted Mountain," and "The Night Farm," among others. My second chapter examines the way in which Tomlinson's interest in chance relates to his interest in the poetry of Wallace Stevens. In fact, the relationship between the two poets involves more than the concept of chance; it includes, perhaps most prominently, the coming together of modern American and modern British poetry.

Chapter Two

An American Presence:

The Influence of Wallace Stevens

. . . but what bothered him most was that the usual effect of estheticizing a discourse was to neutralize it --David Antin, Talking at the Boundaries (51)

1. Charles Tomlinson and Wallace Stevens: A Continuing Dialogue

*And America where there
is the little old ramshackle victoria in the south,
where cigars are smoked on the street in the north;
where there are no proofreaders, no silkworms,
no digressions;

the wild man's land; grassless, linksless,
languageless country in which letters are written
not in Spanish, not in Greek, not in Latin,
not in shorthand,
but in plain American which cats and dogs can read!
--Marianne Moore, "England," (46).*

In his memoir, Some Americans (1981), Charles Tomlinson introduces a theme which runs through his life and work, the pernicious insularity of British culture: "A boy from the provinces, going up to read English at Cambridge in 1945, as I did, will have learned little of American poetry from his university teachers. None of them seemed to mention it" (1). The particular variation on this theme which most occupies Tomlinson here, as in many other places in his writings, is the resistance of British critics and poets to

modern American poetry--to American influence. This cultural resistance has sometimes been explained on the grounds that the British cannot hear the speech rhythms of American poetry and therefore cannot understand or appreciate its art and value. Donald Davie gave this view its greatest prominence in his "Afterword: For the American Reader" in his Thomas Hardy and British Poetry (1972):

One is tempted to say that for many years now British poetry and American poetry haven't been on speaking terms. But the truth is rather that they haven't been on hearing terms--the American reader can't hear the British poet, neither his rhythms nor his tone of voice, and the British reader only pretends to hear the rhythms and the tone of American poetry since William Carlos Williams. And so what we have had for some years now is a breakdown in communication between these two English-speaking poetries, though for civility's sake the appearance of a continuing dialogue between them is maintained"

(Davie 184)

Davie's assessment conjures up a formidable obstacle: if the two nations cannot hear each other's speech rhythms and tones of voice, then a substantial amount of what makes poetry poetic would seem to be lost. However, Davie's statement is not without its own problems of communication. He exaggerates, some of his terms are unclear--what, for instance, does he mean by "a breakdown in communication"?--and he fails to describe the implications of this state of affairs. Indeed, without knowing those implications, one might assume, with some historical justification, that they would on the whole be beneficial; the misreading of Poe by the French Symbolistes is but a leading instance of a well-established cultural exchange. Moreover, Jeffrey Wainwright

has argued against Davie's point that "far from being unable to 'hear' America, for very many years many Europeans, and especially because of the language, many English people, have found it easier and more congenial to tune to the voices of America, with all the contradictions that implies, than they have to those put forward to them as their own" (Wainwright 23). Perhaps Julian Gitzen is correct, in replying to Davie's remark, to attribute the difference between the two poetries "to the evolution of two distinct traditions" and to note further that "few efforts have yet been made to identify the distinct traditional qualities which lend differing character to English and American poetry" (53). In any case, whatever its problems, Davie's remark, like the lives of the two poets, critics, and friends, is bound up with Charles Tomlinson's struggle against British insularity.

Both as a poet and as a critic, Tomlinson has striven to break down the British barriers to outside cultural influences. More than many poets, he has developed a poetic which is bound up with the idea of influence, and Some Americans might be subtitled a personal study of influence, so much is it concerned with meditating on what influence has meant to his poetry. This chapter examines three aspects of the relation of Tomlinson's poetry to that of Stevens. The first section considers his comments on influence and investigates whether his idea of influence is compatible with that of Harold Bloom. The second section looks at the effect Stevens's poetry had on Tomlinson's early verse, the poems in

The Necklace, where the Stevensian influence is most noticeable, and considers his comment that the poems were both a dialogue with and a departure from Stevens. The third section takes up this claim in further detail and explores the implications of his disagreement with Stevens about the basic concepts of poetic language, imagination, and the self. That section will argue that, despite his apparent turning away from Stevens, the older poet has had a lasting, though not always evident, effect on his work.

The idea of influence is related to a number of important issues both in Tomlinson's poetry and poetic and in modern poetry generally: to the idea of modernist internationalism, to the acrimonious relations between modern British and American poets, to translation, and, perhaps least obviously, to the idea of chance, or resipiscence, a main concern of this thesis. Although the element of chance might seem to be a minor element in Stevens's poetic, and although Tomlinson learned from various parts of Stevens's poetic, the importance of his reading of Stevens, especially "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," is important both to the development of his own poetic and to his continuing dialogue with Stevens.

Even though this chapter's main emphasis is on the poetic relation of Stevens's work to Tomlinson's, I will begin by considering the idea of influence in more general terms, because after Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence (1973) influence has become an issue more vexed than ever before. In

one sense, Bloom's theory of "poetic misprision" brings the misreading of one culture and language by another, as in the example of Poe and Mallarmé, to bear on the poets of a single culture and language. In another sense, his theory can be seen as an elaboration of Randall Jarrell's aphorism that "just as great men are great disasters, overwhelmingly good poets are overwhelmingly bad influences" (66). The point of selecting a poet who in many respects is quite different from Tomlinson is to demonstrate how the idea of poetic chance in some ways grows out of a continuing dialogue between them. My main contention is that Tomlinson sees influence as a fortuitous encounter, similar to the way he sees poetic inspiration, and an encounter that at first seems to be somehow in error but which later becomes significant. It is important to emphasize the element of error here, because it shows how the mind's equilibrium responds to a concept which not only does not fit into the way it currently orders the world but which also refuses to be either rejected or subordinated to that present order and, rather, insists on replacing it. In this way, and in terms of literary influence, Tomlinson's notion of chance is closer to Bloom's theory of a psychological struggle between creators than it is to Eliot's or Leavis's idea of the hard-won but essentially smooth assimilation of each new work to the literary tradition. Although Eliot and Leavis, significantly, base their versions of influence on works rather than on authors, as in Bloom, the Eliot-Leavis notion

must finally expand from the level of artifact to that of artificer: for how do works become part of the tradition except through the valuations of poets and readers? The authority for linking Eliot's idea of tradition with Leavis' comes from Tomlinson himself, who has described the connection in his review of the reissue of Scrutiny:

Besides the debt to Arnold the fundamentals of Scrutiny owe a good deal to T. S. Eliot, despite a later tendency to force an either/or between him and D.H. Lawrence. Leavis' "a sense of relative values in the concrete," stressed early in the review, comprises a rephrasing for critics of Eliot's own dicta in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead."

("Scrutiny" 286)

Tomlinson would seem to side with Bloom because Bloom's theory of influence attempts to reassert liberal humanist values against the rise of deconstructionist criticism. (Tomlinson seems to fit the meaning of "liberal humanist" in his defense of meaning, tradition, and morality.) Terry Eagleton argues that overcoming deconstruction is the crucial test that Bloom's theory must pass: "Bloom's criticism starkly exposes the dilemma of the modern liberal-Romantic humanist--the fact that on the one hand no reversion to a serene, optimistic human faith is possible after Marx, Freud, and post-structuralism, but that on the other hand any humanism which like Bloom's has taken the organizing pressures of such doctrines is bound to be fatally compromised and contaminated by them" (Eagleton 184). Like

Bloom's, Tomlinson's writings demonstrate a firm allegiance to liberal humanist criticism and values, but he parts from Bloom in that his allegiance may be too strong to countenance as much of the deconstructionist enterprise. The Anxiety of Influence, A Map of Misreading, and Bloom's later extensions of this theory, for all their determination to resist deconstructionism, borrow heavily from its methodology. As Eagleton remarks: "Bloom advances far enough down the primrose path of American deconstructionism to be able to scramble back to the heroically human only by a Nietzschean appeal to the 'will to power' and 'will to persuasion' of the individual imagination which is bound to remain arbitrary and gestural" (184-85).

One would think, then, that Tomlinson might disclaim attachment to Bloom's theory on at least two grounds. First, as a liberal humanist, he might find the distance Bloom travels with American deconstructionists too far and too much. And, second, he seems to view the question of influence differently from Bloom. Tomlinson seems more open to influences and more able to give them their due than Bloom's theory would allow. Indeed, one wonders if the central importance of Wallace Stevens's poetry to Bloom's theory results in part from that poet's reticence about his own influences. A comparison of Tomlinson's comments on influence with those of Stevens is instructive, but needs to be qualified at the outset. All of Stevens's remarks on influence come from his writings, mostly from his letters; if

Stevens were ever interviewed, and if the topic of influence were mentioned, the results have not been published. On the other hand, most of Tomlinson's remarks on influence have been made in the course of interviews--not surprisingly, since the question of influence is the one most commonly posed by interviewers. But because no direct interaction occurs between writer and reader in the way that it does between speaker and audience, the strategies, or defenses, employed by a letter-writer may well be different from those of an interviewee. But, bearing this qualification in mind, Stevens's comments on influence are more defensive than Tomlinson's.

As an example, one might compare their remarks on the danger of imitating--or even reading--poets with strong mannerisms. Bloom quotes Stevens writing to Richard Eberhart: "I sympathize with your denial of any influence on my part. This sort of thing always jars me because, in my own case, I am not conscious of having been influenced by anybody and have purposely held off from reading highly mannered people like Eliot and Pound so that I should not absorb anything even unconsciously" (Anxiety 7; Letters 813). Compare Stevens's dismissiveness there with Tomlinson's more tempered remarks on Stevens's own mannerism, in the course of Peter Orr's interview: "Well I think one is inevitably influenced by Eliot. There's no way of getting away from the fact that Eliot has something to supply, and here you've got a useful antidote to what is wrong with Stevens. I mean, in

Stevens you've got a strong mannerism, whereas in Eliot, I think, in the Four Quartets, you've poetic manners as distinct from mannerism. This is something one can learn from, whereas you have to beware of the mannerisms of an American like Stevens" (Orr 251).

Tomlinson merely cautions readers to be prudent in reading or imitating the mannerisms of Stevens, whereas Stevens claims to have completely forsworn reading Pound and Eliot for fear of absorbing their mannerisms. In addition to the difference in their degree of openness to strong poetic influences, the two responses may reflect that hearing problem between American and British readers. The note of distrust is perhaps not so easily detected in Stevens's remark as it is in Tomlinson's--"an American like Stevens"--yet one wonders if, for both, Eliot was more a British poet than an American and, for Tomlinson, whether Stevens was more mannered than Eliot because Stevens was the more American of the two. Davie himself seems never to have had a hearing problem with regard to Eliot; indeed, in his memoir, "Eliot in One Poet's Life," Davie remarks that "the late Mr. Eliot has been a presence in my life more insistently influential than any other writer whatever" (230). Davie eventually felt compelled to adopt the Stevensian defense: "early in the 1950s I imposed a self-denying ordinance on myself and quite consciously read no verse by Eliot at all--in a drastic attempt to root out of my own style the Eliotic cadences which were making it not mine

at all" (236). Davie's own admonition is that "Eliot has never been a fruitful direct influence on other poets" (235).

The essence of Bloom's concept of influence is the belief that the "strong poet" cannot abide a stronger creator, for a stronger creator would threaten to deprive him of his creative power: there must be only one creator. Thus the strong poet, in Bloom's Freudian "family romance," must subordinate and deny all influences on his work. What Bloom's idea asserts about creativity seems to depend, in turn, on an equation of creativity with originality: creation is not creation unless the work is sui generis. To attribute one's art to the art of one's predecessors is to circumscribe the imagination. For Stevens, imagination is identity, and in his writing takes the place, usually, of "self." The self with its implication of objective reality --an "I" and an eye, organic, time-bound--is too weak a concept to hold creativity or originality; the imagination, in all its abstractness, is the necessary word, as close to "soul" as a post-Victorian can get.

If Tomlinson's idea of influence is more open than either Stevens's or Bloom's, that openness may explain why he was attracted to Stevens's poetry in the first place. He seems to be conscious of himself as a sustainer and continuer of the modernist initiative toward internationalism, the belief that Britain needed to be put in touch with the "mind of Europe" as he puts it in his essay, "Poetry Today": "Over forty years ago two Americans

and an Irishman attempted to put English poetry back into the mainstream of European culture. The effect of those generations who have succeeded to the heritage of Eliot, Pound, and Yeats has been largely to squander the awareness these three gave us of our place in world literature, and to retreat into a self-congratulatory parochialism" (458).

Tomlinson's acceptance of connectedness and relation, and his willingness to speak about those who have influenced his work, to admit their presence in his creations, can be seen again in his note, "The Unison: A Retrospect," on the group poetic project of Renga, where he describes the way four poets--Tomlinson, Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti--created a single poem:

There was dialogue, even debate and a little reciprocal satire, but these things had to submit themselves to the course of the poem as it unfolded, to the pull of other elements within it, and were affected not so much by the need to "be ourselves" as to contribute to a mutual structure. Not that one was any less oneself: one's self was discovered by the juxtapositions and the confrontations that met it. It was part of a relationship. It was almost an object.
(Renga 35)

Once again, perhaps pre-eminently so, Tomlinson demonstrated by his participation in this venture a recognition and acceptance of other creators in the poem. His remarks suggest that the element of chance that characterizes the structure of rengas was also a part of the bringing together of the four poets from different cultures and backgrounds. Michael Edwards describes the project: "The authors compose on a common theme a volume that is the property of no-one.

They surrender their words and their sense of life to the heterogeneity of their partners' literary and human personalities, to the chance of a collective text, and even to the remoteness of foreign vernaculars" (136).

To focus on one poet, as this chapter does, as of special importance to Tomlinson's poetic development, runs the risk of giving undue weight to one of many influences on his poetry. A list of the poets he has mentioned as influential to him would include the Augustans, Whitman, Yeats, Marianne Moore, Williams, Crane, and Pound. In addition, he has referred to the influence of others besides poets: Nietzsche, Ruskin, Buber, Merleau-Ponty, Max Ernst, and Cézanne, to give only the most frequently cited names. Furthermore, to choose Stevens as that focal point risks running counter to Tomlinson's own cautionary remarks about his influence.

In the "Author's Preface" to the second (1966) edition of The Necklace, Tomlinson acknowledges his "debt" to Stevens, but at the same time emphasizes that the debt was "complicated" because he wanted the poems in The Necklace to accord "objects their own existence" ("Author's Preface" n. pag.). He notes that his "poems were both a dialogue with and a departure from [Stevens]." Taken by itself this statement might suggest that Tomlinson meant by "departure" a final farewell or rupture. But in light of his other remarks on Stevens, the term seems more akin to a partial disagreement. Harold Bloom might call such a "departure" an

instance of clinamen, his term for the imaginative swerve one poet makes away from the influence of a "strong" poetic predecessor. In any case, both Tomlinson's remarks elsewhere on Stevens and his poetry itself show that he did not extricate himself from this influence as completely as this preface might indicate.

Michael Edwards, for example, has noticed echoes of Stevens in Tomlinson's "Movements," from his 1972 volume Written on Water, finding in the lines, "The sound/ Of the thick rain chains us in liberty to where we are," a variation on "The natives of rain are rainy men," from Stevens's "The Comedian as the Letter 'C'." Edwards comments that "Movements" probes "Stevens's argument about reality and the imagination, place and poetry. There may also be reflections of 'Credences of Summer.' One notes that Tomlinson is convoking not those things in Stevens he has demurred about-- 'fiction,' 'elegance'--but those he salutes, and whose importance for his own work he has acknowledged" (Edwards 141-42). And one can find echoes of Stevens's rhetoric throughout Tomlinson's later poetry. As Edwards argues here, they often point to more than an affinity for Stevensian rhetoric, though I would disagree with Edwards if he means to suggest that Tomlinson is successful in wholly freeing himself from the powerful pull of that elegance. These later echoes are evidence of his continuing dialogue with Stevens's ideas, including those of "fiction" and "elegance." As recently as Eden (1985), Tomlinson, in his introductory

essay, "The Poet as Painter," tests his thoughts on this matter against those of Stevens.

Tomlinson's comment to Peter Orr, made five years before the "Author's Preface," also gives some authority for studying the influence of Stevens on his poetry: "I have been influenced by Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens, the American poets, more so, I think, than any other English poets that I particularly care for" (Orr 250). Moore herself has said of the poems in The Necklace: "'I think there is as much Moore as Stevens in them'" (Some Americans 14). Moore is correct in finding much of her poetic in Tomlinson's early poetry; yet in The Necklace, it is Stevens with whom Tomlinson most vigorously contends.

If Tomlinson candidly admitted his influences, critics have noted them too, but, in general, have left the relations unexplored. One critic has even turned that openness against him by derogating him as a "cultural magpie." In The Art of the Real (1977), a study of American and British poetry from the 1940s to the 1970s, Eric Homberger asserts that the relationship between Tomlinson and the American poets Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams is "crucial" to Tomlinson's development after The Necklace and Seeing is Believing, and calls for a discussion in "greater detail" than his own can undertake (104). He is right in claiming that no adequate discussion of Tomlinson's relations to these two poets exists, and he is also right in asserting that both are crucial to Tomlinson's development. The order of these

influences is clear: Stevens before Williams; Tomlinson states that he did not read Williams in concentration until 1956, some eight years after reading Stevens (Some Americans 5, 13). Ever since Hugh Kenner's review of The Necklace in Poetry in 1956, critics have mentioned in passing, but usually only in passing, that Tomlinson's poetry resembles that of Stevens. Kenner's discussion of that relation in his short review is one of the fullest to date. Sadly, the neglect of this substantial issue is indicative of the critical neglect of Tomlinson's work generally. To some extent, he has been the victim--and continues to be--of two general trends in criticism. On the one hand, in America, as a post-war British poet, he suffers from the scant attention accorded to this group by American critics. On the other hand, in Britain, as a post-war British poet with strong American influences, he suffers a similar neglect.

If Tomlinson's need to identify Moore and Stevens for a British audience--in his comment to Orr previously cited--illustrates the lack of British awareness of these poets in the early 1960s, a review-article by Alan Young suggests that that lack of awareness may have continued into the 1980s. Its title, "Rooted Horizon: Charles Tomlinson and American Modernism" (1982), holds out the promise that Young might answer Homberger's call for a detailed discussion of Tomlinson's relation to Stevens and Williams. But within the limits of his review Young gives an unfortunately, though understandably, cursory treatment of this topic. What

underlines the problem Tomlinson faces as a stranger at home and abroad is the closing paragraph of Young's review:

"Charles Tomlinson has argued that English poets can learn from modern American poetics. He has also provided the most convincing introduction to American modernism over here. In The Flood he has demonstrated this argument tellingly while showing above all that an original and masterly English imagination can transmute all its hard won materials, from whatever source, into original English poetry" (72-73).

Unless I misread the tone of this passage, Young, at the same time that he asks for the British reader's attention to Tomlinson's work, casts his appeal in terms of an apology and implies that the readership of a leading British literary periodical, The Critical Quarterly, still needs, in 1982, a "convincing introduction to American modernism."

In addition to the lack of British awareness of American poetry, it is possible that another factor may have diverted attention away from Tomlinson's relation to Stevens. In defining that relation, he might have had happier advocates than Davie and Kenner. Of all who have written about him, they have been his most important supporters: Davie from the time he was his tutor at Cambridge, and Kenner at least from his Poetry review of The Necklace. Kenner gave further exposure to his poetry when he included Tomlinson--but few other modern British poets--in his pedagogical anthology, The Art of Poetry (1959), publishing his poems "The Crane" (1957), "Paring the Apple" (1956), and "Through Binoculars"

(1955). Moreover, in his book on Eliot, The Invisible Poet (1959), he wrote in the "Preface": "I am indebted to conversations with Mr Charles Tomlinson, who helped me understand Laforgue" (xiv) and used a quotation from Tomlinson's poetry for the epigraph to his chapter, "Laforgue and Others" (13). Tomlinson has acknowledged Davie's and Kenner's importance to his poetic development on several occasions. He dedicated Seeing is Believing to them in the following words: "To Donald and Hugh who saw and believed." Although both Davie and Kenner have referred to the influence of Stevens on Tomlinson, neither critic is primarily a Stevens advocate; rather, each holds an eminent place in Pound criticism. As Marjorie Perloff has argued, those critics--such as Bloom, Vendler, and Doggett--who write about Stevens and believe in his central importance, tend to deprecate the importance of Pound, while those critics--such as Davie, and Kenner, among others--who believe in the central importance of Pound, tend to deprecate Stevens. Kenner, Perloff points out, has never been much of a Stevens enthusiast: "'The Pound Era,' Hugh Kenner called the first half of our century, dismissing Stevens in two of his almost 600 pages as having created 'an Edward Lear poetic pushed toward all limits'" (Perloff 485-86).

Like Kenner, Donald Davie has remarked on Stevens's influence on Tomlinson's poetry, but, like Kenner's, Davie's interest and sympathy seem to lie with Pound more than with Stevens. Both Kenner, in his review of The Necklace, and

Davie, in his review of Seeing is Believing, qualify their comments on Stevens's influence to suggest that Tomlinson has, fortunately, struck off in a new direction from Stevens. Though Davie has written on Stevens in a number of essays, his attitude, as Charles Doyle points out, is somewhat ambivalent: "Throughout Davie's distinguished criticism there is a curious and pervasive ambivalence in his appraisal of the American modernists," and, as a case in point, he notes the "mixture of condescension and reluctant admiration" in Davie's review of Stevens's collected poems (Doyle 426). Thus, the two critics who have done more than anyone else to encourage Tomlinson and promote his work, and who were among the first to address Stevens's influence on him, display an apparent lack of sympathy with the Stevens aesthetic. Every critic should endeavour to see through the prejudices that cloud his perception, and yet when critics of the repute of Davie and Kenner offer their opinions on Stevens and Tomlinson, perhaps the nature of the relationship between these poets suffers some distortion. In any case, whether or not Davie's and Kenner's advocacy of Tomlinson has tended inadvertently to deflect attention away from his relation to Stevens, Tomlinson and other poets who seem to possess a quite different poetic from that of Stevens's may in fact borrow a good deal from him precisely because his poetic offers something missing from theirs. Alan Golding argues this view in his essay, "The 'Community of Elements' in Wallace Stevens and Louis Zukofsky":

each stage in Stevens's stylistic evolution . . . has its own manner, its own limited, definable set of recurring tropes. Because of this Stevens's styles are easily imitated, and they have been assumed not only by Zukofsky but by other poets in the Objectivist line with whom Stevens would seem to share little: Rakosi, Creeley, Charles Tomlinson, Clayton Eshleman. Stevens has served these poets as a kind of stylistic antiself, giving them access to a manner that their tradition finally leads them to reject. (Golding 136-37)

The prominence Tomlinson gives to his influences may be partly responsible for directing his energies in the direction they have taken. That direction is outward rather than inward. The problem that he has constantly faced in his poetry, at least since The Necklace, is how to accord proper recognition to the object world. When he does turn his attention to the imagination, he does so not obsessively, as Stevens may be said to have done, but by turning to the self and questioning its powers and its relations with the world. Tomlinson does not see the imagination as a supernatural power, not even, as in Stevens, metaphorically so. The intensity that Stevens expended on theorizing about the imagination constituted, as more than one critic has argued, a substitute religion. A. K. Morris, for instance, contends that "[Stevens's] search for a substitute for religion occupied his poetic energy from the early poetry to the late" (Morris 9).

Both Stevens and Tomlinson have made poems from their contemplation of the imagination, but their results are quite different. For Tomlinson, "imagination" is more clearly connected with the self, and the dichotomy of imagination and

reality is relatively well defined. For Stevens as well, the dichotomy is between imagination and reality--but the terms are not synonymous with Tomlinson's self and world. Moreover, for Stevens, the dichotomy is blurred and out of balance: the imagination, at least in poetry, clearly dominates. His sense of a self shows most clearly in the mixed pleasure derived from naming and renaming the world, but with only a faint hope that one name will transfix reality. Tomlinson's poetry gives a stronger sense of faith both in the reality of the world beyond the imagination and in the self's ability to articulate that reality. Against Tomlinson's notion of according objects their own reality and the world-view implicit in his title, Seeing is Believing, we might place these lines from Stevens's "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas": "The eye believes and its communion takes./ The spirit laughs to see the eye believe/ And its communion take" (Collected 253).

2. "A Carving Not a Kiss": Stevens and The Necklace

*The letter "a" in psalm and calm when
pronounced with the sound of "a" in candle,
is very noticeable, but
why should continents of misapprehension
have to be accounted for by the fact?*

--Marianne Moore, "England," (46).

A brief comparison of Wallace Stevens's life with that, to date, of Charles Tomlinson provides some insights into their poetic relations. In broad outline, both combine careers in poetry with other more stable careers, though Tomlinson's as a university professor would seem to be closer to his craft than Stevens's as an insurance executive. Both combine a love for poetry with a love for other arts, in particular, music and painting, but Tomlinson's involvement as a painter is a closer one than that of Stevens's as a connoisseur. Both feel the need to communicate with people in other cultures. But while Stevens travelled widely in the U. S., usually on business, and to Cuba, for pleasure, for the most part his poetry was the product of a "homemade world," the phrase Hugh Kenner uses to distinguish between those expatriate poets--like Eliot and Pound--who felt compelled to go abroad and those of their contemporaries--like Stevens and Williams--who chose to write in America. Increasingly, Stevens derived a substitute nourishment from letter-writing to correspondents around the world. In contrast, Tomlinson has travelled a good deal, both in Europe--especially in Italy--and in North America, and has sought out those with whom he has corresponded and from whom

he has learned his art.

The pattern that emerges from this crude comparison suggests that Tomlinson has been more open to outside influences and has not built the same screen between himself and the world that Stevens did. Tomlinson himself seems to have mixed feelings about Stevens's privacy; in summing up his 1969 review of The Letters of Wallace Stevens, he writes:

One of the impressive things about this volume, when all is said and done, remains its sense of privacy and, though at times one may feel that privacy too insistently self-protective, its positive aspect is the measure of a genuine integrity which knew what it wanted to do and, in an age of publicity and self-presentation, did it out of the public eye. (96)

One would not want to put too much reliance on this biographical analysis alone, for many factors intervene to qualify its conclusions. For instance, Stevens died in 1955, four years before Tomlinson paid his first visit to America. Though as my final chapter notes, after Paul Fussell, Stevens's age was almost by definition an age when artists travelled, Stevens's business career restricted his mobility. Artists of Tomlinson's day may move about as much as or more than those of Stevens's--though Fussell argues that they move as tourists now, not travellers--and his academic career may in fact promote rather than restrict his mobility. Moreover, if Stevens rarely left America, his early business career involved a fair amount of travel in America, and, more importantly, his poetry reflects the thought of what might be termed, without derogation, an "armchair traveller." Still, the stereotype of Stevens as reclusive has a ring of

truth: he might not have availed himself of the opportunities to travel even if they had been allowed by his career. William Van O' Connor, writing a few years before Stevens's death, and at the time Tomlinson was composing The Necklace, gives an account of how Stevens was viewed by contemporary poets--"Stevens as Legend": "Stevens has also been a somewhat mysterious figure to his fellow poets because he has, for the most part, gone his own way. He has felt no deep need for frequent associations with other writers. But those writers have long looked upon him as a poet's poet, as the exquisite and careful artist" (7).

Tomlinson's first trip to America in 1959 was sponsored by the editor of Poetry, Henry Rago, who had been impressed with The Necklace (Some Americans 12, 23). Though Stevens was dead by the time of Tomlinson's visit, the two poets had already been in correspondence. Tomlinson first sent his commentary on "The Comedian as the Letter 'C'" (Some Americans 11). Stevens's reply has not been published, but his reply to a second essay from Tomlinson shows polite interest: "Your commentary on 'Credences of Summer' which came a day or two ago seems to be a very fair and perceptive job I should be very interested to see the longer commentary although I shall not be willing to comment on it" (Letters 719). Even if Stevens had been alive in 1959, Tomlinson might not have been able to arrange a meeting with him. The older poet might well have turned down a request for a meeting, just as he had similar requests from other

young poets. However, judging from the accounts of Tomlinson's meetings with other poets on his visits to America--for instance, with Moore, Williams, Winters, and Zukofsky--the younger poet would quite likely have tried to arrange a meeting. Though he could not meet Stevens, Tomlinson did meet others on his first visit, which was a testing of his early imaginative enthusiasm for American poetry and culture against the real thing. His relations with these poets is marked by the eagerness of one anxious to learn by dialogue, to know at first hand the poets whom he had read. This human quality in his approach to poetry enhances the nature of his achievement, just as his openness to questions of influence enlarges our response to his work.

Tomlinson's period of deepest interest in Stevens--when he was "haunted" by his poetry (Hamilton 83)--from late 1949 to the completion of The Necklace in March 1953 (Some Americans 5,12; cf. Schmidt, "Charles Tomlinson" 35)--corresponds to the time when Stevens was writing his last poems, which appeared in periodicals between 1952 and 1954 and which would comprise his final volume, The Rock (1954), and part of Opus Posthumous (1957). Stevens's poems of these years are analogous to the last poems of Yeats and Pound--and, indeed, to many other aging writers' works--in the surprising sense of renewed energy they display, paradoxically, in their contemplations of aging and death. In Randall Jarrell's estimation,

Stevens did what no other American poet has ever done,

what few poets have ever done: wrote some of his best and newest and strangest poems during the last year or two of a very long life. These are poems from the other side of existence, the poems of someone who sees things in steady accustomedness, as we do not, and who sees their accustomedness, and them, as about to perish.
 ("Fifty Years" 307)

Even though Stevens's reputation was less assured then than it would become in the 1960's and after, his work, especially his last poems, was a formidable model for a neophyte poet to absorb. Indeed, as Tomlinson told Ian Hamilton in a 1964 interview: "It was a case of being haunted rather than of cold imitation" (83). Thus it is not surprising that Tomlinson's first volume written under Stevens's influence should bear so heavy a Stevensian imprint. What is more surprising and what attests to the strength of Tomlinson's poetic abilities is that the American poet's style did not completely drown out his disciple's own voice. It may be that Tomlinson was as clear-sighted about Stevens's limitations in 1948 as he was when he came to write his Preface to the second edition of The Necklace in 1966. But it is hard to read that volume as the work of a poet wholly free of undue influence and wholly in command of his poetic model.

What may have helped sustain Tomlinson's voice is that he had already been writing poems for some time before encountering Stevens's work and had already overcome the highly mannered, "strong" voice of Whitman "[who], along with Nietzsche, formed the style of the earliest unfortunate poems that I wrote on going down in 1948" (Some Americans 3).

One wonders to what extent Tomlinson was "haunted" by American culture at this stage in his life. Later in his interview with Hamilton, he expands on this curious term: "You see, I was, as I said haunted by a number of American poems--they made an inhabitable atmosphere that seemed consistent with modernism as I knew it through painting, particularly cubism and die Brücke--and Williams seemed part of this world as no English figure did, but as Stevens did (in his very different way) and Miss Moore's Steeplejack, Crane's Voyages, Laura Riding, Pound" (83-84). The degree to which he partakes of the American poetic tradition bears directly on his response to Whitman. Speaking in the national "we" in the course of his 1962 review of Roy Harvey Pearce's The Continuity of American Poetry, he writes : "we are made to feel the pressures governing the poets' decisions. The Whitman question provides a case in point which, as Englishmen, we are prone to ignore, because we 'don't like' Whitman" (277). As Tomlinson points out, one of the "continuities" of Pearce's title is "the manner in which modern American poets, for all their diversity of intention, have felt called upon to create their work in some degree as a reply to, even a dialogue with Whitman" (276). Like American poets, and unlike most English poets, Tomlinson in turning to Stevens's poetry may have been seeking to reply to Whitman. If Tomlinson was seeking a means to reply to Whitman, his endeavour may not have been so much an aberration or eccentricity as an anticipation of the

direction of Anglo-American poetry. At the close of his review, Tomlinson seems to be in sympathy with Pearce's contention "that we all now share in the American situation, for better or worse." In conclusion, Tomlinson quotes Pearce:

We have not yet sufficiently realised the degree to which the history of American poetry is a sort of model, an initial if not initiating test-case, for the recent history of all Anglo-American poetry. Almost from the beginning, the American poet's world has been the one we now know everywhere around us: where the very role and function of poetry as a valid human art is in question; where the creative sensibility struggles not just to express itself, assured that such expression has a place, in the world, but merely to survive. (278)

Whatever pattern Tomlinson was pursuing in turning from Whitman to Stevens, even as he wrote those "unfortunate poems" he was beginning to read modernist poetry. He read, while still at grammar school, the Sesame Books selection of Ezra Pound's poems; shortly after his arrival at Cambridge, Michael Roberts's Faber Book of Modern Verse; and, also probably while at Cambridge, Anne Ridler's Little Book of Modern Verse (Some Americans 1-4). However, while he was slowly digesting these works, he was still absorbed with Whitman. As he wryly asks, "Why, when I admired this sort of thing, and when I was looking at Cézanne in the Fitzwilliam Museum, did I imagine I was a Whitmanian vitalist?" (Some Americans 4-5).

His own reply introduces--perhaps in more than one way--the next step in his poetic growth: "The conscious mind is a shallow thing. Or rather, it is seldom conscious enough at the right moment" (Some Americans 5). For the "next step,"

as he says, was Wallace Stevens but "It should have been Stevens and William Carlos Williams" (Some Americans 5). His description of this error ("I muffed the thing badly") is worth quoting in full, for it demonstrates a common way in which he sees--in retrospect at least--his encounters with people, books, or, as here, with poems that, confusing at first, later prove to hold unforeseen possibilities:

One evening, late in 1947, my new tutor--my earlier tutor had passed me on as a hopeless case--read to me, in a pub in Trumpington, Williams's "Tract" from Oscar Williams's Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, English and American. I thought it delightful. He handed me the book to reread it and, as he did so, the pages fell open at Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." I gazed through this rapidly then moved back to "Tract." It was "Thirteen Ways" that stayed in mind. However, as I didn't possess the anthology, and Stevens was unpublished in England, I did not reencounter the poem for two or three years. The Williams sank from recollection. He also was unobtainable and I was not to read him seriously until 1956. (Some Americans 5)

(Though he here dates his introduction to these two poems as "late in 1947," in his interview with Ian Hamilton he says he read "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" "late in '49" and that "In the spring of '48 Donald Davie read me Williams's poem 'Tract'" (83).) His somewhat puzzling remark--"It should have been Stevens and William Carlos Williams"--is explained in part by considering who influenced him and whom he influenced. Helen Vendler cites Tomlinson as one of the writers to have learned from Stevens's example:

Among the writers to whom Stevens has taught new possibilities, one could name Elizabeth Bishop, Howard Nemerov, Charles Tomlinson, John Ashbery, W.S. Merwin, Louise Glück, Charles Wright, and Jonie Graham (no doubt there are many others.) These writers have

explored the imaginative, formal, lexical and rhetorical possibilities opened by Stevens. They have benefited from his sense of the poem as enacted mental process rather than as statement or narrative. ("Hunting" 42-43)

As Vendler states, it was Stevens who influenced Tomlinson, together with the other poets she lists; and yet George Oppen, the Objectivist, that is a non-Stevensian poet, credits Tomlinson and Basil Bunting with being the two British poets who have most influenced American poets (Oppen 40). Oppen uses the word "influence," a word charged, as we have seen, with connotations of possessiveness. How much "influence" Tomlinson has had on American poetry is open to question, but at least he has had the attention and respect of a broad range of poets. Marianne Moore, herself something of an influence on Tomlinson, has written, "I think well of Denise Levertov, Daniel Hoffman . . . and George Starbuck; [and among British poets] Charles Tomlinson, Stevie Smith, and Hal Summers" ("Poet as Patron" 672). Frank O'Hara, quite a different "New York" poet from Moore, has also expressed his interest in Tomlinson's work: "There's a big gap in my thinking about English poetry, although for instance I admire Tomlinson and Thom Gunn" (24). It seems that though Tomlinson was influenced by both Williams and Stevens, his influence may be more on the Williams line of poets.

One suspects that, like Williams, Stevens held the promise of the new for Tomlinson at this stage; but unlike "Tract," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the poem that caught his eye, may also have appealed by its sharp

images, its epigrammatic wit, and its concern with perception. Most specifically, it showed Tomlinson a way of incorporating the random, or chance, into his poetry, a way that I will discuss shortly. Tomlinson seems to have been drawn to Stevens's poetry by its imagist techniques and its use of colour words. Despite his later criticism of Stevens's poetry as lacking a sense of the physical world-- "Stevens rarely makes one see anything in detail for all his talk about a physical universe" (Hamilton 83; cf. Preface to The Necklace)--at first he may well have thought he had discovered a very physical universe there together with the techniques for importing a powerful way of describing it into his own poetry. Furthermore, at this stage he may have been quite interested in aestheticism and in a verse that places a high value on the aesthetic, as "Thirteen Ways" and other poems from Harmonium do. In Some Americans we have Tomlinson's remembrances of this time which attest to this intense interest in art. And in "Dates: Penkhull New Road," a poem written almost twenty years after The Necklace, the speaker reflects: "It took time to convince me that I cared/ For more than beauty" (CP 245). Further reading of Stevens would have re-enforced these first impressions and might have begun to interest him in Stevens's grand style, the style of "Sunday Morning," for example. This style, which later he came to distrust, might also have impressed him by its air of seriousness about the poet's endeavour. At least some of Stevens's rhetoric in Harmonium might have seemed not too

different from that of Dylan Thomas, but it was Thomas' rhetoric put to a different task. The attractive newness of Stevens's poetry lay in its aestheticism as much, perhaps, as in its Americanness. The very features of Stevens's poetry that some British--and American--reviewers found most disagreeable--that is, its aestheticism and its word-play--were just those that most interested him.

What recurs through Tomlinson's comments on Stevens, both as a poet and as his poetic mentor, is his suspicion of Stevens's mask or persona. On the one hand, Tomlinson was drawn to Stevens's mastery of the Imagist technique in a poem such as "Thirteen Ways" and, more generally, to his high and serious tone about the poet and poetry. But, on the other hand, he criticizes Stevens for his lack of contact with the object world, the other side of his Imagist technique, and for the emptiness of his rhetoric, the other side of his serious tone. The Necklace shows Tomlinson picking his way between these two dangers; he did not write that volume in uncritical admiration. Of the fifteen poems, most show one or another trait of Stevens: the use of colour words especially as applied to unlikely subjects; the use of negative declaratives and short copulatives; the assumption of the connoisseur's manner; the preference for exotica, especially the artistic and the oriental; and, most significantly, his adoption of Stevens's variation technique.

The critical awareness of himself as an imitator is at once evident from his title and epigraph. Neither they nor

the volume itself comprise merely a simple homage to the poet who died in the year it was published and whose collected poems had appeared in the preceding year. It is the authority inherent in Stevens's serious tone about poetry and art that must be one of the most attractive features of his verse for young poets. According to Randall Jarrell, Stevens was all too clearly the dominant model for American poets of Tomlinson's generation. Even allowing for Jarrell's exaggeration, he is serious in his claim:

If someone had predicted to Pound, when he was beginning his war on the iambic foot; to Eliot, when he was first casting a cold eye on post-Jacobean blank verse; to both, when they were first condemning generalization in poetry, that in forty or fifty years the chief--some times, I think in despair, the only--influence on younger American poets would be this generalizing, masterful, scannable verse of Stevens's, wouldn't both have laughed in confident disbelief?
("Collected" 66).

The answer, or part of it, to Jarrell's bewilderment about this phenomenon may lie in one of Jarrell's own words, "masterful." It might be argued that precisely because Stevens's verse is less radically innovative in technique than either Eliot's The Waste Land or Pound's Cantos, it is therefore more authoritative (and attractive) than either of theirs. Donald Davie points out that we cannot read The Waste Land or "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in the same way we can Stevens's poetry:

When we try to understand "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" or "Sunday Morning," it is a question of "Do you follow? Have you hold of the thread?" Eliot does not ask us to "follow" in this way. The process of understanding The Waste Land is not a process of pursuit, but of harking back and forth. In short, Stevens's poem,

like an ode by Keats, is still discursive; it moves from point to point, always forward from first to last. Lose the thread and you may go back and look for it. In The Waste Land, by contrast, it is only when the poem is grasped as a whole that each part of it falls into place.

("'Essential'" 375)

Moreover, because Stevens's poetry habitually reflects upon the art of poetry itself, that difficult art the young poet is trying to master, his work may be especially appealing to the neophyte. For the young poet doubting not only his own abilities in his chosen craft but also the values of that recalcitrant craft, Stevens's authority of tone is doubly inspiring. In its strongest form, Stevens's serious and authoritative tone is compounded of all those techniques which we find Tomlinson imitating in The Necklace. It is a mixture of his flat, short declaratives and the irreproachable critical discernment of the connoisseur applied to aesthetic topics.

The title and epigraph bring together all the important Stevensian influences in the volume and, taken together, they represent Tomlinson's critical tribute to Stevens. The epigraph, taken from Stevens's "The Auroras of Autumn," is an example itself of the enduring Stevensian conceit of the short declarative: "The necklace is a carving not a kiss." Tomlinson chooses the "necklace" for his title, ignoring both what Stevens says it is, a carving, and what he says it is not, a kiss. In "The Auroras of Autumn" the sense of the distinction is that a souvenir of childhood, such as the mother's necklace, remains merely a cold, inanimate

object that cannot bring back the human warmth of the mother herself. Donald Davie, in an essay on that poem published a year before The Necklace, focussed on this "audacious and difficult image" to show how "scrupulous this poet is through all his brilliance," and glosses it in the following way: "The necklace, one of the mother's charms, being a carving, is cold. Our idea of a mother's charm, just because it is an idea, is an artifact, something we have constructed for ourselves; and to that extent it is inevitably cold, colder than the warm presence itself as the child understands it" ("Auroras" 170). Tomlinson's rendering of the line at the same time pays homage to the creator of "audacious and difficult" images and yet demurs from its exclusion of the thing itself. By choosing the "necklace" for his volume's title, he turns away from the poet's metaphors for the object and returns to the object (thing) itself--much, so we have seen, in keeping with his practice of entitling. Nevertheless, the choice, at the same time that it alters Stevens's emphasis, records Tomlinson's tribute to a poetic mentor.

Poetic imitation, even when conscious, may involve the imitator in problems of communication similar to those encountered by the parodist, the most common of imitators. When the poetic imitator, as in the case of Tomlinson, has indicated that his imitation is not uncritical, then the reader must seek to determine how much of the original is being rejected and how much retained. When the imitator

embarks on ironic imitation of a model which is, as in the case of so much of Stevens, ironic, the difficulties of separating the ironic from the straightforward are multiplied. Such is the problem in reading "The Art of Poetry" against its model, "The Snow Man." In his preface, Tomlinson cites this poem as an example of his departure from and disagreement with Stevens: "its third verse playfully modelled on 'The Snow Man' demurs about certain aspects of Stevensian 'elegance'; the according of things their own life demurs about Stevens's insistence on 'the supreme fiction.' All this was done, I hope, lightly" ("Author's Preface" n. pag.). The second and third verse must be quoted together:

But how shall one say so?--
The fact being, that when the truth is not good enough
We exaggerate. Proportions

Matter. It is difficult to get them right.
There must be nothing
Superfluous, nothing which is not elegant
And nothing which is if it is merely that. (11)

His deft handling of "nothing"--three "nothing"'s in three lines--avoids what some of the weaker poems in this volume do not always manage to do, unintentional parody. Here, in his demurring, he intentionally parodies to show both his mastery of Stevens's style and distance from Stevens's poetic. The elegant, the air of the dandy, falsifies art as it falsifies life because it subordinates the world to the self's taste and convenience--the necklace, neither as art work nor as personal memory but as mere adornment, the objective correlative of dandyism. The third verse may demur from

Stevens's poetic, but the verse that demonstrates Tomlinson's ability to assimilate Stevens's techniques to his own purposes is the final one, a farewell, in a way, to dandyism: "Yellow butterflies/ Nervously transferring themselves/ From scarlet to bronze flowers/ Disappear as the evening appears." The skill in articulating this perception subtly shifts our attention from elegance to the notion of "according objects their own existence" and according them that existence by the care with which they have been observed and described.

The technique of Stevens that Tomlinson seems to accept most uncritically, or with least irony, is that of the random or chance, found in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The poem, as we have seen, made a deep impression on him, and its technique of presenting a random number of indirectly related images can be seen in "Nine Variations on a Chinese Winter Setting," "Eight Observations on the Nature of Eternity," and "Suggestions for the Improvement of a Sunset." A. Walton Litz argues that the individual poems of "Thirteen Ways" become "a set of variations on an epistemological theme." He goes on to point out, however, that "the real virtue of the series does not lie in its perceptual argument but in the absolute pitch of its moods and sensations. It is not surprising that this group, of all Stevens's poems, holds the most fascination for children: for all its hidden sophistications, 'Thirteen Ways' gives an overwhelming illusion of the innocent eye spontaneously recording nature" (Litz 65). And as he further

points out, "The success of the poem is the direct result of Stevens's variations on the form of the Japanese haiku" (66). Given Tomlinson's interest in early modernism and in perceptual accuracy, it is understandable that he should have been intrigued by this poem of "the innocent eye spontaneously recording nature."

Donald Davie, in reviewing The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, singled out this poem as exhibiting Stevens's "one technical discovery" and noted: "If one means by this not just a new way of packaging or advertising, but a genuinely new mode of apprehension, thereafter made current for others, then to credit a poet with even one such is to say a great deal. And I can't see but that 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' is just such an invention, one that Stevens has either chosen not to, or else has been unable to exploit" (427). In his "Introduction" to The Necklace, Davie credits Tomlinson with being a poet capable of exploiting Stevens's invention, and uses this contention as his main argument to defend Tomlinson against the anticipated charge of "slavish imitation":

["Thirteen Ways"] has suggested, I think, the form employed by Tomlinson in his "Eight Observations on the Nature of Eternity" and "Nine Variations on a Chinese Winter Setting." A title like "Suggestions for the Improvement of a Sunset" similarly recalls titles used by Stevens. So it is just as well to point out that what we have here is no slavish imitation, conscious or unconscious pastiche. Stevens has been a model certainly; but he has not been allowed to dictate, to overpower the different vision of the poet who has learned from him. It would be truer to say that this poet has chosen to develop one side of Stevens, the side represented by "Thirteen

Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." (xiv)

Davie argues that Tomlinson avoids "slavish imitation" or pastiche by extending Stevens's invention. Though he may have extended it in the way Davie suggests and though he certainly was drawn to this side of Stevens, a reading of the poems in which he most obviously follows "Thirteen Ways" shows that his poems at times regress from their model. More generally, a reading of The Necklace shows that Stevens's poetic concerns and techniques posed potential dangers to the autonomy of the young poet. The particular danger that looms over The Necklace is immobility. The poems tend toward the static. Richard Poole, who feels that the last verse of "The Art of Poetry" does not manage to "rise above elegance" and who therefore accuses its "idea-image" of preciousness, finds the main trouble of The Necklace to be the "studiedness of its aestheticism": "The poet is trying too hard, and the trying manifests itself as a self-conscious (or word-conscious) sophistication" (93). Poole is correct in contending that elegance frequently hobbles these poems. That Tomlinson was conscious of this tendency toward the static is clear from his remark in "Sea Change": "A static instance therefore untrue" (CP 7). Davie argues that this line shows Tomlinson's affinity with Stevens's technique. While the young poet is clearly preoccupied with the idea of change and can assert, as he does here, its essential importance to any notion of the true, his own mastery of poetic change here is imperfect. Much of the volume has a

sculpted, posed, artistic appearance, as Poole says, and unlike Stevens he cannot manage, in most instances, to turn this disadvantage into an interesting meditation, as Stevens so often could, as for example in "Add This to Rhetoric": "It is posed and it is posed/ Where in nature it merely grows" (Collected 198). When combined with these artistic set-pieces, the prevalence of short declaratives comes close to undermining his verse. Used sparingly, the short declaratives can engender a serious and authoritative tone, but too often resorted to, they become parodic and counter-poetic.

The most serious problem with The Necklace is its dominant persona: the mask is too obviously a mask. And this problem again goes back to an incomplete control of Tomlinson's model. Randall Jarrell has made the point that "Stevens's rhetoric is at its worst, always, in the poems of other poets," and he implies that the reason for its resistance to assimilation may lie in Stevens's eschewing of the dramatic monologue: "In Stevens the reign of the dramatic monologue--the necessity to present, present! in concentrated dramatic form--is over, and the motion of someone else's speech has been replaced by 'the motion of thought' of the poet himself" ("Collected" 66). The Necklace falls short of its model because it only partly repudiates the dramatic monologue form and as a consequence ends up as an uncomfortably incomplete metamorphosis, neither exactly a dramatic monologue nor wholly not. The possibility that the

speaker of "Eight Observations on the Nature of Eternity," for example, is speaking in anyone's natural voice is slight. More serious, the persona adopted--like some of the personae in Relations and Contraries--is offensive in its unnaturalness: the implied self in fact limits itself and, therefore, the interest in its poem.

Certainly, an immoral or neurotic self can be the medium for great poetry. To go no further back than Browning, the moral failings of his monologists provide the substance of their poems' interest, and, as another example, Eliot's Prufrock leads a narrow, neurotic existence; but in these poems the poets overcome their personae's limitations by taking them beyond the mask and developing them in the direction of character. In a different way, Stevens overcomes the limits of a narrow persona, for example, that of the clown-persona used in many of the poems of Harmonium, in which the persona is most similar to that in The Necklace. Even in his early poems the focus is not so much on the implied character of their speakers but rather the philosophical problems they raise and the wit and language displayed in raising them--all only tokenly attributed to an implied character. The problem with some of Tomlinson's poems is that their personae are redeemed neither by exploiting their psychological side, as in Browning's and Eliot's verse, nor by shifting our attention away from character to the interplay of rhetoric and philosophy as in that of Stevens. As a consequence and residuum, we are left

with the worst of both poetries: the mannerisms of early Stevens and the unenlightened self of a Prufrock. In fact, the mannerisms compound our dislike for the persona and deflect our attention from his aesthetic concerns.

3. A Way Out of Stevens: Toward a New Fiction

Edges are centres (CP 324)

In this section, I will discuss Tomlinson's basic disagreement with Stevens on the nature of the self and the object world. This disagreement has consequences both for his poetics and for the problems he tries to solve in his poems and paintings. The idea of a self as distinct from an imagination is the difference from Stevens's poetic that allows Tomlinson to move towards a political poetry. Indeed, Michael Wood, in writing of Stevens and Octavio Paz, emphasizes that even in Stevens's role as critic (for instance, in his essays on poetry) the way Stevens would have his own poems read is apolitical:

the space Stevens and Paz seek to create, in their prose, for their poems, is not a political space. It is not even a secretly political space, one of those false fronts conservatism so often throws up when it says something is not political. This space does not prejudice the politics that go on immediately outside it. (325)

The poetry that cannot get beyond the issue of the imagination's relation to reality, as Stevens's poetry mostly fails to do, cannot admit as an assumption the existence of anything beyond the imagination. What the reader hears recurring in Tomlinson's comments on Stevens is this charge: that for all Stevens's pronouncements--both in and out of his poems--about the problem of imagination and reality, he does not get a sense of the physical world or the social world into his poems. This indictment relates

directly to the other recurring fault Tomlinson finds with Stevens: elegance for its own sake. Tomlinson pulls away from the necessary consequence of Stevens's unresolvable dialectic--that it is "a world of words to the end of it" (Collected 345)--in order to save reality from Stevens's poetic solipsism.

One way to measure their disagreement about the nature of the self is to compare Tomlinson's Preface with Stevens's famous conclusion to his essay, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," where he writes of the mind:

It is not an artifice that the mind has added to human nature. It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation: and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives. (Necessary 36)

Both passages seem to share an embattled defensive quality. Like Stevens's statement, Tomlinson's seems to reflect a battle between reality and imagination, at once both defensive and offensive. Yet Tomlinson might be said even here to demur from Stevens. Tomlinson's Preface merely speaks of "putting aside" the self. Stevens's speaks of the imagination as a "violence" pressing back against the pressure of reality. In one way, Tomlinson reduces the pitch of Stevens's rhetoric, perhaps by euphemism, but in another way he increases that rhetorical force by the same devices: by euphemism, by litotes, by repression. Tomlinson's wording suggests that the extremism he wished to avoid was an

extension of rhetoric. In this respect, his disagreement with Stevens is identical with his more public disagreement with Stevens's placing of words (rhetoric) before things. Perhaps, for Tomlinson, in such extreme rhetoric words threaten to materialize, to cross the boundary from discourse into violent action.

Do Stevens and Tomlinson address the same "self" in these passages? The self which protects itself by a violence within from a violence without--that is, Stevens's self--is that self the same as the self which puts aside the personality--or, to be more precise, "the more possessive and violent claims of personality"--that is, Tomlinson's self? Indeed, it may be possible to hear a faint echo of Stevens's words in Tomlinson's Preface; an echo, in fact, very like his deliberate echo of Stevens's "Snow Man" in his poem "The Art of Poetry."

The question of the self in the poem lies near the centre of a basic issue in modernist poetry, that of impersonality. Stevens himself has often been charged with evasiveness in his use of masks. But Tomlinson, interestingly, despite his high praise for modernist poetics, has seldom adopted a mask clearly different from his self; that is, he has few masks as, say, the clown persona of Stevens in Harmonium, or of the historic personae of, for instance, Browning and Pound. Relations and Contraries, his first volume, contains most of the examples of his departure from this norm. But to say that Tomlinson speaks in his own

voice, maskless, is it to say that the personality is not thereby put aside? Tomlinson implies that he knows what parts of the personality should be put aside and, more to the point, he seems to be confident that he can control those possessive and violent parts. The personality, therefore, seems to be permitted in his poems, but in a chastened, purified form. This is quite different from Stevens's practice too. Stevens is closer to the theory--if not the practice--of Pound and Eliot in the matter of impersonality than is Tomlinson. Nowhere in Stevens is the reader ever allowed to feel confident that the feelings and attitudes expressed are to be attributed to the poet; rather, forever is he faced by the mask or persona, by voices and attitudes that are always hedged and qualified by irony. Those qualifications, evasions, and ironies taken together may add up to a single personality, but that sum is somehow less palpable than is the self which inhabits Tomlinson's poems.

Moreover, Tomlinson's Preface differs from Stevens's passage in the perceived direction of attack and, hence, of defense. Stevens's passage externalizes the enemy ("a violence without"); Tomlinson's Preface internalizes it ("the more possessive and violent claims of personality"). Stevens seems to attribute violence to the physical, social, and experiential worlds--all that violence *out there*. Tomlinson situates the violence within the self, in the self's possessiveness. In keeping with this metaphorical transposition, Tomlinson places his supreme value precisely

where Stevens places the enemy, in the outside world: "where space represented possibility." Stevens, on the other hand, places his supreme value on the inside, as phrases scattered throughout his work attest: "the supreme fiction," "the interior paramour," "It Must Be Abstract."

It might be remarked in relation to Bloom's psychoanalytic theory of influence that both Stevens and Tomlinson, each in his different way, deny a large part of the psychoanalytic project. Stevens changes the internal battlefield of Freud's psyche to a zone lying on the border between the self and forces outside the self. Tomlinson accepts the same field as Freud--the psyche--and indeed resorts to a division of the self that may recall the Ego's struggles to constrain the Id, yet, at the same moment, sweeps away the whole Freudian drama by simply denying that there is a struggle. Tomlinson's language undermines the Freudian crisis. The outcome of the self's negotiations in the world seems not at all in doubt; by an act of will, the self controls itself. If there is irony, as there well may be, in his phrasing--"where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully"--it is a conscious one which, by another act of will, sets aside the claims of psychoanalysis--just as it may set aside the extreme rhetoric of Stevens's passage.

For all his undoubted championing of the American poets, especially Stevens, Williams, Pound, and Moore, Tomlinson's basic disagreement with Stevens is in at least one respect

similar to other English commentators' charges against the American poet, dating back as early as Riding and Graves' A Survey of Modernist Poetry (1927). Riding and Graves give a few lines of Stevens's verse, without benefit of their contexts, to support their argument that modernist poetry in its defiance of civilization is, among other things, frivolous: "To the demand for deep thinking the reaction is a frivolousness like Mr. Stevens's 'Là-là! The cat is in the violets . . .'" (166). They also cite lines from "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" as an instance of the pernicious effects of Imagism (216), and label Stevens, along with Poe, Rimbaud, Edith Sitwell, Eliot, and Crane, "enforced romantics" (289).

The story of Stevens's critical reception in Britain is one chapter in the long and often strained Anglo-American literary and cultural relationship. In a curious way, the British dismissal of American culture is characterized not so much by an old culture's condescension toward a relatively newer one, though this attitude is frequently present, but by its perception of American culture as tainted by European culture. Harry Levin points out in his essay, "The American Voice in English Poetry," that in the developing literature of nineteenth-century America one "social consideration was the increasing number of articulate Americans who were not of English-speaking ancestry, and who brought in lilts and accents from continental Europe" (187). Levin quotes a book with which Tomlinson was familiar to show the British

reaction to this mixture: "The English critic, Michael Roberts, in The Faber Book of Modern Verse, suggested that, whereas his compatriots 'take the language as they find it,' American poets inherit a 'European sensibility' in which there is 'something of the dandy and the dilettante'" (187-88). And Levin goes on to show how a "European sensibility" could be a liability in the eyes of a British reviewer: "Another English critic has recently given an invidious edge to that valid distinction by describing Wallace Stevens as 'a cultural show-off'--a rather testy refusal to be amused by the playful bravura of the Pennsylvania Dutchman who toyed with 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle'" (188).

Unlike their American contemporaries, Frost, Pound, and Eliot, through most of their careers Stevens and Williams were largely unknown in Britain, in part because both went long unpublished there: Williams until 1963, the year of his death, and Stevens until 1952, three years before his. Charles Doyle points out that it was the publication of Opus Posthumous and The Necessary Angel in 1959 which consolidated Stevens's British reputation (18). Doyle comments that when Stevens finally began to be noticed in Britain, his reception was generally marked by "a mixture of respect and caution" (16), but also by a note of resentment that British publishers had not seen fit to publish him until he was seventy-three. He finds perhaps the truest measure of Stevens's British reception in the poet Henry Reed's remark in 1960: "'over here we are in a peculiar position as regards

Stevens. Most of us don't, quite simply, know him well enough. It is not our fault entirely: but it is possible to feel, with some resentment, that when Stevens was finally published in England a few years ago it was because the event could no longer be decently delayed'" (19).

All poets have their detractors, and so it is with some suspicion that one examines the proposition that Stevens has been any more inaccessible to the British than to the Americans. Stevens has always had a reputation as an "obscure" poet, and perhaps his long-delayed debut in Britain is sufficient explanation to account for any national imbalance in understanding. To some extent that imbalance may result from a juggling of audiences. Stevens's poetry cannot claim a large popular following in the way that Frost's, for example, can. Nor can his poetry lay claim to the rhetoric of "common speech," which is one index, though often a misleading one, of poetic accessibility, in the way Williams's can. Still, the distinguished critic, Helen Vendler, in her most recent book on Stevens, can quote with some exasperation the English critic Harold Beaver, writing in 1980 with an echo of Graves and Riding's charge, from over fifty years before, of frivolity against Stevens: "'[his] peculiarly mincing panache, the phony francophone fuss''"; and the English poet and critic, Craig Raine, writing in 1977, a patently wrong-headed, and possibly condescending, interpretation of Stevens's "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage." Vendler remarks, "The English

incomprehension of Stevens continues almost unabated (Frank Kermode being the exception that proves the rule)" (Words Chosen 81).

What Vendler's asperity shows is that, for her, an American reader finds Stevens's rhetoric playful and witty where an English reader, more often than not, finds it frivolous and phony. Perhaps a full-blooded persona, a Browningian one, who spoke in this way would be frivolous, but the way Stevens succeeds with his word-play is by omitting a solid persona, or, rather, since a persona is the creation of its rhetoric, by replacing what might be termed a "first order" persona with a "second order" persona. Vendler has elsewhere made a useful--though she herself has called it "crude"--distinction between first and second order poems: "As a poet [Stevens] tends to write second-order poems. First-order poems . . . have a first-person narrative base; second-order poems reflect on that first-order plane for crude purposes we can say that there are many poems of the pure second order, which either do not exhibit a visible first-order human narrative, or exhibit it in a subordinate or oblique way." And Vendler feels that it is the absence of first-order poems in his work that accounts for the bafflement of some readers: "Something in Stevens seems remote, enigmatic, indecipherable, even inhuman to many readers" ("Hunting" 42).

The self, in Tomlinson's poetry, is different from that in Stevens's poetry. In Stevens, if the concept of self has any

meaning, then it is at a much more abstract level than Tomlinson's self. The "I," "you," "he," "she," and "we" which populate Stevens's poems are often mere postulates by which he theorizes about the nature of the imagination and reality. Their level of abstraction never goes beyond such theorizing. The reader never reaches a point where the debate is settled; and because the debate is always open, the self in his poetry never evolves to a political stage where questions of moral rightness and error could present themselves. Stevens's poetic world is one of metaphor, metaphor set to the endless task of speculating about imagination and reality. In Tomlinson, on the other hand, the self can recognize error: his poetic personae have always occupied a political stage because his poems take as settled the demarcation of reality from imagination. What we find in Tomlinson's The Necklace is perhaps his unfortunate attempt to follow Stevens's example of a selfless poetry. But because Tomlinson's poetic does not function at Stevens's level of abstraction, the result tends to impair his own voice.

Eventually, Tomlinson came to be skeptical of Stevens's rhetoric, finding its elegance too much dressing for too little substance, at least for his purposes. Like his friend Donald Davie, Tomlinson has criticized Stevens's "elegance" on several occasions. And even when writing The Necklace he seems to have determined to stand against this aspect of Stevens's poetic, though at that time he was still unable to

do more than claim such a determination of purpose. If he reflected Stevens's elegance, it was in an attempt to assert a different aesthetic, one which tries to give more credence to things as things and to diminish, if not silence, the sound of words which describe those things. Nevertheless, from his first encounter with "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" he seized upon an element in Stevens that has continued to interest him : the element of chance.

Rather than the mannerisms of Stevens, and rather than the theoretical side of Stevens, with its belief in a supreme fiction, he saw the less systematic Stevens: the poet of the weather, with whom he may have felt a greater affinity. Davie, in a somewhat sarcastic way, casts this side as Stevens's populist or "homespun" side: "'Homespun seems absurdly inappropriate to the sophistication that announces itself so loudly from all these pages [of Stevens's collected poems], and from none so loudly as from the first dozen or so, with their list of titles. But isn't it just the loudness that makes the sophistication suspect? And isn't it just this that shows the naivete is genuine? For of course it is precisely the genuinely naive who try hardest to seem urbane" ("Notes on the Later Poems" 426-27). Even some thirty years later, Davie was still having trouble "hearing" the sense of Stevens's titles. In commenting on Turner Cassity's "arch and cute" titles, he returns to an old theme: "It is a mannerism that we have been resigned to ever since Wallace Stevens, and I've never seen a convincing explanation

of what purpose Stevens meant his dandified titles to serve" ("On Turner Cassity" 27). Davie's own explanation, his "homespun" hypothesis, touches yet again on the American-British hearing problem and the problem of Stevens's frivolity, but at the same time too it points up a major division among Stevens critics: those who find his poetry significant because of its philosophizing and those who find in it virtues other than epistemological consistency. Denis Donoghue shows this less systematic side in a more favorable light than Davie has. In a recent essay he draws a comparison between Thoreau and Stevens: "Thoreau, like Stevens, seems to me a poet of one's self and the weather and things of the weather, best read as an expert in pleasure rather than in knowledge" (Donoghue 436).

In Eden, Tomlinson may be thinking of this aspect of Stevens when he quotes from the Adagia and then relates Stevens's notion of the "casual" to his own notion of "chance":

I think, once more, of Wallace Stevens, and that entry in his Adagia which reads: "The aspects of earth of interest to a poet are the casual ones, as light or colour, images." By "casual," I take it that he refers to the fortuitous nature of art--the way one may find its deepest meanings on a dull street corner, in an old pair of shoes, in the chance conjunction of the totally unforeseen and the apparently unrelated. Suddenly things knit up--the canvas joins hands, in Cézanne's words. You cease to impose and you discover, to rephrase another aphorism of Stevens. And you discover apparently by chance. But what is chance? And if one accepts it, does it not cease to be chance? (Eden 15)

That he may have discovered the element of chance, or the casual, in Stevens a good deal earlier than the time of Eden's essay, even as early as The Necklace, is suggested by a remark in his interview Rasula and Erwin when he discusses the "two arcs" implicit in his poem, "In the Fullness of Time": "I think there are two arcs in question here: first, the fact that . . . things are not given absolutely, so that there is much (necessarily) that escapes us, escapes the forms of language The second arc I speak of in that . . . poem is one we can convert into a circle by accepting things as given" ("Charles Tomlinson" 408-09). The first of these arcs he connects to his reading of Stevens: "The other arc that resists completion has been there implicitly since the early Stevens poems based on 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'--thirteen, the odd number, the series that could go on forever" (409).

Thus Tomlinson's most enduring and deeply felt response to Stevens may be to his casual side, and though it is the less remarked-upon side, it encompasses more than the single technical invention to which Davie's remark would tend to limit it. In one sense, both Stevens and Tomlinson are aesthetic formalists who seek a perfect world through art. Once more Helen Vendler provides a useful pair of categories to amplify this idea: "There are many writers from Chaucer to Dickens, who love and relish the imperfect, but there are other writers, chiefly lyric poets, who see (it is not too much to say) and love the perfect--the perfectly harmonious,

perfectly shaped, impeccable whole. These writers are subject to passionate misery at the spectacle of inharmonious, distracted, and fragmented life (as well as at the spectacle of unsuccessful, partly realized, or unfinished poems") ("Youth" 138). In Eden, Tomlinson writes of his difficulties in balancing the idea of a perfect world, here what he calls, after Pound, the "radiant world," with the imperfect world in which he grew up: "I wanted to recover that 'radiant world' in poems, and by doing so I seemed to have lost touch with the Midlands. But the Midlands were always present as one term in a dialectic, as a demand for completeness subconsciously impelling the forms of one's art, even demanding two arts where the paradisaical aspect of the visual could perhaps be rescued and celebrated" (Eden 12).

If Tomlinson was only partially and momentarily in the thrall of Stevens's elegant mannerisms, that is, while writing The Necklace, he has continued to find in Stevens's work more than mere rhetoric. In a sense Alan Golding is correct in arguing that Tomlinson, Zukofsky, and others find in Stevens their poetic "antiself." But in another sense, Tomlinson's continuing dialogue with Stevens seems to stem from his recognition that, as in himself, so in Stevens there was a less hierophantic voice, indicative of a desire for a more direct communication and with a broader audience than that usually permitted the formalist, "high art" poem. It may be that his dialogue--and disagreement--with Stevens has enabled him to attempt his political poems, the poems which most

clearly show his interest in achieving a broader and more human aesthetic than that he found in Stevens, a direction which my final chapter will explore. Before that, however, my next two chapters will examine how the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility relate to his poetry of locality. To begin, chapter three will examine the place of Eden and his interest in reviving and redefining the idea of Eden in his poetry.

Chapter Three

Space and its Eden

*Sunsets! They are interminable. Too late, however
For his exclamations. Sunsets . . . A point
Of interrogation, perhaps? How long
Can a sun go on setting?*

--"Antecedents: II. Praeludium" (CP 50)

1. "The Measure of All Eden"

On the face of it one might think that as a way of protecting his originality the myth of Eden would suffer from the same problems as Tomlinson's early recourse to the tradition of poetic satire in Relations and Contraries: myth, no less than poetry, would seem to be an impoverished means of defending one's originality. Why then does Tomlinson draw on the myth of Eden? And how does his use of this myth relate to the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility? Indeed, how does this dialectic relate to modernism? For modernism itself has had ambivalent feelings towards myth, and Tomlinson early declared his allegiance to modernism. Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, and Pound, all the major figures of high modernism, have made use, albeit complex and various use, of myth. To complicate the issue further, these writers in the course of the last eighty years have become the centre, their works the canon of modernism. If in

1910, for instance, or in 1922--that annus mirabilis--the mythic component was a device for unsettling and subverting the centre--cultural and social--by 1950 and with the increasing acknowledgement of their works as central modernist texts, that component too became co-opted, regarded as of the centre, not of the margin: its resistance that of the entrenched against change, not that of the radical for change. In the early 1960s, for example, Alfred Alvarez could be somewhat dismissive of Tomlinson's poetry because of its lingering allegiance to modernism, judged by him to be outdated:

At the end of Charles Tomlinson's book [Seeing Is Believing] was a series of poems very closely modelled on early Pound and Eliot--the Laforgue things. Now, there was a review by Hugh Kenner which seemed to be absolutely disingenuous, where he said that English poets have never coped with American poetry, and Tomlinson is the first one to do so, ergo he is the first really good English poet. This seems so stupid. The point is, these poets were writing in 1917, Charles Tomlinson was doing it forty years later at least. Times have changed.

(Davie "Discussion" 21-22)

Alvarez's remarks point up one risk that a late modernist, like Tomlinson, faced in the 1950s: indictment by his contemporaries for being out of fashion. In "Some Aspects of Poetry Since the War," Tomlinson himself cites a further instance of the hostility to allusion and myth in contemporary poetry. He quotes Philip Larkin's comments in a 1964 interview: ". . . to me the whole of the ancient world, the whole of classical and biblical mythology means very little, and I think using them today not only fills

poems full of dead spots but dodges the writer's duty to be original'" (451). Lionel Trilling, writing at about the same time as Alvarez and Larkin, points to another risk that poetic reference to "Eden" in our times may run:

How far from our imagination is the idea of "peace" as the crown of spiritual struggle! The idea of bliss is even further removed. The two words propose to us a state of virtually infantile passivity which is the negation of the "more life" that we crave, the "more life" of spiritual militancy. We dread Eden, and of all Christian concepts there is none we understand so well as the felix culpa and the "fortunate fall"; not, certainly, because we anticipate the salvation to which these Christian paradoxes point, but because by means of the sin and the fall we managed to escape the seductions of peace and bliss. (Trilling 79)

In a post-Christian world, "Eden," with its connotations of, as Trilling emphasizes, passivity, makes its contemporary usage especially hazardous.

Was Tomlinson's first allegiance to modernism, or to some (single) aspect of modernism? On the one hand he has been careful to distance himself from too close a connection with myth; on the other hand, his interest in myth extends beyond the high modernist writers to include their first generation of poetic descendents who even now for the most part remain marginal literary figures but in whose work myth has also been central: for example, David Jones, Basil Bunting, William Carlos Williams, and Robert Duncan. In a sense, Tomlinson recognizes in these poets both the kinship of a shared poetic tradition and that of the revolutionary--the radical element essential to poetry.

Alluding to Eden is referring to a placeless place: a

place which both is and is not. Octavio Paz's remark on Tomlinson's graphics applies as well to his poetry:

A morphology and not a mythology: the places and beings which Tomlinson's collages evoke for us reveal no paradise or hell. Those skies and those caverns are not inhabited by gods or devils; they are places of the mind. To be more exact, they are places, beings and things revealed in the dark-room of the mind. They are the product of the confabulation--in the etymological sense of that word--of accident and imagination. (Paz, 13)

In this respect, Eden represents a parallel to "Poem" itself and the space of possibility. For Eden signifies the original place: the place first recognized as place, in the same way that "Poem" is the poem first recognized as a poem. But to draw a parallel between "Poem" and Eden raises the question of why Tomlinson found it desirable to allude to Eden at all. For a modern poet to allude to Eden can be seen as a challenge, one which takes up the fight with his contemporaries by refusing yet again to bow to all programmatic prescriptions of what the modern poem should be. Narrowly construed, the Edens which appear in his poems and prose can be understood as a politico-cultural statement of defiance. Perhaps reflecting some degree of this cultural isolationism, Anthony Thwaite once called Tomlinson a "cultural magpie" (Poetry Today 63) because of his far-ranging poetic borrowings. The underlying charge contained in this label is that a cultural magpie is a mere collector, a dilettante, and its darker insinuations are that the poet is rootless and superficial, even, perhaps, a thief. It was to satirize another but similar expression of literary

parochialism that Tomlinson retorted to "a recent disquisition on poetics"--a poem by Kingsley Amis--which had declared: "'Nobody wants any more poems about foreign places'" (CP 31):

Not forgetting Ko-jen, that
Musical city (it has
Few buildings and annexes
Space by combating silence),
There is Fiordiligi, its sun-changes
Against walls of transparent stone
Unsettling all preconception--a city
For architects (they are taught
By casting their nets
Into those moving shoals); and there is
Kairouan, whose lit space
So slides into and fits
The stone masses, one would doubt
Which was the more solid
Unless, folding back
Gold segments out of the white
Pith globe of a quartered orange,
One may learn perhaps
To read such perspectives. At Luna
There is a city of bridges, where
Even the inhabitants are mindful
Of a shared privilege: a bridge
Does not exist for its own sake.
It commands vacancy. (CP 31)

The poem resists parochialism in a number of ways. The very existence of this subtle poem defies the epigraph. The title proposes exactly that which the epigraph declares to be unwanted: more foreign cities. The four cities--Ko-jen, Foirdiligi, Kairouan, and Luna--themselves bear witness to the implicit dangers of parochialism. The poem's structure goes back to Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," this time drawing on that poem's powerful method of suggesting a plenitude, if not an infinity, of (counterarguing) examples. However, whereas in Stevens's poem

the deliberate choice of the odd number, thirteen, generates the sense that the ways of looking at a blackbird (any commonplace, taken-for-granted thing) are vast, Tomlinson's poem gives that same sense of an abundance of refutatory exempla by a different method. The opening phrase, "Not forgetting Ko-jen" and the repeated phrase, "There is," used to introduce two more cities, suggest that the poem is but an excerpt from a compendium of foreign cities, all worthy of poetic treatment. Indeed, he chooses four cities, rather than an odd five or three, so he can call upon the connotative stability inherent in "four"--foursquare, four-legged, not three-legged--to lend his satiric rebuttal firmness.

Each city has a lesson to teach, and, as the poem unfolds, each reveals another dimension of what other people in other places and times have thought and done--that is, in foreign cities. The kernel technique of the poem is given in the image of peeling an orange: "folding back/ Gold segments out of the white/ Pith globe of a quartered orange." The keenness of his satire forms a more pondered and civil rejoinder than one might think the epigraph could provoke. In effect, it marshalls history and architecture--whole cities of it--against its target. The basic counter-argument of the poem, posed as an ironic question, is whether we really should dismiss history, culture, the world. In effect, the telling phrases that stand out--"combating silence," "Unsettling all preconception," and "commands

vacancy"--pierce their target by indirect but nevertheless accurate thrusts. His closing lines on Luna, the fourth city, imply that poetry should be a bridge from one culture to another:

At Luna
 There is a city of bridges, where
 Even the inhabitants are mindful
 Of a shared privilege: a bridge
 Does not exist for its own sake.
 It commands vacancy.

"Not forgetting" Eden either. Tomlinson's references to Eden, then, can be narrowly read as another rejoinder to parochial and programmatic views of poetry. Eden, after all, and despite William Blake, is a foreign city. Moreover, to some of his contemporaries, Eden's foreignness would be less distasteful than its apparent deadness as a literary allusion. Eden might well appear to some readers as a cliché, an allusion depleted of freshness especially as it lends itself to myth-making: too many poems have too frequently referred to Eden; by now the response has worn very thin. But it is precisely freshness which Tomlinson means to recoup by his use of "Eden." More broadly, Eden relates less to his fight against British parochialism--"our English propensity for self-enclosure" ("Travels" 5)--and more to his sense of originality. In a recent interview Tomlinson outlines what Eden has meant to him. His comments show that his use of Eden has in one sense been carefully weighed but in another has been inevitable--"You don't choose such things. . . they choose you" ("Human Balance" n. pag.).

It is oversimplifying to say that the first sense is restricted to the moment of poetic creation and the second to the poet's reflections--if not rationalizations--on the completed poem. Yet if Eden is intended to represent the space of possibility, what he here calls "the newness of fresh perceptions," then the implication is that in creating the poem the poet recognizes that somehow the moment of creation takes account of his later and earlier deliberations, and that part of its "freshness" lies in exactly this recognition of the dissolving of categories, of suddenly seeing the long pondered as new and fresh. The space of possibility encompasses the world beyond the poem.

His commentary on Eden reflects something of his own wonder at how, beginning, as he remarks, "with a certain distrust of myth," his poetry has increasingly resorted to the myth of Eden. From the space of possibility of "Poem" to Eden is a journey from a space, an instant of creation, towards a place, the instant allegorized, ramified, as he says, into "the idea of a fall, a possible loss, a possible return" (my italics: to emphasize his repetition of "possible"). His explanation also suggests both a possible loss and a possible gain. By metamorphosing space into Eden some of its potential power might seem to be lost in the process; yet Eden is only one dimension of the space of possibility, one of a plenitude of possible metamorphoses.

Eden allows Tomlinson to explore one dimension of his creativity. At this point, a distinction needs to be made

between the myth of Eden as an allusion and the myth of Eden as a sign of a myth-making tendency on the part of the poet. When Browning, for example, writes, "Where the apple reddens/
Never pry--/ Lest we lose our Edens,/ Eve and I," or when Stevens writes, "This luscious and impeccable fruit of life/
Falls, it appears, of its own weight to earth./ When you were Eve, its acrid juice was sweet,/ Untasted, in its heavenly,
orchard air," both poets are appropriating certain features of the myth to their own poetic purposes. There is a difference between these passing references and references which constitute part of the structural component of a poem. When the myth of Eden means the Christian myth, the pre-eminent example of this structural use is Paradise Lost; when it means something more elemental, possibly inclusive of the Christian myth, the best example might be Finnegans Wake. Christian or not, Eden can be reduced to very simple blocks--to a loss and a restoration--so simple that they may fit almost any work of literature. Indeed, in Anatomy of Criticism and other works, Northrop Frye has developed a theory which argues that this mythic pattern underlies all Western literature.

Tomlinson is a Christian poet neither in the sense of a man who writes poetry primarily out of his belief in God nor in the sense of one who writes about his loss of belief, or of the impossibility of belief, in God. J. Hillis Miller in The Disappearance of God has charted the course of the poetry of disbelief from the nineteenth century up to Stevens's

generation. (The latest author Miller discusses is Hopkins, who died ten years after Stevens was born.) Stevens may well be read as a poet caught fast in his disbelief, continually attempting to find a substitute belief. Tomlinson belongs to a later generation--about two generations beyond that of Stevens--for whom neither belief nor disbelief is the same powerful poetic force each was for earlier poets. Nor does Tomlinson have much patience with the existentialists' notion of an "absurd universe." In The Poem as Initiation, he writes, "One of the lazier recruits to recent literary distinction is what has been called 'the universe of the absurd.' Once you use a word like 'universe,' you can prove anything, and once you throw in the word 'absurd,' you can take up a rhetorical stance that rids you of the necessity of noticing that the universe is there at all" (n. pag.). On the other hand, in his most recent interview, with Richard Swigg, he suggests that he too may be read in relation to the Christian myth, indeed, has himself so seen his poetic enterprise for some time: "In my next book, Annunciations, on which I am working now, I shall go on with this attempt to redefine Christian concepts, something I've been doing quietly for a long time" ("Charles Tomlinson at Sixty" 61).

However, the quiet redefinition of "Christian concepts" suggests an undertaking at a considerably cooler emotional temperature than that generated by his recent predecessors, such as Stevens, Eliot, or Hardy, in their struggles with the disappearance of God. Once again, as in his characterization

of the dialectic of relations and contraries in the Preface, Tomlinson gives the impression that he is in control of what for many poets could still be, and certainly for others long has been, an issue of personal crisis. The activity of redefining Christian concepts has a cool, analytical air of reason about it; at the same time it seems both less emotional and also less grandiose than, for instance, Stevens's description of the supreme fiction as an attempt to find a substitute for the belief in God. Yet, however understated, Tomlinson's account does point back to the earlier poetic generations' preoccupation with belief. If that preoccupation is a dominant, if not defining, feature of modernism, then his account suggests that he may have inherited the project along with the more strictly formalist and prosodic techniques, which he has more frequently emphasized--for example, in Some Americans--as his debt to Pound, Eliot, and Stevens.

When Tomlinson's remark on his project is considered in relation to his use of the myth of Eden, a number of possibilities arise. Taken together, his remarks on Eden and on redefining Christian concepts may suggest a synthesizing tendency: the desire of a mature poet to affirm continuities and major concerns in a body of poetry which might otherwise be regarded as a mixed collection of discrete pieces; or even an attempt to correct what David Wright in 1965 characterized as "the fallacy that contemporary poetry is largely composed of those conveniently shaped wedges of reading-matter that

get fitted into the blank spaces of egghead periodicals" (Wright 10). The tendency, in other words, is towards seeing his poems as a single long poem. Apart from his uncollected poems in Nightbook, written before Relations and Contraries, he has written a few longish poems--"Monuments," "Antecedents," "The Flood," "Movements," and recently "The Return" and "Winter Journey," for example--but no long poems: no poems of comparable length to the Cantos, Four Quartets, Notes toward a Supreme Fiction, Paterson, or A. Perhaps the achievement of a long poem is unavoidably regarded in one way as a sign of greatness; socially, the metaphor-we-live-by which applies is big is better; culturally, the long poem covers more territory than the short poem and sometimes covers it more effectively. Yet mere largeness is no guarantee of greatness. For every Faerie Queene, Paradise Lost, and Prelude, there are many more unread long poems: The Recluse, for instance, and Clarel, and the already largely forgotten long poems of Robinson and Aiken. Moreover, especially in the twentieth century, the very quality of length itself has been called into question even for those long poems which are counted successful. (And it is worth noting that even their "success" is hardly a settled matter in many cases.) Rosenthal and Gall have argued that the poetic sequence, rather than the long poem, is the poetic form most characteristic of modern poetry, and have shown that many "long" poems might better be read as sequences of "short" poems.

Nevertheless, either as a long poem or as a sequence of short poems the feeling persists that length, whether of loose or seamless joining, allows the poet both to occupy more territory--by consolidating and abolishing boundaries between poems--and to defend it more effectively. Thus, underlying the so-called "popular" estimate that the long poem is a poem to be reckoned with may lie the ingrained fear of the small. The critic's tasks of discerning continuities and synthesizing disparities approach the poet's own efforts to "bring a world quite round" (Stevens, Collected 165), to see order in his poems, as it were, from the outside. The understating of so large-scale an aspiration points up yet again Tomlinson's struggle to be unpossessive toward the world and his originality yet to be bold in defending his poetic space. As the epigraph to Eliot's Notes Towards the Definition of Culture wryly notes in its carefully edited definition of "definition"--fleetingly reminiscent perhaps of the collage element of The Waste Land and the Cantos:

"Definition: 1. The setting of bounds; limitation (rare)--1483." Man-made bounds or borders can be transgressed, and rarely do they limit or contain.

The Edenic impulse in Tomlinson's work runs the risk of offending not only by anachronistic allusion and by sinning against the modernist's high valuation of the particular over the general, but also by reintroducing possessiveness into his poetry. Essentially, that possessiveness has two different aspects: first, in the

apparent appeal to the poetic tradition in the form of the hallowed literary allusion to Eden, and secondly, in the apparent drift towards totalizing, the apparent submission to the metaphor of big-is-better, especially when it comes to protecting one's poetic territory. These are the negative sides to Tomlinson's project of redefining Christian concepts, beginning, perhaps, with Eden. The question is whether the control he seems to exercise over this project allows him to escape these negative risks.

2. A Metamorphosis of Eden: "Where space represented possibility" (CP xvii)

How is Eden--Tomlinson's use of Eden--part of his project of redefining Christian concepts? Eden allows a larger canvas on which to portray his ideas of perception and imagination. According to the Christian myth, by faith and belief in God man can return to Eden--or, more exactly, not return to Eden but enter paradise. Tomlinson's project is to see this myth as an allegory of and for the imagination. Stevens untiringly, and unerringly, celebrated the joys and terrors of a world still, as it were, warm with the presence of the just-dead gods. Tomlinson, perhaps more analytically than Stevens, might be seen as attempting to carry through the next step in the wake of the gods.

That next step includes the resettlement of unreclaimed territories left vacant after the departure of the gods; thus Eden represents an array of concepts still connotatively underdeveloped precisely because the imaginative idea which empowered it, the idea of God, has itself been rendered impotent. In a sense, some nineteenth-century poets--including Stevens: born 1876--were too close to the disappearance of God ever to get beyond its first impact: whatever subject they touched in their poetry turned, Midas-like, to metaphors for that disappearance. At a further distance from the disappearance of the gods, Tomlinson recognizes the necessity of moving beyond the initial wonder

at the possibilities opened up by such a new, changed world, and at this distance he is better able to do so than some of his predecessors. If terms like Eden are not redefined, their connotative dullness will continue to impede the poet's--and everyman's--relationship with the object world; the language we use to refer to that world needs to be released from its past. This side--the good side--of Tomlinson's Edenic programme, ambitious as it indeed is, can be seen, paradoxically, as a scaling down or reduction rather than a magnification. His goal is to rescue the idea of Eden and make it available again, newly defined and empowered. His project is to bring Eden down to the space of possibility.

The myth of Eden is directly related to the myth of paradise, and entails many of the same problems associated with paradise. If England, in the rhetoric of Richard II, is "this other Eden, demy paradise," Eden itself is already but half the celestial paradise: the celestial paradise cannot change; the terrestrial paradise has a more complex relation to change. Read as a sign of the celestial paradise, Eden attempts to habituate natural man to uninhabitable and unnatural eternity. By being both a reflection of the eternity towards which man's life leads but also a reflection of the world he knows, Eden is a counterpart to Christ: half-human, half-divine. That Eden is a garden signifies the natural world; that its plants and animals do not change signifies the divine, unchanging paradise. In his own,

paradoxically Edenic poem, "The Greenest Continent," Stevens writes, "It was a mistake to paint the gods," and his epigram points up the aesthetic and representational problem of Eden. Art which attempts to represent the sublime quality of permanence or eternity falsifies the only world we know and eventually undermines the credibility of the gods themselves.

Tomlinson's own version of this notion finds its most vehement expression in his early poem, "Art and Chaos": "And hence the falsity of Christs and ideal Madonnas/ and the eternality of the pietà. These symbols are the tyranny/ of ultimates that freeze men into an eternal subjection./ Subject to immortal ghosts. Defying the breath of chaos./ For all of life returns to chaos" ("Art and Chaos" 52). However, the imperative of this theme--It Must Change--persists in his later poems, as, for example, in the declaration of "Aesthetic," the first poem of The Necklace (1955): "Reality is to be sought, not in concrete,/ But in space made articulate: / The shore, for instance,/ Spreading between wall and wall;/ The sea-voice/ Tearing the silence from the silence" (CP 3). What rescues art from the false reality of concrete--no less false than that of paint--is the acceptance of change as a law governing both perceiver and perceived. The complacency of the self before the physical world invites the same stagnation as the complacency of the eye before "ideal Madonnas." If the world is--fatalistically--granted a permanency underwritten by some supreme being, then the regenerating potential of change will

be lost. Eden can be redeemed and restored to our language if it is seen not as a token of eternal changelessness but as the place of changes from which we come and to which we continually return, simply as we attend to the sights and sounds of this world. "Eden," as a word, represents Tomlinson's attempt to redeem all words, our language, from "the tyranny of ultimates." Thus the falsity of "Christs and ideal Madonnas" lies in their power, both as icons and as artworks, of playing on man's desire for changelessness. They "freeze men into an eternal subjection" before both art and the physical world.

"A Rose for Janet," from The Return (1987), expresses the same idea as "Art and Chaos" but in gentler, more personal tones:

I know
 this rose is only
 an ink-and-paper rose
 but see how it grows and goes
 on growing
 beneath your eyes:
 a rose in flower
 has had (almost) its vegetable hour
 whilst my
 rose of spaces and typography
 can reappear at will
 (your will)
 whenever you repeat
 this ceremony of the eye
 from the beginning
 and thus
 learn how
 to resurrect a rose
 that's instantaneous
 perennial
 and perfect now (Return 39)

No less than Eden, the word "rose"--as in Yeats's early poetry--carries a heavy cargo of religious and literary

connotations, of which its association with the Madonna--that symbol of tyranny--is part. But here that tyranny is nowhere in evidence, circumvented by the poet's careful nurturing of his rose/poem. Indeed, his poem is also a garden of rose associations: first of all, perhaps, in its possible synecdochic relation to the Garden of Eden--especially an English Eden--as W. E. Shewell-Cooper remarks, "One can hardly imagine a garden in England without a rose bush or two" (139). The poem delights and grows strong in its heavy soil of allusions. Though the strength of the poem in no way depends on seeing in its title an allusion to a specific work--nor, for that matter, does its strength entirely depend on any other of its allusions--still it is in keeping with its light and witty strategies for its title to echo so common a poetic formula: like their namesakes, rose allusions are hardy perennials.

The endurance of the rose as a symbol of love and sincerity owes as much to its commonness, its domestic quality, as to its hierophantic traditions, and because it combines the popular and the esoteric, it continually reappears in all manner of literary works: as apt in those by a Dante or a Yeats as in those by a Burns or a Cole Porter. Tomlinson acknowledges both traditions, and acknowledges them lightly, subtly, and freshly. His opening lines--"I know/ this rose is only/ an ink-and-paper rose" avoids the quite substantial difficulty of writing a new poem about roses, a poem which can assert its individuality

even though it uses so well-worn a literary counter. These lines upset our expectations by punningly referring us not primarily to the lore of the rose as to the lore of the moon--in some respects, notably here as a popular symbol of romantic love, interchangeable with the rose--by way of a line from the popular song, "It's Only a Paper Moon." (Paper roses are also common tender in their own right.) His nicely balanced lines which champion artifice over nature appropriately glance at the carpe diem associations of the rose by an indirect allusion to the "vegetable love" in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress": "a rose in flower/ has had (almost) its vegetable hour/ whilst my/ rose of spaces and typography/ can reappear at will." And the final lines of the poem manage a fresh reference to the resurrection, the most important religious association of the rose: "and thus/ learn how/ to resurrect a rose/ that is instantaneous/ perennial/ and perfect now."

The poem, both simple and modest in ambition, is a demonstration in how to read a poem. Addressed to a friend, as are many of Tomlinson's poems, "A Rose for Janet" balances whimsy with seriousness--it may borrow some of its playful and fanciful tone from the metaphysicals, Donne and, again, Marvell. As a poet's gift for a friend the poem is more than a curious memento; it succinctly encapsulates an approach not only to rose/poems but to the world. Re-read by that friend, or by any reader--in "the ceremony of the eye"--it provides an object lesson in careful perception. Behind the poem's

allusions to roses and their associations, and behind its act of passing on, and down, poetic wisdom, lies the ritual at the centre of Christian religion, the Eucharist. "A Rose for Janet" quietly redirects, and redefines, the promise of eternal life signified in the ceremony of Holy Communion into "the ceremony of the eye" and offers the promise of renewal in attending to this world--roses, poems, friends, people--with care and love.

If "A Rose for Janet" demonstrates how Tomlinson has put into practice his redefinition of Christian concepts, a closely related poem shows that this project is, as he remarks, "something I've been doing quietly for a long time" ("Charles Tomlinson at Sixty" 61). Seen as a gift for a friend, "A Rose for Janet" in some ways completes a meditation begun in the much earlier poem, from A Peopled Landscape (1963), "The Picture of J. T. in a Prospect of Stone." Tomlinson has remarked, "In this poem there has been an attempt to combine family associations with a moral climate and setting which yield up 'the constancy of stone' as their fundamental image" ("The Picture" 261). Of the poem's allusion to Marvell, he notes, "The mode of attention the poet hopes she [the poet's daughter] gets is hinted at in his borrowing from Andrew Marvell's title, 'The Picture of T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers'" ("The Picture" 262).

The poem takes the form of a dialogue of the soul: the first voice expressing more doubts about what and how a father can best give, not to a friend on this occasion, but

now to his daughter; the second, expressing another side to the father/child relationship: the father's need to be firm and constant himself both in example and in objective so that his child will grow strong enough to resist the trials--"slow corrosives"--of life. The poem brings the idea of God's gift to man, the example of sacrifice, down to the familial, to the real, from the spiritual. In the earlier poem, Tomlinson considers the problems of a father's responsibility to his children. Implicit in the poem's notions of "gift" and "wish" is the recognition of how powerful is the influence a father exercises over his children. That recognition is filtered through the meditation's deliberately contrived tone of coolness and its adoption of a stance at some remove from paternal tenderness, even from the friendly affection of "A Rose for Janet." The aim and effect of these strategies are certainly not unloving, but they seek a degree of objectivity in an effort to avoid the obvious danger of sentimentality attending its subject.

The speaker's distance from his subject is initially suggested by the title itself: to "J. T. in a Prospect of Stone" has been prefixed the phrase, "The Picture of." We need not construe "picture" literally as a photograph, painting or other depiction; we might, after all, understand the phrase simply as the mind's, or memory's, image. But whether the poet had a photograph before him or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the phrase accentuates the static, and therefore unreal, quality of stopping--or

imagining that one can stop--the living process, child or father, even for the space of a poem. The title also suggests an aesthetic distancing between poet and subject--the daughter as the father's work of art--a sense continued in the poet's choice of the impersonal "one" in the opening lines--"What should one/ wish a child/ and that, one's own." The wish he proposes--"the constancy of stone"--can only be given by giving and by example:

--Gift is giving,
 gift is meaning

The father's wishes for his daughter, like his gifts for her, are only to be proved in the living of both. To wish her constancy--constant to her own best self--is really a wish for her to grow into a recognition of that self. If "The Picture of J. T." can be said to constitute a gift, rather than a meditation on gifts, its gift consists of the lesson of meditation. In order to understand what the father gives, the child must first understand that the gift is part of a process, is a "giving," and that in another but closely related sense, the precipitation of "giving" into "gift" is meaning--"gift is meaning." The gift of "A Rose for Janet" by its conflation of rose and poem, and by its built-in ambiguity about what, in fact, is its gift--A real rose? A picture of a rose? A poem (only) about a rose? Some combination of these?--carries through the issues raised in the earlier poem. Moreover, the later poem proceeds on the assumption that the receiver is ready to receive and

understand --"I'd have her/ understand/ the gift I gave her"--the poet's gift and his reasons for bestowing it. What may have changed--what third voice may have been added to the dialogue--in the time between these two poems is the poet's heightened awareness that we never entirely lose our innocence.

The final lines of "The Picture" suggest a departure from Eden--"emerging/as she does/ between/ her doom (unknown),/ her unmown green"--an end to innocence. But part of the poem's Edenic allusion lies in the dialogue form itself: its two angelic--"angelic," at least in their aspiration to objectivity--speakers are not in agreement: no fiery sword is brandished and the twice-repeated verb of "emerging" suggests a process of indeterminate cessation. Her departure is delayed because she awaits knowledge, and knowledge comes with the playing away of innocence. The later poem might be read as a corrective to the last line of the earlier: "but let her play/ her innocence away." This is to read the last lines as clear-cut, which indeed they are not. First of all the lines do not explicitly assert that understanding will only follow after the death of innocence; "play" here could mean rather "wear down," "tire of," "play out"--but not to the end. Secondly, the reader should acknowledge that the poem's dialogue is also an argument and that perhaps the first and more lenient voice, finally wishing an end to the dispute, seeks to persuade the second voice through at least a semblance of concession in the form

of a possible compromise between their two positions, hence the conciliatory phrasing of "And so she shall." In any case, the later poem implicitly makes amends for a possible undervaluing of "play" and "innocence" in the earlier poem. That poem's first voice, so to speak, is given the final word--or else makes harmonious both its voices. The amends take the form of the poem itself: that is, the virtues of playfulness, whimsy, fancifulness emerge in the notion of the poem as a rose, growing at the will of the reader and as the reader reads. The notion is fanciful, mechanical, like a child's toy, yet not trivial, not merely mechanical or childish.

3. "Those Toys of Arden, Seeing and Half-Seeing"

The innocence of play is a main feature of Eden as well as of the space of possibility. In poetry, play seems to be the necessary ritual or incantatory nonsense for breaking down the enclosed space of normal reality and for the freeing-up of space for the poem--"Space: not between/ but where" (CP 164). In Tomlinson's poetry, frequently play takes a similar form to that of "A Rose for Janet." In poems such as "A Word in Edgeways" (CP 158), "The Instance" (CP 176), "Parsnips" (CP 331), and "On a Pig's Head" (CP 333), he takes the poem about as far it can go in the direction--the same direction often taken by e.e. cummings--of making it an enactment of some experience of the poet. Each of these poems, like "A Rose for Janet," tries to get at some essential element of his experience through this particular form of imitation. In some ways it comes close to drama: foregoing almost altogether the distancing of lyric for the experience itself, and commandeering the reader as actor by the way. Such poems are one or two steps away from the technique of the humorous "Mr. Brodsky" (CP 127) or the serious "Up at La Serra" (CP 78), in both of which, as in other poems of his, he fuses quotation into a basically straightforward anecdotal style. Rather, this other technique may be related to his willingness to experiment with poetic forms and so to open up the meditational lyrical norm of his poetry--for example, as in his collaborative

efforts with Paz and others (Airborne/Hijos Del Aire, "Two Poems on Titles Proposed by Octavio and Marie Jose Paz," and Renga); his translations (Versions from Fyodor Tyutchev, Castilian Ilexes, and others); his prose poems (beginning with the long sequence near the end of The Way of a World (1969) and in "At Chimayó" (Return 28-29), still continuing in his latest volume); his experiments with the open forms of Williams, Creeley, Olson, and others; and the unique venture of "On the Principle of Blowcocks" (CP 169).

The last of these, described as a "Three-way Poem," is accompanied by the poet's instructions on how to read it: a reading "should include (a) the italicized lines, (b) the unitalicized, (c) the whole as printed":

The static forces
 not a ball of silver
of a solid body
 but a ball of air
and its material strength
 whose globed sheernesses
derive from
 shine with a twofold glitter:
not the quantity of mass:
 once with the dew and once
an engineer would instance
 with the constituent bright threads
rails or T beams, say
 of all its spokes
four planes constructed to
 in a tense surface
contain the same volume as
 in a solid cloud of stars
four tons of mass (CP 169)

In The Art of Poetry, Hugh Kenner proposes a distinction between the way we "read" such things as maps and trees and the way we read poems: "You can start reading a map at any point. Your eyes can examine the details of a tree in any

order. But a poem moves in one direction and has only one starting place" (137). Although the three-part structure of "On the Principle of Blowcocks" may suggest a departure--or attempted departure--from Kenner's distinction, the poem is unique mostly on its surface; in fact, it is very much in keeping with Tomlinson's prevailing concern of giving the thing its due. Moreover, it highlights a pedagogical element in his poetry that we have already encountered in "A Rose for Janet" but which is more generally related to the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. In one sense, the poem is over-determined: we are told--as Janet is--how to read the poem; in another sense, though, the poem exhibits a liberating sense of simultaneity and free-play. As readers, we are asked to set aside our notions of lineation and to reconsider the poetic line as analogous to a physical plane or line of force. The first recommended procedure for reading--the italicized portion--asserts that sheer mass does not constitute either material strength or the property of stasis; rather--as in the T-beam or rail--these properties depend on construction, the way things are joined together. The second procedure--the unitalicized portion--describes an instance of right joining: a globe. The third procedure defies grammatical rules--sheer mass?--and insists on a principle of parataxis, perhaps the linguistic equivalent of right-joining. The physical principle set forth in italics joins with the poet's observation of an instance of that principle: reading "the whole as printed" challenges another

metaphor we live by, that sheer mass (bigness) means strength.

"Three-way Poem" demonstrates the poet's need to invite the reader to partake of the experience as well as the poem about the experience; as he early remarked in "Distinctions": "Art exists at a remove./ Evocation, at two,/ Discusses a blue that someone/ Heard someone talking about" (CP 21). This is to pose the subject-object problem in the metaphor of gossip and hearsay: poems like these attempt to collapse the distorting distances between the poet's experience and his recollection; his recollection and his poem; his poem and the reader's experience of it. At the same time as such poems depend on a somewhat mechanical technique to imitate, or rather, induce the experience, they use mechanics wisely, indeed ironically, to undermine that very attitude, the mechanical, of everyday perception. They do not desperately seek the collapse of the self and the other, but rather they propose a metaphor through which to understand that the poem is like the act of perception, both for poet and for reader. It is, in Stevens's words, "The poem of the mind in the act of finding/ What will suffice" (Collected 239).

Thus "The Instance" conflates the barber's tale of how frost can flow like water, with the poet's experience, as he listens to the tale, of the barber's "cold shears on his neck" and also with the poet's later proving of the truth of the tale when he discovers frost on his car:

They do say said

the barber running
 his cold shears
 downwards and over
 the neck's sudden
 surprised flesh:
 They do say frost
 will flow in
 through the gap of a hedge
 like water, and go
 anywhere and I
 believe it. I believe
 him--a gardener,
 he knows. The tepid
 day erases
 his wisdom and he
 is out of mind
 until at night
 I grope for a way
 between darkness and door
 and passing a hand
 down over
 a parked car's
 roof feel
 the finger tips
 burn at the crystal
 proof of a frost
 that finding a hole
 in the hedge
 has flowed through like water. (CP 176)

"The Instance," in a similar way to "A Rose for Janet,"
 employs a metaphoric connection between poem and perception
 to evoke "the ceremony of the eye" (Return 39). Its basic
 features--short lines, severe enjambment, and a long, narrow
 profile--combine to re-enforce the salient features of the
 experiences the poem recounts: surprise, coincidence, the
 metamorphosis of memory and time, of state and
 temperature. As we read (and re-read) the poem we are
 conscious of the formal similarity between the shears of the
 barber--who is also a gardener--"running/ downwards and over/
 the neck's sudden/ surprised flesh" and our own perceptual
 descent of the page. In the same way that the barber is not

merely a barber, repetitively and monotonously tending the small plot of the skull--but a gardener as well, and not merely a gardener but a knowledgeable, articulate, and outspoken one--the reader is aware of other parallels in the constrained optics of reading the poem. The coldness of shears on neck is echoed in the barber's (gardener's) "wisdom": "They do say frost/ will flow in/ through the gap of a hedge/ like water": frost too--like the shears, like water--flows downward. Thus, symmetrically, the poem ends with another instance of "surprised flesh," as the barber's tale suddenly returns to mind when the poet's hand (itself part of the pattern of descent) touches frost on his car. The final line of the poem, the longest line, by its comparative length, suggests through imitative form yet another parallel between poem and experience: the line seems to flow outwards, the way frost or water flows, or the way memory and anecdotal wisdom flow.

Imitative form can pall quite quickly if it is not used sparingly. Read in quantity, e.e. cummings' poems, for example, sometimes lose their individual freshness and may seem to lapse into a facile mechanicalness which, ironically, those same poems strove to defeat. Other poetic forms do not weary so quickly, and the interesting question is why this should be so. The quickest answer may be to label cummings' poems, and others like them, trivial, but on reflection the problem in many cases seems to lie elsewhere. Perhaps, engrossed as we become in the process of interpretation, we

resent all but the severest forms of wit in poetry. The critic may be disinclined to acknowledge what may appear as an inappropriate and cruder use of language when the poet shapes his lines--as a barber the hair, a gardener a hedge. The cause of the critic's reluctance may be an embarrassment at being invited to play rather than to work. When the poet resorts to such techniques, he wishes to infuse his poetry with the spirit of the experience itself. To break out of the analytical use of language and, indeed, even out of its emotive use, is to put mute experience, unmediated and to a large extent unmediatable, before all. Play, in a certain sense, then, and despite verbal co-optings of the word--the play of/with, mind, words--is antithetical to thought and language; in Tomlinson's terms of subject and object, such play may represent the essence of the other, the object, that which neighbours us and that which he endeavours to give its due in his poems. To put aside the idea of art as anything other than subjective expression is to give up on the possibility of finding the right relationship with our neighbouring world of things, as it is also to fall into disbelief about the value of even entertaining the possibility of a world beyond our words--a form of fatalism Tomlinson rejects. In "The Instance," therefore, part of what unsettles the reader is the final and implicit parallel: the subversive element of play--like the shears and the frost--has found its hole in the hedge of words and concepts and has flowed like water into that citadel, the poem.

If a shaped poem, tending as it does towards spatial form, largely frustrates the reader's attempts to pull it back down within the ambit of words, the function of spatial form within a poem need not be seen as entirely subversive. Even in "The Instance," the intention of its spatial pattern does not seem to be to destroy the poet's belief in words but rather to temper that belief and humble its temptation to self-sufficiency. In one sense, as pure shape or pattern, the words of the poem no longer are words; but even as pure pattern the shapes of the poem harmonize with what its words as words say. The implications of this harmony have a strong and a weak form. The strong form points towards an inevitable and ever-present accord between words and things: the very shape of words as they emerge on a page or in air, feeds into the meanings they bear. By the strong form the mind--that "hunter of forms" (CP 189; 233)--as a receptor of shapes and patterns has primacy over the mind as a fabricator of sense. The strong form, by subverting words as words, even as they are used, would give the lie to Stevens's "It is a world of words to the end of it" (Collected 345). In itself, the exercise of seeing shapes in letters and words is as trivial as Hamlet's cloud-gazing. But, like Hamlet's activity, the cozening of words as shapes has a deeper purpose. "Clouds are pedagogues," Stevens writes, and, for Tomlinson, the mind's play with the look of words is another form of misperception, another means of outwitting, at least for a while, possessiveness and of re-establishing the space of

possibility: to read words as things takes Bloom's notion of misreading to its limit.

Yet, as the verb "read" above points up, the strong form of words as things is untenable, except as a metaphor for the similarities and parallels between (intellectual) verbalizing and (non-intellectual) perception. So long as man speaks and thinks so long will he verbalize even shapes. And it is as a metaphor suggestive of these possible parallels that Tomlinson employs the idea. As his first poem, "Poem," shows, he was interested even then in the possibilities for poetry of using visual and aural spaces to increase the space of sense. The "unstopped ear" of that poem does not stop at the mere identification of the noise in the street--indeed, it is sound, not noise--but proceeds to create in the mind's eye a counterpoint of visual meaning, recognizing in the process how each sound, like each extrapolated "dotted line," brings with it an enlargement of its space and, by so doing, brings also an excitement in seeing the possibilities for poetic creation similarly enlarge: "And space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;/ Though space is soundless, yet creates/ From very soundlessness a ground/ To counterstress the liltng hoof fall as it breaks" (CP xix).

Simply seeing words and letters as shapes as well as meanings entails the granting of room for visual space in the poem; more room, that is greater legitimacy, than any mere reference to visual space can grant. In a parallel way, techniques that emphasize the sound of words, in distinction

again to their meanings, admit more aural space than mere references to sound.

Treating words as visual space can take the form of seeing through and past their meanings to their spatial form. This technique, almost--indeed, probably--unavoidably--brings with it a sense of error or misperception, of classic proportions: how can one look at a word and see only its shape? Once again the attendant risk is the appearance of triviality, of foregoing the centre for the surface. Yet the sense of misperception, as my first chapter argued, is in fact one way of penetrating beneath the surface of things. And, once again, the goal is not the loss of self but the sharpening of self through fresh perception; at the end of the last of his "Four Kantian Lyrics," "How it happened," Tomlinson distinguishes between two ways in which self and world can marry:

There are two
ways to marry with a land--
first, this bland and blind
submergence of the self, an act
of kind and questionless. The other
is the thing I mean, a whole
event, a happening, the sound
that brings all space in
for its bound, when self is clear
as what we keenest see and hear:
no absolute of eye can tell
the utmost, but the glance
goes shafted from us like a well. (CP 77-78)

That "other" way can be reached by chance misperceptions of words, for instance as in "Ritornello": "Wrong has a twisty look like wrung misprinted" (CP 334); or in "Misprint": "'Meeting' was what/ I had intended:/ 'melting'

ended/ an argument that/ should have led/ out (as it were)/
 into a clearing" (CP 302); or in "Hyphens": "'The country's
 love-/ liness', it said:/ what I read was/ 'the country's
 love-/ lines' (CP 255). If words can be (mis-)taken for
 things; things can be (mis-)taken for words, as in "Comedy":

It was when he began to see fields
 As arguments, the ribbed ploughland
 Contending with the direction of its fence:
 If you went with the furrows, the view
 From the fence disputed with you
 Because you couldn't see it. If you sat still
 The horizontals plainly said
 You ought to be walking, and when you did
 All you were leaving behind you proved
 That you were missing the point. And the innumerable views
 Kept troubling him, until
 He granted them. Amen.

(CP 225)

"Comedy" grants speech, or words, to things, but more than simple speech, it grants them the power to discourse and argue. It is as if the animation of fields, fences, and furrows preceded the writing of the poem. Their animation is comically egotistic: each part of nature demands recognition from the poet, arguing that its "view" is the best. The poem's comedy arises from his deliberate confusion of the meaning of view as sight with its meaning as opinion, in such phrases as, "And the innumerable views/ Kept troubling him." The poem gives the romantic notion of animate nature an argumentative edge. Inspiration is seen here to originate in the poet's desperation to bring peace to the squabbling and contending subjects of poetic contemplation: "And the innumerable views/ Kept troubling him, until/ He granted them. Amen." "The Fox" expresses the poet's terror at

seeing himself stumbling through the world of his words into the space of inarticulate nature, as the last stanza makes clear: "It was like clambering between its white temples/ as the crosswind tore/ at one's knees, and each/ missed step was a plunge at the hill's blinding interior" (CP 110). "Comedy" expresses the comic side to this same vision. However, whether felt as threatening or as amusing, when things are treated as actually *animate* (possessing a spirit) and *vocal* (capable of speech), that is, independently of human projection or anthropomorphism, a quite different sense of space enters the poem. The presence of the non-human in the poem, either as words-as-things or as things-as-words, recognizes what another poem calls "the insistence of things":

At the edge of conversations, uncompleting all acts of thought, looms the insistence of things which, waiting on our recognition, face us with our own death, for they are so completely what we are not. And thus we go on trying to read them, as if they were signs, or the embodied message of oracles. We remember how Orpheus drew voices from the stones. (CP 260)

The metaphor which turns words to stones, like that which turns stones to speech, is a technique of giving things--"so completely what we are not"--recognition as inalienably non-human presences. The anthropomorphism evident in "Comedy" surprises because it implies not the condescending bestowal by the poet of language on nature, but almost the opposite: what powers of articulation are man's are his wholly at the discretion of things; nature empowers man with speech, not

man nature.

In another poem entitled "Poem," the space of things encroaches on the space of words, insisting on this very point: that what the poet means in writing about things is theirs, belongs to things not to the poet:

It falls onto my page like
the morning here
and the ink-marks run
to a smoke and stain, a vine-cord, hair:
this script that untangles itself
out of wind, briars, stars unseen,
keeps telling me what I mean
is theirs, not mine:

I try to become all ear
to contain their story:
it goes on arriving from everywhere:
It overflows me

and then:
a bird's veering
into sudden sun
finds me for a pen

a feather on grass,
a blade tempered newly
and oiled to a gloss
dewless among dew:

save for a single
quicksilver drop--
one from a constellation
pearling its tip (CP 320-21)

As in "Comedy" so in "Poem," the poet not only finds himself reduced, in Stevens's phrase, to being "the Socrates/Of snails" (Collected 27), but--added insult--to being found a poor amanuensis at that. In "Poem" things overwhelm the writing poet, and indeed their continuous bombardment of the poet's senses is seen here as their strategy for reclaiming their own identities from the poet. He struggles "to contain

their story"--contain or possess their meanings in his words-
-but the sheer volume of sense stimuli mocks the feebleness
of all human attempts at usurping what belongs to things:
"this script that untangles itself/ out of wind, briars,
stars, unseen,/ keeps telling one what I mean/ is theirs, not
mine."

4. "The Perpetuity of Eden"

. . . a place unspaced
 And thus not quite there? The mocked mind,
 Busy with surroundings it can neither
 bound nor unbind
 --"The Gate," (CP 324)

To treat things as things-in-themselves, autonomous, free of all human taint, is to make of them a kind of earthly paradise or Eden. Moreover, this recognition of things brings with it a new recognition of the self. The idea of a new self in a new world is a fundamental step in Tomlinson's redefinition of Christian concepts. When beheld in their independence, things constitute man's Eden. In a sense, each return to this Eden is as hard-won as Adamic man's entrance into paradise. As Tomlinson remarks in an interview, "the world resists us, but in certain moments and in the creation of certain poems, it seems to come to us new and whole. Eden is there again" ("Human Balance" n. pag.). And, further on in the interview, he yet again draws a connection between the difficulty of achieving the freshness of perception and the violent possessiveness of the self:

as human beings, we live in a universe which goes beyond the merely human, is animal or inanimate, is vegetable, mineral--stone, clay, light, dark, what have you. We have so violently annexed that universe to our needs and our fantasies, literary, economic, political, we need to look again and find a language for it and, in doing so, become more human, although, in the finding of that language we are, say, putting to one side, the ego, the personality, the what is thought to be human. ("Human Balance" n. pag.)

The idea of the human advanced here suggests that the

constitution of the ego, like the fabrication of the gods, was at root a means of dealing with the terror of being human in a non-human universe. Both the gods and the ego were ways of disguising this fact. But man--"Distracted by distraction from distraction"--can only come to realize his humanness through allowing the non-human to be non-human. Nature or the non-human world thus becomes a moral principle which challenges the poet to temper a self which would prefer to subordinate the world as man's tool or God's. As Tomlinson remarks in the same interview, "What painters and poets have had to recover is a less predatory relationship between inner and outer--between our egos and all they threaten to aggrandize" ("Human Balance" n. pag.). In his poem, "Green Quinces," from Written on Water (1972), he meditates on the nature of envy, finding in the ambivalence of greenness an emblem for men's "predatory relationship" with the world of things:

Ripening there
 among the entanglement of leaves
 that share their colour--
 green quinces:
 fragrantly free
 from the contaminations
 of daily envy,
 the sight and suddenness
 of green unknot
 all that which thought
 has ravelled where it cannot span
 between the private and the public man--
 between the motive
 and the word:
 the repeated and absurd
 impulse to justify
 oneself, knows
 now its own
 true colours:

it was the hardest-to-be-
 put-down
 vanity--desire
 for the regard
 of others. And how wrong
 they were who taught us
 green was the colour
 should belong
 to envy: they envied green. (CP 231)

In a way, the poem reconceives Adam's act of disobedience: man's "hardest-to-be-/ put-down/ vanity--desire/ for the regard/ of others" is envy, an envy so indelible that it has caused man to colour it green, the very colour which ought to be "fragrantly free/ from the contaminations/ of daily envy." The implications of the last lines of the poem are far-reaching: "And how wrong/ they were who taught us/ green was the colour/ should belong/ to envy: they envied green." The "they" in these lines is really a metaphoric subject standing for, in Tomlinson's view, man's historic and continuing perversion of the non-human world. The "daily envy" which characterizes man's social behavior is seen here to characterize also his relations with the non-human world. What outrages--or saddens--Tomlinson is that that green which should be a solace, free from envy, has come to signify envy itself: outrage at man's blindness, but also sadness at such desperation: "they envied green."

The discernment of green's solace from green's envy is a delicate surgery, but it is a mission of rescue wholly representative of Tomlinson's poetry. Indeed, the word "rescue"--like "resistance"--is a key term in his lexicon, and its heroic resonances underline the importance that he

ascribes to the work of poets and artists. He uses the term in the Preface, for example, in referring to the material he wishes "to rescue" for his Collected Poems. At the end of "Dates: Penkhull New Road," he uses the term in a parallel way to describe his purpose in writing poetry: "I write to rescue/ What is no longer there--absurd/ A place should be more fragile than a book" (CP 245). "To rescue/ What is no longer there" seems a quixotic task, but it is really more an act of remembrance or of witness, in part to his own childhood but more importantly to a way of life, an architecture, stupidly destroyed for expedient reasons:

Like England,
The place had half-moved with the times--the 'other
side'
Was gone. Something had bitten a gap
Out of the stretch we lived in.

(CP 245)

When poetry is rescue, he realizes, it reflects a concern for more than mere beauty: "It took time to convince me that I cared/ For more than beauty." Having been convinced of the broader nature of his care, he also comes to see the strength and endurance of poetry emerge as its fragility drops away: "absurd/ A place should be more fragile than a book." The absurdity lies partly in the gross contrast: a large, physical thing--that is, a neighbourhood--of houses, alleyways, and factories, evincing the same apparent permanence as Ozymandias, in contrast to a small physical thing of paper and ink, a book. But in another sense, the absurdity lies in the contrast between a peopled landscape

and an all but unpeopled one--between, that is, a place in which generations of people have lived, a place, therefore, where one might well expect a long-nurtured, robust sense of community, capable of resisting anything that threatened to bite "a gap/ Out of the stretch we lived in," and, in contrast, a poem or book of poems, inhabited by the poet alone. But that single occupant cares about his house and is able, unlike those of his neighbours who also care, to rescue a time and a place through his craft of poetry.

The preceding poem in The Way In (1974), "Gladstone Street," expresses a similar sense of absurdity. "Gladstone Street," built on top of mines, is in fact undermined not by mining but through the want of care shown by its residents:

Miners were everywhere
Under that cancerous hill. My mother swore
That you could hear them tapping away below
Of a quiet night. Miners unnerved her so
Ever since one sat beside her on the train
And soiled her with his pit dirt. But it wasn't miners
Undid the street.

(CP 244)

The collapse of the neighbourhood seems to be the result of an inability to cope with the changes brought about by the war and by the post-war acceleration of technological change:

The housemaids lasted
Until the war, then fed the factories.
Flat-dwellers came and went, in the divided houses,
Mothers unwedded who couldn't pay their rent.
A race of gardeners died, and a generation
Hacked down the walls to park their cars
Where the flowers once were.

(CP 244)

The final lines of the poem wryly consider the fate of Gladstone Street: "No one has recorded the place. / Perhaps

we shall become sociology. We have outpaced/ Gladstone's century. We might have been novels" (CP 245). From the pre-eminent literary genre of the nineteenth century, the novel, to the sociological treatise of ours, is a decline in writing about places which exactly parallels their physical decline.

As Alan Swingewood remarks in The Sociology of Literature:

In the purely documentary sense, we can see the novel as dealing with much the same social, economic, and political textures as sociology. But of course it achieves more than this; as art, literature transcends mere description and objective scientific analysis, penetrating the surfaces of social life, showing the ways in which men and women experience society as feeling. "Without the full literary witness," writes Richard Hoggart, "the student of society will be blind to the fullness of a society"

(Laurenson and Swingewood 12-13)

Sociology, then, can neither record nor rescue what poetry and the novel can: the poetry of locality supplements locality.

In the prose poem "Oppositions" (debate with Mallarmé for Octavio Paz) from The Way of a World (1969), the object of "rescue" is neither his own poem nor a locality but rather "etymology":

The poet must rescue etymology from among the footnotes, thus moving up into the body of the text, "*cipher*: the Sanskrit word *sunya* derived from the root *svi*, to swell."

To cipher is to turn the thought word into flesh. And hence "the body of the text" derives its substance. (CP 189)

Paradoxically, the "thought word" is also the unthinking word, the word used with only a partial apprehension of its substance. "Oppositions" offers itself as its own

demonstration in its rescue of the word "ptyx" from its own footnote: "'Oppositions' replies to one of Mallarmé's most famous sonnets, "*Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,*" whose 'ptyx' is explained as being a sea shell." Tomlinson's poem both retrieves "ptyx" from that footnote (and from Mallarmé's gloss) and gives it substance within "the body of the text." As a reply to Mallarmé, the poem points up precisely where Tomlinson departs from the Symbolist strain in modern poetry. Arthur Symons remarks of French Symbolism, "It is all an attempt to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority" (Symbolist Movement 8). Tomlinson, in contrast to Mallarmé, sees the primary value of poetry to lie in its use of words to bring forth the world of things. For Tomlinson, the world of language cannot escape referentiality, nor should the poem try to do so.

The Symbolist attempt to escape referentiality may be seen as a (failed) attempt to avoid possessiveness, but for Tomlinson unpossessiveness lies in seeing space or nothingness as possibility, not as the annihilation of things. No conceiving of emptiness or absence can be complete. Thus in his reply to the lines from Mallarmé's poem--"*Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx/ Avec se seul objet dont le Néant a honoré*"--he finds the room empty yet still full:

The master who disappeared, taking with him into
the echo-chamber the ptyx which the Styx must
replenish, has left the room so empty you would

take it for fullness. (CP 189)

Inevitably, "Solitude charges the house." Moreover, if the skull, like the shell, has connotations of nothingness, both hold--or, more accurately, cannot hold--the brimming world of things in potentia: "If the skull is a memento mori, it is also a room, whose contained space is wordlessly resonant with the steps that might cross it, to command the vista out of its empty eyes." To accept the Mallarméan goal of nothingness would be to forego the world of things. The mind, that abstraction, exists in forms: "The mind is a hunter of forms, binding itself, in a world that must decay, to present substance."

The phrase "binding itself" is another from his vocabulary of possessiveness and recalls his use of "embrace" in the Preface: "where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully." Like his use of "embrace," "binding" presents another side to the idea of possessiveness, indeed, casts some light on the ambiguities of that "passionate embrace." Binding brings with it, more or less directly, the idea of rescue. We bind things together--sticks, for example--to keep them from going astray. However, in Tomlinson's lines the mind is figured as itself doing the binding, and "binding" may point back to something of a literary archetype of self-rescue, The Odyssey, Book XII, when Odysseus commands his men to bind him to the mast as their ship approaches the Sirens: "'you must bind me hard and fast, so that I cannot stir from the spot

where you will stand me, by the step of the mast, with the rope's ends lashed round the mast itself. And if I beg you to release me, you must tighten and add to my bonds'" (Homer 193). Unlike the mast of Odysseus' ship, the forms to which the mind binds itself are here characterized by their impermanence, and Tomlinson's implication in calling the mind "a hunter of forms" is that it searches (heroically) for permanence in a world of change. Binding, like passionate embracing, may well lead to possessiveness toward the world of things and people, but the mind must take purchase on things, on forms, though it knows they decay, if it is to save itself from madness. The impermanence of form is emphasized even more in "Mistlines," a metered variation on "Oppositions":

. For the mind is a hunter of forms:
 Finding them wherever it may--in firm
 Things or in frail, in vanishings--
 It binds itself, in a world that must decay,
 To present substance, and the words
 Once said, present and substance
 Both belie the saying. (CP 233)

Madness may very likely follow upon a mind unable, for whatever reason, to take purchase on physical reality; however, it is not the extremity that Tomlinson would emphasize. In "The Chances of Rhyme" (CP 194) he uses "binding" as a way of describing the process of rhyme: "The chances of rhyme are like the chances of meeting--/ In the finding fortuitous, but once found, binding" (CP 194). He is careful to qualify the kind of "meeting" and "binding" he intends:

Yet why should we speak

Of art, of life, as if the one were all form
 And the other all Sturm-und-Drang? And I think
 Too, we should confine to Crewe or to Mow
 Cop, all those who confuse the fortuitousness
 Of art with something to be met with only
 At extremity's brink, reducing thus
 Rhyme to a kind of rope's end, a glimpsed grass
 To be snatched at as we plunge past it--
 Nostalgic, after all, for a hope deferred. (CP 194)

The chances of rhyme, "the fortuitousness/ Of art," are a way forward" into a more intimate relationship between words and experience. Randle Wilbraham's sham castle atop Mow Cop or the railway works of Crewe--at one time, the largest in the world--are fitting penitentiaries--representing, perhaps, on the one hand art reduced to the falsification of form, on the other, life reduced to the Sturm-und-Drang of a railway yard--for those who confuse the ends of art. The pun on "ends" derives from Tomlinson's own pun on "extremity." In the generic sense, a rhyme is a poem; in a narrower, technical sense, rhyme is the similarity of stressed vowel sounds, frequently between the last words of proximate lines--that is, words taken to the extremity. Thus in his image of "extremity's brink," the humour arises from all the variations on this pun--final words, the end of the line, and so on--and, in effect, creates another conflation of words and things: the image metamorphoses the right-hand side of the poem into a cliff-face of verbal protuberances--the chances of rhyme. It is a popular confusion to condemn the poet to the same desperation as that of the lunatic, as if poetry were taken up, all else having failed, as a last desperate gamble (chance). This confusion is part of the

greater confusion of the romantic view of art which he everywhere--most notably in the Preface--censures for its reduction of the world to the self or eye of the poet.

The meetings and bindings of rhyme--both in its generic and technical senses--suggest that Adam's task of naming really begins on departure from the demi-paradise of Eden, as man starts to make his way through a non-human world. Travelling, or the way forward, paradoxically depends on repetition or return to "where we were." "Movements" II, from Written on Water (1972), expands on this idea:

For travelling, we come
 To where we were; as if, in the rhymes
 And repetitions and the flights of seeing,
 What we sought for was the unspoken
 Familiar dialect of habitation--speech
 Behind speech, language that teaches itself
 Under the touch and sight: a text
 That we must write, restore, complete
 Grasping for more than the bare facts warranted
 By giving tongue to them. The sound
 Of the thick rain chains us in liberty to where we are.
 (CP 234)

Rhymes bind because they share both an aural similarity and an abstract array or set of associations; both types of similarity contribute to the rhyme--its sounds and images--and in this way constitute "a way forward." The repetition of sounds cannot be divorced from or subordinated to the set of associations shared by rhyme-words. For Tomlinson, the aural repetition is a pledge of harmony between the world of words and the world of things. In his poetry, words used as things parallel words used as sounds. The element of sound, like the element of shape, relates--or binds--language to

things with a closeness beyond the power of the more abstract elements of words. At times, those rhymes, repetitions, or returns bind man to place as if these were their common language; as he writes at the end of "In Arden":

voices
 Of the place that rises through this place
 Overflowing, as it brims its surfaces
 In runes and hidden rhymes, in chords and keys
 Where Adam, Eden, Arden run together
 And time itself must beat to the cadence of this river.
(CP 306)

Tomlinson is interested in the rhyme of man and place-- Eden/Arden--and in the idea of poetry as a way of travelling: "We are led, though we seem to lead/ Through a fair forest, an Arden (a rhyme/ For Eden)--breeding ground for beasts/ Not bestial, but loyal and legendary, which is more/ Than nature's are" (CP 194). This pair of interests compose two major subsets of his myth of Eden and of his project of redefining Christian concepts. Chapter four continues the exploration of place by examining some of its major components in his poetry: water, stone, people, and music.

Chapter Four

"A Reign of Outwardness": The Elements of Place

the story
of a body that cannot contain itself (CP 223)

1. Written on Water: "Such Solid Vacancies"

Chapter three discussed Eden as an extension of the space of possibility into an array of ideas aimed at redefining Christian concepts. That chapter sought to show that Eden is a way of recouping a language still weakened by the disappearance of the gods. It also introduced but did not develop the idea that Eden is a placeless place. Chapter two examined the similarities between Tomlinson's and Stevens's ideas of nothingness and chance. The present chapter together with my last chapter develops the idea of Eden as a place in order to show the importance of place in Tomlinson's poetry. The idea of place or locality is central to Tomlinson's poetry, and that centrality is reflected in his choice of "Eden" both as a key term and as a myth. Eden above all is the idea of a place or home or origin. As we are repeatedly reminded in reading his work, his poetry has fought a continual battle against possessiveness in general, and against cultural insularity--the narrowing-down of Eden to England--in particular: Eden, for Tomlinson, is another

foreign city, but should not therefore be dismissed.

What lies behind the impulse to reduce Eden to England, many places to one place? Essentially, it is the impulse to possessiveness: to possess and be possessive about one's self, including one's place, home, and country. In his essay, "The Poet as Painter," Tomlinson discusses his ambivalent feelings towards his home in the Midlands:

I left the district in my early twenties and subsequently lived among many landscapes both urban and rural--London, Italy, New Mexico, the northern United States, the Cotswolds. I think it was Liguria and Tuscany and then Gloucestershire taught me the way men could be at home in a landscape. And how necessary this different view of things was, in order to place those earlier experiences of streets that threatened to enclose you, to shut you off from a wider and more luminous world, from intuitions of what Ezra Pound calls "the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clear edge, a world of moving energies, magnetisms that take form . . ." I wanted to recover that "radiant world" in poems, and by doing so I seemed to have lost touch with the Midlands. But the Midlands were always present as one term in a dialectic, as a demand for completeness subconsciously impelling the forms of one's art, even demanding *two* arts where the paradisaical aspect of the visual could perhaps be rescued and celebrated.

Coming back to the Potteries almost thirty years later, I saw how much the world of my poems depended on the place, despite and because of the fact that they were an attempt to find a world of clarities, a world of unhazed senses, an intuition of Edenic freshnesses and clear perceptions. (11-12)

What he here describes might be called a geographical rhyme: on returning to Stoke, the poet discovers the resonances of his home: he rhymes himself with Stoke. Homes or origins are given by chance, and chance may be the hardest fact of the object world, the most indigestible to man. The poet's initial rejection of Stoke, his home, is in part a rejection

of chance. By an act of physical removal, he attempts to differentiate himself from his place. By his departure, he seeks to prove himself more than simply another chance-given thing in a set of other things which constitute his place. The rhyme of man and place is too close: place is felt to be too possessive of the self; the first word, "place," drowns out its rhyme, man. The poet's return to his place is the completion of the rhyme in which he acknowledges the binding nature of his relationship with his home. In his poem, "At Stoke," he describes the delayed recognition of his debt to that place:

I have lived in a single landscape. Every tone
 And turn have had for their ground
 These beginnings in grey-black: a land
 Too handled to be primary--all the same,
 The first in feeling. I thought it once
 Too desolate, diminished and too tame
 To be the foundation for anything. It straggles
 A haggard valley and lets through
 Discouraged greennesses, lights from a pond or two.
 By ash-tips, or where the streets give out
 In cindery in-betweens, the hills
 Swell up and free of it to where, behind
 The whole vapoury, patched battlefield,
 The cows stand steaming in an acrid wind.
 This place, the first to seize on my heart and eye,
 Has been their hornbook and their history. (CP 243)

The recognition that "This place, the first to seize on my heart and eye,/ Has been their hornbook and their history," is also a further accord between the self and the object world; in effect, these last lines affirm how much a part of the object world is the self.

The metaphor of the geographical rhyme is something of a poetic principle in his work, and although his poem, "The

Chances of Rhyme," speaks primarily about the technical nature of rhyme, the poem may be read as a gloss on the larger possibilities of rhyme. As the poem remarks--and demonstrates--the chances of rhyme are a way forward: "They say, they signify and they succeed, where to succeed/ Means not success, but a way forward/ If unmapped, a literal, not a royal succession" (CP 194). More than words can rhyme, and the poet can rhyme with more than one place. But in the same way that the resonances of the first word in a rhyme haunt each succeeding rhyme (or half-rhyme), so the travels of the poet ever remind him of his first home or Eden.

Eden, the geographical first chance of rhyme, both propelled, or expelled, the poet and continues to inform his ways of seeing and describing the world. In "The Marl Pits," Tomlinson recognizes a further rhyme between himself and his home, and sees it as one of the ways that allowed him to move forward:

It was a language of water, light and air
 I sought--to speak myself free of a world
 Whose stoic lethargy seemed the one reply
 To horizons and to streets that blocked them back
 In a monotone fume, a bloom of grey.
 I found my speech. The years return me
 To tell of all that seasoned and imprisoned:
 I breathe familiar, sedimented air
 From a landscape of disembowelings, underworlds
 Unearthed among the clay. Digging
 The marl, they dug a second nature
 And water, seeping up to fill their pits,
 Sheeted them to lakes that wink and shine
 Between tips and steeples, streets and waste
 In slow reclaimings, shimmers, balancings.
 As if kindling Eden rescinded its own loss
 And words and water came of the same source. (CP 248)

The water which rescinds the loss of Eden is twinned, and rhymed--in a fashion--with the words which allow him to see more than the deadening surface features of Stoke--"to speak myself free of a world/ Whose stoic lethargy seemed the one reply/ To horizons and to streets that blocked them back/ In a monotone fume, a bloom of grey."

This conjunction of words and water--an elemental rhyme--has long been an important part of Tomlinson's work. His volume titles, Written on Water (1972) and The Flood (1981), together with many of his poems in these and other volumes, point to this important conjoining of water with the poet's craft. Water, as "The Marl Pits" shows, signifies the elemental and the resurgent. Water begins the accord between poet and object world. It also represents the principle of metamorphosis or change, "the way forward" of rhyme. In Poetry and Metamorphosis (1983), Tomlinson discusses metamorphosis, recreation, and translation in relation to poetry: "the wisdom of The Metamorphoses inheres in its imaginative vision of a world where all things are interrelated, where flesh and blood are near kin to soil and river, where man and animal share common instincts, where vegetarianism is poetically the only defensible philosophy of life" (2). His interest in Ovid's work is in part that of the translator but also that of a modern poet: "Ovid seems to me a chief ancestor of literary modernism" (1).

The imaginative insight of Ovid to which Tomlinson seems most to respond relates back to his own interest in the

otherness and autonomy of the object world and his special concern as a poet to render that sense of otherness in his poetry:

What is still being asked in many of the stories-- particularly in those transformations into vegetable, mineral or stone--and asked often against the grain of the story, focuses on what it is like to become an object. Even in the act of consenting to this universe of fecund change, even in the act of consenting to become (say) a tree, an intimation, a *frisson* of real death touches the imagination.
(Poetry and Metamorphosis 6)

Tomlinson interprets Ovid's metamorphoses as emblems of mortality which compose an elaborate eschatology. Such an interpretation may or may not fit Tomlinson's sense of the relationship between man and things. On the one hand, Ovid's system is open to self-centered readings--l'Ovide moralisé-- which tune his metamorphoses into a narrowly moralistic channel: to a gallery of bad ends for wicked people. Tomlinson also recognizes the moral side of Ovid's imagination, finding in Ovid's treatment of the legend of Philomela a Dantean insight: "This awareness of what people do to themselves, of the nature of self-destruction and the torture of the self-enclosed ego, unexpectedly unites the poet of The Metamorphoses and the poet of The Divine Comedy (21). But even here it is interesting to note that the focus of Tomlinson's attention is on precisely the same target at which his whole poetic enterprise takes aim, the destructiveness of the self-enclosed ego.

However, the side of Ovid's system which Tomlinson feels bears most directly on modern poetry is not the moral but the

aesthetic. As in Tomlinson's Relations and Contraries, so in his interpretation of The Metamorphoses, he seems to want to push poetry beyond mere satire and towards an apprehension of the implications of being a human in a nonhuman world:

Images like this [i.e., of humans turning to stone] strike deep--beyond any mere sense of justice done--into the mind of a reader, and bring home with far greater finality than arboreal change the knowledge that our death sets the seal on all that we are, that such choices as we have made are now irrevocable, that death has made an object of our past weaknesses since nothing can now redeem or uncongeal them.

(Poetry and Metamorphosis 12-13)

Significantly, it is the loss of human speech--the tongue turning to stone--which, for Tomlinson, really differentiates the human from the nonhuman: "The involvement of tongue with word, and the tongue's capacity or incapacity to utter sounds, would appear to be a theme close to a poet's most intimate sense of himself" (14). In fact, his reading of metamorphosis in Pound and Eliot might be seen as a reading--a Bloomean misreading--of his own poetic into the works of these two predecessors. Both Pound and Eliot, he argues, "respond to the idea of metamorphosis but in startlingly different ways" (26).

Pound "still shares Ovid's feeling that we belong to our world and of the essential unity of men with animal creation." For Eliot, on the other hand, "a sense of metamorphosis often means a sense of the provisional nature of personality" (26). Though "startlingly different," these two ways of responding to metamorphosis may both be seen in Tomlinson's own poetry--another instance of his dialectic of

relations and contraries. Thus, although we do not find the same response of terror at the "provisional nature of personality" in Tomlinson's poetry that we find in Eliot's --indeed, Tomlinson's repeated attacks on the romantic ego suggest that for him the personality appears all too obdurate--still that attack comes from a recognition that the obduracy is illusionary and that poetry should reflect the personality's true provisionality. Moreover, although to say of Pound that his poetry gives the sense of the "essential unity of men with animal creation" may suggest a greater loss of personality before the object than Tomlinson would allow, Tomlinson, like Pound, does seek to find just such a unity between man and the physical world, neither in the collapse of the ego nor in the collapse of the object, but in their resistant marriage.

Metamorphosis is important to Tomlinson because it unsettles both the authority of the ego and the fixed relationship between man and the physical world, and water, because of its fluidity, is a fit emblem for metamorphosis. More than an element of place or even than merely an emblem for change, water is an agent of change and a solvent of place. In a 1981 interview, "Words and Water," Tomlinson was asked about his feelings toward his childhood home of Stoke; Tomlinson noted the absence there of a nurturing culture:

I have both resisted and drawn from my adolescent surroundings. When people ask me if I rejected my surroundings, I have to reply that they rejected me. Meaning that so much of them was just too thin a soil to support the weediest growth. Even though I helped

in the fish and chip shop round the corner, I've no nostalgia about all that. What it came to in terms of literary culture was the *Daily Express*, the *News of the World*, the *People*. (25)

Yet if Stoke proper "rejected" him, the environs of Stoke had a great deal more to offer:

One thing I haven't said about Stoke is that it was a long narrow town and, on foot or by bike, you could easily get out into surrounding country--lush to the south and harsh moorland to the north. The place was still invaded by farms and fields side by side with pitheads and the housing estates. So I knew the countryside intimately from early on. And like so many others I was a member of a fishing club--of two or three, in fact--and we fished the canals on the outskirts of the city and went to matches or fished alone, all over Staffordshire. That's what contemplation was for me--fishing. Silently watching water and willing the fish to appear--or not willing, just letting the fish drift up, luring them in a peculiar will-lessness into one's mental orbit. It's a wonderful discipline for a boy--just learning to sit still and keep your shadow off the water, to sit in silence and take in things under the surface. A good place to start as a poet--or a painter.
("Words and Water" 25-26)

If in his youth the waterways about Stoke helped to dissolve the limitations of Stoke, the industrial town, water has continued to signify a way out of the enclosure of place. "Swimming Chenango Lake" (CP 155-56) which opens The Way of a World (1969), is a meditation on the relationship between water and man. Because of water's viscosity--"the all but penetrable element"--it allows an approach to the physical world denied by the eye. The poem begins with the poet watching a swimmer watching the water's reflections and the "liquid variation" of its surface. This "fantasia of distorting forms" is not, however, the particular feature which concerns the poet: "But he has looked long enough and

now/ Body must recall the eye to its dependence/ As he
 scissors the waterscape apart/ And sways it to tatters." The
 swimmer's contact with water puts him in contact with the
 physicality of the world: "For to swim is also to take hold/
 On water's meaning, to move in its embrace/ And to be between
 grasp and grasping, free." To swim is to break through the
 look of things, to move beyond images into an awareness of
 the otherness of the world. To say that swimming is a
 metaphor for the poet's art is only partly true. The poet,
 like the swimmer, attempts to break through the mere images
 of the surface of things. But, significantly, the poet is
 not the swimmer, rather his distanced observer. The poet's
 words must remain apart from the experience; his words give
 meaning to the experience, but to give the object its due
 they must recognize the limits of metaphor. The act of
 swimming takes man close to a world before words, and what
 the poet witnesses is something like an Ovidian
 transformation in which the tongue turns to stone:

The image he has torn
 Flows-to behind him, healing itself,
 Lifting and lengthening, splayed like the feathers
 Down an immense wing whose darkening spread
 Shadows his solitariness: alone, he is unnamed
 By this baptism, where only Chenango bears a name
 In a lost language he begins to construe--
 A speech of densities and derisions, of half-
 Replies to the questions his body must frame
 Frogwise across the all but penetrable element.
(CP 155)

In part this anti-baptism consists of a reorientation to
 place, especially to the territorial instinct of
 possessiveness. The swimmer can take hold of water's

"meaning" but he cannot take hold of water, and in that enforced detachment from place lies a kind of freedom: "to move in its embrace/ And to be, between grasp and grasping, free." As in the Preface, so here, his use of embrace does not suggest possessiveness but rather the rhythm of repeated intimate contact followed by happy release. In the act of swimming, man finds himself a willing relinquisher: "He reaches in-and-through to that space/ The body is heir to, making a where/ In water, a possession to be relinquished/ Willingly at each stroke" (CP 155). The image of swimming as "a possession to be relinquished/ Willingly at each stroke" also suggests "the way forward" of "The Chances of Rhyme," when man and place most nearly rhyme. The space found in swimming--"that space/ The body is heir to"--is an embodiment and a realization of the space of possibility.

"On Water," the short poem which opens Written on Water (1972) meditates on an ancillary aspect of "Swimming Chenango Lake." The poet who watches the metamorphosis of the swimmer into an unnamed creature in an "all but penetrable element," in this later poem observes a related metamorphosis and himself approaches speechlessness. Water resists the containment of human language; it speaks a "speech of densities and derisions" (CP 155). The poem is also another example of etymological rescue--"The poet must rescue etymology from among the footnotes" (CP 189)--applied here to "furrow," an old metaphor for the sea, as in Tennyson's "The sounding furrows." As a possible metamorphosis for the sea,

"furrow" seems "inexact," too solid: "'Furrow' is inexact:/ no ship could be/ converted to a plough/ travelling the vitreous ebony." The particular reason for its inexactitude lies in the impossibility of metamorphosing a ship into a plough. "Furrow" and "plough" falsify the nature of both sea and ship. Both reflect the eye of a landsman out of his element. Man and place fail to rhyme, and a plough proves no way forward through "this vitreous ebony." Yet as the poem proceeds in its apparent attempt to dislodge these metaphors, its language enacts the very characteristics it attributes to water. Moreover, this attempt to generate--one might say inadvertently generate--its own metaphor for water as a "book without pages," reenacts the genealogy of those false metaphors:

seal it in sea-caves and
 you cannot still it:
 image on image bends
 where half-lights fill it

with illegible depths
 and lucid passages, bestiary of stones, book without
 pages: (CP 199)

Water cannot be stilled nor contained by language; a "book without pages" is hardly a book, and the string of metaphors which leads up to this unsatisfactory substitute are no less solid, in their own way, than "furrow" or "plough": "illegible depths," "lucid passages," "bestiary of stones." The attempt to correct the erroneous metaphors of "furrow" and "plough" results in a recognition of the otherness of water: its language resists translation. And

yet, though the attempt to contain water comes to nothing, the attempt to do so "confers/ as much as it denies."

Tomlinson's critique of "furrow" as a transferred epithet for the sea is curiously indirect. He attacks this metaphor through its associated metaphor--the ship as plough--by implying that such a change would be contrary to all laws of metamorphosis. A piece of paper on an airport tarmac may be taken for a bird, or a handkerchief for a book, but the experience of travelling in a boat or of watching a boat travel through the water--experiences like swimming or watching a swimmer--could not engender a plough from a ship. Everything in the nature of water militates against such a conversion. What the poem really demonstrates is the limit of our container metaphors: water is uncontainable--or, at least, its nature is such that it challenges the concept of containment--and although the poet struggles to correct the old error of "furrow," he too must cease from metaphor-making and acknowledge that the nature of water finally denies all metaphors, as the following poem phrases its resistance: "The waters will have nothing to do with the shaping/ Or unshaping of human things" (CP 199). A "bestiary of stones" is a bestiary in which even the at least semi-anthropomorphic beasts have been reduced to the speechlessness of stones; and a "book without pages" is an image, if anything, even more emphatically estranged from human language.

2. "So Much Certainty of Stone"

If the metamorphic nature of water provides a way forward in Tomlinson's geographical rhyme-scheme, the constancy of stone suggests the necessary continuity between rhyme words. In "The Picture of J. T. in a Prospect of Stone," he considered wishing his daughter "the constancy of stone" (CP 74). Unlike water, indeed in many ways its antithesis, stone is the very thing itself, that which contains, if anything does, the essence of the object world: its non-human muteness, its permanence. Stone is the basis of rhyme between man and place, the material for homes as much as for poems. The nature of stone seems to underwrite the concept of containment: to be "contained" a substance must be able to resist--to some degree--erosions of other substances and of time. Containment means endurance in a recognizably similar state over time. Stone, for Tomlinson, represents the all but impenetrable element. Paradoxically, stone is both an ally and a foe of the human mind. As he points out in Poetry and Metamorphosis, stone is the archetypical metamorphosis of the human into the non-human, the tongue turned to stone. On the other hand, stone holds out the promise of permanency, of duration, and of containment and so allies itself with language and the poet's art. Yet because stone represents the principle of containment, it partakes of the problem of possessiveness.

Given this set of assumptions about the meaning of

stone, the opening lines of "The Flood," from the 1981 volume of that title, suggests a somewhat rueful retraction or late resipiscence about the nature of stone: "It was the night of the flood first took away/ My trust in stone" (CP 346).

Admittedly, the tone of these lines, like that of the poem as a whole, is not altogether serious. Yet the flooding of the poet's house--"Our ark of stone" (CP 347)--brings with it a revelation about stone which should not be overlooked because of the poem's mildly self-deprecating tone. The house's carefully "soil-sacked" door does not fail, but the stone of its walls does:

Awakened eyes
Told that the soil-sacked door
Still held, but saw then, without looking,
Water had tried stone and found it wanting:
Wall fountained a hundred jets:
Floor lay awash, an invitation
To water to follow it deriding door
On door until it occupied the entire house. (CP 347)

Allegorically, the poem is a confrontation not only between water and stone, but between here and there, the familiar and the new, or, in prosodic terms, between that element which advances or extends through change and the original rhyme word.

In relation to possessiveness and containment the poem is also interesting. Tomlinson qualifies his initial statement that the flood had taken away "his trust in stone":

I say
That night diminished my trust in stone--
As porous as a sponge, where once I'd seen
The image of a constancy, a ground for the play
And fluency of light. That night diminished
Yet did not quite betray my trust.

For the walls held. (CP 348)

His qualification suggests that stone still holds its power as a force of containment but to that power has been added a new recognition of its porousness: stone has an inside too. This invasion of stone by water has its counterpart in the flood's invasion of his house. The house as container has been shown to be as porous as the stones of which it is built, and this double invasion doubly attacks the mind's notions of inside and outside, container and contained. With the dawn, the occupation by water is complete: "When I rose/
The rain had ceased. Full morning/ Flouted and raced with water through the house,/ Dancing in whorls on every ceiling/
As I advanced." The interplay of flood waters and morning sunlight creates as dramatic a metamorphosis as that of "Swimming Chenango Lake":

Sheer foolishness
It seemed to pause and praise the shimmer
And yet I did and called you down
To share this vertigo of sunbeams everywhere,
As if no surface were safe from swaying
And the very stone were as malleable as clay.
Primeval light undated the day
Back into origin, washed past stain
And staleness, to a beginning glimmer
That stilled one's beating ear to sound
Until the flood-water seemed to stream
With no more burden than the gleam itself. (CP 348)

Light and water have metamorphosed the inside into the outside, but, unlike the earlier poem, the direction of the metamorphosis is towards origin--back to Eden--rather than toward some non-human form: stone loses its constancy and becomes malleable, "Primeval light undated the day/ Back into

origin." It is as if stone were not so much a container par excellence as the embodiment of the principle of containment, that which allows the concept of containment.

As Poetry and Metamorphosis shows, the particular metamorphosis from human into stone is connected by Tomlinson to the principle of metamorphosis itself: to turn to stone permits no return to the human. In a world, and a language, in which light and understanding are immutably conjoined, all is death for and before the eye. Yet stone refuses the eye: light and vision cannot penetrate it nor can that which stone contains escape: the tongue turns to stone. Thus when stone seems to lose its very nature, as it does here, we enter a new order of metamorphosis. When stone is malleable and porous, containment no longer holds, and all is open to the light. Metamorphosis transforms the flooded house into origin, the space of possibility.

Skulls are refinements of stone, the stone partly humanized, or the skull seen as stone-like. Emptied of life, the skulls of birds and animals yet retain traces of their former purpose; by their weight, their shape, their fragility, skulls "resist the eyes' imaginings":

Shadow explores them. It sockets the eye-holes with black. It reaches like fingers into the places one cannot see. Skulls are a keen instance of this duality of the visible: it borders what the eye cannot make out, it transcends itself with the suggestion of all that is there beside what lies within the eyes' possession: it cannot be possessed. Flooded with light, the skull is at once manifest surface and labyrinth of recesses. Shadow reaches down out of this world of helmeted cavities and declares it.

Flooding a skull with light produces a revelation similar to that brought about in "The Flood." In both poems, the habitual given of inside and outside has been disturbed, and in both as well the physical world demonstrates its power to resist the easy possession of the eye. His fascination with the plenitude of a skull may have begun in "Bone," from American Scenes and Other Poems (1966). In that poem, the speaker pulls himself back from a murderous fantasy prompted by a chance find, "what seemed like the jawbone of an ass." His first response is to see it as like the formidable weapon "that Samson wielded":

How many
 was it he slaughtered thus
 in a single bout
 with just such a boomerang of teeth
 grained, greened and barbarous? (CP 110)

But only when he had cleaned it did he realize how it would have "shone/ out of the desert brightness" (CP 110). A small correction, this realization, yet significant. The poet's jawbone--"soil-stained," "grained, greened and barbarous"--because of a modern predilection to associate the barbarous with dirt and the unclean, short-circuited the actual, or more probable, sight Samson beheld in the desert: "how candidly fleshless/ that jawbone must have shone/ out of the desert brightness."

This early indication that a skull is more than meets the eye is developed in a later poem, "To Be Engraved on the Skull of a Cormorant," from The Way of a World (1969):

across the thin
 façade, the galleried-
 with-membrane head:
 narrowing, to take
 the eye-dividing
 declivity where
 the beginning beak
 prepares for flight
 in a still-
 perfect salience:
 here, your glass
 needs must stay
 steady and your gross
 needle re-tip
 itself with reticence
 but be
 as searching as the sea
 that picked and pared
 this head yet spared
 its frail acuity. (CP 187-88)

The idea of engraving a poem on a cormorant's skull implicitly contrasts the poem with the object world, as if the poet could only feel and express the full nature of the object by bending his craft of writing to its miniature scale: to its contours, delicacies, and textures. The poem points up the grossness and clumsiness of human art in comparison with the fineness and delicacy of the cormorant's skull. Tomlinson accomplishes the contrast in several ways. First, he casts his poem as an instruction to the engraver. The instruction is given the force of precision by its focus on a particularly difficult place on the surface of the skull, below the eyes where "the beginning beak/ prepares for flight." The metaphor which the poem enacts reflects the necessary care which large things must have for small things--if small things are to survive. The extremest delicacy--a well-nigh impossible delicacy--is required if the engraver's

needle is not to shatter its medium. In just this way, so the poem implies, the poet must exact equal care in writing of the world of things.

The skull of the cormorant like the jaw-bone of an ass is not only an objet trouvé, a chance find, but also a rescued object; and the conjunction of chance and rescue (two key words for Tomlinson) reflects on the meaning of both words. In a sense, the element of chance or error diminishes the more the poet attunes himself to rescue; that is, skulls are uncommon objects in most settings--"The Mausoleum" (CP 24) and "Catacomb" (Return 15) are exceptions in his poetic landscapes--and in part because of their uncommonness they stand out from their places. Metaphorically, skulls are an easy find. In relation to those things common to their environment they are as gross and clumsy as the engraver's tool in relation to the skull of a bird. Skulls are hard to miss. What might be called their geographic dissonance provides the powerful thrust of chance to propel them into the poet's consciousness; not much is left up to rescue. On the other hand, the more common the object to its environment the less powerful is the thrust of chance, and the less likely is the poet to rescue the common object, unless he has disciplined himself to accord objects their due. The very grossness of skulls in relation to their environment is seized on by Tomlinson as an opportunity to meditate on this inverse relation between chance and rescue. Because of their high geographic dissonance skulls may be more apt to prompt

these lines of thought than more common objects. Moreover, also because of this dissonance skulls are exemplary of the process of poetic rescue: they highlight themselves against their ever-foreign backdrops but they also highlight what it is to pay careful attention to any object in any terrain.

The first ten lines of the poem focus on the extreme fragility of the bird skull. By its short lines and enjambment, Tomlinson forces the reader to concentrate on just how delicate are its details. These two- and three-word lines, combined with their stong enjambment, protract the reader's sense of the description. They impede his progress, deliberately making our experience of the poem difficult, even laboured, in order to retard the pace of perception and allow the absorption of the skull's detail. The technique recalls that of "The Instance" and looks back to that of William Carlos Williams in such pioneering poems as "Poem"-- "As the cat/ climbed over/ the top of . . ." (Collected 352)-- and perhaps even more closely parallel, "Daisy"--"The dayseye hugging the earth/ in August . . ." (Collected 160). The tight-corning surprises of this technique have become a convention of modern poetry; indeed, of Robert Creeley's and Louis Zukofsky's work, it may be said to form the spinal column. In "To Be Engraved," the retarding effect comes not only from the fracturing of the sentence into such small pieces that the line as unit of meaning is put in extreme stress against the sentence or clause as unit of meaning. The compactness of the syntax and the multiple hyphenation

also slow the pace of reading. Moreover, as in "The Instance," so here the reader feels that the poem's narrow profile is not only the result of a lineation designed to focus perception by making the reader's progress difficult. Once again the poem seems to be using words both as things and as words. One feels that the size of the lines and the size of the poem somehow correspond to the object which they describe, not, clearly, as an obviously shaped poem, but, rather, as if in sympathy with the smallness of its subject, the poem imposed on its own form the severest restrictions of size.

The last ten lines of "To Be Engraved" instruct the engraver to exercise care, yet to persevere--"but be/ as searching as the sea"--in performing his task. That task teeters between farce and art, the possible and the impossible. The tone, especially of lines eleven to fifteen, seems to recall an apt literary parallel, Bottom's style of speech in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The poet-instructor, like the opinionated Bottom, is a comically dubious source of reliable advice for the undertaking. The allusion to Bottom--like Bottom himself--is not one-dimensional; the unexpected echo of his voice in Tomlinson's poem does bring with it the contrast already noted between man's gross art and nature's delicacy; but even Bottom--rude mechanical, "translated," with ass's head in place--displays more delicacy than grossness in his behavior toward his most delicate fairy captor/servants, Pease-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed:

Monsieur Cobweb, good monsieur, get you your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humblebee on the top of a thistle, and, good monsieur, bring me the honey bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the action, monsieur, and, good monsieur, have a care the honey bag break not. I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey bag, signior.

(IV, 1: 10-17)

Like Bottom, the poet-engraver must attune himself and his powers to the special time and space of little things and creatures. As he notes in the prose poem, "Skullshapes": "The skulls of birds, hard to the touch, are delicate to the eye. Egg-like in the round of the skull itself and as if the spherical shape were the result of an act like glass-blowing, they resist the eyes' imaginings with the blade of the beak which no lyrical admiration can attenuate to frailty" (CP 191).

3. "A Peopled Landscape"

The accusation that Tomlinson's poetry somehow is lesser poetry because it lacks a human presence or stocks too many things and not enough people has sometimes been raised in considerations of his work. The title of his third volume, A Peopled Landscape (1963), seems to respond to this charge in much the same spirit as his earlier poem, "More Foreign Cities," responded to militant literary provincialism. That at least seven of the poems in this volume--"John Maydew, or The Allotment," "Portrait of Mrs Spaxton," "The Farmer's Wife: at Foston's Ash," "The Death of Elizabeth Grieve," "The Hand at Callow Hill Farm," "The Portrait of J.T. in a Prospect of Stone," and "Ode to Arnold Schoenberg"--refer to people in their titles should not be taken as an admission that the charge was true and that he hastened to correct the imbalance noted by his critics--neither as atonement for an omission nor as exploitation of an opportunity overlooked. What is interesting is that the human presence comes first of all--in the standard order of reading--through the titles of these poems. As discussed in Chapter one, the title is an important battleground in his fight against possessiveness. A title, like an ostentatious picture-frame--or, as in "At Chimayó," like a signed testimonial to miraculous healing--can magnify the sense of the poet's possessiveness towards his creation or gift.

Chapter one showed how his use of minimally descriptive

titles--in a way somewhat similar to his use of imitative form--is an attempt to foreground the thing itself. However, the relationship between the self and the other becomes complicated when the other is also human. What he calls "the more possessive and violent claims of personality" would seem to be exacerbated when the poem has another personality--with its own possessive and violent claims--for its subject. The titles of these poems perform a distancing, formalizing task. They frame the human subject--simply by naming him or her--and by so doing they lead us away from the possessive concerns of personality and prepare us for more universal features: we will not be enmeshed in their human stories so much as we will see them as measures of what it is to be human in a non-human world. They are emptied of almost all their human dimension that we may see them the more clearly within their non-human landscape. The ceremonial gesture of bringing these "people" into his titles dehumanizes rather than humanizes them. In a sense, he metamorphoses the human into the non-human: we are not to find, or expect to find, human being in the poems to follow but rather portraits of human being. The subject is not to be summed up so neatly nor will he permit even the appearance of so simplifying and reductive an approach.

As I have argued in my discussion of "A Portrait of J.T. in a Prospect of Stone," Tomlinson uses his titles to foreground the artificiality of removing the self from its living process; the formality of the title creates an ironic

contrast by hyperbole, by consenting to rather than abstaining from the literary convention of titling. It is interesting to note that Tomlinson's strategy, though having a similar purpose, is in fact the exact opposite to that used by Richard Howard in his volume of dramatic monologues, Untitled Subjects (1970). In that volume, Howard uses not names, or even words, but numerical dates--1801, 1825, 1851, and so on--to head each of the fifteen poems. In contradistinction to Tomlinson's titled subjects, Howard's untitled subjects proclaim their withdrawal from the convention of the unified self by providing numbers, not names, as though to emphasize temporal flux above every fiction of continuity. And though Howard's "Notes" (n.pag.) to the poems seem on the one hand to restore the convention that the numerical dates take away--by apparently identifying these speakers ("The speaker is Sir Walter Scott . . .," for example)--on the other hand, they seem at times to unsettle further the identity of the self by, for instance, interposing some doubt about who is speaking ("The speaker is probably Thackeray . . . ") or by putting "historical" identification just beyond the reader's reach ("The speaker is Gladstone's secretary, though not so celebrated a one as John Morley . . . "). Robert Lowell whose volume, Notebook, appeared in the same year as Howard's, also displays, though somewhat differently, a date- rather than a name-oriented approach to the self: "as my title intends, the poems in this book are written as one poem, intuitive in arrangement, but not a pile or sequence of

related material" (Lowell 262). Like Howard too, Lowell found it necessary to add a gloss on the most prominent dates in his poems: "Dates fade faster than we do. Many in the last two years are already gone; in a year or two, most of the rest will slip. I list a few that figure either directly or obliquely in my text" (Lowell 265).

If the titles of the peopled poems, like those of Richard Howard and Robert Lowell, in Tomlinson's volume direct the reader's attention toward a complex sense of the self, the poems themselves point up the equally complex interplay between place and self. The irony of "John Maydew, or The Allotment" lies in its portrayal of a man who has succumbed to the metamorphosis from human to non-human:

A thoughtful yet unthinking man,
 John Maydew,
 memory stagnates
 in you and breeds
 a bitterness; it grew
 and rooted in your silence
 from the day
 you came
 unwitting out of war
 in all the pride
 of ribbons and a scar
 to forty years
 of mean amends . . . (CP 66)

A different engine of metamorphosis appears in "Portrait of Mrs Spaxton" (CP 69-70). Unlike John Maydew, whose roots in the England he once knew have all but been destroyed by the war and industrialization, Mrs Spaxton is one in harmony with her place; hers is a portrait of leisure and "concentration": "If she arrests the scene, it is her concentration/ That commands it, the three centuries and more/ That live in her .

. . ." (CP 70).

Both these poems display a complex relationship between the self and its locality. The poem following "Portrait of Mrs Spaxton," "The Farmer's Wife: at Fostons Ash" (CP 70-72), develops this relationship in a meditation on the distorting effect of memory, how the past becomes aureate. The Proustian opening seems to revel in the pleasure of this phenomenon of memory:

Scent
 from the apple-loft!
 I smelt it and I saw
 in thought
 behind the oak
 that cupboards all your wine
 the store in maturation
 webbed
 and waiting. (CP 70)

The poet recognizes, however, the dangers of sentimentalizing what he loves; too much fondness can corrupt the poet's eye: "Distrust / that poet who must symbolize/ your stair into/ an analogue/of what was never there" (CP 71). The everyday act of taking the well-known place for granted corrupts the real in the same way as the poetic act of metamorphosing both word and object into the unreality of symbolism. In the same way as John Maydew allowed his memories of a past England to corrupt his existence in the present, so the poet too must guard against the falsification of memory if he is to remain true to things: "Fact/ has its proper plenitude/ that only time and tact/ will show, renew" (CP 71). To look unsentimentally at what is there brings the speaker to his most penetrating observation:

(CP 71).

The recognition on which the poem ends is a complicated one. As the rhetorical strategy of the poem shows throughout, the poet is addressing himself and his feelings for his craft, his language, and his land. The poems in A Peopled Landscape demonstrate what might almost be called a political awakening--or an awakening to the (political) power of poetry; as he remarks in a later poem: "It took time to convince me that I cared/ For more than beauty" (CP 245). The power of poetry, in some large measure, is seen to derive from the poet's mask of visitor or traveller. The people of this volume--the farmer's wife, Mrs Spaxton, John Maydew, and, most typically, "the hand" of "The Hand at Callow Farm"--are significantly silent inhabitants. They have lived so long in one place, they and their forefathers, that they have bargained their tongue for their land--and the bargain is one the poet both abhors and envies. Silence, that is the silent tongue, is almost an acquired feature of dwelling for a long time in a rural place, where non-human things predominate:

Silence. The man defined
 The quality, ate at his separate table
 Silent, not because silence was enjoined
 But was his nature. It shut him round
 Even at outdoor tasks, his speech
 Following upon a pause, as though
 A hesitance to comply had checked it--
 Yet comply he did, and willingly:
 Pause and silence: both
 Were essential graces, a reticence
 Of the blood, whose calm concealed
 The tutelary of that upland field. (CP 73)

The poet, as these portraits show, envies, to some extent, even the silence which purchased these perfect matchings of man and place. His envy springs from the tempting notion that these people have achieved what he seeks to achieve: the according of things their due. To paraphrase a later poem, he envied green (CP 231).

Yet envy for the green-world--like envy of another's possessions or good opinion--can only be tempered by keeping the eye unsentimentally clear. Silence is, after all, not to be envied, and the poet knows that his task is not to become as mute as stone but to restore speech to stone--to be, in Stevens's phrase, "the lion in the lute/ Before the lion locked in stone" (Collected 175)--to be the tongue of Philomel. As a political responsibility, the poet must exploit the detachment or aesthetic distance which art permits and give voice to his place and its people. To accept silence would be to fail at this responsibility. The first poem in this volume, "A Prelude," asserts (echoing his epigraph) the poet's desire to be vocal--even grotesquely or gratingly so, like a goose: "I want the cries of my geese/ To echo in space, and the land/ They fly above to be astir beneath/ The agreement of its forms, as if it were/ A self one might inhabit" (CP 59).

This realization will insure that the poet resists the temptations of muteness, of cold pastoral, that he will sympathize, yet not to the point of forgetting that which he must tell:

Our language is our land
 that we'll
 not waste or sell
 against a promised mess
 of pottage that we may not taste.
 For who has known
 the seasons' sweet succession
 and would still
 exchange them for a whim, a wish
 or swim into
 a mill-race for an unglimped fish? (CP 62)

Directly before this declaration of independence from
 his countrymen, he has indicated quite precisely where he
 must part from them, though, as he acknowledges, "I share
 your certain enemy":

Narrow
 your farm-bred certainties
 I do not hold:
 I share
 your certain enemy.
 For we who write
 the verse you do not read
 already plead your cause
 before
 that cold tribunal
 while you're unaware
 they hold their session. (CP 61-62)

As in other poems--for example, "The Instance," "Providence,"
 "The Order of Saying," "The Lesson," and "Jemez"--Tomlinson
 here resists the "farm-bred certainties," which threaten to
 override his speech. At times his eye--"the eye of
 newcomer,/ a townsman's eye' (CP 322)--cannot read into the
 signs of the weather what the inhabitants can, and his poems
 arise from this measurable difference between poet and
 countryman. In "The Order of Saying," he quotes one such
 expression: "'As soon as the blackthorn comes in flower/ The
 wind blows cold,' she says," but admits that he "can only

see/ The order of her saying":

in that flare
That rises like a beacon for the wind
To flow into, to twist and wear
Garment and incandescence, flag of spring. (CP 322)

Just as the cultivated silence of the rural life has an attraction that must be rejected by the poet, so the folk wisdom, which takes the place of fresh observation, must be acknowledged as a temptation but, finally, resisted.

"Providence," for example, begins with a prophecy, the prediction of a bad winter from the profusion of hawthorns: "It is May: 'A bad winter, '/ They prophesy, the old women--they/ Who remember still--for I cannot--/ Years when the hawthorns were as thick as now" (CP 293). His ambivalence about such prophecies--is there truth in the farm-bred certainty?--becomes clear in the course of the poem. As in "The Fox," the poem resists possessiveness through a recognition of the poet's error: "I thought it must be those snow-brides, snow-ghosts/ Brought-on their unseasonable dream of frosts" (CP 293). However, he realizes, it is not the simple likeness of hawthorns to snow which has led to this saying:

But old women know the blossoms must give way
To berry after berry, as profuse as they,
On which, come winter, the birds will feed:
For what in the world could justify and bring
Inexplicable plenty if not the 'birds' need?-- (CP 293)

In a sense, the old women's reasoning parallels the poet's own attempts to give things their due. Like the poet, the old women--here representative of those who have long lived

in close conjunction with a rural, secluded place--pay close attention to the things around them. However, the pathetic fatalism which underlies such reasoning is not shared by the poet. Their providential reasoning is finally too possessive; metaphor hardens into myth, and the concern of Nature for the sparrows is simply the old wish for a God showing forth concern for the human self: "Old women reason providentially/ From other seasons, remembering how/ Winter set out to hunt the sparrows down/ In years when the hawthorns were as thick as now" (CP 293).

Such adages are close in kind to childish superstitions, the disappearance of which is to be regretted only insofar as they are signs of that cultural leveling--that "certain enemy" (CP 61) he shares with his countrymen--he witnesses in the Stoke poems. However, their passing is not to be sentimentally mourned as the passing of a golden age, a perfect time and place. In "Jemez," the poet as visitor would seem to stand apart both from the old superstitions of earlier generations and from the dismissive skepticism of the current generation:

When we were children said
 Eva they told us
 the trees on the skyline there
 --we turned to see
 the trees on the skyline there
 stand staring down--
 were the kachinas and we
 believed them but today
 if you say to children
 the trees on the skyline there
 --the skyline trees stand
 calling up sap out of rock and sand--
 are the kachinas they

reply kachinas?
 they're nothing but trees (CP 326-27)

His course is to approach folk wisdom in an open but also a questioning frame of mind, prepared, as he is in "The Instance," to admit wisdom when it accords with his own experience. That approach is summed up in "The Lesson":

The larks, this year,
 fly so early and so high,
 it means, you tell me, summer
 will be dry and hot,
 and who am I
 to gainsay that prophecy?
 For twenty years here have not
 taught me to read with accuracy
 the signs either of earth or sky:
 I still keep the eye of a newcomer,
 a townsman's eye:
 but there is time yet
 to better my instruction
 in season and in song:
 summer on summer (CP 322)

The poet's mask of visitor, with "the eye of a newcomer" (CP 322), rescues him from unquestioning acceptance of these prophecies.

4. "Look with the ears . . . / Trusting to Music"

*O you the mutation
of feelings to what?--: to audible landscape.
You stranger: music. You heart-space
grown out of us --Rilke, "To Music" (69).*

The dominance of the primary metaphor for understanding --seeing-is-understanding--seems not to hold, or, at least seems challenged, when we speak of misunderstanding or error: the metaphor of seeing changes to something else. The simple negation of seeing or the application of the prefix "mis-" to "understanding" indicates that the metaphor of seeing has changed--or is trying to change. Yet a substitute metaphor has not fully emerged to replace seeing-is-understanding. The concept of error seems to come to us through our metaphors not as an autonomous concept but already subordinated to seeing-as-understanding. The need for certainty and permanence, for truth and perfection, the principal connotations of understanding, are so deep-seated that they affect even metaphors for misunderstanding. The eye, even when it does not see, is trying to see. If ideology imposes itself through the metaphors we live by, then an ideology of the true, the perfect, the permanent, the certain, may be imposed, almost by definition, upon metaphoric domains which represent concepts antithetical to these notions. Error, in point of fact, is essential to the process of cognition; one might say it is more important to be wrong than to be right--more important, that is, within a framework

of a broader concept of understanding than that implied by such an ideology. In this way, then, everyday usage does not reflect the role of error in the process of cognition. When we speak we do not acknowledge by our metaphors that we always must err in order to understand. Error's role in cognition is suppressed in this way. Our cultural rules seem to want to suppress error metaphorically.

To be merely the negation of seeing is to be straightaway relegated to an adversarial and immoral position, for what could be more moral than right seeing (understanding)? In terms of metaphor, when we leave the world of seeing, we necessarily leave behind understanding. The metaphor of seeing would contain the world. Metaphors for erring leave this container for places at the margin or boundary or beyond: woods, darkness, vacancy. To be constrained to apply metaphors of seeing may, therefore, distort the role of error in cognition. There are two related problems here: (1) the dominance of seeing as a metaphor, and (2) the weakness of our concept of error: that is, that error is always subordinated to the metaphor of seeing. These problems are related because the strength of a concept depends to some extent on the metaphors by which it is expressed and known. The concept of error is weak because its full importance in cognition is not reflected in the metaphors by which we know it: we do not value errors, nor the process of erring, nor the significance of error in the process of cognition. How is the concept of error weakened?

space or nothingness: visual space introduces the notions of container and contained, and any object uses up space-as-possibility; to see is to deplete our sense of possibility. Music and sound, on the other hand, are in perfect accord with space; neither limiting nor limited by it, they express space as possibility. In part that perfection seems to lie in sound's avoidance of the visual; music redeems the ear, gives primacy to the second sense. In part it seems to lie in sound's avoidance of meaning; sound is a non-human speech, as foreign to human thought as stone.

Sound is music waiting to be heard. In other words, the ear's creativity is often eclipsed by the eye's. Sara Garnes and Zinny S. Bond describe the psychology of the ear's--as distinct from the eye's--poetic of misperception:

When listeners cannot make sense of what they hear, their typical reaction is to question the reader, "Did you say--?" There are, however, different kinds of data that show that hearers may instead attempt to reinterpret what they hear and actually attempt to process their misperceptions. (232)

As we have seen, "Poem," that *first* poem by Tomlinson, is an awakening in several ways. In particular, it is an awakening to the space of sound. The "unstopped ear"--his phrase borrowed from Pound's "E. P. Ode Pour L'Election de son Sepulchre"--has been stopped by the dominance of the eye. To awaken to the space of sound is to recognize a larger space than the eye's. The poem ends on a paradox: "And space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;/ Though space is soundless, yet creates/ From very soundlessness a ground/ To

counterstress the lilting hoof fall as it breaks" (CP xix). Nor do these lines really resolve the paradox of how a ground can be created from soundlessness. Yet sound is here celebrated as the creator, the prime mover, that which realizes the extent of space as possibility. The paradox comes down to the relation between seeing and hearing. Although the poem grants sound primacy over sight, sound is transposed straightaway into visual terms. Sound seems to recreate a sense of space, yet visual coordinates seem to be necessary in claiming that new territory: "The hooves describe an arabesque on space,/ A dotted line in sound that falls and rises/ As the cart goes by." Even as we accord sound the same attention that Tomlinson advocates according to things, sound turns to music, becomes visual, meaningful, humanized.

"Words for the Madrigalist" (CP 170) takes up the relationship between sight and sound in a meditation on the sixteenth-century Italian composer Orazio Vecchi's advice that begins the poem:

Look with the ears, said Orazio Vecchi,
 Trusting to music, willing to be led
 Voluntarily blind through its complete
 Landscape of the emotion, feeling beneath the feet
 Of the mind's heart, the land fall, the height
 Re-form: Look with the ears--they are all
 Looking with the eyes, missing the way (CP 170)

By the close of the poem the poet has formulated a reply to Orazio Vecchi: "Hear with the eyes" The poet's reply--a kind of retort--follows his attempt, as he waits for sleep, to do as the composer bids:

space than the eye's. The poem ends on a paradox: "And space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;/ Though space is soundless, yet creates/ From very soundlessness a ground/ To counterstress the lilted hoof fall as it breaks" (CP xix). Nor do these lines really resolve the paradox of how a ground can be created from soundlessness. Yet sound is here celebrated as the creator, the prime mover, that which realizes the extent of space as possibility. The paradox comes down to the relation between seeing and hearing. Although the poem grants sound primacy over sight, sound is transposed straightaway into visual terms. Sound seems to recreate a sense of space, yet visual coordinates seem to be necessary in claiming that new territory: "The hooves describe an arabesque on space,/ A dotted line in sound that falls and rises/ As the cart goes by." Even as we accord sound the same attention that Tomlinson advocates according to things, sound turns to music, becomes visual, meaningful, humanized.

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By the close of the poem the poet has formulated a reply to Orazio Vecchi: "Hear with the eyes" The poet's reply--a kind of retort--follows his attempt, as he waits for sleep, to do as the composer bids:

So, waiting for sleep, I look
With the ears at the confused clear sounds
As each replenished tributary unwinds
Its audible direction, and dividing
The branchwork of chime and counterchime
Runs the river's thick and drumming stem (CP 170)

What he hears is the enormous difference between patterned, meaningful, human sound--as in music or language--and natural sounds, devoid of emotional content:

Loud with their madrigal of limestone beds
Where nothing sleeps, they all
Give back--not the tune the listener calls
But the measure of what he is
In the hard, sweet music of his lack,
The unpremeditated consonances (CP 170)

More than this, the shrewd and wakeful listener realizes that even as he hears the non-human sounds and even as he recognizes that they are meaningless, he has translated them into human meaning, into words, and, once again, into the domain of the eye: "...and the words/ Return it to you over the ground-/ Bass of their syllables, Orazio Vecchi:/ Hear with the eyes as you catch the current of their sounds" (CP 170).

Music poses the great danger--greater, perhaps, than that of any other medium--of tempting the human listener away from the world of things into an absorption with the self and the emotions of the self. Vecchi's instruction appears to recommend that we dispense with our rational faculty, the

eye/mind, and become, as another poem phrases it, "all ear" (CP 223). To "look with the ears" is thus a displacement of eye by ear, of reason by emotion. But because of the dominance of the metaphor, seeing-is-understanding, even the displacement of the eye/mind requires the verb "look," borrowing from the same metaphoric domain which it attempts to challenge. When the poet attempts to follow Vecchi's advice, he is reversing the direction of his original poem, "Poem": in that poem the poet wakes to hearing but in this one he tries to fall asleep.

The reversal signals the skepticism and irony with which the poet undertakes the task of proving Vecchi's words. To look with the ears is not only to attempt the unnatural and futile task of shutting off the reason. It is to credit too much to music and emotion. But also it is to falsify one's accord with the object world. The poet tests Vecchi's advice by listening not to music--patterned, human--but to the unpatterned, non-human sounds of a river. Vecchi's advice, in other words, may apply to the "complete/ Landscape of the emotion" which is music, but in listening to, attending to, the world of things, the listener does not call the tune, and the difference between him and things is all too apparent. In "Poem," the eye and the ear inform one another in re-creating the world; but here, having, as it were, voluntarily blinded his eye, the poet finds not the expansion of the space of possibility but the reflection of his false self-imposed limitation, "In the hard, sweet music of his lack."

Ironically, the sounds that reach the would-be sleeper mock his difficult art of poetry. The effortless, unceasing vocality of the stream never achieves words, human utterance, yet constantly reminds the poet that he must live with words; neither the eye nor the tongue can be denied. Hence the poem ends with a correction to Vecchi's advice--and hence the import of the title "Words for the Madrigalist"--to hear with the eyes is to balance the emotion of music with the reason of the eye.

Although "Words for the Madrigalist" ends by qualifying Vecchi's instructions, it recognizes and celebrates the proper balance between hearing and seeing: one sense does inform the other, and both are balanced by the reason. In a recent poem, "Hearing the Ways," Tomlinson returns to this idea:

Stream beds are pouring
a week's rain through--
hill-race into hollow,
mill-race out of view.

Under a cleared sky
you can hear the ways
the waters are steering
and measure out by

the changes of tone
their purchase on place,
catch the live note off stone
in the plunge of arrival.

The closed eye can explore
The shapes of the vale
as sure as the Braille
beneath a blind finger.

In all its roused cells
the whole mind unlocks
whenever eye listens,
wherever ear looks. (Return 45)

Here sound extends sight and, as in "Poem," recreates what the eye cannot see. Yet even though the eye is closed, neither it nor the intelligence it represents has been artificially turned off. Though closed, it "can explore" that place which the ear alone can reach. Accorded the same attention as things or objects, sound can provide a "purchase on place," and, in conjunction with the eye, put aside possessiveness: "In all its roused cells/ the whole mind unlocks/ whenever eye listens,/ wherever ear looks" (Return 45).

As the poems just examined show, hearing for Tomlinson is both a way of reaching out and beyond the eye and a way of measuring or mapping especially congenial to the imagination. To reach beyond the eye is to break free of the dominant container metaphor of seeing-is-understanding. In "Words for the Madrigalist," on the point of testing Vecchi's advice, the speaker--who is also on the point of willing himself a listener--remarks: "they are all/ Looking with the eyes, missing the way" (CP 170). In "Hearing the Ways," one of the meanings of "way" coincides with that of the earlier poem: that is, the ear can help find the right way. His use of the common metaphor for error--to miss the way or path, to go astray--in connection with seeing raises the problem of how error is figured metaphorically in a world dominated by metaphors of sight.

The space of sound and the space of music bear a resemblance to two other spaces of possibility in Tomlinson's

poetry, those of travel and politics. His use of music as a metaphor, because music challenges the dominance of the eye and, by inevitable and obdurate implication, the dominance of the concept of understanding, permits us to consider some broader and more fundamental aspects of his aesthetic of giving the thing its due. If Tomlinson's poetry is conceived as a challenge to the dominance of the eye and of seeing-as-understanding, and if music is an incipient metaphoric domain for error, then how does his extensive travel poetry and his less extensive, but still considerable, political poetry, relate to this challenge? Do travel and politics also constitute incipient spaces of possibility for challenging error's subordinate role in cognition? Travel and politics are not inherently related, and their conjoining here needs explanation. On the one hand, travel seems to represent the basic principle of bodying forth, of going outward to things. More than a mere variation on that aesthetic, travel represents the poet going forth in, as it were, bold face type.

But this testimony to the virtues of his aesthetic seems by its very amplification of that aesthetic to prompt us to re-examine its arguments. Tomlinson's attack on cultural insularity is, as I have argued, bound up with his aesthetic of giving the thing its due: to go outward to things is akin to going out to other cultures. Yet his attack on cultural insularity has been pressed on purely cultural grounds; the undeclared assumption has been that culture can be separated

from politics, the way we govern ourselves. The theme of travel, I think, causes us to reconsider this assumption. Travel takes the poet to other landscapes and those landscapes mightily stimulate his imagination, but not even the New Mexican desert is an altogether unpeopled landscape, and the peoples who have lived there have never lacked some form of government. Travel, therefore, perhaps more than any previously considered aspect of his poetry, causes us to ask whether the arguments for and against cultural insularity are really being waged on political, not cultural grounds; and if politics and culture are thus interdependent, then can the debate over cultural insularity really be determined without considering that political ground? In my last chapter I will argue that Tomlinson's travel and political poetics can be usefully considered in relation to one another, as the two sides of a single coin.

Chapter 5

Travel and Politics: Some Relations and Contraries

*Oh Tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you
and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension?*
--Elizabeth Bishop, "Arrival at Santos" (103).

*For a long time I have thought of adding other
sections to the Notes and one in particular:
"It Must Be Human."
--Wallace Stevens, Letters (863-64).*

*Art
Is complete when it is human (CP 34).*

1. Bodying Forth: Questions of Travel

*Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
--Bishop, "Questions of Travel" (107).*

Modernism has a large travel-motif running through many of its chief works--Ulysses, The Waste Land, "The Comedian as the Letter 'C'," The Cantos--what one might describe even as an ironic travel motif. These works seem to share the sense that there is as bad as here in the modern world, that, nevertheless, modern man--including the artist--goes there, anyway, and that the truest route--indeed, the only realistic one, perhaps the only possible one--for the modern work of art is to reflect this bitter irony. Indeed, for the modern

artist, perhaps the bitterest irony was that the there of art was as bad as any other there. Travel for the modern artist did not broaden the mind or enrich the sensibility so much as it was the fated completion of the arc of irony, a leveling of places, cultures, and boundaries into one place, the modern waste land. Perhaps that late modernist--even anachronistic modernist--Marshall McLuhan provides the culmination of this modernist tendency with his phrase, "the global village."

Against all this, Tomlinson stands firm: for him travel both enriches and broadens, and there is interestingly different from--and yet interestingly similar--to here. Unlike the modernist travel motif which evinces a restless, hopeless search for something better than here--as though the purpose of travel were for the proving of placelessness--Tomlinson's travel motif is a lateral extension of his need to accord the object its due. For him, it is morally wrong either to ignore foreign places--as the Amis epigraph he uses in "More Foreign Cities" advocates--or to give in to the modernist myth of man's placelessness, and hence to tear down all borders and boundaries, all distinguishing features of place and culture. The careful mapping of a bird skull washed ashore marvellously intact in "To Be Engraved on the Skull of a Cormorant" finds a natural extension in his interest in mapping the elements of places to which his travels take him.

Travel, however, necessitates a different kind of map-making to that required in defining the local, as in his

Stoke poems, for example. Travel re-institutes--one might say "magnifies"--possessiveness in a new dimension. To the boundaries of light and shadow, of inside and outside, which distinguish one thing from another, are added the geographic, cultural, and political boundaries which determine Italy as Italy, America as America, and both, especially, as distinct from England. Travel tests the poet's real, as opposed to his professed, repudiation of parochialism and isolationism. It may also test his beliefs about the physical world.

Aldous Huxley wrote of Wordsworth:

It is a pity that he never travelled beyond the boundaries of Europe. A voyage through the tropics would have cured him of his too easy and comfortable pantheism. A few months in the jungle would have convinced him that the diversity and utter strangeness of Nature are at least as real and significant as its intellectually discovered unity But Wordsworth never left his native continent. Europe is so well gardened that it resembles a work of art, a scientific theory, a neat metaphysical system. Man has re-created Europe in his own image. Its tamed and temperate Nature confirmed Wordsworth in his philosophizings. The poet, the devil's partisan, were doomed; the angels triumphed. Alas! (128-29)

Huxley here displays a faith, albeit one prompted largely by his dislike for the reactionary Wordsworth, in travel as a tonic, a faith which in turn, rests on the assumption that travel is possible. Paul Fussell doubts that possibility exists any longer and considers ours an age of mere tourism: "Before tourism there was travel, and before travel there was exploration. Each is roughly assignable to its own age in modern history: exploration belongs to the Renaissance, travel to the bourgeois age, tourism to our proletarian moment . . ." (38-39). Each of these journeying

types possesses characteristics peculiar to its age--or "moment"-- as he goes on to outline:

All three make journeys, but the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveler that which has been discovered by the mind working in history, the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity. The genuine traveler is, or used to be, in the middle between the two extremes. If the explorer moves towards the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché. It is between these two poles that the traveler mediates, retaining all he can of the excitement of the unpredictable attaching to exploration, and fusing that with the pleasure of "knowing where one is" belonging to tourism." (39)

Tomlinson would claim a special dispensation for the poet-- or, at least, he would lay the responsibilities of travel on even today's poets: "A poet should be a traveller, not a tourist, looking for more than the exotic and carrying home surprises and sympathies in both subject matter and language--for he is travelling, also, through the realms of his native speech, bringing it to reflect on the foreign which turns out often to be disconcerting yet familiar" ("Travels" 4).

Tomlinson's remarks suggest that he would agree with Fussell that "Before the development of tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of the judgment" (39).

Yet the idea of "carrying home surprises and sympathies" redeems, one might point out, both the impersonality of the explorer and the selfishness of the tourist. What might be called Tomlinson's personal or private poetry occupies an important place in his work. The personal poem, that is, the

poem primarily, or in the first instance, addressed to a particular audience--to wife, daughter, or friend, for example--is characterized by its tone of shared experience, relative intimacy and familiarity, and by its use of a particularized and personalized "you" or "we." "Departure" (CP 289), "Prose Poem" (CP 288), "The Epilogue" (CP 350-51), "On a Pig's Head" (CP 333), "Mushrooms" (CP 293), and, from The Return, "Winter Journey," all display these properties. What they venture to do is to make the poem an extension of the experience, to celebrate, verbalize, and return the experience to those who shared in it. Even if considered merely as a rhetorical pose, this voice must be seen as an attempt to create a mood for communication, whether the audience is the purportedly private one or a more public, general reader.

Both departure and return rest on the idea of this sharing of experience: the poet travels that he may bring back accounts of his experiences and share them with family and friends. The sense of a sympathetic, known audience is especially important to his poetry: a stay when at home or abroad. This personal tone saves his poetry both from the impersonality of mere observer and from the possessiveness of writing solely for one's self. Indeed, travel in addition to its beneficial effects on the mind and the judgement stimulates a good deal of his personal poetry. That his most successful travel poems are voiced in this personal tone seems to show a need to translate the unfamiliar into his

most trustworthy language. To address someone as "you," in the way that such poems as these do, is to entrust the audience with a part of one's self in an almost custodial way. The "you"s become the human counterparts of his Gloucestershire valley home, the place from which he departs and to which he returns. Possessiveness is qualified when one invests that much of one's self and confidence in the audience.

Travel is another form of mapping and measuring. "Movements," a long meditation on the nature of travel, chooses travel as a metaphor for all our acts of perception:

Anew we see
Nature as body and as building
To be filled, if not with sound, then with
The thousand straying filamented ways
We travel it by, from the inch before us to the
height
Above, and back again. (CP 234)

Such faith in the physical world seems to confound Huxley's theory of the tropics. Far from being the product of a temperate climate, Tomlinson's faith seems to lie in a shrewd understanding of how one perceives. At the same time that the metaphor of travel helps to suggest the full participation of the body in every act of seeing, so travel itself becomes naturalized and domesticated by this metaphoric employment: in seeing we venture forth from the mind; in travelling we are merely seeing, yet again:

For travelling, we come
To where we were; as if, in the rhymes
And repetitions and the flights of seeing,
What we sought for was the unspoken
Familiar dialect of habitation--speech
Behind speech, language that teaches itself

Under the touch and sight: a text
 That we must write, restore, complete
 Grasping for more than the bare facts warranted
 By giving tongue to them. The sound
 Of the thick rain chains us in liberty to where we are.
 (CP 234)

The act of seeing--or travelling--described here suggests that these activities must always be attempts to make the unfamiliar familiar, the non-human human.

The notion of a "speech/ Behind speech" which we struggle to translate, in our every act of perception, into human terms, as if we caught glimpses of the human even in those "bare facts," recalls in a curious way Ted Hughes's remark on conversation, quoted by Tomlinson in his essay on Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen: "The greatest satisfactions of conversation are probably musical ones A person who has no musical talent in ordinary conversation is a bore, no matter how interesting his remarks are. What we really want from each other are those comforting or stimulating exchanges of melodies" ("Objectivists" 87). In the same way that we long for the non-human to speak, to be human, so, paradoxically, our language ("conversation") itself, according to Hughes, is not enough. What we long for is music as comfort or stimulus.

Hughes's remark is the complement to Tomlinson's idea of a "speech/ Behind speech." Tomlinson is saying that we seem to look for the human in the non-human; Hughes, that we seem to look for the non-human in the human. This particular dialectic may shed some light on the relation between ear and eye, hearing and seeing. In a sense, both poets mean the

same thing: both suggest that in perceiving we seek to recreate the given. In conversation we are presented with a talking object, and our hearing tries to push back the boundaries of this double containment. What the speaker says may well be interesting--that is, relevant, timely, accurate, creditable, and so forth--but we want more than this. For both poets music seems to provide this needed "more." What Tomlinson calls "speech" is really the musical element of speech; what Hughes calls "interesting" is the non-musical element, the purely informative element of speech. Yet a paradox remains to be resolved: is it the human demanding the more than human, or the human demanding nothing more than the human? We are as dissatisfied in the face of the inhuman as we are in the face of the human. The mind invariably seeks to expand its territory, to go beyond the boundaries that would restrict it.

In "Face and Image" (CP 107), Tomlinson employs the travel or geographical metaphor in a meditation on the human face. Hughes's musical element finds a physiognomic counterpart in the space between the face and its image:

Between
the image of it
and your face: Between
is the unchartable country,
variable, virgin terror and territory. (CP 107)

Love is the emotional state corresponding to the recognition of the space of possibility, or to turn the notion inside out, love metamorphoses the idea of a boundary--itself pure restriction, the line of containment--into that of space,

that which a boundary would contain. An "unrestricted boundary" is oxymoronic in a strange way. The phrase is not the same as an "unrestricting boundary." An unrestricting boundary is a failed boundary, but an "unrestricted boundary" is a transformed boundary, a boundary against which the concept of boundary has been applied--as though boundaries themselves had boundaries---and, subsequently, repealed. Travel is the crossing of boundaries in the physical world; love is the unpossessive spirit in which the traveller should go.

A door, like a face, can also represent an "unrestricted boundary." In "The Picture of J. T. in a Prospect of Stone," Tomlinson frames his daughter in a kind of doorway, "emerging/ from between/ the stone lips/ of a sheep-stile/ that divides/ village graves/ and village green" (CP 74). The child is "emerging," that is, she is neither in the village green nor among its graves but within the boundary between. A later poem expresses the double nature of doors:

For doors
are both frame and monument
to our spent time,
and too little
has been said
of our coming through and leaving by them.

(CP 112)

That same poem describes the door as "the sudden/ frontier to our concurrences, appearances,/ and as full of the offer of space/ as the view through a cromlech is." For a poet as concerned with the questions of inside and outside, container and contained, possessiveness and possibility, as Tomlinson,

the door has a special affinity. It collapses and concentrates the ideas of travel and metamorphosis into a single frame for departure and return. As a frame it not only separates inside from outside; it also represents the "sudden frontier" or "unrestricted boundary" between one state or condition and another. "Too little/ has been said/ of the door," that poem maintains, and "too little/ has been said/ of our coming through and leaving by them": too little has been said of the boundary, or frontier, or frame, in and of itself.

Though the door suggests framing and separation, Tomlinson also frequently sees it as the way in, as the title of his 1974 volume phrases it: the way into the space of possibility, the way out of containment and limitation. In "The View," as the poet contemplates the onset of autumn, his eye falls upon "The window that stands open like a gate/ In the opposing house-face" (CP 167). Though the word itself does not appear, the idea of resistance is present at least in the poem's search for a way beyond the lifelessness of the "view": "Of the view, there is no tale to tell you./ Its history is incidental." The very darkness of the window suggests to him a way not only into the hill-side but into the place, unseen by the eyes, where the metamorphoses of summer to winter, life to decay, occur:

The dark of the window square might be
 A mineshaft of pure shadow, a way
 Through to the heart of the hill--the black
 Centre, if centre there were where
 Sight must travel such drops and intervals,
 And an undulation of aspens along the slope

Is turning the wind to water and to light,
 Unpivoting place amid its shaken coins,
 While under a shuddering causeway, a currency,
 The season is dragging at all the roots of the view.
 (CP 168)

A later poem, "The Gap" (CP 308-09), meditates on man's attraction to doorways: "Why does one welcome the gateless gap?" (CP 309). The gap, for instance, caught out of the corner of one's eye while driving:

it is a gap
 (No more) where you'd expect to see
 A field-gate, and there well may be
 But it is flung wide, and the land so lies
 All you see is space--that, and the wall
 That climbs up to the spot two ways
 To embrace absence, frame skies (CP 309)

The mind can supply any number of good reasons--"Reason can follow reason, one by one"--however, none of them will last as long as the memory of the experience itself:

But the moment itself, abrupt
 With the pure surprise of seeing,
 Will outlast all after-knowledge and its map--
 Even, and perhaps most then, should the unseen
 Gate swing-to across that gap. (CP 309)

Like "Poem," "The Gap" has a self-reflexive quality which makes the idea of space as possibility the highest value of poetry. The clear echo of "the constancy of stone" from "The Picture of J. T. in a Prospect of Stone" found in "the certainty of stone" points up again the poet's dissatisfaction with the earlier poem's proposed wish for his daughter.

"The Gap" also underlines why the poet's discovery of the porousness of stone comes as a revelation in "The

Flood." The gap--"A saving grace in so much certainty of stone"--exactly parallels the poetic revelations recounted in "Poem," "The Flood," and other poems in which space means poetic creativity. In a way, the gap in the wall of stone is made to represent the moment itself. That moment will outlast stone because the moment is beyond "all after-knowledge and its map": the experiencer is sure of the moment in a way that he can never be sure of his thoughts about it. The moment is an unfillable gap, exact temporal equivalent to the glimpsed spatial gap. The poem's series of reasons, thrown out as much to show the futility of filling the gap as to show the mind's insatiable need to try to do so, are really akin to poems themselves. His use of this series--"the series that could go on forever"--of reasons or questions is a further example of the technique of chance he learned from Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," and subsequently employed in such poems as "Eight Observations on the Nature of Eternity" and "More Foreign Cities." The vision afforded the poet in "The Gap," quite literally a glimpse of nothing, is even less than that granted in "Poem," even less than Polonius's at least cloud-filled space, yet as in that first poem space is seen not as emptiness but as plenitude.

The prepositions may vary--the way in, out of, through, toward--yet the gap in the wall, like the door, suggests that the nature of departure is man's nature. Tomlinson's "Departure" (CP 289) implicitly looks forward to return.

Addressed to one who has recently taken leave of the poet,
 the poem celebrates a special place in the poet's garden, a
 "place of perpetual threshold":

it is here
 That I like best, where the waters disappear
 Under the bridge-arch, shelving through coolness,
 Thought, halted at an image of perfection
 Between gloom and gold, in momentary
 Stay, place of perpetual threshold,
 Before all flashes out again and on
 Tasseling and torn, reflecting nothing but sun.

(CP 289)

The gently sentimental and personal character of the poem and
 its domestic setting meliorate the fact of travel or
 departure: the poet's faith remains in the boundary, the
 threshold, despite the facts of flowing waters, trailing jet
 vapours, and human aging.

2. "To Become the Face of Space": America: West Southwest

*Oh, must we dream our dreams
And have them too?*

--Bishop, "Questions of Travel" (107).

Travel is open-ended. It embodies the metaphor for error: the arrow continuing off into space. In travel, the body passes through a similar trajectory of missed targets, traversed boundaries, erring into the space of possibility. To travel is to participate in this metaphor--to "Look with the ears" or to "Hear with the eyes" (CP 170). In travel, the body itself most clearly becomes both the unit of measure and an instrument with which to measure and map. To describe one's activity as travel implies this whole mythology of erring, measuring, and, to give a favoured phrase of Tomlinson's a sense mostly left implicit in his usage, of "bodying forth." In order that things may be seen as things, that the poet may body forth things, he must first of all himself body forth, that is, be conscious of his body as the measure of all things. What makes the words "measure" and "map" so important to Tomlinson is that they particularize and focus the value of the object world. Both words seem connotatively neutral, yet as Tomlinson employs them they become synonymous with value. The traditional and conventional applications of "measure" and "map" to physical quantification suggests that for Tomlinson they carry a connotation of valuing the outwardness of things, not abstractions or essences, but size, shape, and weight, colour

and texture. "Map," more obviously than "measure," has associations with travel. But even "measure" has a traditional "poetical" sense of travel: "to travel over, traverse (a certain distance, a tract of country)," as the OED describes it.

A poem which suggests this necessary linkage between the body and the world it would measure is "Dialectic." The poem, dedicated to Edoardo Sanguineti, reflects on Sanguineti's thought that "Life is the story of a body," but straight away metamorphoses it into slightly different terms: "the cough in the concert-hall is the story/ Of a body that cannot contain itself" (CP 223). The seemingly trivial example of a cough turns out to be fundamental to the poet's meditation and brings Sanguineti's abstraction of "a body" into the world of the actual--a world of damaged ears, cramped knees, and itching legs--and shifts the emphasis to the metaphor of containment. A cough suggests that the body will be heard, in the same way that Beethoven refuses to let his "damaged ear" contain the music he would write. Is the body the container or the contained? Or both? The conventions of the concert hall enforce an unnatural containment upon the audience:

Side by side
all those itching legs! straining
to give back to the body
the rhythm out of the air and
heel-tap it into the ground. (CP 223)

The body straining to respond to the music points up the necessary interaction of the body with the world of sound and

the other senses. The body's need thus to interact is only put aside in sleep:

A dropped programme tells
 Of a body lost to itself
 and become all ear--ear
 such as only the deaf
 could dream of, with its gigantic
 channels and circuits, its
 snailshell of cartilage
 brimming and quivering with the auricle's
 passed-on story where
 life is the breaking of silences
 now heard, the daily remaking a body
 refleshed of air. (CP 223-24)

In sleep, the body is "lost to itself": it becomes a passive receptor. Unable to respond to the world about it, the body becomes--in a grotesque metonymy--"all ear," not simply an ear, but a glorious ear, an envied, idealized ear--"such as only the deaf/ could dream of." The image is, once again, that of the space of possibility; here, specifically an aural space, lovingly mapped and detailed and attended to like the beautiful snailshell it resembles. (Indeed, his technique in describing the snailshell/ear resembles that used in mapping the bird's skull in "To Be Engraved on the Skull of a Cormorant.") The passage-ways of the ear are like a stream bearing "the passed-on story." The image carries the imprint of his first poem, "Poem," in which creativity is apperceived as sound reaches "the unstopped ear." As in that poem, so in "Dialectic," "life is the breaking of silences/ now heard," and just as "harness-jingle" and "hoof fall" create (or re-create) the world, so in this later poem sounds are figured as "the daily remaking a body/ refleshed

of air" (CP 224).

Although even before Tomlinson left Britain, Mexico and America were, in his imagination, peopled landscapes, that is, inhabited from his reading about their cultures, they were, especially the American Southwest, also unpeopled landscapes. In large, the Southwest represented, geographically, the space of possibility: it was "all ear." His uncollected poem, "To Louis Zukofsky," records some of the feelings the Southwest raised in him. Written at Lawrence's former home at Kiowa Ranch, the poem expresses a mixture of feelings: relief at escaping the oppressiveness of England's stale literary scene, relief on arriving in the open spaces of New Mexico, sympathy for Lawrence's similar "exile," and, characteristically, gratitude for a new mentor's help--and, indeed, sympathy as well for that mentor's own and continuing exile: "that/ solitude/ in the world/ of letters/ which is yours" ("To Louis Zukofsky" 14). Most relevant here, though, is how his poem ends. Its ending creates out of his meditation on exile and space what amounts to a travel metaphor, which tentatively relates, in a concluding question, poetry with walking:

is not

poetry
akin to walking

for one
may know

the way that
he is going

(though I did not)
without

his knowing
what he

will see there:
and who

following on
will find

what you
with more than

walker's care
have shown

was there
before his

unaccounting eyes? ("To Louis Zukofsky" 14)

Travelling or walking, like writing poems is, to refer back to W.S. Merwin's definition of originality, akin to "trying to come from the place from which all renewal comes" (18).

Significantly too, this travel image forgoes the map for chance. As we have seen, Tomlinson has frequently had recourse to the idea of mapping as a metaphor for writing poetry, but here in speaking of originality he chooses a different metaphor. Perhaps in a foreign land and, at least in imagination, amidst mentors of his craft, he refuses the metaphor of the map because he is in these circumstances especially conscious of the political connotations of "map" and "map-making." As G.N.G. Clarke points out, "the map exists as a text of possession: a reconstruction of a culture's way with the world" (454). Ann C. Colley adds further substance to this side of the map as metaphor: "the

act of mapping is protective, for it allows its creator simultaneously to participate in and keep his distance from the subject. The map mediates between him and the land; it is a shield as well as a guide" (523).

Tomlinson's preface to America West Southwest (1970) expands on his feelings for that area and the sense it gave of an "attunement between people and place":

Perhaps the experience, for an Englishman, of space, light and race, would stand out the more clearly. Lawrence's words inevitably come to mind: "Very nice, the great South West, put on a sombrero and knot a red kerchief round your neck, to go out in the great free spaces! That is New Mexico wrapped in the absolutely hygienic and shiny mucous-paper of our trite civilisation. But break through the shiny sterilized wrapping, and actually touch the country, and you'll never be the same again." Conceivably Lawrence is right. One felt the difference. But one also felt at home. The magnificence was a fact, but so was the sense of an attunement between people and place: it was there in the dance ceremonies and in the rightness of adobe structures. If you couldn't overlay all the region's magnificence with the merely human, the human had at the same time taken a purchase on the region, had married with it. (n.pag.)

Part of the "magnificence" of which he writes is the internal space he explores in "The Cavern." The poem may be read as a metamorphosis of the human into the inhuman. It also attempts to understand further the nature of space or possibility. As in "The Fox," the poem's structure follows the pattern of the recognition of error. The penetration of the mountain, which is necessarily an attempt to understand it, leads to the gradual giving up of the human: the stripping away of the human constitutes the recognition of the absolute otherness of the cavern and also of the mind's

error in wanting to "contain/ this canyon within a mountain." The final verse suggests an extreme limit to defamiliarization, but when the speaker reaches the deepest interior of the cavern, what he finds must inevitably be transformed into "the self's unnameable and shaping home."

In part, at least, the poems which follow show Tomlinson confronting that "magnificence" as if he deliberately chose to plumb the strangeness and grandness of mountain and desert. One might say that such poems as "The Cavern," "Arizona Desert," and "Arizona Highway" aim to take the measure of the American Southwest. "The Cavern," especially, is good at giving the other its due. These poems continue his long-held goal of attending to things as things. In a way, they master both strangeness and grandness of scale through this careful discipline of attention: the self bodies forth and the landscape responds.

On the other hand, in poems such as "Las Trampas U.S.A.," "Old Man at Valdez," "Mr Brodsky," and "Chief Standing Water," in which the focus is on the poet's encounters with people, the disjunction in cultures seems to dominate. To argue that "Mr Brodsky" should not be read and judged in the same way as "The Cavern," because it belongs to a different genre of poetry, may be true enough. Tomlinson has, very recently, suggested an inherent narrowness of choice in Helen Vendler's The Music of What Happens. As he says in his review, "'Lyric' seems to be Vendler's synonym for 'poem,'" yet "one feels that there are other types of

poets and poems . . . offering possibilities other than 'lyric'" ("The Claims of Lyric" 757). (Perhaps both Vendler and Tomlinson might agree with Louis MacNeice's remark that "The best lyric after all is a lyric plus, but this plusness is the hardest thing for a critic to analyse" (244).)

However, even if we grant that "Mr. Brodsky" is not a lyric but some other type of poem--comical-satirical verse, for example--the question still remains as to why Tomlinson produced this mixture of types from his travels in the American Southwest. As we have seen, far from being humourless, Tomlinson's poetry displays an abundance of humour. Short poems such as "Comedy," "A Night at the Opera," "Parsnips," and "On a Pig's Head" reflect that humour. But even his longer and mostly serious poems have a humorous element--for example, "The Flood" and "The Chances of Rhyme." In some poems, the effect of humour to defuse and dissipate emotion is linked with its contrary, the satiric aim to wound and ridicule. "Foreign Cities" shares some of that satiric goal, but it is most evident in "Mélisande," "Class," and "The Rich," where the ridicule outweighs the humorous. This group of poems is not large and their tone and goal most recalls the satiric poems of his first pamphlet, Relations and Contraries.

Indeed, taken as a separate text, America: West South-west itself recalls Relations and Contraries more than his later volumes, at least in that both show the preponderance of satirical anecdote over lyric, even the infringement of

satire on lyric's poetic territory. Anecdote tries--as satire does--to reinstitute the social into the discourse of the lyric. Satire can be as much a poetic defense against imagined threats to the self as it can be a poetic attack by a safe (unthreatened) self upon the ills of its society. No doubt those ills may well be an affront, more or less severe, to the safe satirist, but the safety of the self need not provoke the satirist's attack. Tomlinson's poetic response to the culture of the Southwest might be interpreted as a xenophobic one: the disjunction between the British culture and the American culture may have provoked a defensive satiric response. The carefully phrased Preface to his pamphlet makes clear the terms of the problem-- "Lawrence's words inevitably come to mind"--people and place: is New Mexico a land blighted by its culture or is it possible to "actually touch the country"? Is there "an attunement between people and place"? He maintains here that there is, yet how should the reader account for the portraits or sketches of a culture barely clinging to its surroundings?

Perhaps, instead of resorting to a generic division of lyric from verse or anecdote, we should rather consider the similarities and connections between what at first seem to be separate categories. Writing of the anecdotal element in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, Frank Lentricchia remarks: "The storyteller's most powerful effect comes when he convinces us that what is particular, integrated, and different in a cultural practice (like the writing of rarefied high-

modernist poetry) is part of a cultural plot that makes coherent sense of all cultural practices as a totality: not a totality that is there, waiting for us to acknowledge its presence, but a totality fashioned when the storyteller convinces us to see it his way" (22). How do we dissolve the boundary between them? "Anecdote" may not be the precise term to help differentiate these two types. Yet a good portion of all Tomlinson's poetry is anecdotal and even in places explicitly celebrates and praises that form of communication, as in "The Instance." Anecdotes have something basically human about them--because of rather than despite their rough edges and time-worn features. They reflect human imperfection. Thus the poems the reader may tend to relegate to a lower position in America: West Southwest may in fact be seen as a necessary human counterweight to the more obviously poetical or lyrical ("higher") poems in that volume. A human counterweight in spite of--or, again, because of--its anecdotal features: its satire, its jokes, its full human detail.

Read as a continuum rather than as different genres of different gravity, the poems of America: West Southwest seem to tell one story: the Southwest resists and rejects the imposition of any culture which does not give due attention to the nature of the place. Moreover, that recognition must, in particular, go beyond the possessive, aggrandizing drives of its human inhabitants. The poet who descends inside the mountain in "The Cavern"

recognizes an affinity for the place he enters--he has found the way in--which distinguishes his relationship with the place from those figures of greed and violence who populate the legends of the old West. Attunement with the physical space of this land comes about through the commitment of time to that place: anything less is thievery. Significantly, the two most lyrical--least anecdotal--of the poems are its opening and closing ones, "The Cavern" and "A Sense of Distance."

"The Cavern" takes the poet into the land he has travelled to see, takes him, indeed, to its innermost limit. That limit is appropriately figured as the womb both of the self and of the place, the Southwest:

Not far
 enough from the familiar,
 press
 in under a deeper dark until
 the curtailed sex
 the arch, the streaming buttress
 have become
 the self's unnameable and shaping home. (CP 121)

The poem is proleptic and prophetic of the recognition afforded in "The Flood" of the porousness of stone--"porous as a sponge"(CP 348)--though in this earlier poem it is the poet, not flood-waters, who penetrates the seemingly impenetrable. In the double context of the other poems of the Southwest and of his American travel poems generally, "The Cavern" represents both a journeying to the end-point of travel--the poet breaches the known--but also a braving of this land's--and possibly every place's--utterly alien, non-human, genius

loci.

The forbidding character of this desert land is repeatedly figured in these poems by emblems of death--its skulls, bones, and snakes--and this motif is echoed in their meditations on death. The poet, then, at the same time as he enters the generative centre of this foreign place also symbolically dispels his xenophobia, the foreign feared as the annihilation of both the self and the place of the self, its home: to penetrate to the centre of the foreign is to undergo a kind of death, but to reach that centre is to emerge from the fear of the foreign. If the lyric risks placelessness, or immobility, then "The Cavern" earns both the place of primacy in the series and its lyric mode because it prefigures the highly anecdotal poems which follow: in effect, its lyricality springs from their anecdotal witness.

In a parallel way, the closing poem in the series, "A Sense of Distance," earns both its lyricality and its end position because it too depends on the accumulated anecdotes which precede it. Avowedly written after the poet has returned from America, the poem describes, quite exactly, the rewards of travel in the terms of space as possibility. It blends the spaces of the Southwest, England, and the mind:

For I am in England,
and the mind's embrace
catches-up this English
and that horizonless desert space
into its own, and the three there
concentrically fill a single sphere. (CP 176)

And this act of mentally synthesizing the new-found space of America with those of England and the mind's own space affords the poet another sense of creative expansion, very similar to that of "Poem":

And it seems as if a wind
had flung wide a door
above an abyss, where all
the kingdoms of possibilities shone
like sandgrains crystalline in the mind's own sun.
(CP 176)

Indeed, even the earlier poem's "hoof fall," as an auditory stimulus to the poet's revelation, is closely paralleled in the later poem's "hoofbeats": "The hoofbeats--silent, then-- /are sounding now/ that ride/ dividing a later distance" (CP 176).

The poems which intervene between to sustain these lyrical termini present various examples of failed and successful human attunement to the Southwest. In many of them, human death is used as a measure of the tenuous hold that man has achieved on this land. The fragility of the human intrusion is emphasized not only by man's diminishment before the physical largeness of desert and mountain but, by implication, by the shortness of his life--his space of time--compared to the geological ages which have produced the Southwest. In what I have been resisting categorizing as either verse, or satire, or anecdote, that is, in poems such as "Las Trampas U.S.A.," "Mr. Brodsky," and "Chief Standing Water," that awareness of the fragility of human culture strikes closest to the poet himself: these are anecdotes

which implicate the poet in various attempts to impose an alien culture on the land.

In "Las Trampas U.S.A.," for instance, the poet, seeking a church door key, is caught up in a comedy of language errors--what another poem in the series calls "a/ dance of/ multiform confusions" (CP 173)--in which the overlays of Spanish, American, and British languages and the errors they generate are played out against the backdrop of mountain and desert. In "Mr. Brodsky," the poet refuses to participate in a Burns' Night dinner, feeling too strongly the absurdity of this cultural collision. The humour Tomlinson here wrings from Mr. Brodsky's doomed cultural yearnings recalls Hugh MacDiarmid's mock fury, in A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, aimed at the misappropriation of Burns's poetry: "You canna gang to a Burns supper even/ Wiout some wizened scrunt o a knock-knee/ Chinee turns round to say 'Him Haggis--velly goot!'/ And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney" (6). The only note of pathos sounded in either of Tomlinson's poems comes in the final lines of "Mr. Brodsky," when the poet compares the absurd fantasy of Martin J. Brodsky to the story--another anecdote--he had "heard/ before of an/ American who would have preferred/ to be merely an Indian" (CP 128). As if to counterpoint that wish, one which, even though as fanciful as Brodsky's, at least points its fantasist in the right direction--towards an understanding of the new land through its past and peoples--Tomlinson follows it with an anecdote of an Indian who wanted to be an American.

"Chief Standing Water" presents the sharpest satire of the series, probably because the poet in the anecdote it recounts is pulled closest to involvement with what he sees as a corruption of the proper relationship between self and the non-human world. Satire, as in Relations and Contraries, and as in the preceding pair of poems, seems to be a register of the self's need to assert its difference from the people and events it surveys. The Chief is a more grotesque figure than Mr Brodsky because the chief represents a failure to resist the imposition of an alien culture, Brodsky merely an indulgence of cultural eccentricity. Far from being attuned to his land, as one might reasonably expect from a people who possess "a song/ one hundred thousand/ years old," the Chief's sole cultural asset seems to be the cynicism of crude, frontier-style capitalism. He is the Indian counterpart of Buffalo Bill Cody, who, in the words of another poem, "Cimarron: a Western" (part of the same series but not included in the Collected Poems), "took the West/ on tour" (America 32). And note how well, in Fussell's terms, the word "tour" evokes a miscarriage of cultural continuity: a whole culture has been reduced to the status of tourist. In effect, the cultural impoverishment these American poems witness is exactly parallel to that of such English poems as "Gladstone Street" and "Dates: Penkhull New Road."

The Chief, like Buffalo Bill, charges for the culture he dispenses, and the poet's opinion of the price and the

product is clear from the poem's concluding reversal of one of his host's texts--"the house/ was full of texts"--from "Jesus Saves/ Courtesy pays" to "Jesus pays/ Courtesy saves." In a way, the poet's experience of the Chief's greed is a personal, if minor, experience of the possessiveness which seems to undermine many of the encounters between man and the Southwest. In "On the Mountain," the emptiness of the desert landscape which the poet contemplates is emphasized by the presence of a decaying house:

Somebody
 finding nobody there
 found gold also:
 gold gone, he
 (stark in his own redundancy)
 must needs go too
 and here, sun-warped
 and riddled by moon, decays
 his house which nobody occupies. (CP 124)

"On the Mountain" resembles a minimalist rendering of the notion that greed or possessiveness interposes between man and place; "Cimarron: a Western" is a retelling of that tale in much greater detail. Indeed, "Cimarron" is decidedly more anecdotal, even garrulous, and leans towards biography and social history, as do other of his poems not in this series, for example "A Meditation on John Constable," "Of Lady Grange," "A Biography of the Author: A Cento," and "The Littleton Whale." In these poems, the details seem to demand recording and resist distillation into lyrical abstraction.

Bigness lies at the centre of "Cimarron": a human presence which seeks to challenge the vastness of the land. Yet the over-inflated human presence, built through

exploitation of the land, collapses as surely as that vanished "somebody" of "On the Mountain." "Cimarron"--the poem which alludes to Buffalo Bill's touring show--is a satire against containment and the trivialization of culture implied by tourism. Appropriately, the vehicle for its satire is the tourist brochure--a mock-brochure--that document which so often points up man's appetite for the greedy and bloody doings of his forefathers. Both the accumulation of detail and the magnification of L.B. Maxwell's wealth betray its quasi-literary model:

the first
swell there was L.B. Maxwell
hunter and trapper from
Kaskaskia, Illinois:
by eighteen-hundred and
sixty-five, his "grant"
spanned one million and more
acres, a territory three
times the size of Rhode
Island (America 31)

The measure of Maxwell's grant is the state of Rhode Island, and the comparison is satirically accurate, at the same time capturing a common formula of such brochures and also highlighting the limitations of its own self-declared magnitude. The comparison calls to mind another American poem by Tomlinson, though not in this series, "A Word in Edgeways":

I will not
say that every literate male in
America is a soliloquist, a
ventriloquist, a strategic
egotist, an inveterate
campaigner-explainer over and
back again on the terrain of him-
self (CP 158-59)

Providing the needle to puncture Maxwell's excesses is the word "swell," judiciously selected from an English, not an American, vocabulary. The measure of the Maxwell house--"as large as a city block"--has similar overtones of self-inflation. What these comparisons, and the poem as a whole, depict is a nation's attempt to establish a noble past out of very meagre material.

All the "heroes" of the Old West are seen to be tainted by the greed of unrestrained capitalism. Buffalo Bill, Kit Carson, Tom Boggs, all, as the poem nicely phrases it, "met with the Maxwell hospitality" (America 32). A similar subversion of the popular hero occurs in "At Barstow." Like "Cimarron," "At Barstow" works its satiric effects at the expense of tourism, in this case, the ubiquitous motel. The poet's discovery of a signed photograph of Roy Rogers on the motel desk leads into a rather sad reflection on the gap between the reality of Barstow--"a placeless place"--and the myth of the western hero. The final satiric deflation in "Cimarron" is not that of a balloon burst but of an extended fizzling out of air, a slow leak of corruption which seems to infect even Maxwell's descendents who come to write up the deeds of the West. Maxwell himself slides from rancher to mine owner to banker to railroad owner, before dying a poor man. But the final satiric thrust is in the brochure's desperate reaching after one more glorious association with Cimarron:

and here the remains

of the desperado, Davy Crockett
 (said to be of the same
 kin as the "immortal" Davy
 of Alamo fame) are buried
 in a grave whose marker
 was stolen by a stranger
 claiming to be his relative. (America 32-33)

The desperate pride of needing as part of one's past someone of "the same/ kin as the 'immortal' Davy"--even if the connection is merely a rumour, even if the Cimarron Davy is a desperado--is given its final come-uppance in the theft of the grave marker "by a stranger/ claiming to be his relative." More than the vanity of Cimarron, or any other locality, is under attack here. The poem demonstrates both the shallowness of a people's roots when greed and expediency displace respect for a land and also the pathetic need to fabricate a glorious past, no matter how thin its soil.

Attunement between people and place is little in evidence in these satires. Only in those poems which reflect on the Indians who have somehow resisted the invasion of foreign cultures is there some sign of an alliance between land and people. Perhaps the poem which best differentiates the attuned culture from the unattuned is "Old Man at Valdez." It is the retold story--another anecdote--of a man who, kidnapped as a boy by the Indians, returns to his home and culture forty years later. The poem can be read as a wry commentary on the land's rapacious usurpers, such as Maxwell. What the Indians teach their white captive to be is a thief, and, as his townsman, the poem's anecdotal source, recalls: "'And we never did,' the old man says/ "see a thief like him/

in Valdez'" (CP 127). "Arizona Desert" does not diminish the harshness of life in the desert, but it notes that only patience can achieve what attunement is possible:

Here, to be,
is to sound
patience deviously
and follow
like the irregular corn
the water underground. (CP 122)

Like Maxwell's house and that of the vanished "somebody," the Hopi's dwellings also return to the land, but their disintegration is a peaceful giving back to the land of its only temporarily leased materials:

Villages
from mud and stone
parch back
to the dust they humanize
and mean
marriage, a living lease
on sand, sun, rock and
Hopi
means peace. (CP 122)

In Tomlinson's poems of the Southwest, what seems to redeem the disappearance of man and his culture is a metamorphosis of man into place. The poem following "Arizona Desert," written in memory of Homer Vance, an "old Hopi doll-maker" who dies one week before the poet's return to the desert, begins by noting the transient nature of Hopi graves. Its final image blends the time Homer Vance had been dead with the space of the desert, as if the desert were an image for the space of death:

And the week
that lay
uncrossably between us
stretched into sand,

into the spread
of the endless
waterless sea-bed beneath
whose space outpacing sight
receded as speechless and as wide as death. (CP 123)

"Ute Mountain" and "Arizona Highway" present two variations on the metamorphosis of man into place. In "Ute Mountain," the entire Southwest takes on the shape of a mythic Indian chief. His legendary words--"'if you need me, call me'" (CP 135)--in effect are the means by which the eye measures out the place: "Reading it so, the eye/ can take the entire great/ straddle of mountain-mass,/ passing down elbows, knees and feet." In "Arizona Highway," the poet himself experiences a fusion with the desert. In part, the experience is brought about by the intrusion of the day's monotonous routine into the poet's sleep. The image recalls Frost's "After Apple-Picking," but here the monotony comes from highway-driving:

To become the face of space,
snatching a flowing mask
of emptiness
from where the parallels meet.

One is no more
than invaded transparency, until
on falling asleep, one can feel
them travelling through one still. (CP 133)

As in "The Cavern," the poet bodies forth to make his own body his measure of the place. On waking, he finds himself blended with the place, in a way parallel to that of the mythic chief:

When I wake,
hands and head
are in sand, ants are shifting,

inspecting the remains of breakfast,
and on the lips and tongue
burns the fine-ground glass of the sand grains. (CP 133)

These poems at the same time that they realize an attunement between man and place also recognize a new sense of the space of possibility. Perhaps nowhere in England could the physical fact of space present itself so persistently; only the Southwest affords the poet the opportunity to blend himself quite so literally with space, "To become the face of space," as his geographic rhyme puts it.

3. Poetry and Politics: "History Treads Out the Music of
Your Dreams"

*"Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?"*

--Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel" (107).

In an essay in praise of Auden and MacNeice's Letters from Iceland, Tom Paulin declares that the effect of that work on him was to throw into radical doubt the value of non-political poetry:

For me, the total effect of their work, and especially of Letters from Iceland, is to make it impossible to read a volume of nature or rural poetry (especially by any poet writing after the Second World War) without being affected by a peculiar feeling of emptiness. Without human or political content nature means very little, and to describe it in isolation from that content is to abdicate the responsibility to be relevant which Auden and MacNeice impose on themselves and us--indeed it is to recommend, however unconsciously, such an abdication. (75)

Paulin's dismissal is more or less sweeping according to what we take the phrase "human or political content" to mean. However broadly or narrowly that phrase may be defined, Paulin's remarks, especially as they relate to political poetry, may cause us to re-examine the old contention that Tomlinson's poetry lacks a human content. At least after The Necklace, no one can take seriously the charge that his poetry, however immersed in the world of things, lacks that component. Michael Kirkham remarks, "Much of Tomlinson's work invalidates the distinction generally drawn, in discussions of it, between poems about sense experience and poems on human themes" (311). But the human, both in

the minds of Tomlinson's critics and in Paulin's mind, may be subordinate to the political. What lies behind both may be the idea that politics and culture are indissolubly mixed and that a poetry which does not show awareness of that fact necessarily brings upon itself Paulin's charge that "it is to recommend, however unconsciously, such an abdication."

The idea of travel brings us into a political realm in a more direct way than any previously considered aspect of Tomlinson's poetry. Travel, as we have seen, places the poet within new landscapes but also within more or less peopled landscapes, that is, travel raises the problem of how other cultures have married with their places and of how they have been governed. Looked at in the light of his prevailing concern with opening up British poetry to wider influences, Tomlinson's travels and the emphasis he places on travel assume the outline of an almost doctrinaire position: if giving things their due is the way in, then travel is the way out. Yet if travel gives considerable weight to his argument for embracing other cultural influences, it is only fair to give serious consideration to his critics' contention that such influences are pernicious: culture and politics may not, after all, be hermetically sealed one from the other. Perhaps the obverse of Tomlinson's travel poetry is his political poetry.

Although his travel poems may be seen as merely an extension to foreign territories of his aesthetic need to give the thing its due, a closer scrutiny reveals

an interesting conjunction between his political and his travel poems. Tomlinson himself has pointed to "Up at La Serra" as one of his first political poems, and that poem was written from his experience of travelling to Italy. More recently, "At Trotsky's House" takes up the political theme of a previous poem about Trotsky, "Assassin," drawing its form from a visit to the revolutionary's former Mexican house. In a similar way, his poem "Over Elizabeth Bridge: a Circumvention" meditates on the difficulty the poet had to overcome before he could write of the impression that bridge had once made upon him--again, an impression presumably acquired during his travels to Hungary, though whether or not he saw the bridge at first hand does not disturb the point of my argument: that politics and travel are closely joined in his poetry. His poem "Tarquinia," like the preceding examples, fits a political meditation to a poem again presumably, though not necessarily, arising from an experience in his travels.

In the course of a 1981 interview, Alan Ross asked Tomlinson, with some evident degree of tentativeness or even embarrassment, if "committed poetry"--"a commitment to political action of some kind, a vague radicalism"--had any meaning to him. Tomlinson's answer distinguishes between two kinds of political poetry. On the one hand is what one might call propagandistic poetry, poetry, as he characterizes it, which urges "liberal sentiments that your audience agrees with anyway--knowing in advance what it is your poem has to

say and then joining your auditors in a bath of self-righteous indignation" (39). The example of this kind of political poetry that he cites is the Vietnam poems "which were so much to the fore in public readings in America in the 'sixties," and his opinion of those is not high: "pretty corny little things they look now." On the other hand is a poetry which is political in the sense that it takes a political situation for its subject:

in poems like "Assassin" . . . and "Prometheus," not to mention "Over Elizabeth Bridge . . . I've written poems *about* political situations. I began as early as "Up at La Serra" in A Peopled Landscape, where I see a young boy trapped in a situation in which unemployment is the chief threat. And in my last book, I try to imagine what it was like to be Charlotte Corday, Danton, J. L. David, at the time of the French Revolution. But the measure of these poems oughtn't to be that they're committed to a political reality (though they are), but whether I've preserved the language there in which such things can be written of--whether my duty to language has been maintained and I've thus succeeded in reconciling public and private concerns. ("Words and Water" 39)

In distinguishing poetry *about* political situations from propagandistic or *committed* poetry, Tomlinson seems to be implying that political action finds no useful outlet in poetry.

The new imaginative space Tomlinson found in America is also a new political space. And we may consider his political poems as a group as constituting the answer to the question why he made such extensive use of anecdote in his travel poems. Travel does broaden the mind, as his America Southwest series demonstrates: the space of possibility expands when the poet immerses himself in the foreign. But,

as we have noticed also, those poems show the poet struggling anew with possessiveness. The preponderance of anecdotal poetry in this series is the critical feature here. The anecdotal poems balance between the defensive, satiric, and possessive forms of his earliest poetry, in Relations and Contraries, and a new recognition of the value of anecdote as a way to break down those defences.

This sometimes uneasy balance is itself indicative that he bears his struggle against the parochial into the new world--and worlds. In other words, what manifests itself as anecdote may be seen as a recognition of the political dimension of culture, and the uneasiness and unevenness of the Southwest series show that he finds this aspect of his critics' position the hardest with which to deal: if assimilation of foreign cultural influences entails the assimilation of political views as well, does this entailment undermine the value of foreign influence? The way that we are governed may be itself a strong boundary, and if neither Tomlinson nor his critics have engaged in their debate on political grounds, may not their cultural difference of opinion nevertheless be seen to be grounded in politics? Tomlinson's dialectic of possessiveness and possibility may be engendered and fueled not by aesthetics alone but by politics as well. That dialectic, in all its ramifications, may be but the surface movement of an unresolved political struggle: does the cultural include the political? If it does, are foreign cultures therefore more threatening than

they would otherwise be? That is, do they threaten the concept of the state, raising issues which we may have assumed as long settled: How should we govern ourselves? Who should have power?

Tomlinson's political poems form an interesting counterpart to that larger body of his poetry which embodies his aesthetic of giving things their due. If we interpret his political poems in accord with this aesthetic, then they become admonitory portraits of egos which have, in effect, themselves breached that aesthetic. Charlotte Corday, Marat, Danton, and Trotsky all failed to put aside--indeed, passionately embraced--"the more possessive and violent claims of personality." They have not only made a stone of the heart but a stone of the tongue as well: each has broken faith with the porous nature of things--even stone things. Their aesthetic, an aesthetic based on possessiveness and violence, is, in a sense, deconstructed by the poet's words. Those who would raise monuments of permanence, without regard to the cost in human life or to the fact of change, are, in Stevens's phrase, "part of the mythology of modern death" (Collected 435). The poems which contain these portraits of extremist politicians demonstrate Tomlinson's fundamental departure from the modernist lyric viewed as an unassailable monument. The anecdotal form of Tomlinson's container-poems subverts the permanency to which their subjects would lay claim. In a sense, we see more clearly in these poems the full implications of the argument he puts

forward in "The Chances of Rhyme" and elsewhere that poems are not at the brink. Poems belong in this world, our world of change, not in the death-like world of perfection and permanence. Those poets who push poetry to the brink are close kin to political extremists, and the exchange which both propose is the sacrifice of the poet's--or politician's--life for the hope of permanence for their poems or ideas; his poem "Against Extremity" is a kind of prayer against the fascination with endings and the possessiveness that fascination produces:

Against extremity, let there be
 Such treaties as only time itself
 Can ratify, a bond and test
 Of sequential days, and like the full
 Moon slowly given to the night,
 A possession that is not to be possessed. (CP 163)

"Up at La Serra" is a poem for which Tomlinson has expressed some fondness and which may be thought of as his *first* political poem. The poem meditates on the pathos of the political endeavour particularized in a local election victory of a left-wing party. In particular, as Tomlinson remarks to Alan Ross, his poem sympathizes "with a young boy trapped in a situation in which unemployment is the chief threat" (39): a young boy who happens also to be a poet:

He knew, at twenty
 all the deprivations such a place
 stored for the man
 who had no more to offer
 than a sheaf of verse
 in the style of Quasimodo. (CP 78)

As a visitor but also a friend to those caught up in the political proceedings, the poet steers between cynical detachment and sentimentality: as an outsider, he can see the local events in a broader perspective; as a friend, he can sympathize with the feelings which move these people towards politics as a solution to their present poverty. The poem would seem to be political, not in the propagandistic sense, but rather in the sense that it takes politics as a subject for poetic meditation. Implicitly, it asserts the authority of poetry over politics both in a normative sense and in a practical sense: poetry permits us to see more than politics does. The superiority of the poetic vision over the political one is made more explicitly in other places in his writings. The approach taken on this issue is closely connected with his thinking about the nature of poetry itself. The extremity in poetry against which he inveighs in several poems is simply the poetic expression of a dangerously narrow way of looking at the world. Once again, the argument against extremity both in poetry and in politics goes back to the relationship between the self and the world. The poem which would assert the self over the world is akin to the politician who would make his will prevail. This idea turns up early on in his work in a striking image from his poem, "Le Musée Imaginaire": "An Aztec sacrifice/ beside the head of Pope" (CP 86).

Yet the claim that poetry is superior to politics leaves unanswered the question of what political system

should exist. Poetry, in "Up at La Serra," has a function in relation to politics. Poetry performs a meliorating, mediating, critical function in relation to politics, both as lyric and as anecdote. As anecdote--and we have seen this in the Southwest series as well--poetry can replant both politics' abstract ends and also its expeditiously crude means in the rich and complex earth of human desire and community. "Up at La Serra" shows the need for some such political faith as communism as well as its inevitable limits. The anecdote here provides Tomlinson's primary means of achieving the necessary stilling of the self before the human other: it allows the human other to speak and be heard on its own terms. The lyric, on the other hand, formalizes that witness or testing. The more the shaping of lyric shakes the roots of anecdote free from its human earth, the nearer we come to pure lyric, abstracted from the particular human plot, but also, neither coincidentally nor incidentally, the nearer we come to political speech or rhetoric: the lyric, not the anecdote, is the voice of politics.

Yet anecdote appears itself already half-way to lyric: anecdote is the layman/orator's attempt to formalize and abstract, to order his experience in language. So the difference between anecdote and lyric may seem to be much more one of degree than of kind. Nevertheless, taking the further step into the domain of poetry may indeed constitute a difference of kind. Poetry, as we saw in Chapter one, is

the most possessive art--or can be. And where the anecdotalist's words remain open to the change, even while the anecdotalist speaks, the poet's words, hardened into the poem, can no longer change in quite the same way: the lyricist/poet bargains away that communal openness for the hope of permanence--which is akin to the hope of perfection. In political terms, the poet's hope is that he may serve his community all the better by withdrawing his words from the flux of communal intercourse into a higher domain: one with the authority of permanent record, a witness tantamount to law. The long tradition of the poet as seer rests on this bargain, and the two most salient features of the poet as seer--his distance from the community and his visionary power--spell out its terms. The legal metaphor Shelley uses in his famous pronouncement--"Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"--is perfectly in keeping with the economy of this change from anecdote to lyric.

"Up at La Serra" merges its general observations about the townspeople with their night of victory, when the local communists win the election:

The construction
 continued as heretofore
 on the villa of the Milanese dentist
 as the evening
 came with news:
 --We have won
 the election.
 --At the cafe
 the red flag is up (CP 81)

Juxtaposed with their celebrations is the poet/visitor's departure from the town for the cliff-top overlooking the

sea: "He turned his back/ quickly beneath the tower" (CP 81).
 The poem ends on the cliff, traditional setting for poets,
 and on the poet's announcement that he is writing a poem
 about the victory:

*I am writing
 a poem about it:
 it will begin
 here, with the cliff and with the sea
 following its morning shadow in.*

The poem--the poem which we have--is not the poem that the townspeople would expect as a celebration of their victory. It does not, for example, celebrate that victory in any usual socialist formulation. The poem frames that victory by taking account of the things which qualify and determine it: the old struggles between man and church, between man and woman; the stratagems necessary for scraping even a meagre living from the land. Even the way in which the poet's local friends describe the nature of their political project to their English visitors reflects this qualifying:

*We are not communists
 although we call ourselves communists
 we are what you English
 would call . . . socialists. (CP 80)*

The poet sees and records in his poem the unadmitted yearning not for a property-less society but for more property; the poem hints at an engrained entrepreneurship, a possessive spirit contrary to the ideals of Marx:

Some
 carried down crickets
 to the garden of the mad Englishwoman
 who could
 not
 tolerate

crickets, and they received
soldi, soldi
 for recapturing them . . . (CP 80-81)

From the special vantage of the visitor, both detached from but sympathetic to these people, the poet can see the limits of their new faith in Marxism, limits to which they are blind. By his simple listing of the forces of religion, gender, and art, the poet performs a Marxist deconstruction of Marxism. Implicitly, the poem denies that these forces can ever be subsumed one by another or all by the Marxist hypothesis of class struggle. The sea, in contemplation of which the poem begins and ends, does not offer so much a consolation or refuge from the human political invariables as a metaphor for them:

Distance
 did not obscure
 the machine of nature:
 you could watch it
 squander and recompose itself
 all day, the shadow-run
 the sway of the necessity down there
 at the cliff-base
 crushing white from blue. (CP 78)

The Shaft (1978) is much concerned with perfection, specifically, the poet's and the politician's notions of that concept. The opening poem in the volume, "Charlotte Corday," suggests a parallel between these two searchers for perfection. The blow of the dagger with which Corday assassinates Marat is a "faultless blow" (CP 275), and Corday herself is described as "a daggered Virtue" (CP 276): "She struck him from above. One thrust. Her whole/ Intent and innocence directing it/ To breach through flesh and enter

where it must,/ It seemed a blow that rose up from within" (CP 275). The image of the dagger blow relates to that of the volume's title and to the poem of the same title: "The shaft seemed like a place of sacrifice" (CP 306). In the later poem, the mine-shaft suggests a place of sacrifice; in "Charlotte Corday" the blow suggests the making of a place of sacrifice. Sacrifice, it seems, is part of perfection.

Although "Charlotte Corday" does not condone Corday's act of murder, the poem sympathizes with her impulse, even as it recognizes her foolish naivete. In particular, the poem sympathizes with Corday from the point of view of the poet or artist: he who would create and preserve. The mine in "The Shaft" is a place of sacrifice because there men have sacrificed themselves through their work, by sometimes giving up their lives, but also by merely working in a place of hardship and risk. Both poems suggest that a kind of perfection, a kind of sacrifice, were present in these places, and in both poems the poet seeks to preserve and commemorate--to sanctify--what happened in each. The shaft is a "cathedral space," and the long-dead miners are "pharaohs/ Awaiting excavation" (CP 306).

Charlotte Corday is a political martyr who sacrifices her life for the hope of saving France. The poem polarizes the perspectives on the assassination. On the one hand, the poem creates an unassigned perspective--that of verse three--which sympathizes with her act, or at least with its impulse. On the other hand, it provides the perspective of Tinville,

the public prosecutor, and of the law he defends: "Tinville reduced it all to expertise." Yet the ironies which undermine the expertise of Corday's naive act are as nothing compared to those which lurk behind the "expertise" of a regime poised on the brink of the Terror. The words of the court may be more distorting, more guilty, than Corday's act. The particular sympathy the poem propounds for Corday derives from an implicit parallel between Corday and poetry. Her act is like a poetic gesture. Part of the impetus for her act comes from her reading of Plutarch; in other words, hers is a gesture from *literature*, from history, and from the authority of books. Her act seeks to challenge and overthrow the political authority of her time. She is the embodiment of the book, the will to preserve and cherish, to sustain cultural continuity and tradition, in short, the poetic impulse. Corday is the poet armed in time of political chaos, the poet in extremis--"it seemed a blow that rose up from within." In her desperation, the pen metamorphoses into a dagger.

To discover the *poem* Corday wished to create, we must turn to the following poem, "Marat Dead," a meditation on Jacques Louis David's painting of the assassination of Marat by Charlotte Corday. Like "Charlotte Corday," "Marat Dead" seeks to articulate the universality of the assassination. Marat died trusting and generous: "Words in this painting victimize us all/ Tyro or tyrant, neither shall evade/ Such weapons" (CP 277). The poem absolves Marat in much the same way

that the preceding one absolves Corday. But from this perspective--that of Marat or of David's Marat--treachery causes his death. Yet the elements of treachery are not located in Corday, the individual, but rather in the very existence of trust and generosity, universal and necessary virtues:

Words in this painting victimize us all:
 Tyro or tyrant, neither shall evade
 Such weapons: reader, you grow rational
 And miss those sharp intentions that have preyed
 On trusting literacy here: unmanned
 By generosity and words you fall,
 Sprawl forwards bleeding with your pen in hand.
 (CP 277)

The primary "reader" in these lines is Marat, stabbed while still reading Corday's letter, but the implied, secondary reader is the reader of the poem. The corruption of the pen to the dagger, of words to violence, is the universal element: "Words in this painting victimize us all." Corday, because she trespasses beyond words to violence, corrupts language: "Marat's best monument with this began,/ That all her presence here's a truthless scrawl" (CP 278).

The final two poems in the series broaden out from the scene of Marat's murder. "A Self-Portrait: David" traces the genealogy of Marat's death to the painter's self: the man who painted the assassination, Jacques Louis David. Structured as a dramatic monologue spoken by the painter's self-portrait, the poem reads that portrait as a confession of ignorance and takes it as a measure for reading all his art. The measure of truth in his works lies in the presence

of that same confession of uncertainty: "distrust/
 Whatever I may do unless it show/ A startled truth as in
 these eyes' misgivings,/ These lips that, closed, confess 'I
 do not know'"(CP 278).

"For Danton" is a fitting conclusion to the series. The poem imagines Danton's return to his birthplace, Arcis-sur-Aube, shortly before his arrest in Paris. In that return, Tomlinson sees the juxtaposition of two powers, that of politics and that of nature. In a sense, his recreation of Danton's last days envisions his return as a confession of the failure of extreme politics. If David's self-portrait confesses "'I do not know'," Danton's return to his rural birthplace confesses regret for having broken faith with the natural world in his desire for the power of rule:

Destroyed and superseded, then secure
 In the possession of a perfect power
 Returned to this: to river, town and plain,
 Walked in the fields and knew what power he'd lost,
 The cost to him of that metropolis where
 He must come back to rule and Robespierre. (CP 279)

The "power he'd lost" is that of the poet's faith: the nurturing relationship with things and places. Danton's is a time "in love with endings" (CP 163), and, until his return, Danton was part of his time, but his confessional return is evidence of a renewed treaty with that forsaken world of his childhood. Too late, Danton recognizes the "contrary perfection" he had forgotten in his quest for "the possession of a perfect power."

"For Danton" not only rounds out Tomlinson's series of

meditations on the French Revolution, it also marshalls most of the metaphors this thesis has been exploring: resipiscence or the recognition of error, possessiveness, music, travel, and the geography of rhyme. By centering on Danton's little journey, the poem borrows from the pattern of the traveling-poet and transposes that bodying-forth onto the politician: the poem *makes* Danton a traveller, just as his return to Arcis-sur-Aube *makes* Danton a poet. Moreover, the poem makes an even closer identification between the poet and the politician, or, more precisely, an even more personal metamorphosis of the politician into the poet. The poem presents Danton listening to the river "Chiming his life away," an image recalling the basic figure of "Poem":

The stream comes on. Its music deafens him
 To other sounds, to past and future wrong.
 The beat is regular beneath that song.
 He hears in it a pulse that is his own;
 He hears the year autumnal and complete. (CP 279)

But unlike the poet, Danton discovers his geographical rhyme--his identity with "river, town and plain"--with no time remaining for him to create and enjoy. Yet if the poem must finally relinquish *its* Danton to *history's* and the facts of his arrest, trial, and condemnation, nevertheless it returns him--a confessed and absolved Danton--on its own, poetic terms. Here, if anywhere, is the victory of poetry: the poem subordinates whatever other forces pulled Danton back to Paris and his death to the law of rhyme:

This contrary perfection he
 Must taste into a life he has no time
 To live, a lingered, snatched maturity

restraint and discipline: he will not be tempted to mistake words for things. The extremists lapse into the error of conceiving of the world as a world of words; indeed, assassination seems to them to be no more than words.

Both Charlotte Corday and Trotsky's assassin seem to move as in a dream in performing their acts of murder, and both poems dramatize the awakening from that dream by making it simultaneous with the murder itself. The significances of their awakenings are exactly parallel to that of Danton as he leans against the bridge in Arcis-sur-Aube. The memory of Marat's dying cry--pre-verbal, inarticulately human--seems to haunt Corday: "Perhaps it was the memory of that cry/ That cost her most. . . ." (CP 276). In the same way, Trotsky's assassin is unnerved by the cry of his victim:

The blood wells. Prepared for this
 This I can bear. But papers
 Snow to the ground with a whispered roar:
 The voice, cleaving their crescendo, is his
 Voice, and his the animal cry
 That has me then by the roots of the hair. (CP 162)

Aural space which frees the poet from the deadened constraints of the eye, betrays the assassin, awakening him to his--and his victim's--common humanity. Sound, rather than sight, performs this task, in part because the victim's cry itself stands posed precisely on the intersection of language with non-language, of existence with extinction. But in part too the very centreless, boundless nature of sound creates and fills--as it creates and fills in "Poem"--a world entire.

A somewhat parallel instance of a nightmare world created by a victim's cry appears in Tomlinson's "The Scream." There, the poet awakes to a cry that "seemed to be everywhere": "A dream/ Had delivered me to this, and a dream/ Once more seemed to possess one's mind" (CP 310). Lacking visual points of reference, the poet in "The Scream" is at the mercy of his wildest imaginings. Only when his eye finally discerns the actual source of the scream can they be dispelled:

It took reason
To unknot the ravel that hindered thought,
And reason could distinguish what was there,
But could no more bear the cry
Than the untaught ear. (CP 310)

Clearly, Tomlinson's political poems are not intended as strict biography. Rather, they take events which, in Tomlinson's view, have had great significance in the unfolding of human affairs, and use a kind of poetic identification to dramatize their common truth about extremism. Imaginative identification seems to be the way that poetry can best accommodate political subjects. Tomlinson has praised Vallejo's poems "in which he identifies himself with the Peruvian *chollo*, without urging solutions or attitudes" ("Words and Water" 39). And Tomlinson seems to have aimed for a similar effect in his revolution series: "I try to imagine what it was like to be Charlotte Corday, Danton, J.L. David, at the time of the French Revolution" ("Words and Water" 39). Yet these poems written close upon a particularly unsettled period in recent history also seem at

least indirectly to reflect that period. The assassinations of the Kennedys and of Martin Luther King were in the first instance American events but carried great and immediate international impact; perhaps these poems register that impact on an English poet with strong American sympathies.

In a later poem, "At Trotsky's House," the poet visits the home in which Trotsky was living when he was assassinated. Once again, the poem meditates on a place of assassination, and once again the place coincides with a place of writing, a place where writing leaves off and violence begins. Words form a continuity at this historic meeting place, flowing from before the assassination through the assassination and on up to the present. Even the moment itself when Trotsky is murdered is signified by words: "Words, words . . . there are cylinders/ for the silent dictaphone/ and a bottle of Waterman's Ink long dry" (Notes from New York 59). But these words are dry and lifeless, the end-point, the extremity--in a different sense from that of "The Chances of Rhyme"--of language. They are words become things in a metamorphosis which runs directly counter to the poet's goal of bodying things forth: Trotsky's living words have become mere dead things: "the books, the pamphlets . . . the silent dictaphone." The poet asks: "And this is the way he left things/ the day of the assassination?" The phrase "left things" asks a double emphasis: both on the sense of the state or disposition of objects in Trotsky's room at his death but a still stronger

emphasis on the wider and wider meanings of "things": his words, his set of ideas, our world of words, ideas, objects, all of which, at least from the dead Trotsky's perspective, can be summed up as "things."

Having summoned up an image of a departed, far-distant Trotsky, the flow of words continues, eddying around and past his absence. The meditation takes its conclusion from that absence. Trotsky's grandson, his grandfather's curator, whose words of explanation have replaced and further distanced in their way his grandfather's living words, changing them from rhetoric for action to curios, mementos, one more "long dry" set of objects left behind, is "courteous in three languages." The poem thus turns the reader's attention upon both Trotsky's descendant and the question of descent as we register the irony that the grandson of a murdered revolutionary should display such bourgeois courtesy. Moreover, the languages in which he displays this courtesy--English, Spanish, French--themselves force the question: "Does he never return to Europe?" In other words, the grandson's maintenance of Trotsky's Mexican house seems revealed as the erosion and co-opting of the revolutionary spirit. As in "Cimarron," so here Tomlinson emphasizes the way in which such shrines or monuments, whether dedicated to the American frontier myth or to the myth of a martyred revolutionary, are undermined by the exigencies and pressures of their descendants and curators. The grandson's facility in three languages and his courtesy to those who visit the

house cannot escape being read as in some measure antithetical to the revolutionary they purport to serve. Trotsky's house, bathed in the strains of that quintessential bourgeois music, "Tales from the Vienna Woods," has become a site for tourists.

Thus the irony of the question--"Does he never return to Europe?": If the grandson were to return (which we immediately learn he does), his return itself must stand in stark and ironic contrast to that long-planned return of his grandfather to Europe. The grandson must inevitably return as a mere tourist. And, indeed, his reply--"*De temps en temps*"--redoubles the question's ironic implications: the grandson does not make *one* return, as Trotsky would have, but *returns*, in the plural, casual returns, each one cutting a little more substance away from that never-to-be-achieved revolutionary return. Even the choice of language--French--in which he makes his courteous and casual reply contains its own irony: French, the language of 1789, of *that* revolution, undercut by speaker, situation, and tenor: "*De temps en temps*." No proscription, no edict of exile or threat of death hangs over those returns. To step from the unreality of Trotsky's house/museum into its Mexican garden is to feel that unreality compounded and to feel far distanced from "Europe, or one's own part of it." It is also to realize how far from ever being completed are Trotsky's hopes for revolution:

Europe, or one's own part of it,

seems a distant planet:
 and the Moscow
 to which the urn of ashes
 is awaiting its return
 lies kremlined forever in historic snow.
 (Notes from New York 59)

As in "Up at La Serra" and the other political poems we have examined, so in "At Trotsky's House" the broader perspective of the poet encompasses that narrower one of the political extremist.

The obliquity of Tomlinson's approach to current political events can also be seen in "Tarquinia." The poem meditates on the possible meanings of a graffito: "*Vince Viet Cong!*" What the poem deduces is that both of its possible grammatical meanings are either naive or improbable in their sentiment. If the slogan is not a simple statement of fact ("is winning"), but an expression of sentiment ("let them win"), the victory, so history has shown frequently enough, may well be a hollow one. The slogan seems naive, unmindful of history, especially of Etruscan history. The street scene which contrasts with the slogan underlines the doubtful rewards of conquest:

Said Forster,
 "Let yourself be crushed." They fought and were.
 A woman goes past, bent by the weight
 Of the trussed fowl she is trailing. The cross
 Swings from her neck in accompaniment.
 The eyes of the winged horses
 That rode on the citadel are still keen
 With the intelligence of a lost art.
Vince Viet Cong! What is it they mean? (CP 211)

Graffiti cut out and dispense with previous texts. They attempt to break free from the literate heritage of writing,

history, books, by inscribing their message on walls and buildings. Moreover, the by-passing of history should not be seen as an ingenuous desire for direct communication and contact with the people. Rather, their messages suppress communication by feigning political action. Graffiti are both text and defacement, both an act--albeit a small one--against the present social order and a use of language as language. However, their use of language as language bears a responsibility that graffiti obscure and disclaim beneath a political gesture of disobedience: the meanings of their words are not to be meditated, not to be questioned, indeed, should be construed scarcely as language but rather as a political example: *facta non verba*.

The problems which political action poses for the writer and for poetry emerge whenever Tomlinson addresses a political subject. In the course of his reply to Alan Ross's question concerning committed poetry, Tomlinson tells an anecdote about George Oppen "who lived through the 'thirties as a member of the Communist Party, but refused to write 'political' poetry":

He says that he saw men who needed feeding and since you couldn't feed them by writing poetry, he went into poor-relief work. He also said that he didn't believe in the honesty of a man's declaring, "Well, I'm a poet and I will make my contribution to the cause by writing poems about it." His reply to that one was, "I don't believe that's anymore honest than to make wooden nutmegs because you happen to be a wood-worker. If you decide to do something politically, you do something that has political efficacy. And if you decide to write poetry, then you write poetry, not something that you hope, or deceive yourself into believing, can save people who

are suffering." I really let George answer that question for me ("Words and Water" 39)

Tomlinson's--and Oppen's--response quite clearly denies the political efficacy of poetry. Apparently, according to the other half of Tomlinson's reply, poetry can take politics as a subject, but in so doing it aestheticizes the political. The implication here is that poetry is not politically efficacious because that which poets and their poems take up as subjects necessarily becomes subsumed by the aesthetic domain. What is the contrary here? That is, if the close-guarding of poetry's power against territorial incursions by the political lies behind this defense of poetry, is there a counter movement in Tomlinson's poetry that works against this resistance? Does the barrier between the political and the aesthetic ever come down, or at least crack, in his poetry?

Perhaps some recognition of the possible co-existence of the aesthetic and the political in poetry appears in "Over Elizabeth Bridge: a Circumvention" which begins:

Three years, now, the curve of Elizabeth Bridge
Has caught at some half-answering turn of mind--
Not recollection, but uncertainty
Why memory should need so long to find
A place and peace for it: that uncertainty
And restless counterpointing of a verse
"So wary of its I," Ivan, is me:

Why should I hesitate to fix a meaning? (CP 226)

The "curious sort of courteousness" which the bridge expresses in its curve is paralleled in the last verse to the life and work of the Hungarian poet, Attila József. The poem's epigraph (dedicated "To a friend in Budapest") quotes

from József's poem "By the Danube": "' . . . my heart which owes this past a calm future.'" As Tomlinson's footnote comments, József "killed himself in the thirties," and though, as his poem avers, "That reckoning/ Which József owed was cancelled in his blood,' yet like Elizabeth Bridge "his promise veered beyond the act,/ His verse grown calm with all it had withstood" (CP 227). József's suicide, like the assassinations of Marat and Trotsky, and like the act of painting graffiti on a wall, is a political act. But the swerve of the bridge stands in defiance and resistance to such acts of extremity in precisely the way that Tomlinson wishes poetry to stand. The bridge, in this poem, is a metonymy for poetry, and neither the bridge nor József's poetry should be thought of as bids for permanence. Each embodies a human will and character which stands in opposition to extremist acts. In a sense, they represent the "other voice" which Paz maintains is the true voice of poetry. In fact, Tomlinson himself has noted this aspect of Paz's work: "For Paz insists on the non-ideological nature of poetry. 'Poetry is the other voice,' he writes, 'Not the voice of history or of antihistory, but the voice which, in history, is always saying something different'" (Configurations n.pag.). Elizabeth Bridge--that unmistakable *thing*--is the means by which the poet remembers Hungary; its "curious sort of courteousness" is an objective correlative for the stubbornly human quality which persists in Hungary, despite its chaotic history as "a highroad and a

battlefield" for Europe and Asia.

Read in conjunction with the comparatively non-violent history of Stoke--though, as his poems show, Stoke's is a tragic history too--the poem's reversal of the poetically more usual trope of asserting poetry's supremacy, or at least relative permanence, over things draws out the pathos of the final lines of that home-grown poem, "Dates: Penkhull New Road." "Elizabeth Bridge" gives things their due through this reversal: it is the thing (the bridge) before the word (poetry). "Dates" ends on a note of regret for the loss of its things: "It took time to convince me that I cared/ For more than beauty: I write to rescue/ What is no longer there--absurd/ A place should be more fragile than a book" (CP 245). Here, the poet's book (poetry) stands in metonymic--and heroic--relation to the vanished *things* of his boyhood Stoke: houses, buildings, streets. But in "Elizabeth Bridge," even though the poem ends by affirming the same parallel between the bridge (Hungary, Budapest) and József's poetry as between Stoke and Tomlinson's poetry, the efficacy or smoothness of transition--the very ability of poetry to *rescue*--is at the same time called into question.

Memory and poetic memorialization are the means by which the poet may rescue the past. But the opening verse implies a second and somewhat contrary sense to the word "curve" and equally present in its near synonyms: "swerve" (verse four) and "veered" (verse six). The poem itself swerves away from this secondary sense on which it begins. Verse one draws a

parallel between the curve of the bridge and the poet's "half-answering turn of mind." But that parallel--his "uncertainty/ Why memory should need so long to find/ A place and peace for it"--is itself swerved away from as the poem proceeds. What takes its place instead is the secondary parallel between the curve of the bridge and Attila József's verse, which "veered beyond the act" of the poet's suicide. The poem does not directly answer the question posed in verse two: "Why should I hesitate to fix a meaning?" One implication is that the poet hesitated out of respect for the life and death of József. Too quick a fixing of meaning would be too facile a taking over by poetry of that life and death from the political reality in which József lived and died. That swerving away is a direct expression of what Seamus Heaney calls "the great paradox of poetry"--more direct, perhaps, than many poems manage:

Here is the great paradox of poetry and of the imaginative arts in general. Faced with the brutality of the historical onslaught, they are practically useless. Yet they verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the ore of self which lies at the base of every individuated life. In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil--no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed. (Heaney 107)

The very uncertainty and hesitancy of composition must be introduced into Tomlinson's poem in order to attest to the value of the aesthetic itself. In that tone of uncertainty is an acknowledgement of the co-existence of the political and the aesthetic. This is neither the propagandistic, or

committed poetry, which Tomlinson dismisses as inefficacious, nor is it yet quite of the same order of sympathy as those poems in which he identifies with a figure caught up in the political events of quickly changing times, though it bears a resemblance to them.

In Tomlinson's Preface to his Collected Poems, he sets forth two aesthetic credos. The first expresses a belief in the need to discipline the self before the object in poetry, and the Preface points to its partial achievement in "Poem": "I realized, when I wrote it, that I was approaching the sort of thing I wanted to do, where space represented possibility and where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully, putting aside the more possessive and violent claims of personality" (CP vii). "Over Elizabeth Bridge" swerves towards that credo's fulfillment too, yet the trajectory of its swerve--or error--is a palimpsest with traces of a different aesthetic, one also pointed to in the Preface: "The title Relations and Contraries proved to contain a dialectic very fundamental for subsequent poems." The first aesthetic credo finds its trajectory in "Poem": "The hooves describe an arabesque on space,/ A dotted line in sound that falls and rises" (CP xix). But "Over Elizabeth Bridge" recognizes by its swerve that "the more possessive and violent claims of personality" cannot be put aside, or swerved away from without leaving a trace or signature of that excluded and politically formed "I"--its contrary. The cryptic final line to the first verse

suggests that the precise point of sympathy between Tomlinson and József--the free Western poet and the threatened Eastern poet--is the fear of expressing the "I": "'So wary of its I,' Ivan, is me." (CP 226). Their common enemy is not external but internal: the fear that always threatens to silence contrary speech.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to read Tomlinson's poetry in the light of a dialectic he refers to in the Preface to his Collected Poems. His first paragraph there describes how his poem "Poem" represents his first successful attempt to achieve "the sort of thing I wanted to do" in poetry, that is, to put aside "the more possessive and violent claims of personality" for a space of possibility. The last sentence of that paragraph draws our attention to the title of the pamphlet in which "Poem" appeared: "The title Relations and Contraries proved to contain a dialectic very fundamental for subsequent poems" (CP vii). As I argued in my first chapter, the proprietary element of literary entitling demands careful consideration in a reading of Tomlinson's poetic as a dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. Tomlinson here points out that the title of his first pamphlet was, like "Poem," an achievement of sorts because it enunciated a method which, as he says, was "very fundamental for subsequent poems." In fact, "relations and contraries" does not so much "contain a dialectic" as define the dialectic process as an analysis of the contradictions between apparently related things, and the relations between apparently contradictory things. Thus, both his first poem

and his first title achieve, at least in retrospect, a prophetic, initiatory status. Yet even as titles, neither can escape altogether from the contrary pole of the dialectic of possessiveness and possibility. The very assertion of prophecy enhances the original works' value as original works by fabricating a tradition, both of art and method.

Beginning with the idea that the dialectic of possibility and possessiveness is a fundamental dialectic for Tomlinson, this thesis has shown how "Eden" has functioned as a new word, expressing not the idea of a supernatural world but of a natural one, a name for the space of possibility. By relating his work to that of one of his major influences, Wallace Stevens, I have tried to show one of the ways in which that dialectic came into being. In places that dialectic assumes the coordinates of specific latitudes and longitudes, and my thesis has also tried to show how important a sense of place is to his work by describing some of its basic constituents: stone, water, people, and music. Finally, I have argued that this dialectic is reflected in his long-time concerns with both travel and politics.

Tomlinson's recent prose poem, "At Chimayó," brings together a number of these concerns. The poem recounts a visit to a New Mexican church by an otherwise unidentified "we." Like his earlier Southwest American poem, "Cimarron," "At Chimayó" is self-conscious about its visitors' participation in a debased ritual: we are more tourists than penitents. Yet, unlike "Cimarron," the more recent poem does

not dwell on the ironies of this difference, nor does it more than briefly allude to the brochure-genre which the earlier poem parodically exploits. "At Chimayó" begins with a sentence--"The sanctuary was begun in the New Mexico of 1813 by one Don Bernardo Abeyta"--the tone of which may suggest the brochure as source, but neither that possibility nor the possibility that, as in "Cimarron," the source is being parodied is developed or confirmed. Instead, the poem proceeds to display a concern with other sources for other words, in particular the feudal (and political) word, "domain."

Among other things, "domain" is here a prisoner's rhyme: "I've wasted my life and its cost me my family and friends . . . No longer with a home not even a place to roam and this cell has become my domain. I know that its blame for bringing shame to my name and now I must part with my time" (Return 29). Just why this anonymous prisoner's rhyme should stay with the poet as he drives away from the church and, in particular, why he should be struck by his use of the word "domain" are parallel to the question which begins "Over Elizabeth Bridge," only here the dialectic takes the form of pride and humility. "At Chimayó"'s final paragraph suggests parallels between the poet and the prisoner which seem deliberately half-drawn:

Driving back through the dusk I find it is his
 unsigned letter keeps returning to mind, outdoing the
 presence of those garish saints. And I wonder from
 what source a feudal word like "domain" came to him in
 his cell where, King of Lackland, he is monarch of all

he surveys. Perhaps, turning it over on his tongue, he tastes anew each time the lost liberty of these vistas, this unfencable kingdom of desert and mountains.

Like the Publican of the parable, the anonymous prisoner does not even lift his eyes; he is an image of vanquished vain-glory, and seems somehow tangential to the poet's state.

Yet the poet is not exactly a Pharisee, though his poem is, as we shall see, very much a self-reflexive parable. There are strong tensions here, emanating from the distorted mirror-image in which the poet recognizes the prisoner as like himself. The poet can sieve a moral from the prisoner's life: severe punishment indeed to be imprisoned and so unable to enjoy the experience of the Southwest, especially after knowing what that "unfencable kingdom" is like: a tragic loss follows on the wasted life. On the other hand, the poet recognizes in the prisoner a brother poet of sorts, albeit an almost mute and seemingly inglorious one. Yet at the root of the identity is the poet's recognition of the similarity between his own first poem "Poem" and the anonymous prisoner's letter. Both poet and prisoner have turned to rhyme as the solvent for their troubles. Just as the poet apperceived himself creating and recreating his world and his freedom or possibility as he awoke, years before, in the cell of his room listening to the passing horse-drawn cart, so this prisoner begins again in his anonymous letter, recreating, ordering, even celebrating his freedom. But what is the value of anonymity?

Both poet and prisoner come to the church to submit themselves to a power not their own. The prisoner, evidently, retains belief in the reality of the power, God's power. The poet, for his part, seems to acknowledge some obligation of respect for God's church, even if "God" is a concept in which he does not believe. What kinship the poet feels for God and the church seems to lie in the idea that what they represent are manifestations of a much more general and basic attitude to life, perhaps best summed up in Blake's phrase, "Everything that lives is holy." The impulses to believe in God and to raise a church for his worship can be identified with the poet's values: his resistance to the violence of possessiveness and the demands of the ego, and his belief in giving things their due and in the space of possibility. Yet what he beholds in surveying the church is largely a travesty of this attitude and faith.

The accumulation of things in the church suggests a kind of rampant selfishness or possessiveness. Moreover, everything is named, that is, identified with its owner or donor--thus undermining to some degree the original gesture of giving: "This, as we discover, is a place of notices, messages and names. Particularly names: the givers of ex-votos have inscribed theirs; those who believe it was this place brought about a cure for themselves or their relations, have written signed letters to say so and these are duly exhibited within." The accumulating mass of names, together with the both vividly coloured and familiarly decorated

sacred images, suggests a double blasphemy: the pride of self is exhibited in the need to attach the self even to the testimonies to cures, but also in the patronizing aspect of personal names--these witnesses seem too familiar with the sacred. The signed testimonials to the curative power of the church seem to presume another cure--or presume to expect another cure--that of their souls. The poet here confronts, then, not at all a new phenomenon for his poetry. Rather than meditate on "the last, the very last" who will enter here, as Larkin does in "Church Going," Tomlinson once again tests his feelings towards an instance of popular superstition or folk belief. Thus, for example, he bemusedly reflects on the logic behind the repeated signs that state prohibitions against the admission of food, drink, or pets: "After all, what could be more rational, if one has a sick pet, than to bring it in to the source of healing?"

In the chapel of the Santo Niño Perdido, holy ground has been transformed into a human repair shop, yet it is not this transformation which calls forth his remark, "Innocence of taste possesses its own fecundity." But it is a corrupt plenitude. Like "Mushrooms," "At Chimayó" rhymes "taste" with "waste." In the earlier poem the poet admonished his audience to relish perceptual errors and not to waste the fictions to which they give rise: "waste/ None of the sleights of seeing: taste the sight/ You gaze unsure of" (CP 293). In a sense, "At Chimayó" shows the consequence of ignoring those "sleights of seeing." Here "innocence of

taste" equates with an innocence--or absence--of humility.

Tomlinson's long discipline of the self may be seen as yet another part of his "redefinition of Christian concepts." The poet in the little room of his art--be it a bedroom or a prison cell--continually runs the risk of great pride, a pride that, like the great envy described in "Green Quinces," threatens to destroy the bridges and treaties he would build between man and the world of things. The parallel between the prisoner's values and the poet's own values lies in their shared attempt to maintain the sanctity of their worlds. Of the prisoner, he says, "In this place of names, he is the only one to realize that to use his name would be a sort of blasphemy and that here he must forfeit it." Hence, in its last paragraph, the poem expresses a sympathetic identification for the prisoner. In its presentation of the thing before the self, the ideal poem would be as humble as the prisoner's unsigned letter.

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