

## A Collection of Selves: Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*\*

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[...] because a diary is like lacework, a net of tighter or looser links that contain more empty space than solid parts.

Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*

### 1. Salvaging of Order

Louis MacNeice started writing *Autumn Journal* in August 1938. Before February 2, he sent T. S. Eliot its completed typescript. Preceded by an introductory note, the poem came out in London in 1939. Unlike some other poets of his generation, who were writing pamphlets and turning their attention to political action, MacNeice was writing a journal. He intended it as a simultaneously public and private form of life writing, a form where a "man writes what he feels at the moment," and where that scope is extended by "some standards which are not merely personal" (*Collected Poems* 101).

"I found that I read it through without my interest flagging at any point," admitted T. S. Eliot, the journal's first recorded critical reader. He praised its "imagery of things lived through, and not merely chosen for poetic suggestiveness" (qtd. in Stallworthy 237). Over the decades, *Autumn Journal*'s conscious and balanced looking inwards and outwards continues to draw readers' attention. Critics tend to classify *Autumn Journal* as either an autobiographical or a biographical document, either as central for understanding Louis MacNeice's

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\*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debbzus0222.htm>>.

*oeuvre* or as central for grasping the reality of life in the thirties. There are also those critics who experience it as an elegiac fusion of the two.<sup>1</sup> The diversity of these positions shows, among other aspects, the composite wide-ranging form and content of the journal as a genre, its instability as well as its capacity to mark with great economy the conjunction of subject, place and moment.

*Autumn Journal's* singularity lies in its sustained journal effect. It was written not in the *form* of a journal but *as* a journal. The acknowledgement of the resulting lyrical diaristic infrastructure is absolutely central for any attempt at reading *Autumn Journal*. It connects in twenty-four cantos<sup>2</sup> discontinuities and meaningful gaps; it records personal experiences; it metaphorically collects, adjusts, and contains the poet's various roles, masks, and personae, as well as many ordinary things. *Autumn Journal* is an inclusive personal archive of echoes of public events.

*Autumn Journal*, informed by proleptic anxiety of the expected loss which is familiar and which is going to happen,<sup>3</sup> is propelled by massive archival stockpiling aimed at aesthetically collecting "various and conflicting / Selves" (*Autumn Journal* XXIV) of the diarist and traces of social, political, and economic pressures of his time. This paper proceeds by first assessing *Autumn Journal's* composite and very intricate nature as a journal which secures and manages the coherence and economy of the lyric. Then, drawing on Manfred Sommer's thinking on collecting, classifying, and creating, the paper engages with a reading of the journal as an archive of a collector, a modern figure who wishes to "fit everything in" (Longley, Introduction xviii); and, thanks to the things he collects, he addresses a pressing set of crises. He believes his private collection can help him salvage some sense of order. Because for the rootless MacNeice home as the ultimate space of gathering seems unattainable, often undesirable, he locates self-invention, self-representation, and self-discovery in imaginative territories. Attentive to this blurring of diaristic and poetic rhythms in *Autumn Journal*, I propose in the final part of this paper to approach the journal's most problematic aspect, its prevalent additive method of parataxis. This parataxis results in a propulsive synthesizing mode

of accretion, patterning, and registration of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and things grasped. I will argue that the paratactic lists in *Autumn Journal* embody untidy territories of the self. The lists establish also a radically different new order, a historically specific "altering speech for altering things" (Auden 45).

The speaker of *Autumn Journal* is both a witness and an ordinary "man-about-town," who always assumes a sympathetic audience, and who accommodates to his sense of their presence. His journal turns to the world of the ordinary and, in the most compressed and perspicacious way, offers itself as a document by an observer perpetually struggling with maintaining and marking off his own life. MacNeice's recognition that life is a flux and that "we [...] cannot catch hold of things" (*Collected Poems* 64) does not prevent him from approaching them to attempt a conjoining, open reconciliation of randomness and disparity, also of what he elsewhere calls "the bitter dialectics of opposites which makes humanity" (*Selected Literary* 51).

In response to T. S. Eliot's request, with commercial reasons in mind, MacNeice defined the nature of his poem. Thinking of the "Spring Catalogue," he wrote "in haste" a note to Eliot, dated "November 29(?) [sic], 1938" (*Letters* 312). A long time prior to the publication proper, this explanation was meant to sustain claims for the journal-effect and to justify the poet's censoring operations. The definition, quoted in its entirety below, is also the declaration of MacNeice's poetics in the thirties. Stallworthy suggests that this poetics contains "the impurities of the world, the flux of experience, in a documentary form that, for all its seeming spontaneity, would be directed into patterns on a page—as images fixed on film—by the invisible imagination." Here are the major features MacNeice asked of a poem in 1938 (228):

#### Autumn Journal

A long poem of from 2,000 to 3,000 lines written from August to December 1938. Not strictly a journal but giving the tenor of my intellectual & emotional experiences during that period.

It is about nearly everything which from first-hand experience I consider significant.

It is written in sections averaging about 80 lines in length. This division gives it a *dramatic* quality, as different parts of myself (e.g. the anarchist, the defeatist, the sensual man, the philosopher, the would-be good citizen) can be given their say in turn.

It contains reportage, metaphysics, ethics, lyrical emotion, autobiography, nightmare.

There is a constant interrelation of abstract & concrete. Generalisations are balanced by pictures.

Places presented include Hampshire, Spain, Birmingham, Ireland, &—especially London.

It is written throughout in an elastic kind of quatrain. This form (a) gives the whole poem a formal unity but (b) saves it from monotony by allowing it a great range of appropriate variations.

The writing is direct; anyone could understand it.

I think it is my best work to date; it is both a panorama and a confession of faith. (*Letters* 312)

As an autobiographically conscious writer, the poet explains his own method and the nature of its inventiveness; he addresses questions of the inventory of his memory, the journal's rhythm, and its themes. He also expresses his approach to exposition and effects he desires to produce on the readers of his journal. The apparent contradictions between honesty and objectivity are promised to be resolved and reconciled by a paradox where truth claims are infused with the inaccuracies and errors of the perceiving subject. In the introductory Note to *Autumn Journal*, written in 1939 and included in the text, MacNeice emphasizes that the nature of "this poem" is to be "neither final nor balanced" (*Collected Poems* 101).

We read in the 1939 Note that *Autumn Journal* is "something between the lyric and the didactic poem [...] in as much as it is half-way towards a didactic poem." MacNeice writes that *Autumn Journal* embraces "criticism of life" as well as some impersonal "standards." MacNeice could be and was at once personal and ideologically focused. The poem is not, however, intended to fulfill what he identifies as demands of his public: "a final verdict or a balanced judgment." Anticipating criticism of the poem's qualities like equilibrium or

finality, the aesthetic measures, the poet emphasizes instead the moral value of his creation, the journal's honesty. "I had been writing what I have called a Journal" (*Collected Poems* 101). Anticipating also the reactions to the plausible consequences of immediacy and contingency that associations with the journal form might bring, what he calls "over-statements and inconsistencies" (*Collected Poems* 101) he repeatedly summons the honesty-premise. MacNeice explains that he has not altered anything, he has not qualified any events retrospectively, and he has not turned into abstractions the contents of the beliefs presented in the course of his writing. Honesty, honest voice, is thus reasserted as faithfulness to the moment of writing. Its provisional character is repeatedly self-advertised to enhance the readers' interest and cooperation. Truth and honesty, less so diction or the art of fiction in diary, are often the motor of our interest in life writing. MacNeice re-validates truth again and again: "It is still [...] possible to write honestly without feeling that the time for honesty is past" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 98).

These reiterations communicate his alliance with time, with the recognition of being caught up by the moment in the process of truth-seeking. Such claims allow Lejeune to consider the diary as a "superior form of truth" (162). Stallworthy, attending to the poetic dimensions of this remarkable journal, extends its meaning beyond poetry to a powerful and "symbolic" working of "communication," "honesty," and "the unity of form" (89) which, as he perceptively charts this arrangement, "undercut poetry itself" (94).

Following Manfred Sommer, we can say that MacNeice's journal is not a mere subjective gathering of experiences, a product of spontaneous interferences, but a collection, which Sommer always understands as a complete form, a nuanced, conscious, and aesthetically consolidated accumulation. Such a collection can be created by one who is not a specialist, who is not interested in becoming an owner, but, as Sommer points out, someone who is interested in "making," in bringing into being through acts of *poiesis*. The collector gives form; he is a poet (cf. Sommer 206).

Concerned with responsible economy of wording in which every word can acquire a nuanced signification thanks to its place in a rhythmical scheme, MacNeice vindicates verse, noting its ability to lure and hypnotize readers with its visual framing; its special auditory effects of rhythm, repetition and rhyme. We respond to verse's graphic devices with an expected though challenging pleasure, especially with respect to MacNeice's treatment of anxious moments of what the poet elsewhere described as "complex, unmusical world" (*Poetry* 145).

Clearly, in *Autumn Journal* meter plays a very personal emotional role which cannot be experienced in isolation from the poem's communication pattern. The twenty-four cantos in verse address and recapture the flow of time, tracking the journal's various selves in time, integrating both personal and public coordinates, and maintaining a sense of rapid movement. The medium MacNeice devised offers a formal synthesis of freedom, formality, and fluidity which allows the poet to "accommodate the total-subject matter of the 1930s" (E. Longley 59). Generally, lines carry a propositional sense. In *Autumn Journal*, uneven and diverse, ranging from monometers to heptameters, lines control the 405 sentences of the journal. Lines help create a sense of order, a sense of continuity. Using lines, the poet sanctions the dynamic movement of sensations, names, things, ideas. The "elastic" and self-contained quatrain rhymed either *abac* and *abcb* with irregular lines and repetition of motifs can be said to sustain coherence and cohesiveness. Though they dominate and nicely alternate up to canto XII, *abca* and *abbc* also occur and are especially prominent towards the end of the poem. This is a deliberate and directional effect allowing the poet to highlight some instances while deemphasizing others, also to include juxtaposition of series of viewpoints.

There are then roughly two "standard" rhyme patterns but within later cantos, especially XVIII, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, major internal changes dictate the use of contrastive modes, tones, and contexts. Often, the poet brings them about by a shift in addressees. For example, in XVIII, after denying the presence of pastorals and idylls in England, the "I" exchanges the reportorial tone and *abcb* pattern for a prayer with a direct address—"What shall we pray for, Lord? Whom

shall we pray to?"—orchestrating the ensuing litany-like part of the canto in *abac*. In XXI, the restlessness of the thoughts of "many regrets" triggers a deployment of many patterns which, like "the radiant cavalcades" of fire evoking life, affirm diversity and chance. Binding the self in the defining time of the Spanish conflict, canto XXIII moves by a broken pattern and anxious incompatible shifts which bear powerfully on the processes of self-collecting. The canto thematizes the decisive personal shift from consciousness of "broken rambling track" of his life illustrated by long, irregular paratactic lists, to a decision "to correlate event with instinct," to follow a more disciplined measure.

MacNeice's journal serves clear aesthetic and social agendas. He comments that its form "(a) gives the whole poem a formal unity but (b) saves it from monotony by allowing a great range of appropriate variations" (qtd. in Stallworthy 233). Improvising, MacNeice escapes what he calls "that 'iambic' groove" which "we were all born into" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 247). As a contingent, "impure" practice, poetry for MacNeice should be transgressive. Abundant themes, untidy sentences and very rich forms of verse break readers' expectations. Robert Skelton detects in the structure of *Autumn Journal* diverse forms of Celtic, Welsh, and Greek origin (52). In English, writes MacNeice, one can only approximate un-English forms, "attempt to suggest Horatian rhythms," and introduce what he calls "technical Horatianizing" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 248). And thus in patterns like *deibide* (rhyming stressed with unstressed syllables) or *aicill* (internal rhyme), he escapes the definite "groove" with more hovering stresses of Irish patterns.

*Autumn Journal's* design, its forms of language, its molds, its select features of reiterating personal inscription, and its distinctive poetic rhythm of coordinating the grand and the banal, mark the infrastructure of what I posit is a very carefully orchestrated collection. The inclusion and support of the ordinary and everyday in a verse journal contextualize the subject. Exposing his collection, he exposes himself and his understanding of meanings of life; he exposes the culture.<sup>4</sup> The journal's distinctive, propulsive élan, spirit, tone, and vibration are used by MacNeice as a response to the challenges of the moments

of being. As I have emphasized, by unifying the journal through the disciplined application of verse, the poet extends the force of his response. These features bring out the key subtleties of the concept of collection critical for this essay. Sommer argues that collection is a series of acts of collecting (*colligere*) and a product of that collecting, a work or phenomenon that has lasting qualities and which always remains open even after it has been finished or abandoned. To exist and last, a collection absolutely needs a unifying principle, that which gives it a sense of identity and which ensures its support (*Erhaltung*). Sommer says a collection is not an inordinate multiplicity; it is a being together. Bringing things together, the collector needs to make things stay together, for a collection is always threatened with disintegration (214).

In *Autumn Journal*, the speaker knows that “the dice are loaded / Against the living man” (IX); he anticipates a “harder life” (I) to come, and yet he sees life as always promising complexity and mystery. Life is “worth living” (XXI). Recollecting his former love’s scent and moments of perceptible fullness of life (IV), holding on to a memory of life as a “ladder of angels,” the poet engages his rhetoric of enumeration and excess driven by a desire to see life as an object that can be defined through attributes and tokens. He creates an ensemblage of possible modalities of lived life. They reveal the truly banal and flat: “life rotating in an office sleep” (X). They underscore the empty and sterile modern life of a modern man whose “Dad was off the scene” (XIX). They highlight the most glamorous “fancy lives of the few” (III) or the rare “luxury life” valued by those who live “As if to live were ... / But a leap in the dark, a tangent, a stray shot” (XVII).

The essential diurnal pattern of the journal, as I have established, does not aim to reveal in any way the unified pattern of a lifetime. In an effort to address the unrepeatable presentness of the now, to escape some false and corrupting sense of identity, the speaker in *Autumn Journal* departs now and then to Greek but also to relevant Roman *exempla* of human experience and behavior. Horace’s delightful and useful (*dulce et utile*) “appetitive decorum,” his “Middle Way,”<sup>5</sup> greatly influenced MacNeice’s life writing and his later poetry.



*Autumn Journal* unleashes and gathers up a multitude of selves. The journal inscribes also a multitude of alternating times, locations, and experiences. We attend to the modern conditions of abundance but also of paucity. A witness, with “no wife, no ivory tower, no funk-hole” (VIII), the diarist in *Autumn Journal* makes statements about the self, while always focusing his attention on the world outside. MacNeice’s title issues a diaristic contract, setting horizons not for a continuous narrative but for collecting practices, sets of entries and variations, which define the character of this economic diary and suit the difficult moment of change.

In the journal which is a product of a difficult alliance, MacNeice, sketching positive and negative balance sheets of his life, is clearly aiming at preserving what Didier calls the “ultimate capital: the ‘I’” (54). Auditing accounts of what otherwise would be unfulfilled, collecting and preserving what would escape attention and in the end disperse itself, the poet is taking care of himself. In the flux of life, the poet anxiously attempts to diarize in order to redeem his version of the world’s incorrigible plurality,<sup>6</sup> and this occasions aesthetic integration of his own multiple and incorrigible selves.

## 2. Collecting “I to I”

The provisional plurality of perspectives in the journal form appeals to MacNeice as do cumulative effects and the option to re-experience how “we find our nature daily or try to find it” (*Collected Poems* 63). For the one who says, “I not only have many different selves but I am often, as they say, not myself at all” (*Poetry* 146), the diary presents psychological and aesthetic possibilities of coordination, communication, and possible transformation of selves.

MacNeice vehemently defends his perspective in poetry not as universal, but always as “essentially personal” and even intimate (*Selected Literary Criticism* 112). The dramatic quality of *Autumn Journal* gives this personal space much extended, polarized openness. As MacNeice wrote to Eliot, “different parts of myself (e.g. the anarchist, the defeat-

ist, the sensual man, the philosopher, the would-be good citizen) can be given their say in turn" (*Letters* 312). These are the assets of the form of the journal, which "flows from human life" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 114), by accreting more than "self-glory" and "self-indulgence" (*Autumn Journal* III). We read in this autobiographical record, composed at a critical moment of personal anguish connected with the collapse of the poet's marriage, another rehearsal of indeterminacies embracing his changed experiences of subjectivity. These are what he calls the "accidents" of a poem (*Selected Literary Criticism* 11).

*Autumn Journal* opens up many dimensions of the poet's private and public functions. It divulges not only many levels of his variegated experience, but also an abundance of positions that he occupies and fantasizes about taking. In *Autumn Journal*, he tracks his many selves in time. He is a train traveler, taxi rider and driver, tripper, jazz lover, newspaper reader, a consumer of goods, party goer, lonely man, reader of books, smoker and drinker, student and teacher, lover and ex-lover, countryman and townee, husband and ex-husband, classicist and modern man, citizen, Irishman, Londoner. But he is also a man who is not married, one who does not have an access to an ivory tower, and, perhaps most importantly, one who does not have a funk-hole (VIII). Though he barely hints at traumas and is reticent about his family history, he does seem like an "all-rounder" (M. L. Longley xix).

The self-criticism of *Autumn Journal's* plurality culminates in a question "Who am I—or I—to demand oblivion?" (II). The journal invariably orchestrates the collection of these selves, "various and conflicting / Selves" (XXIV), as well as the abundant shadow selves and anti-selves. Their familiar presence is disturbing or even harassing as they buzz, rustle, or fly around like "hidden insects" (V). He only senses their presence "when the cold draught picks my sleeve" (XVII), or when he hears their voices. He speaks of "the tempter" who "whispers" (III) and of the critic "jailed in the mind," who chooses to "murmur gently" and remember what the speaker would gladly forget (X). There are familiar devils, "the flowery orator in the heart" (XIX); there are familiar haunting bogeys: "horrible, stiff / people with blank faces" (XV). There are invisible forces; he can only intuit

their attendance when they are standing "behind the doors" (VIII). There are also his spirits, brain, senses, hunger, spite, and "coward doubts" (XXIV). The catalogue is mutable and curiously rich, especially if we include those figures that he calls up in his imagination as his fantasized others, like "the gangster or the sheiks" who would "Kill for the love of killing, making the world my sofa, / Unzip the women and insult the meek" (III).

*Autumn Journal* conjures up this panorama of selves as it takes the course of conservation of both, his personal losses and deficits as well as gains, autumnal wastage and fruitage. Because the "I's" assets are so dispersed, their collection and control requires diverse figures of accumulation. Acquisitions and losses are additionally mixed with the "debris of day-to-day experience" (XXI), the refuse of all possible sorts polluting the *bios* of a modern man living in "the world of error" (XII), but hoping for a final moment of "equation" (XXIV) in the living time, also for a place where one day "both heart and brain can understand / The movements of our fellows" (XXIV). Thus a stabilizing personal inventory, compiled in preparation for an ending which is also a beginning, opens a site for always new additions, new forms of stock-taking, and possibly new retrieving methods.

Recollection, an act of retrieving, is strongly tied to collection. The subject of *Autumn Journal* says, "and I remember" (XVI), activating the storage of his memories, summoning memories with *ands* and consolidating his memories with *ands*. His *collecta*, objects "coarsed into presence" (Sommer 208; my trans.), are joined by the preposition *and*. Searching through their contents, he creates an arbitrary system. Rudimentary as it is, it helps enlarge the significance of his collection. A list imposes some order, it has traces of form and thus it can facilitate recognition of patterns of his experience.

The poet recollects his childhood in "the half-house"; he enumerates "wogs and dogs and bears and bricks and apples." He remembers Ireland, "like a ship or a car," a "female" who equips her people with "a gesture and a brogue / And a faggot of useless memories" (XVI). Education received in Marlborough and Merton lodged "a toy-box of hall-marked marmoreal phrases / Around in his head" (XIII), which

he “carted” along with masses of other “unrelated facts” (X). Oxford, isolated and unreal, features as a place “crowding the mantelpiece with gods— / Scaliger, Heinsius, Dindorf, Bentley and Wilamowitz” (XIII). Love life, like a chapter in a book, furnishes the “mind’s museum” with elegant but no longer “full and fragrant” “broken jars / That once held wine or perfume” (XIX). These defining personal possessions and their forms of containment not only organize his archive but also determine the principles by which he patterns life experiences. Thus *Autumn Journal* becomes a receptacle of many more additional meanings clustered around collections of the ordinary, of what depends on inattention and habit, objects with power to be experienced and re-experienced. So, in a personal metaphoric act of collecting days and trying to gather his selves, the poet creates an expandable depository with intimate metaphoric structures interwoven with trans-individual ones. He escapes from pure subjectivity by linking his intimate *collecta* with counter-intimate publics. Like the very first journals in the English tradition, MacNeice’s quotidian and intimate collection is a result of its subject’s participation in the public spheres. Reaching in, the poet reaches out, making his experience linkable with other collecting practices.

He tests this principle to its limits in *Autumn Journal*, where not only the excess, the precipitate of lived days, but also the confusion of “this our world” find their remarkably abundant and disturbing presence. The choice of the topos of boundlessness for the management of the journal designed in verse, always more paratactic than prose, allows gathering of pluralities. Any objects, subjects, events, and experiences can be included in the journal. *Autumn Journal*’s nomadic subject follows trajectories that take him to intimate and public spaces, from the “mind’s museum” (XIX) to chromatic Ireland, “the land of scholars and saints” (XVI); to countries like Spain, the experience of which he captures affectively as an encounter with “painted hoarding” (VI); or to England as a “toy bazaar” (VIII). He comes into contact with big towns like Birmingham, the “hazy city,” and numerous, dispersed small places like Bewdley, Chilterns, Henley, and Nettlebed in the countryside, a modern “dwindling annex to the factory” (XVIII). This

dynamic, heterogeneous, and fluid space traversed by the speaker on foot, on train (most often "in a bijou car"), and by plane is the space of emotional traces left on previous contacts. London "littered with remembered kisses" (IV), like Birmingham or Barcelona, contains dispersed things and people and their memories. They constitute the vertiginous space of contamination, noise, and the surplus of daily existence. He re-visits these places to collect memories of things and people, and to form them into territorial and architectonic lists *per excessum*.

In *Autumn Journal* the subject activates the excess and puts it to personal use. Sommer says that, without the process of moving, collecting cannot happen; to collect the collector first needs to become dispersed (215). The autumnal diarist creates an inventory of a world in which he can attempt self-coordination and self-stabilization. The concentrated diary becomes a version of a world *en miniature*, where what is collected is proximate and held together. But the achieved convergence forms only a temporary asylum.

### 3. "And" as *Terminus Technicus*

"Those who take the whole modern world for their canvas are liable to lapse into journalism," the poet as critic explains, and yet in *Autumn Journal* he allows the part of himself that "includes the journalist" (*Poetry* 30) to condition the character of his remarkable journal. MacNeice, painfully aware of the "now-time," nets in abundant successions the excess of the life he lives and observes. He creates catalogues of details linked by the preposition *and* to accrue in a determined fashion the vastness of history and diversity of life.

To approach art, the poet responds to "concrete living." He desires to bring in the messy, the contingent, and the circumstantial. Life and content are his greatest value. Committing himself to "the muck and wind of existence" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 58), to raw, not pure and intense experience of aesthetes like Walter Pater who attached so much attention to style, MacNeice, while strongly defending formal

unity, repudiates the high modernist treatment of form as a basis for telling the truth. In *Autumn Journal*, rejecting the “luxury-writing” of aesthetes (*Modern Poetry* 3), their notion of form as a principle of transcendence, MacNeice invokes unmediated formlessness of a self-made collection.

A collecting aesthetics constitutes a paradigmatic form of modernist art. Braddock argues convincingly that modernist artworks “themselves resemble collections,” and the collection itself functions as a means to present the modernist work of art to its audience (1-3). Speaking of collections as expressing something inherent in modernity, Pound, for example, emphasizes that the modern world needs a “rag-bag to stuff all its thoughts in” (qtd. in Lewis 146).<sup>7</sup> Unsettling sequenced juxtapositions of *Autumn Journal* can allow us to assimilate it within a general model of modernist intertextual collecting. However, a product of the growing pressures of historical circumstances, *Autumn Journal* communicates a distinctive set of relationships. It offers not a dialogue with modernist forms but a striking point of departure for the late modernist<sup>8</sup> poetics of reopening “the modernist enclosure of form onto the work’s social and political environs” (Miller 20).

When “war seemed round the corner again,” when Woolf felt too “black” to “gather together,” she recognized the intense necessity to oppose the dispersal of things and souls. She notes in her *Diary* that, despite everything, she wanted to “gather rosebuds while we may” (*Diary* 5: 165). The last sections of her *Diary* abound in a striking use of polysyndeton. Criticizing *Autumn Journal* as poetry, though, she attributes what she identifies as the lack of transitions and accumulation of oppositions to the influence of films (5: 175). Yet, Woolf herself is not above polysyndeton. In her own 1930s’ diary, Woolf compounds worries and anxieties with long strings of *ands*. We likewise find the encyclopedic strategy in Eliot and Joyce, two collectors adopting devices for putting things together and rendering the unorganized truths of history. Spender, for instance, calls Joyce’s “infinite cataloguing of the outer events” his “unendingness” (129). In the case of lists of “ands,” we seem to be dealing with “trans-individual mental struc-

tures,"<sup>9</sup> the late modernist *langue* framing individual experiences. In diaries, such a structure allows to attain simultaneity, a rapid succession, and a sense of exhilaration. In the poetry of the 1930s, Martin Dodsworth notices, "addition" is a multifaceted characteristic of the time. He argues that it is a product of "the general tendency of the Thirties poets to employ catalogues of objects or similes in their poems" and also of "the kind of feeling that drove them to do this" (186). Dodsworth estimates that, because addition does not logically clarify the relation between the items it conjoins, it is necessary in each case to study the individual nature of its use, the sort of emphases that are placed in every text, like the tone of voice (cf. 187).<sup>10</sup> For Hindrichs, however, "much of the attraction of late modernism lies in the paradoxical excitement that the sense of endings, even catastrophic ones, generate." The critic welcomes the reading of the "valedictory strain" of late modernists in the large contexts of "audience and market forces, cultures and history, and biography" (851).

List making "is a form of collecting, of course" (Gass 178). In *Autumn Journal*, the abundance of the world is held together by means of "and." *And* loosens and tightens MacNeice's cataloguing processes, optimizing accumulation by reducing distance, condensing and shaping the proximity, appointing intimacy but also keeping some knowledge out. "It must be remembered," says MacNeice, "that conjunction like a gate, is also disjunctive" (*Modern Poetry* 162). Indeed, used in lists and pairs, *and* produces opposing results. Unlike lists, pairs are forms which "close upon themselves like clapping hands" (Gass 179). When MacNeice remembers Spain in canto VI, he recollects its "revolt and ruin" and "sun and shadow," "the begging cripples and the children begging." But *and* finally connects, even forces, the presence of many *collecta* to sustain one strong *collection* (cf. Sommer 210). It works paratactically.

Gass persuasively shows that this seemingly unspecific, inessential, indirect, invisible, sloppy, and ordinary word can be found in "regressive-harried circumstances" but also in "child-like speech" (169). Poets and critics treat it with caution, as *ands* can be instrumental in suppressing the movement and vital flow and in evading causality. *Ands*

can and often do overwhelm with excess. In *Autumn Journal*, *and* is used 675 times. Singled out by MacNeice to add and compile his dailiness, it seems fitting that the meanings of *and* and its disturbing presence will designate a very kinetic collection. *And* carries with it the idea of fronting and facing a boundary, edge, or extreme case; it “separates and joins at the same time. It equalizes” (Gass 175).

*And* is employed by the poet almost compulsively, creating a total effect of what Lejeune calls “the madness of repetition that is life itself” (170). As there is no such thing as “pure repetition,” in *Autumn Journal* the recurring *and* is an amorphous figure. It is set regularly in some sections; in others it functions as repetend. In the whole poem, *and* is instrumental in the creation of diverse expressivity, it is a fundamental unit of correspondences and parallels. *And* is MacNeice’s personal key to his arbitrary version of reality. It is distributed unevenly but persistently, ranging from eleven to seventy-four per canto. MacNeice’s *ands* create constellations of complex local and total impact. They not only display the fullness of the world, but also apprehensions of defining his world. *Ands* accommodate a series of coterminous and contradictory positions, relating but also separating the incidentals. *Ands* arrest movement, establishing chasms and sites of anxiety, filled with verbal heaps and nervous suddenness: “I am afraid in the web of night / When the window is fingered by the shadows of branches, / When the lions roar beneath the hill / And the meter clicks and the cistern bubbles / And the gods are absent and the men are still—” (II). *Ands* are also agents of good flow, controlling the movement of the revival of past experiences. Perhaps unexpectedly, these excessive *ands* produce in the end a sense of regulatory rhythm, a soothing sense of pleasure: “Sleep, the past, and wake, the future, / And walk out promptly through the open door” (XXIV).<sup>11</sup>

In canto X of *Autumn Journal*, MacNeice uses *and* 74 times, twice more than in most other cantos. The tenth canto is an autobiographical entry organized between the event of a new school term as “work” for the diarist and his recollections of previous semesters as a student. “And now, in Nineteen-Thirty-Eight A.D., / term is again beginning.” Between “the beginnings of other terms” and “now” there are memo-



ries of his life seen as an "expanding ladder" until graduation, when "life began to narrow to what was done— / The dominant gerundive—." Narrowing brings dissipation and loss of *ands* in the growing awareness of the pressure to conform to and perform in society, visibly manifest in the use of active verbs. *And* in the meditation on the early happy memories exerts itself visibly as a connective force; it designates incidentals and separate things brought together: "dogs and cats, and plasticine and conkers," where "things" "get better and bigger and better and bigger and better." In its unstudied accumulation, that excess is the excess of childhood for the one who remembers the "house of childhood." It is also dynamic and vast; it generates significant forward movement: "we went on / growing and growing, gluttons for the future." The *and* of childhood and early youth enumerates not only things but also conditions: "alarm and exhilaration"; "And we had our little tiptoe minds [...] / And a heap of home-made dogma." With years passing, subsequent terms bring different additions; this time their function is to force collisions of different spaces and objects: "A string of military dates for history, / And Gospels and the Acts / And logarithms and Greek and the Essays of Elia." These heaps alert the reader to the suddenness and passing character of everything. Because they suppress verbs, multiple *ands* mark the disappearance of a sense of time. These are *ands* Gass identifies as *ands* of nervousness, of worry (170). Dominated by nouns, the lists retard the forward movement of the mind. From then on, we enter a site that Gass calls, after Borges, "a ceremonial space, overburdened with complex figures" (182): "And school was what they said it was, / an apprenticeship to life, an initiation." *And*s in canto X balance and coordinate two modes of excess in a world of bankruptcy. Yet, as such, the formulary of *ands*, the internal movement and proximity it establishes, does not render the process of personal gathering in any way conclusive.

On the one hand, *Autumn Journal's* additive method, interspersed with less frequent but still numerous *with*s, provides a flexible resource for conveying information, "the normal business of poetry," says MacNeice, justifying thus the necessity of "word patterns" (*Mod-*

*ern Poetry* 40). On the other hand, attentive to what he identifies as the “present day taste” for economy and concentration, he seems to choose the additive *and* with his readers in mind. Readers in the thirties became psychic collaborators of the texts, powered like *Autumn Journal* by agglomerated fragments. MacNeice certainly identified with his public as the determiners of forms of expression, and he consequently modified the use of his aesthetic forms, opening them up to conditions of an acceptable economy and the dynamics of his readers. In canto XIX, for example, MacNeice exercises the figures of omission and paucity of linking relationships, asyndeton, and the related brachylogia, to produce the effect of broken delivery. The entire canto contains only eleven *ands*, the smallest number of all the cantos. The breathless paratactic rhythm serves to condense long and short snaps of a “busy morning.” We find in this canto a disturbing *bio* of a modern father:

Under the stairs is a khaki cap;  
 That was Dad’s, Dad was a plumber—  
 You hear that dripping tap?  
 He’d have had it right in no time.  
 No time now; Dad is dead,  
 He left me five months gone or over;  
*Tam cari capitis*, for such a well-loved head  
 What shame in tears, what limit?  
 It is the child I mean,  
 Born prematurely, strangled;  
 Dad was off the scene,  
 He would have made no difference. (XIX)

In this micro-section of a life, deletion of connectives in canto XIX communicates economically a spasmodic speed of developments. Its smallness and irregularity construct the personal account in terms of a mosaic of broken tessera and missed alignments. This very rationally organized portion of reality emphasizes relations free from constraints, free from imposing conjunctions, open and direct. The paratactic technique in the whole canto marks a farewell to an experience of rejoining “blight and blossom.” The speaker in the canto feels

despondent because he has to bury what was full of connecting and energizing relation in his "mind museum" (XIX).

Yet, MacNeice's accounting of his experiences and items is principally structured not by asyndeton but by repetitive addition, by incantatory polysyndeton, which stabilizes more satisfactorily the collecting "I." Didier, analyzing inordinate uses of repetition and other play with words in diaries, refers to their clusters as the notebook style ("le style d'agenda") and the quasi-telegraphic style ("un style quasi-télégraphique"; 163-64). She says diarists exercise them in order to break away from the limitations of the monadic world of the diary, to construct psychological aiding mechanisms which allow continuity, despite expected and unexpected interruptions and breaks in the process of diary composition. She argues that repetition ("la répétition") and self-repetition ("la redite"), for example, provide the impulse to keep on writing; they act as a kind of a springboard (166). She says it is not "the architecture of the phrase profoundly structured" that creates and sustains the boring-enchanting ("endormeur-charmeur") rhythm of the journal which "interiorize[s]" and "appropriate[s]" the stifling monotony and the recorded days. Rather, it is the obsessive repetition, enumeration, and presence of incomplete phrases that does so (168-69). This "hypnotic" rhythm of gathering certainly provokes the reader. "Any enumeration of objects or events," says MacNeice, "will take on a rhythm, as we read it, just as the monotony of the noise of a train takes on a rhythm as we listen to it." He knows rhythm can "hypnotiz[e] us into an escape from reality" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 50).

In *Autumn Journal*, the accrued pattern of functional and mechanical repetitions of words, sonic devices, and syntactic structures, linking and riveting details to details, creates poetic cumulative expansiveness, which staves off the boredom of ordinary life repetitions. But Didier suggests yet another, more nuanced feature of a seemingly monotonous style produced by compulsive repetitions. She compares its hypnotic effect to religious ecstasy. She believes that it is generated by a barely perceptible yet obsessive sort of "presence-absence." In the

diary, the "I," like God, is omnipresent, yet invisible. Didier says that the reader tries always to turn towards him, to this pervasive pronominal "I" like a fly to a lamp. Yet for psychological, historic, and social reasons, the notion of the "I," while central, remains uncertain. The journal revolving around this "I," revolves around a subject which is beyond capture (cf. 166-68).

Because there is no single wholeness available to *Autumn Journal's* modern subject, his life is animated by multiple attempts to localize and mark off some small meaningful territories. Caught in the developments of "evil time," recording its reverberations as they gather up and impose on his mind, anxious and uncertain, he is reviewing possible instruments and ways to reaffirm his sense of self. Himself a stranger to a long residential experience of home, with its localized intimacy, though not a stranger to experiences of stifling domesticity, he re-collects the deposits of his imaginary life collections to integrate a temporary asylum, his capacious journal. MacNeice's large catalogue of composite images of home comprises a range of habitats, a collection which reconfigures the concept of home not as a *locus* enabling only movement but as a *locus* of accumulations, variations, and climaxes. In *Autumn Journal*, home is a nonstatic principle, tearing the subject from itself more so than the dispersing force of historical events. Following the speaker's journey of the survey of lumber rooms, houses and homes he experienced, we grow also convinced by his claim that "no poet writes a poem about a house; any poem he writes about a house is also a poem about himself, and so about humanity and life in general" (*Poetry* 18).

*Autumn Journal* houses metaphoric worlds of diverse experiences. We read of a house which is a solid "sanctum under pelmets" (I) surrounded by "farmyard noises," still alive and available to some but not to the speaker, who only senses the house's strength from a distance. He says that there are some who still find happiness in "the hive of home," protecting its inhabitants' intimacy of "thigh over thigh and a light in the night nursery" (II). But this light is not meant to be shared. Those who "are hungry" and live "under the starry dome" can't see or use it. His flat on Primrose Hill, exposed to "the

dahlia shapes of the light" outside, is heated by fire, decorated with heavy curtains, and occasionally even cozy, especially when he can be there and look at his flowers. But it is not a "sanctum." There is a "bloody frontier" which "converges on our beds" and which defines the split barren life of the place. The flat sprouts from his pillows not dreams but "feathers" (V). Removed in time and space, his remembered cluttered "place in the sun," his Birmingham funk-hole, stands in an impossible opposition to his present flat: "With two in a bed and patchwork cushions / And checks and tassels on the washing-line, / A gramophone, a cat, and the smell of jasmine." Yet, as a short though intense episode of spending, not of cultivating, the place is a lost experience, impossible to retrieve: "Memory blocks the passage." This house did not secure anything; its sunny place he so exuberantly "docketed" is gone (VIII).

Moving between interplaces of all sorts like railway stations and village pubs, place-rich maps of his daily experiences, porous multiplicities vaguely engaging his visual perception, the "I" pauses at "jerry-built abodes" which the housewives try to "bolster up [...] / With *amour propre* and the habit of Hire Purchase" (XIV). He follows working men to their places, where "the kettle sings and the bacon sizzles," and where the signs marking domestic virtues are disappointingly empty. There is little to do in such homes but to eat, watch television, and go to bed. He catches sight of small objects like "a wistful face in a faded photo" and a "khaki cap" that belonged to somebody's absent dad. In a lifeless house, "the torn shirt soaks on the scrubbing board" (XIX), forming a visually captivating image behind which there is abandoned effort. Such stagnant foci make England the "home of lost-' illusions." Driving through English villages, he sees "tracks of darkness" everywhere, even the country "is damp and dark and evil" (XIV). Ireland is more complex because its deceptive intimacies still allure strangers; it is "small enough / To be still thought of with a family feeling" (XVI). But there is nothing solid or limpid about its homes. The houses in the North, he complains, are "veneered with the grime of Glasgow"; the houses are surrounded by coughing unemployed men, and their children are playing on "wet pavements."

Even the houses of the rich possess liquid qualities, a “sagging tennis net / On a spongy lawn beside a dripping shrubbery.” Belfast, where he spent his childhood, is a city “built upon mud” (XVI). Water’s unstructurable, dissolving, permeating, and feminine character conditions Ireland’s self-deceptive reality. She, the alluvial Ireland, is his real fascinating mother; returning to her, he returns to his origins, his birth. “Her name keeps ringing like a bell / In an under-water belfry” (XVI).

In the journal, homes are evoked out of *horror vacui*, a likely condition of atopia, of having no-place-at-all. Whether anthropomorphized, as houses in war-stricken Barcelona “with empty eye sockets” (XXIII), or arranged in rows, like sleeping animals, “breathing fires,” empty and hostile, the homes assembled in the journal have no histories. They are not complete aborescent creations. Without any power to stabilize the subject and to protect him from the approaching “zero hour” of anticipated destruction, the accumulated houses embody disjunctive orders, territories of rhizomatic dissipation amplifying a sense of paucity of real relations in the modern world.

#### 4. Autumnal Archiving

*Autumn Journal*’s archival accretion of experience, the journal’s peculiar vertigo of repetitions, create a strong alliance with its time in the face of real crises: “We have come to a place in space where shortly / All of us may be forced to camp in time” (XXIII). MacNeice hopes that recorded confusion of the moment and the traces of time will prove instrumental both for him and a future reader. He finds that writing a journal is a necessity, a way of not stopping to write in the face of growing fear. He also believes that facing “the inrush of a posteriori (commonly called ‘life’)” is a natural poetic activity. Selecting and weighing; “sweep[ing] away the vastly greater part”; forming a new pattern, “the first pattern of its kind and not particularly ours,” must result in “the paradox of the individual and the impersonal” (*Selected*

*Literary Criticism* 43). The choice of his medium seems motivated by its contingency undisturbed by hindsight.

Compelling external circumstances press the poet to more increased political concerns and his acceptance of the political nature of man. They play a critical part in the conditions of his journal as do the poet's love of novelty and variety. Suited for recording personal circumstances chronologically, or at least sequentially, the journal serves to maintain a search for communication. A journal is a site for rehearsing, accommodating, and stabilizing contradictions of its author. As I have shown, *Autumn Journal's* to-and-fro movements, its dramatic growth, and its intermittent rhythm take up diaristically the personal challenges as well as stresses of the now. *Autumn Journal* yields and surrenders to that difficult moment in history; it also takes up the poet's struggles to create an intimate and highly diverse space for a panoramic journey across the span of his intense life to attempt to prove and to articulate himself to himself: "I to I" (*Collected Poems* 331).<sup>12</sup> *Autumn Journal* exposes that private self as a critic of his own discourse with his secrets and the events he finds worth reporting. And, as he hoped, the poet's act of tentative but harmonizing self-identification and unification, an attempt however "uneven" and "unbalanced" (*Collected Poems* 101), survives as a document of its time.

As the personal, so the public accounts of the year appear problematic: "The year has little to show, will have a heavy / Overdraft to its heir" (XVIII). Like the first journals of antiquity, *Autumn Journal* records in a form of an account book the climate of the "needs of commerce and administration." Lejeune says that "up until the sixteenth century, the journal was basically a *community* affair" (52). Here is its thirties version:

International betrayals, public murder,  
 The devil quoting scripture, the traitor, the coward, the thug  
 Eating dinner in the name of peace and progress,  
 The doped public sucking a dry dug;  
 Official recognition of rape, revival of the ghetto  
 And free speech gagged and free  
 Energy scapped and dropped like surplus herring

Back into the barren sea;  
 Brains and beauty festering in exile,  
 The shadow of bars  
 Falling across each page, each field, each raddled sunset,  
 The alien lawn and the pool of nenuphars;  
 And hordes of homeless poor running the gauntlet  
 In hostile city streets of white and violet lamps  
 Whose flight is without a terminus but better  
 Than the repose of concentration camps. (AJ XVIII)

In one sense, an archive is a space where documentary traces of public events, traces of experience, are ratified. The journal invests dated traces with personal meanings. Available for reviewing, emendation, and expansion, the journal transmits experience as knowledge intentionally collected and preserved by a participating and knowing subject, who makes them public. The journal preserves and reveals experience, it is used to testify to a contact with the real world.

More than action, MacNeice regarded witnessing as a position available for him to take. In the face of the unknown, to prevent forgetting but also to cope with the present moment, distressed by tensions of his identity, he produces a lyrically elaborated archive that he retrospectively described as an "honest" journal. Its archival space is held together by the rhythm of the beginnings and endings of its entries; by the natural rhythm of the changing season; and by the recorded rhythm of trains and cars, jazz songs and newspaper slogans, all of which define the rhythm of MacNeice's powerful poetry. Most problematically, however, the internal rhythm of the whole journal is sustained by the indistinct conjunction *and* with its all-inclusive force. An archive gathered by means of *ands* is an archive open to the future, or, as McDonald puts it, "pitched into the future" (93).

This paper has sought to show that *Autumn Journal* is the all-inclusive aesthetic collection consolidated by hypertactical *and*. For the *Journal's* multiple subject the collection serves as an aid ensuring his forward movement. Harmonizing and balancing, *and* emphasizes the subject's difficulty in making sense of historical crises, of grasping history. To make sure that anyone could understand his journal, and



that it would survive, MacNeice wrote *Autumn Journal* in verse. Indeed, "seldom can the lyric have carried so much freight and remained airborne" (M. Longley xvii).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For example, Alan Gillis reads *Autumn Journal* as "explicitly autobiographical" (48). Edna Longley and Peter McDonald defend *Autumn Journal* as a major poem to emerge out of the dark decade of the 1930s. Edna Longley also argues that "[a]ll the currents of MacNeice's writing during the 1930s flow into *Autumn Journal*" (56).

<sup>2</sup>MacNeice refers to his poems as cantos. This study uses uppercase Roman numerals to refer to them.

<sup>3</sup>I owe this powerful image to Patricia Rae, who investigates the idea of the proleptic use of English arcadia in elegies written in the thirties. Her essay provides also a good understanding of the nature of the decade's "Janus-faced grief" that she traces in thirties texts' "mingling" of the "ghosts of the dead with the premonition of future deaths" (258).

<sup>4</sup>MacNeice exposes not only symbolic systems of culture but also its diverse material productions.

<sup>5</sup>I am indebted here to Alan J. Peacock, who argues that the poet assimilated "Horace into his own experience [...]. [S]ubscribing in his attitude to life to something not very different from Horace's 'Middle Way,'" but he adds that MacNeice was a "more astringent commentator on human experience" (128). Also Marsack provides a useful comment from MacNeice himself who, writing about the poet's own re-reading of canto IX, said that he was not objective about the ancient Greeks: "I saw them," he says, "in the light of the mood induced in me by Munich" (49). But it is Horace whose influence on MacNeice Marsack singles out, particularly in features of his writing like rational approach, application of debate, and certain skepticism, as well as "stylistic affinities: ease, neatness, rapidity" (53).

<sup>6</sup>"Incorrigibly plural" are MacNeice's words from his acclaimed "Snow" (*Collected Poems* 30).

<sup>7</sup>Pound's reference to the excess of experience that the poet has to deal with in the so-called modern world is informed by his continuing fascination with emptiness and his awareness of the inadequacy of the lyric to address all the diverse materials he wanted to weave into his poetry.

<sup>8</sup>"Late modernism" is used in recent theoretical discussions as a periodizing term to mark what Miller identifies as a "historically codified phenomenon" (22).

For Hindrichs what defines late modernism is “a group of aesthetics evolving out of the impasse of modernist humanist and imperialist ideals”; it is primarily “the intensity of awareness of a moment of transition (in aesthetics as well as economics, politics, and epistemes)” (844). I am not developing the concept of “late modernism” in this paper as it seems to me to be more fruitful in studies focused on bringing out resemblances between diverse texts. For a discussion of the remembered and proleptic senses of crises in the thirties, see chapter one of my *Life Writing as Self-Collecting in the 1930s*.

<sup>9</sup>“Trans-individual mental structures” is Goldmann’s term, used by Raymond Williams, who speaks of the collective “structure of feeling” helping to shape the literary expressions of a period (28).

<sup>10</sup>In his analysis of “poetry of addition” and the dominant “cumulative style,” Dodsworth relies on Bernard Spencer’s “Allotments: April,” Auden’s “Spain,” and MacNeice’s “Bagpipe Music.” Dodsworth makes an interesting mention of Mass Observation, though, going even as far as calling “accumulative poetry” like Spencer’s its “literary equivalent” (187). William Barrett, on the other hand, calls the strategy of putting odd bits together an “encyclopedic form of imagination.” He considers Joyce as a “complete bricoleur” recycling and putting everything (slogans, radio blurbs, proverbs, songs, gossip, popular sayings) together as a way of redeeming time (335).

<sup>11</sup>Gass addresses all these and many other uses of *and*, providing a wide range of powerful examples from Joyce, Stein, Hemingway, Dickens, and Borges.

<sup>12</sup>In *Autumn Sequel*, canto I, he extends this connection: “An autumn journal—or journey” (*Collected Poems* 331).

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