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Willo Drummond

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Macquarie University

Willo Drummond

To learn to know a thing: The practice of attention in Rilkean-Levertovian poetics

Abstract:

In the early 1950s UK-born US poet Denise Levertov transcribed a passage from The Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke (1946) into her 'Green Notebook' a personal anthology of 'brief essential texts' (Levertov, 1973, p. 43). She labelled the passage 'If a thing is to speak to you'. The excerpt was one of several from Rilke's letters that would remain significant to Levertov across a near five-decade career. This article uses distributed mind theory to reflect on the role of the 'thing' in Rilkean-Levertovian poetics. Drawing primarily on Menary's Cognitive Integration framework (2007a), it considers the role of two particular artefacts (things) – an idiosyncratic index created by Levertov to the Selected Letters and the aforementioned Green Notebook – in the development of Levertov's cognitive character (Menary, 2012a). In so doing, it frames the Rilke-Levertov relationship as an example of enculturated cognition (Menary, 2015). In addition, it looks specifically at the role of Rilke's Ding or thing poetics in this particular example of enculturation; that is, the influence of Rilke's engagement with 'things' in the development of Levertov's objectivist-inflected poetics of presence.

Biographical note:

Dr Willo Drummond is a Sydney poet and sessional lecturer in creative writing at Macquarie University who writes from Dharug and Gundungurra land in the NSW Blue Mountains. Her interdisciplinary research draws upon theories of distributed cognition to illuminate creative writing cognition and practice. In 2019 Willo's doctoral research was awarded a Vice Chancellor's commendation for academic excellence, and in 2020 she was the recipient of a Career Development Grant for poetry from the Australia Council for the Arts. Her scholarly and creative writing is published in Australia and the United States.

Keywords:

Levertov, Rilke, enculturation, literary influence, Cognitive Integration

Introduction

In the early 1950s UK-born US poet Denise Levertov transcribed a passage from The Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke (1946) into her 'Green Notebook' a personal anthology of 'brief essential texts' (Levertov, 1973, p. 43). The passage read as follows:

> If a thing is to speak to you, you must for a certain time regard it as the only thing that exists, the unique phenomenon that your diligent & exclusive love has placed at the centre of the universe, something the angels serve that … day on that matchless spot. (Rilke, 1946, p. 324) [1]

By the time of this transcription event, Levertov had been familiar with the Rilke passage for several years, having engaged in an ongoing practice of reading, re-reading and transcribing extensive material from Rilke's letters into her diaries since 1947: the year she created an idiosyncratic index to the Selected Letters pointing to 77 passages of personal significance. At the time, she labeled the extract above 'to learn to know a thing'. The concept was one amongst several in the index that would prove to be foundational to Levertov's poetics over a near five-decade career.

This article draws upon distributed mind theory (from the cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind) to reflect on the role of the 'thing' in Rilkean-Levertovian poetics. Looking primarily to Menary's Cognitive Integration framework (2007a; 2010a; 2010b; 2012a; 2013; 2014; 2015), and related work from others in the field including Clark (1997; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2010), Fabry (2018), Hutchins (1995; 2008; 2010; 2011), Menary and Kirschoff (2014), Sutton (2002; 2007; 2012) and Tribble and Sutton (2011; 2012), it considers the role of two particular artefacts (things) in the development of Levertov's cognitive character (Menary, 2012a), framing the Rilke-Levertov relationship as an example of enculturated cognition (Menary, 2015). The first of these is an idiosyncratic personal index created by Levetov to the Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke (1946) – a rare image of which was obtained by the author for the purpose of this research – and the second is a small green notebook ('The Green Notebook'), a commonplace book containing 95 passages from significant literary readings encountered by Levertov from the 1940s onward. In addition, limiting the scope of enquiry to two particular index entries – 'to learn to know a thing' and 'each step an arrival' – this paper looks at the role of Rilke's Ding or thing poetics – which emphasises a practice of acute attention and a 'participational vision of things' (Fisher, 2007, p.173) – in this particular example of enculturation. That is, the paper will consider the influence of Rilke's own engagement with things in the development of Levertov's mature poetics.

Born in 1923 in Essex, England to a Russian father and a Welsh mother, Levertov's first 'thoroughly English, neoromantic' (Butterfield, 1994, p. 298-99) volume of poetry The Double Image was published in the UK in 1946. Her second and third collections (both vastly different to the first) would not be published for another 11 and 12 years respectively: Here and Now in 1957 and Overland to the Islands in 1958, both published in the USA. During the intervening period, Levertov not only became a wife to American novelist Mitchell Goodman, as well as a mother and an American citizen, but also lived in France, Italy and Mexico as well as the USA

(Brookner, 2004, p. 283). She also began reading, as well as meeting and building networks with, several influential American poets including (but by no means limited to) Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and William Carlos Williams. Via these networks she absorbed the American idiom and style so very different to that of her own European background. Yet during this time, amongst all these new influences, the words of Rilke remained a touchstone.

Although most often associated with Black Mountain poetics [2] and for her correspondence and association with Duncan and Williams in particular, Rilke remained essential to Levertov's understanding of the role and work of the artist throughout her career. In her preface to Nancy Willard's Testimony of the Invisible Man (1970), Levertov writes she was 'partly formed by Rilke' (p. x). From her reading and reflection upon Rilke's epistolary prose, Levertov developed her beliefs about the role of the artist, about ways of being and perceiving the world that would deeply inform her thinking across a lifetime of poetry.

Rilke is of course one influence among a network of influences for Levertov, yet as she notes herself, even as she came into contact with modern American poetics in the 1950s the new ideas she encountered were absorbed 'into a ground prepared' by 'Rilke's concept of the artist's task' (Levertov, 1981, p. 283):

> I had already been writing for many years, and had been reading Rilke for seven or eight, when I first came to America and began to read Williams, Pound and Stevens. Before long I met Robert Creeley and through him I encountered Olson's ideas. I remember Creeley's grimace of distaste for Rilke, or for what he imagined him to represent; but though I was excited by the new ideas, and open to their influence, I didn't give up on what Rilke meant to me, for I knew it was not the mere web of sentimentality Creeley accused it of being. (Levertov, 1981, p. 283)

This paper examines the process of that foundational preparation. It does so by looking at two material artefacts – two 'things'– Levertov used as cognitive tools to practice and absorb Rilke's ideas about being an artist and perceiving the world, ultimately transforming this into her own mature poetics: The Rilke Index and the Green Notebook. Considered in tandem, via the lens of Cognitive Integration, these artefacts can be seen as cognitive tools in a process of literary enculturation.

The Rilke Index and the Green Notebook

1946 was a significant time for Levertov, not least as her debut collection of poetry The Double Image was published by The Cresset Press. The romantic volume was noted favourably, if briefly in the press; [3] however, by the time the reviews had come out, Levertov had travelled to Holland to take work as an au pair to a Dutch family. She had a few of her most precious books with her, including several of her Rilke texts, and wrote to her parents that she had 'ploughed steadily through all my Rilkeana, returned to annotate, & being now superannotated, superannuated, or whathave you [sic]' (Levertov, 1947, March). These annotations resulted in

the aforementioned index to the R.F.C. Hull translation of the Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1902-1926 (1946). The index identifies 51 distinct concepts, which point to 77 passages of interest to the young poet. As Levertov (1981) would later describe, the category titles themselves were poetic and distinctive:

> Early in 1947 I began making my own index for this volume, to supplement the ordinary one; and – like the wonderful poem-titles of Wallace Stevens – this list alone gives quite a strong, peculiar sense of the contents: autumn the creator – standing at windows – as ready for joy as for pain – how can we exist? – the tower of fear – the savour of creation – each step an arrival – vowels of affliction – alone in cities – our conflicts a part of our riches – strings of lamentation – the mouse in the wainscot – further than work – open secret… (p. 286; italics in original)

The passages Levertov indexed range across issues of poetic craft and technique, as well as the role and work of the artist. Often, they seem marked not only for their content but for their sheer sensuality of language. In addition to this annotating and indexing, Levertov also transcribed several key passages into her notebook at the time. [4]

Although Levertov's personal volume of this Hull translation is not publicly available, in the 1990s she did share the volume with literary scholar Edward Zlotkowski, who was one of the first critics to write at any length about the importance of Rilke to Levertov's work (Zlotkowski, 1992). At the time of writing, Zlotkowski made a copy of Levertov's index, and has since generously shared this artefact, along with an accompanying set of notes to Levertov's annotations on relevant pages, for the purpose of the present study (see Figure 1).[5]

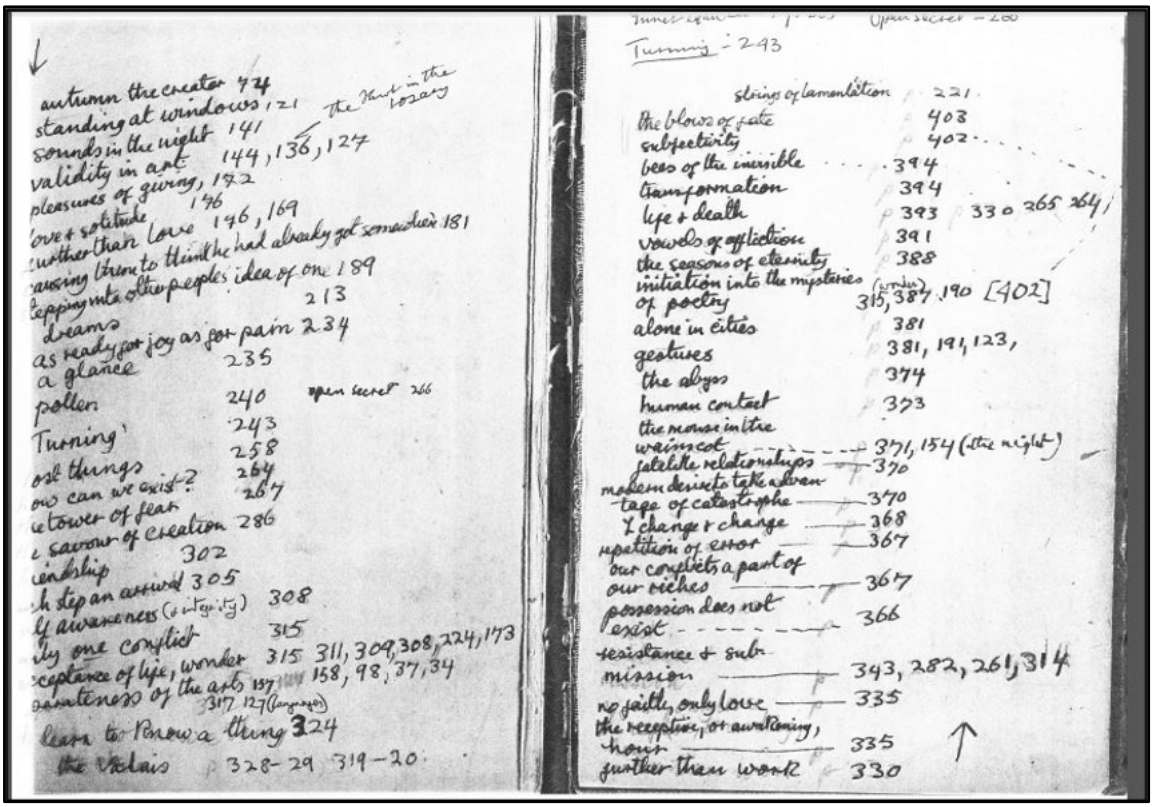

Figure 1. The Rilke Index

This personal index would become essential to Levertov's developing poetics over the coming decades. Letters and diaries from this time demonstrate Levertov's deep and ongoing engagement with Rilke's letters in the early years of her career. Not only did she create the index, but in returning to it many times over subsequent years, re-reading, transcribing and re-transcribing material into a series of notebooks, she established certain patterns of cognitive practice (see next section).

The second 'thing' with which this article is concerned is a particularly significant example of these notebooks – Levertov's 'Green Notebook'– a personal anthology of 'brief essential texts' (Levertov, 1973, p. 43) drawn from multiple sources, to which Levertov added and referred over several decades. The Green Notebook contains 95 individual page entries; a total of 52 writers are present within its pages. Of these, 15 entries are from Rilke. This number, nearing 15% of the material in the anthology, is significant, as Rilke is by far the dominant presence amongst the writers transcribed therein. The anthology was developed largely over the period 1951–65. However, annotations suggest that in fact Levertov was reading and adding to the material as late as 1984 (p. 15). The notebook was indexed and paginated. Entries were recorded primarily on the recto page (with only a few exceptions) with the verso kept blank for annotation and categorisations. This was from the outset a dedicated space for the mapping and materialisation of certain patterns of cognitive practice.

Cognitive Integration and cognitive practices

In this paper I argue that the entries in these two artefacts (or 'things') – the Rilke Index and the Green Notebook – were tools that allowed Levertov to develop certain cognitive practices that were to become foundational to a particular cognitive character. To do this I draw upon work in the field of distributed mind theory, with a particular focus on the Cognitive Integration framework proposed by Richard Menary (2007a; 2010a; 2010b; 2012a; 2014; 2015). In the following two sections I provide a brief theoretical background to Menary's framework in order to define the terms key to the present argument: cognitive practice, enculturation, and cognitive character.

Theories of distributed mind arise from recent work in the cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind which falls under the umbrella terms situated or 4E cognition. These labels, often used interchangeably (Heersmink, 2016), encompass views that challenge, to various degrees, Cartesian or internalist views of mind, positioning cognition as variously, embodied (shaped and constituted by corporeal experience), embedded (involving engagement with the environment), enacted (arising from sensory-motor action, including that involved in visual perception) and extended (extending beyond the boundaries of skin and skull). Approaches within the field occupy a range of positions on any one of these four dimensions (Menary, 2010a, p. 562). Yet what they each share is a 'rejection' or reframing of 'traditional' cognitivism in which cognition is understood purely as an activity of the brain (Menary, 2010b, p. 459). Rather, in distributed models, cognition is conceived as a phenomenon 'spread out

across embodied brains and information-structures in the environment' (Heersmink, 2016, p. 3136).

Distributed cognition comes as a 'second wave' of work emphasising the extended dimension of cognition (Sutton, 2012, p. 193; p. 203), the first wave of which – the Extended Mind hypothesis proposed by Clark and Chalmers (1998) – radically reconceived conceptions of mind. Rather than a 'passive' version of externalism (acknowledging that mind can be impacted by the external environment), they proposed instead an 'active externalism' in which human minds and material artefacts create 'a coupled system that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right' (Clark and Chalmers, 1998, p. 8). The hypothesis was not immune to critique. [6] Where foundational views of the extended mind run into difficulty is around what can be properly counted as 'cognitive'. Is the notebook, for example, really a true part of a human 'mind'? [7] It was partly in response to such criticisms that Menary (2007a) proposed the Cognitive Integration (CI) framework, in which cognition is viewed as a 'hybrid' process comprised of both the internal and external, and dependent upon bodily manipulation of the 'extra-bodily environment' (Menary, 2012, p. 229; p. 232). [8] Such a view emphasises the interaction of, say, notebook and mind as the unit of interest. Menary terms these interactions cognitive practices.

Cognitive practices as defined by Menary are 'patterns of action spread out across a population' (2015, p. 13-14). They are dynamic and interactive. They involve manipulation of objects or public representations in the world by a situated actor in social and environmental context (Menary, 2010a, p. 570; Hutchins, 2010, p. 705; 1995, p. 299; Tribble and Sutton, 2012, p. 592). Writing is one such situated cognitive practice. As has been argued eloquently elsewhere, writing is a form of thinking (Clark, 1997; Freiman, 2015; Menary, 2007b; Oatley and Djikic, 2008; Sutton, 2002). Objects involved in writing include artefacts such as notebooks and drafts, while the mental engagement with, and manipulation of, the language within them constitute cognitive practices. Cognitive practices are inheritable from writer to writer and generation to generation via the process of enculturation.

Enculturation, cognitive transformation and cognitive character

Menary argues that there are 'two routes to cognitive extension' (2012a, p. 147) contrasting his CI framework with the earlier 'artefact extension' (p. 148), style arguments such as that of Clark (2010; 2011) and Clark and Chalmers (1998). Instead, the CI framework explains 'our cognitive capabilities of abstract thought' via what Menary terms a 'process of enculturation' (2015, p. 2) whereby the acquisition of cognitive practices transforms our biological and cognitive capacities:

> Enculturation rests in the acquisition of cultural practices that are cognitive in nature. The practices transform our existing biological capacities, allowing us to complete cognitive tasks in ways that our unenculturated brains and bodies will not allow. (Menary, 2015, p. 4)

Although they occupy similar terrain on the 4E landscape, and are in many ways complementary, Menary further differentiates Cognitive Integration from Clark's Extended Mind thesis in particular, due to this inclusion of the cultural in the framework, rather than simply the biological and the material (Menary, 2015, p. 3). The view builds on anthropological contributions to the cognitive sciences such as the work of Hutchins (1995; 2011). Examples of such cultural cognitive practices include writing, reading, mathematics, navigational practices and memorisation techniques.

Applied already to the acquisition of literacy (reading and writing) in the cognitive sciences (Fabry, 2018; Menary, 2007b; 2015), the concept of enculturation can also be of use when it comes to thinking through the dynamics of influence in the literary arts. Just as Kevin Brophy argued in 2009 that art is 'evolution in action' (p. 26), we can use cognitive integration and enculturation to form an understanding of literary inheritance. Drawing on the biological concept of 'niche construction' as a model of evolution (Laland, Odling-Smee & Feldman, 2000), Menary positions aesthetic practices as cognitive, cultural practices inheritable across generations (2014; 2015). Narrowing our focus to literary practice, cognitive integration allows literary influence to be understood as a form of aesthetic enculturation, a series of cognitive practices inherited by an agentic, situated writer working in the literary, or aesthetic niche (Menary, 2014; 2015). But how does this process of inheritance actually occur? Menary offers an explanation in the form of the transformation thesis (2007a).

Menary argues that the successful 'implementation' of various cognitive practices by an individual 'depends upon cognitive norms' within the social domain (2007a, p. 137). He uses a Vygostkyan developmental approach to explain how we come to master these norms and fine tune our higher cognition. Drawing upon the concepts of 'intermental' (social) and 'intramental' (individual) planes of cognition, Menary claims that, 'intermental cognition as mediated through language and interaction with tools and external representations allows us to understand the intramental capabilities of an individual' (2007a, pp. 175-176). Over time, as cognitive practices are learned and absorbed (for example as part of a period of literary apprenticeship), they move from the intermental to the intramental cognitive plane and 'the inside is transformed to be more like the outside' (Menary, 2012a, p. 152; 2013; 2015; Hutchins, 2011). Menary calls this the transformation thesis, and from a creative writing research standpoint, it is a concept that seems quite relevant both to the early phases of an artist's career, when they are developing and refining their practice, as well as, more broadly, to discussing the dynamics of influence from the perspective of the working individual writer.

Via learning driven plasticity (Fabry, 2018, p. 918; Menary, 2014; 2015, p. 8) the process of cognitive transformation allows us to think new thoughts, to perform cognitive tasks that are often new, novel, that previously would not have been possible (Menary, 2015, p. 8; 2007a; Menary and Kirschoff, 2014, p. 621). This is where CI comes closest to a theory of literary influence. It is via the practice of working with their influences – reading, transcribing, reflecting, and drafting new work – that a writer becomes 'integrated' with this material; its content, style and cadence becomes an integrated part of what Menary terms their 'cognitive character' (Menary, 2012a, p. 160), a concept that we might gloss as a style of thinking, or

taking a cue from Hutchins (2008), a certain cognitive stance to the world that informs 'ways of being', 'seeing' and 'apprehending' (p. 2012).

Taking such a view of literary influence allows the reinsertion of the agentic writer back into the conception of influence. Influence becomes a hybrid process comprised of both writer and text, rather than text in a disembodied field, or the writer as a passive vessel, 'scriptor' or scribe (Burke, 1995, p. xvi). There is both agency and intentionality inherent in the role of influence in artistic cognition; influence – being influenced, falling under the influence – is actually 'an intentional act on the part of the living artist' (Brophy, 2009, p. 73). One example of such intentionality in the context of writing practice is the fact that writers often look to certain texts as a 'way in' to writing. 'Something about the tone', they might say, of a certain piece of writing, seems to reorient the cognitive flow enough to 'get them in the zone' to generate new text. In this sense, both Levertov's index categories themselves, and the longer passages of marked text to which they refer – many of which were ultimately transcribed into her Green Notebook and referred to over decades – may have served as tools for priming the mind in the service of writing. The sensuous language and imagery Levertov gathered and collated in the Green Notebook, as well as the labels she used to sort the material, provided a multi-tiered structure of material symbols with the power to 'stabilise' and 'reorient' (Sutton, 2007, p. 774) her cognitive flow in the service of her writing in the moment of creative practice. [9] In this sense the Index and the Green Notebook were tools for the honing of cognitive practice in the moment, but they were also tools of enculturation: artefacts that allowed for a range of cognitive practices to be integrated over time.

Creativity research has demonstrated the importance of a period of skill acquisition for artists (Policastro & Gardner, 1998, p. 213). Keeping the mind poised in a delicately balanced state of intense receptivity, like any skill, requires scaffolded learning, practice and cognitive diligence. Moreover, as Tribble and Sutton demonstrate, skill acquisition is 'profoundly social', even when practiced alone (2011, p. 99). As writers, our mentors and guides do not need to be physically present to function for us as mentor. Webb and Carroll discuss the significance of 'elder-initiate chains' in the contemporary poetry community, pointing out that these mentorship style relationships may involve an 'actual or an imagined' elder (2017, p. 8). Levertov's 1981 essay 'Rilke as Mentor', and her engagement with the Rilke Index and the Green Notebook bear out this claim.

Building on the work of Clark (2005b, p. 259; 2005a; 2006) and with a particular focus on skill acquisition, John Sutton presents an argument for the role of language in skill acquisition whereby 'words and phrases can… stabilize the cognitive flow just enough for us to reorient it' (2007, p. 774). Sutton calls these cues 'instructional nudges' (2007, p. 774). Considering Levertov's Green Notebook from such a perspective suggests the anthology might have acted as a catalogue of just such types of instructional nudges: as a knowledge source in the usual sense, but perhaps more significantly, as a cognitively orienting wellspring for creative practice and the development of her mature poetics. When her Green Notebook was donated to the Stanford University archives in the 1990s, it came with a post-it note on the cover. The small orange note states: 'This 'Green Notebook' was essential to me for years. It now seems part of

the past, absorbed' (Levertov, 1951-1956). In other words, the language, and patterns of cognitive practice modelled within the Green Notebook had by this time moved from the inter-mental to the intra-mental plane of Levertov's cognitive landscape via the processes of enculturation.

In this anthology, we see Levertov engaged in the act of finely tuning her poetics, or to borrow from Menary, her 'inner cognitive niche' (Menary, 2012a, p. 159-160). The anthology is a rich material artefact of a literary cultural ecology to which Levertov had apprenticed herself. It is also an artefact of her ongoing cognitive practices: reading and re-reading, cross-referencing and thickening the connective tissue between entries, tracing and retracting cognitive paths. As Levertov (1973) states in her 1968 Hopwood Lecture on poetics (later published as 'Origins of a Poem'):

> most or all of the sources [I shall be referring to in this lecture] … were probably familiar to me by 1960, and in many instances long before, and had been copied out by then into my private anthology, the reflections on them written in my journals… I am… not speaking of simple sequence but habitual preoccupations, which accrue and which periodically emerge in different forms. (p. 43)

In other words, the passages marked in Levertov's Rilke Index, and later transcribed in her Green Notebook, acted as heuristics to patterns of cognition which informed Levertov's use of the poetic image, and that significantly guided and shaped her thinking about poetic practice and creativity itself. Levertov read material identified and indexed in the late 1940s again and again over many years, transcribing and re-transcribing it into her notebooks, and drawing upon certain passages repeatedly in her reflective journaling and drafting in an ongoing practice of agentic and iterative integration. Absorbed and sedimented over time, these conceptual and imagistic cognitive layers formed a substantive part of the bedrock of a distinct cognitive character, such that all the new ideas Levertov encountered as she became an increasingly 'American' poet from the 1950s were met with a mind already formed by 'Rilkean' patterns of thinking, by a certain 'Rilkean-Levertovian' cognitive character or stance to the world.

'To learn to know a thing': Rilke's 'Ding' poetics and Levertov's practice of attention

The particular extract from Rilke's letters with which I opened this paper, labelled by Levertov as 'To learn to know a thing' speaks to the poetics underpinning what Rilke termed Dinggedichte (thing poems). The concept has origins in the time Rilke spent observing Rodin for the purpose of his 1903 monograph on the sculptor. As outlined by Fisher (2007) Rilke was very interested in the way in which Rodin 'followed the movements of his models with an attentiveness far more concentrated than our everyday habits of perception' (p. 171), as this this led to 'certain insights into the thing seen' (Fisher, 2007, p. 172).

Combined with later insights gleaned from Rilke's study of Cezanne, Rodin's way of working from intense visual perception led Rilke to the approach taken in The New Poems, in which

the poet looked outward to 'things' themselves for inspiration; a radical new direction in his poetics at the time. For Rilke, 'things' encompassed non-human animals, and he sought a participatory gaze that did 'not subjectively project attributes onto the object [or being] before it, rather [a gaze that] has the gesture of a self-forgetting, an attentiveness to the thing itself, which allows the thing, as it were, to reveal its own meaning' (Fisher, 2007, p. 173). In other words, the gaze of the Ding poet allows the 'thing… to speak to [him/her]' (Rilke, 1946, p. 324).

In her 1970 study of 'Ding' poetics, Testimony of the Invisible Man, Nancy Willard (1970) draws on Bergson to clarify this stance further:

> Bergson maintains that in ordinary perception we do not see this tree or this flower but a tree, a flower. Because we classify things according to the use we shall make of them, we see only this classification and not the things themselves. (p. 2)

The Ding poets, in contrast, seek to 'remake the world by destroying stereotyped modes of thinking that prevent [them] from knowing it (Willard, 1970, p. 2). 'If a thing is to speak to you' says Rilke 'you must regard it … as the only thing that exists…', observing it with an 'exclusive love', a practice of acute attention that places this other at the 'centre of the universe' (1946, p. 324). Writing of the passage in 1981, Levertov notes Rilke's call is for 'an objectivity that arises from respect … from the recognition of … a life having its own integrity separate from one's own' (1981, p. 97).

Willard's study of the Ding poets includes chapters on Rilke, Ponge, Neruda and Williams, the latter of whom famously stated (in his long poem 'Paterson') that there are 'no ideas but in things' (1946). While much has been written about Levertov's correspondence and association with Williams, there has been less critical focus on the significance of Rilke for her poetics as they developed from the late 1940s. [10] Levertov's index and the Rilke material in her Green Notebook demonstrate both the early and enduring influence of Rilke across her nearly five-decade career.

'To learn to know a thing' was in fact the fourth Rilke entry Levertov added to her Green Notebook. It was transcribed at the top of page eight of the anthology between 1951 and 1953, retaining Levertov's original index label. It is a passage noted by Zlotkowski as being not only marked, but 'marked heavily' in Levertov's copy of the Selected Letters (Zlotkowski, n.d.). In the Green Notebook, Levertov also marked the passage, 'S&H', for 'seeing and hearing', a core concept in her mature poetics (Levertov, 1973, p. 97; 1981, p. 97).

By the time of her 1968 Hopwood Lecture, Levertov places the practice of attention at the very centre not only of her poetics, but of her ethics: 'All the thinking about poetry leads me back, always to Reverence for Life as the grounds for poetic activity' (1973, p. 54). She links 'reverence' to 'attention' in a sequence she understands to be the origins of a poem:

> The progression seems clear to me: from Reverence for Life to Attention to Life, from Attention to Life to a highly developed Seeing and Hearing, from Seeing and Hearing

> (faculties almost indistinguishable for the poet) to the Discovery and Revelation of Form, from Form to Song. (Levertov, 1973, p. 55)

The page in Levertov's Green Notebook which contains 'to learn to know a thing' is a dense one, bearing five entries related to the particular practice of attention labelled by Levertov as 'S&H'. From William Carlos Williams she noted three lines of verse: '—and the worn, /blue car rails (like the sky!) / gleaming among the cobbles!' and at the bottom of the page, returning in the 1960s she added a passage from Thoreau: 'The Scarlet Oak must, in a sense be in your eye when you go forth. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, take in into our heads, – & then we cannot see anything else' and two passages from Carlyle: 'No most gifted eye can exhaust the significance of any object', and 'To know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first love the thing, sympathise with it: that is, be virtuously related to it' (1951-1956, p. 8; underlining in notebook). To the latter she added two labels 'I and Thou', referencing Martin Buber's dialogic philosophy, and a second label 'Reverence for Life'. Clearly many of Levertov's 'guides' (Levertov, 1955, September 12) shared a similar position on the practice of attention. Yet Levertov had encountered Rilke's position on this matter during that early reading of the Selected Letters in 1947, when she first created her index. Moreover, the position of the Rilke material at the top of this page in the Green Notebook suggests that, 'to learn to know a thing' was still foundational to her understanding of this concept. In a sense, we might view the latter entries as iterations of the cognitive practices established with the former.

Zlotkowski argues that in 'many respects [it was Rilke who] … helped Levertov attain that very balance which had been fundamental to her achievement as a poet: the balance between what she has called her 'sense of the pilgrim way' and her 'new, American, objectivist influenced, pragmatic and sensuous longing for the Here and Now'' (Zlotkowski, 1992, p. 325, citing Levertov, 1973, p. 69). In his introduction to *The New British Poets* (1949), Kenneth Rexroth makes a distinction between what he terms American and British Objectivism(s), identifying American Objectivism as having origins in the work of 'William Carlos Williams, Pound, the Stein of *Tender Buttons*, Yvor Winters' early work and a variety of French writers – Cendrars, Appollinaire, Cocteau, Mac Orlan, Deltiel, Soupault, and certain phases of Aragon, Tzara and Eluard' (p. ix). Levertov's notebooks bear out Rexroth's claim, particularly around Williams, Cocteau and Eluard (ca.1948-51, May 4, 1948). Though Rexroth positioned Levertov as a British Romantic at the end of the 1940s, these influences make it clear she was in fact already becoming an 'American Objectivist' (by Rexroth's rubric) by this time, and she was using 'the ground prepared by Rilke's concept of the artist's task' (Levertov, 1981, p. 283) to navigate her way into, and through, this new territory.

'Every step an arrival': Rilkean-Levertovian cognitive character

For Rilke, the opening of the thing to the poet is a moment of a 'special kind of sympathy he calls Einfühlung' (Willard, 1970, p. 7). It allows for what Rilke termed inseeing (Einsenhen),

a type of perception distinct from 'inspection'. As he explained to Magda von Hattingburg in a letter of 17 February, 1914:

> I love inseeing. Can you imagine with me how glorious it is to insee, for example, a dog as one passes by – i n s e e (I don't mean in-spect, which is only a kind of human gymnastic, by means of which one immediately comes out again to the other side of the dog, regarding it merely, so to speak, as a window upon the humanity lying behind it – not that) – but to let oneself precisely into the dog's very centre, the point where it begins to be dog, the place in it where God, as it were, would have sat down for a moment when the dog was finished, in order to watch it under the influence of its first embarrassments and inspirations, and to know that it was good, that nothing was lacking, that it could not have been better made… Laugh though you will, dear confidant, if I am to tell you where my all-greatest feeling, my world-feeling, my earthly bliss was to be found, I must confess to you: it was to be found time and again … in such inseeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this divine inseeing. (qtd by Levertov, 1981, pp. 287-8) [11]

Levertov transcribed this passage as the final entry in her Green Notebook in 1965. The transcription matches the Leishman translation of the extract, included in his 1957 introduction to Rainer Marie Rilke: Poems 1906-1926 (p. 29) and his 1964 introduction to Rilke's New Poems (pp. 18-19). Levertov later referred to the passage in her essay 'Rilke as Mentor' (1981) noting Rilke's 'intense joy in the visual' and his 'acute' 'sensitivity to subsurface tremors' (1981, p. 288). For Levertov this made him a significantly 'valid' role model for the practice of staying alert to inner experience (1981, p. 288), and over a long apprenticeship to Rilke, she honed her own cognitive stance in this direction. In a 1996 interview with Jewel Spears Brookner, Levertov links Rilke's 'inseeing' to Wordsworth's 'intellectual love,' a 'state in which there is a 'fusion of intellect and feeling'' (1998, p. 185); a fusion which Levertov argues in 'Origins of a Poem' is absolutely necessary to the writing of poetry (1973, p. 53). Whatever name it might be given, this was a cognitive practice with which Levertov had been engaged at least since her early encounter with Rilke's 'to learn to know a thing' in 1947.

Perhaps the most significant evidence in Levertov's poetry of the impact of Rilke's 'dog of inseeing', [12] is the titular work to her third collection, Overland to The Islands (1958). The poem is a meditation on the cognitive patterns of the artist, with a dog personified as creativity itself, its movement representing 'the instinctive life of the artist' (Kyle, 1973, p. 282):

> Let's go – much as that dog goes,
> intently haphazard. The
> Mexican light on a day that
> 'smells like autumn in Connecticut'
> makes iris ripples on his
> black gleaming fur – and that too
> is as one would desire – a radiance
> consorting with the dance.
> Under his feet

rock and mud, his imagination, sniffing,
engaged in its perceptions – dancing
edgeways, there's nothing
the dog disdains on his way,
nevertheless he
keeps moving, changing
pace and approach but
not direction – 'every step an arrival'.

(Levertov, 2013, p. 65)

The quoted phrase in the final line of the poem is a near verbatim reference to the following passage, from a letter written by Rilke (1946) in 1920 following a reprieve from one of his creative dry spells:

> For the first time … I am feeling the continuity of my life… I now know again, my mind has thrown off its fetters, I have ceased being rooted to one spot, I circle once more in my consciousness. One hour here, the first, would have been enough. And yet I have had hundreds, days, nights, – and each step was an arrival. (p. 305)

Levertov indexed this passage in 1947 with the label 'each step an arrival', a slight paraphrase of Rilke's prose. The label itself was then paraphrased once more, to appear in her poem, 11 years later. In a 1972 interview with Ian Reid Levertov describes 'the work of the imagination' as 'an activity, kinetic, dynamic' (1998, p. 70) and 'Overland to the Islands' is one of her more self-reflexive poems when it comes to this concept. Levertov's Rilke Index, and her ongoing engagement with Rilke's words, had allowed Levertov to carry this phrase with her, slightly transformed, yet – remarkably – retaining its kinetic dash, over the decade it took this poem to emerge. [13]

'Overland to the Islands' also contains references to several other conceptual layers from Levertov's Rilke Index. For example, the creative vitality of autumn ('Autumn the creator') and the significance of change ('I change & change') among several others beyond the scope of this paper. [14] These metaphoric constructs have by the end of the 1950s been integrated into Levertov's cognitive character, have come to form her particular practice of seeing. In her poetry, they appear and reappear, 'changing /pace and approach but /not direction', scaffolding the developments in her thinking with each new work.

'Overland to the Islands' performs what Altieri terms Levertov's 'objectivist celebrations of presence as plenitude', characteristic of her mature poems prior to the 1970s (1979, p. 226). For Levertov: 'verse must capture the energies of the attentive consciousness open to the event of arriving each step along the way' (Altieri, 1979, p. 227; emphasis added). At the same time, 'Overland to the Islands', and in particular the last line of the poem, carries with it Rilke, cognitively embedded, both absorbed and transformed. As argued by Menary, 'cognitive transformations occur when the development of the cognitive capacities of an individual are sculpted by the cultural and social niche of that individual' (2015, p. 8). In the case of writing

and the literary niche, the cognitive practices that shape these transformations occur across reading, writing, notebooking and drafting. No longer simply Rilke or even 'Rilke-in-English' (Bayley, 1997, as cited in Leeder, 2010, p. 189), the phrase 'each step was an arrival' (and the content with which it resonates) is by the time of Levertov's poem transformed into Levertov's Rilke, and it comes forth both unconsciously and materially nearly intact as Levertov emerges from her transitional phase at the end of the 1950s. Following an 11-year gap after the publication of her first volume, a period in which her style would transform from her early neo-Romanticism, *Overland to the Islands* (1958), Levertov's third full length publication, would prove to be her breakthrough collection. [15]

Concluding remarks

Levertov of course is not alone among writers who have looked to the words of Rilke for guidance and inspiration. In a special issue of Agenda magazine Peter Porter was quoted on the significance of Rilke for many writers: 'Rilke's mind has got into our minds and thence into our sensibility and language' (as cited in McCarthy, 2007, p. 20). In this paper I have demonstrated that the material artefacts of Levertov's cognitive practices of reading and writing Rilke [16] – the index, her notebooks and drafts – provide traces of this process of 'getting inside'. That is, the process of cognitive transformation. Levertov's writing and reading of Rilke over the early decades of her career demonstrate the process of enculturation of a Rilkean-Levertovian cognitive character, one actively honed in the service of poetry. 'If a thing is to speak to you' said Rilke, 'you must … regard it as the only thing that exists, ... [something] your diligent & exclusive love has placed at the centre of the universe…' (1946, p. 324). This literary apprenticeship was comprised of the dynamic between words, published, read, transcribed, re-transcribed, and a mind open, awake. It was an apprenticeship enabled by the hybrid process of cognitive integration: a brain engaged with the scaffolding of a languaged world, and the cognitive practices that wield it. This is the nature of literary influence: it involves the agentic practice of writers and the fleshly materiality of texts, cognitively coupled in what Hollingsworth (2001) terms the 'hive of language' (p. 265). [17]

In a systems-view of cognition such as cognitive integration, where mind is viewed as the interaction between brain and world, literary influence occurs 'pressed between the minds' pages' (Levetov, ca. 1944-1958). That is, as an iterative process of enculturation. Writing is a situated practice that occurs in the sensuous languaged world. It is a thoroughly distributed cognitive practice: embodied, embedded, enacted and extended. The cognitive character of a writer is built of a scaffolded tower of word and image, concept and skill, experienced, forgotten, integrated, absorbed. On this note, and in the tradition of literary apprenticeship, it seems only fitting to give Levertov herself (a significant guide to the writer of this article) the final word: 'Without Attention – to the world outside us, to the voices within us – what poems could possibly come into existence?' (1973, pp. 54-5).

Notes

[1] Ellipses added for clarity. In the Hull translation, the final clause reads as follows: 'something the angels serve that [every?] day on that matchless spot' (1946, p. 324). Levertov transcribed the clause as: 'something the angels serve that very day on that matchless spot' (1951-1956, p8).

[2] The term refers variously, to the group of mid-20th Century American poets associated with Black Mountain College or to Robert Creeley's Black Mountain Review (see Harris, 2015). The application of the term to Levertov is debatable as Levertov never actually had any association with Black Mountain College, although her work was published by Creeley.

[3] By Vita Sackville-West (Singing voices. The Observer, 16 Feb., 1947, p. 4;), A. M. Hardie (Femininity in poetry. Times Literary Supplement, 1 Feb., 1947) and Ernst Sigler in Charles Wray Gardiner's Poetry Quarterly (Vol 9. No 1 Spring 1947, p. 61).

[4] Levertov describes this 1947 phase of transcription, which occurred in both Holland and Paris in a later entry to another diary, her 'Blue-Grey Diary' where she re-transcribed much of the material (ca. 1948-1951, May 4th 1948). The original 1947 diary is no longer in the archive.

[5] A note on usage of this artefact and accompanying notes: While many of Zlotkowski's notes are direct transcriptions of sections of the text marked by Levertov, some are summary indications of marked passages only. Wherever possible I have taken care to match Levertov's index categories as closely as possible with these notes; however, occasionally gaps have been filled, and conclusions drawn based on category titles and other evidence in Levertov's poems and prose. Sometimes Rilke's prose is of such a startling quality that certain passages announce themselves as a near-certain match; other times the matching process required more in-depth investigation. Where I was uncertain regarding transcriptions in Zlotkowski's notes, I sought clarification via email, which was generously provided.

[6] See for example, Adams and Aizawa (2001; 2006; 2008; 2010), Rupert (2004). For an overview (and rebuttal) of criticisms in the field see Menary (2006) and Sutton (2012).

[7] It is important to note the distinction that the extended mind is not an externalisation of otherwise internal functions, nor do Clark and Chalmers (1998) ever claim that internal and external processes are in fact equal or identical. What they are implying, however, is that they are functionally similar (Menary, 2012b, p. 5) and therefore should be similarly counted as cognitive processes. This concept, known as the 'Parity Principle', has been one of the main targets by critics of early extended mind theory (for example, Adams and Aizawa, 2001; 2006; 2008; 2010).

[8] The framework was also a response to what Menary perceives as a lingering internalism in the ongoing work of Andy Clark (Menary, 2015; see also Hutchins, 2011). The emphasis on manipulation builds on the work of Rowlands (1999, p. 23).

[9] For additional context on the term 'material symbols', see Clark (2006; 2011, Ch. 3).

[10] See Archer (2000), Hearn and Paul (2000), Hyams (2014), Zlotkowski (1992). This handful of focused critical attention on the Rilke-Levertov relationship, though extremely enlightening, remains surprisingly small considering the fact that, in addition to her essay 'Rilke as Mentor' (1981), Levertov frequently referred to Rilke in her writings on poetics and related matters throughout her career. Seven

essays in her first collection The Poet in The World (1973) reference Rilke, while four essays (including 'Rilke as Mentor'), do so in her collection Light Up the Cave (1981).

[11] Briefwechsel mit Benvenuta, (1954, p. 94-5).

[12] I adapt the term from Mogenson (2015a; 2015b) who in fact disputes the contention that 'Rilke's dog of 'divine inseeing'' succeeds on its own terms.

[13] The poem is dated July 24th, 1957 in Levertov's 'Oaxaca copybook' (1956-1967; see also ca. 1958).

[14] For further details of (and a creative engagement with) several additional index entries, including 'Autumn the creator' and 'Keeping the weirs open', see Drummond (2021).

[15] Overland to the Islands (1958) came out quite soon after Levertov's second collection Here and Now (1957). The new style is evident in both collections, though more cohesively integrated in the later volume. Receiving two offers for publication around the same time, Levertov divided the work done during the 1950s across two publishers (Hollenberg, 2013, p. 142-44).

[16] And indeed, we might refer to the two practices as a singular, if compound, practice: reading-and-writing.

[17] The hive is a space of distributed practice. For background on the concept of cognitive coupling see Clark and Chalmers (1998); Clark (1997, p. 163-66).

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