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ARTICLE

Attention: Thomas A. Clark and Simone Weil

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This essay studies the connection between attention and redemption in the poetry of Thomas A. Clark. It discusses the possibility of using Simone Weil's religious philosophy to interpret Clark's understanding of attention as 'waiting'. It argues that while there are affinities between Clark and Weil, Clark's poetic practice also reveals a resistance to the ascetic extremes which attention assumes in Weil's philosophy. To think through the difference between attention as method and style, the essay then draws on the failures of Descartes' *Meditations* in order to argue that only a practical, that is to say, stylistic, engagement with attention will allow for the radical attention that Weil sought but could not achieve.

Keywords: theology; Thomas A. Clark; Simone Weil; attention; minimalism

Not to be imprisoned by the greatest things
but to be limited by the smallest, is divine.

—Epitaph, St. Ignatius of Loyola

The poetry of Thomas A. Clark is a poetry of attention. It is also a poetry of redemption: 'Clark invites us to look at the world with attention and to receive in return a form of redemption, a falling away from the self, and a sense of the numinous'.¹ In the 1990s Clark read and took impression from Simone Weil, a philosopher and mystic who also wrote extensively on the redemptive quality of attention. 'The love of God [has] attention for its substance', argued Weil, because '[t]hose who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention'.² Since the 1990s Clark's work has contained many echoes of Weilian themes, and Clark often describes attention in terms similar or identical to those used by Weil. Yet Weil mostly writes *about* attention, while Clark attempts also to *perform* attention

with his poetry. Where Weil presents us with a theory of attention, Clark experiments with different techniques of attention and presents us also with a practice of attention. As I will try to show, the most important result of Clark's experimentation with attention is to challenge the absolute claims which a philosophy of attention may make when it forgets its practice,³ at the same time as Clark's experimentation with attention gives to any philosophy of attention its ground and purpose.

Simone Weil on Attention

Weil, a philosopher and writer, was born in France in 1909 and died in London in 1943. She thought about attention all her adult life but the topic became particularly important to her after a religious experience in 1938.⁴ From this point on she identified as a Christian though she never accepted baptism, arguing that Christianity was a universal faith independent of any institution.⁵ Weil was a school teacher by profession, and one of her most famous definitions of attention appears in the essay 'Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God' (1942). Here Weil argues that the value of a school exercise lies not in whether a problem has been solved correctly but in whether the exercise has been attended to with care. Weil believes that the ability to show such care is very rare and difficult. To illustrate this, she compares attention to the compassionate glance one might give a suffering stranger: '[t]he capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing [...]. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough'.⁶ Weil uses a play on words to show what she means by describing attention in this way. In French, the word for 'attention', *l'attention*, is cognate with the word for 'waiting', *l'attente*. In addition, *l'attente* can mean 'attending' or 'waiting upon'. For Weil, to pay attention is to be like a patient servant waiting upon their master.⁷ A good servant is always on the ready for whatever might happen. It is the same, Weil argues, with school exercises: 'In every school exercise there is a special way of waiting upon truth, setting our hearts upon it, yet not allowing ourselves to go out in search of it'.⁸

The core of Weil's understanding of attention is to be found in her early work, written while Weil was still a student at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris.⁹ In 1929 Weil chose to write her dissertation on Cartesian science and the discovery

of truth. In her dissertation Weil criticises some aspects of Cartesianism but agrees with its basic method – that ‘so long as I attend (*attendo*) to the proof I cannot but believe that it is true’¹⁰ – and argues that attention is fundamental if one is to know anything about the world.¹¹ She also agrees with Descartes’ opinion that attention is a mental power separate from and superior to the powers of the body.¹² As she puts it a few years later: ‘[t]he individual has only one power: it is thought’.¹³ Like Descartes Weil compares attention to meditation. In 1942, while studying the Zen *ko’ans*, Weil writes: ‘The methods employed by the masters of Zen tend to convey the attention to the highest degree of intensity’.¹⁴ For Weil a *ko’an* intensifies attention because *ko’ans* demand careful puzzling out, as in the famous paradox: ‘think on the sound made by one hand’.¹⁵ On the face of it, the instruction to listen to a single hand clapping is absurd, because listening demands sound and silence produces no sound. But while sound and silence are different, they are not mutually exclusive, for like any opposites sound and silence make sense only in relation to one other (it is impossible to conceive of sound without silence, and vice versa). What Weil admires in the *ko’an* – and so, by extension, what she admires also about attention – is its ability to reveal the relation between things: ‘To “think on the sound made by one hand” – this is to search for the relation between things whose only being lies in the relation. [...] Truth manifests itself as a result of the contact made between two propositions, neither of which is true; it is their relation which is true’.¹⁶

Weil’s reading of the *ko’an* as a theory of attention is significant because it shows that what Weil is interested in when it comes to attention is the way attention reveals the invisible and immaterial. Weil believed that truth was the mediation of the invisible through visible things but did not believe that material things also participated in truth. For Weil, matter on its own is an inert mass which only receives meaning when the mind contemplates the ordering principles which ‘gives body to things’.¹⁷

Weil also compares attention to the mystical illumination which, in the Christian tradition, follows a spiritual trial or a ‘dark night’ of the soul.¹⁸ For Weil this trial is the trial of a soul abandoned by God and erring among the natural impulses of the body. Attention leads the soul out of the night of suffering into the light of God’s love.¹⁹ For

this reason Weil often insists on the rigorous and demanding nature of philosophical method, referring to it as a form of training or self-discipline.²⁰ To write attentively, for instance, is a slow process which it is impossible to speed up: 'There is a way [...] of waiting, when we are writing, for the right word to come of itself at the end of our pen, while we merely reject all inadequate words'.²¹ Weil liked prose and verse that were plain and devoid of flourishes. Her own writing is very vivid and her syntax is simple and easy to understand.²² She also liked living simply. Weil dressed plainly, ate very little, worked long hours, and gave her earnings to the poor. Many of the people she met were impressed by Weil's ability to disregard fashions and dedicate herself wholeheartedly to a task.²³ But her asceticism could also take extreme forms, as for instance when Weil's wartime rationing turned into self-starvation and became a contributing factor in her early death.²⁴ As commentators have pointed out, the case of Weil's attention is also a case of inattention, for where Weil pays attention to the moral and spiritual life she neglects entirely the life of the senses and the body.²⁵

Pessimistic views of the body and of the material world are common in many philosophies which, like Weil's, take their inspiration from Descartes.²⁶ Yet while Weil's mind-body dualism finds its closest parallel in Descartes' philosophy,²⁷ the most famous expression of dualism in Weil's thought is not Cartesianism but Gnosticism. In 1941, after reading an account of Catharism – a medieval gnostic sect – Weil argued that Gnosticism represented a true faith cruelly repressed by Church authorities.²⁸ Weil's source presented the Cathars as ascetics who believed that human beings were sparks of divine spirit trapped in matter.²⁹ For the Cathars – whose name in Latin, *cathari*, means 'the pure' – the aim of the religious life was to return the spirit to God by purifying the body of defilement. Though the comparison between Weil and Gnosticism has been exaggerated (Weil never studied Gnosticism in any detail and would not have agreed with all its doctrines),³⁰ it has become significant and remains useful, for like Weil the Cathars viewed the spiritual life as a trial that could be performed successfully only by the few. Weil made similar, total claims regarding philosophy, which she believed to be a dark night of the soul and a rare and difficult undertaking. In the letters she wrote during her final years, Weil often repeats this opinion, relating it directly to attention. Weil frequently disparages her own ability

to pay attention, and where others were concerned Weil admitted to meeting only two persons whom she thought capable of giving attention.³¹ One of her correspondents, on learning from Weil that he possessed this highly prized ability, attempted to persuade Weil otherwise. But Weil stood firm: 'Most of those who think they possess it, do not'.³²

Thomas A. Clark on Weil and Attention

In 1995 Clark was interviewed by the poet Alec Finlay. The interview mentions Clark's recent engagement with Weil.³³ Themes from Weil's philosophy – principally the themes of attention and waiting – are prominent in Clark's prose poems of the 1990s, later collected as *Distance and Proximity* (2000). In these pieces, Clark compares walking to 'a mobile form of waiting',³⁴ attention to 'a mode of sympathy'³⁵ and looking to a form of redemption: 'On looking at the sea, it is not the sea but the looking that is redemptive'.³⁶ On a more general level, Clark's style can also be said to share affinities with Weil's work. In a recent piece, Clark describes poetry as 'poor', 'spare' and 'plain'.³⁷ Where writing was concerned Weil believed that the unadorned and simple expression was particularly favourable to attention. Plain style is essential to Zen poetry and philosophy, both of which Weil admired, and from which Clark also takes impression.³⁸ Plain style and a limited set of linguistic or visual resources are also key features of minimalist art, with which Clark's work is often compared.³⁹ Since the 1980s Clark's poetry has been characterised by a page meticulously uncluttered, stanzas occupying only a small space on each page and punctuation avoided wherever possible.

Distance and Proximity contains one piece, 'Of Shade And Shadow' (1992), which stands out for developing Weil-like descriptions of attention. Weil compared attention to waiting, and waiting to the attitude of an alert yet patient servant. 'Of Shade And Shadows' compares waiting to shadows, which display the same double quality of being at once still and ready to change at the slightest movement: 'One thinks of the patience of shadows, but there is also their tension, their immediacy of response'.⁴⁰ Earlier in the same piece Clark refers to a 'practice of shadows' that would consist in 'a waiting that renounces every path',⁴¹ echoing Weil's dictum that attention is a way of waiting for the truth without going out in search of it.

'Of Shade And Shadow' also develops Weil's presentation of waiting as compassion. Comparing the cold attitude of a detached person to the cool temperature of a shadow, Clark writes: 'The coolness which the shadow spreads at the front of the tree is a detachment not to be confused with indifference'.⁴² The same argument is developed more fully in another piece from *Distance and Proximity*, 'Jouissance' (1992), originally published the same year as 'Of Shade And Shadow'. 'Jouissance' also uses shadow as an image of attention, but compares shadow to chiaroscuro and 'tone' rather than to detachment, explaining how from shadows 'we may learn tenderness, a fineness of concern'.⁴³ 'Jouissance' also compares looking – the activity that Clark associates with attention most frequently – to pleasure, announced by the title of the piece, which in French means 'pleasure', usually a sensual or bodily pleasure. This expands the meaning of attention beyond its references to Weil's philosophy. In 'Jouissance' it is pleasure, not concentration or mental exercise, which transpires as the immediate purpose of noticing things: 'The first of all pleasures is that things exist in and for themselves',⁴⁴ and later: 'In small things, delight is intense'.⁴⁵

While at one level, then, Clark's poetry of attention shares many evident similarities with Weil's philosophy of attention, on another level Clark's concern with attention is of a different order. Where Weil is interested in attention as a grueling form of mental exercise, Clark is interested in attention as an enjoyable form of physical sensation. An example of Clark's distinctive interpretation of attention when compared to Weil is his verse poem 'Waiting' (1992), also contemporaneous with 'Of Shade And Shadow' and 'Jouissance'. Below is the fourth of the poem's six paragraphs:

waiting
 in the rain
 at the head
 of the glen

 by a ruined
 sheiling

pausing &
waiting

waiting under
a pine tree
waiting under
a willow

waiting
and longing
waiting and
waiting

effortlessly
waiting

waiting
and forgetting
waiting
and falling
asleep⁴⁶

Though the theme of the poem – ‘waiting’ – echoes Weil, Clark’s presentation is different from Weil’s in several ways. While the poem describes ways of waiting, it also describes the environment – a forested and rainy glen – in which one might find oneself waiting, as well as the physical experience of waiting. Moreover, in Clark’s poem about waiting, waiting is not performed at a constant rate, but follows the natural rhythms of the body; it ceases with sleeping and forgetting. Both these features – description of environment, linking of attention to the body – are unusual in Weil’s work, which normally considers waiting to be whatever does not follow ‘natural movements’ (the image she often uses is grace pulling against gravity).⁴⁷ Clark, by contrast, extends waiting also to the particulars that belong to the natural

rhythms of the body and the world. As he puts it elsewhere in *Distance and Proximity*: 'Constant vigilance would be a parody of attention, a fullness without phases, an inability to put the self to sleep'.⁴⁸

Weil chose the Gnostic philosophy of the Cathars to signify her mind-body dualism, and the most striking demonstration of Clark's difference from Weil on this point is a poem about the Cathars, 'The Castles of the Good'. The poem was composed in the winter of 1991, a year before the publication of 'Waiting' and 'Of Shade And Shadow', the other pieces where Clark engages with Weilian themes. The poem is subtitled 'in the land of the Cathars' and describes a visit to the town and surrounding fields of Carcassonne where the Cathars were massacred by the armies of the Inquisition in 1209. The reference to the Cathars as 'the good', together with Clark's description of them as 'the faithful' in the poem's final stanza, suggests an appraisal of Catharism similar to Weil's. Yet 'the faithful' is the only explicit reference to Cathars Clark makes in this poem, which consists of six close descriptions of different environments around Carcassonne and is otherwise free of references to Cathar philosophy. If anything, the descriptions that make up the poem – taking in everything from the colour of the sky to the scent of stacked timber and the alarm calls of birds – seems to distance itself from any Gnostic pessimism about the physical realm. This is most noticeable in the final stanza, in which 'the field where the faithful burned' is juxtaposed with a string of observations pertaining to the produce of the field in its present-day state:

white lifted up to blue
healing warmth and cleansing cold
the view from the battlements
the field where the faithful burned
lavender honey
flowers, butterflies, a slow thaw
the quiet of backstreets at noon
the fluttering of pigeons⁴⁹

Here the ashes of the Cathars enrich the soil and provides nutrients for the lavender which in turn feeds the industry of bees. This invites the reader to think of the faithfulness and goodness of Weil's Cathars – and of Weil's philosophy – in a new way. Where Weil's Cathars were faithful because of what they believed, Clark's Cathars are good because they lived, becoming faithful to life and all the pleasures of the sensible things which continue to transform their remains into pleasurable and sensible things also in death.

Clark's interest in the physical sensation of attention shapes his understanding of the way in which looking, in his own words, may become 'redemptive'. The best guide to Clark's sense of redemption is an essay he wrote on the poetry of Robert Lax, 'Words and Stones, Eloquence and Astonishment' (1999). Lax's poetry is abstract and minimalist in style and resembles Clark's in many ways: both poets make frequent use of repetition and often focus a poem on specific words or objects.⁵⁰ Lax was also religious, and Clark interprets Lax's poetry as a form of religious devotion, 'strikingly close to the practice of meditation'.⁵¹ When glossing meditation, however, Clark does not follow the Cartesian tradition and does not compare meditation, as Weil had done, to a purely mental exercise. Instead, Clark defines meditation as a 'complete absorption in the object'.⁵² The example Clark uses to illustrate meditation is a poem by Lax which repeats the phrase 'one stone' five times. A few years previously, Clark had used a similar technique to describe the shine of a black stone in the poem 'By Kilbrannan sound' (1993):

the glare of a black stone
the gleam of a black stone
the glimmer of a back stone
the glint of a black stone
the glitter of a back stone
the gloss of a black stone
the gloom of a black stone
the glow of a black stone⁵³

Writing about Lax's poem, Clark argues that each time 'stone' is repeated the attention of the poet is lead through different stages: from the word on the page; to the image of the word in the mind; to the sensation of the stone that preceded the word, and finally to sensation itself: 'As the poems return again and again to a word or a phrase, so the poet returns to a primal perception, to a non-instrumental knowledge which is the substratum of experience'.⁵⁴ We can compare the 'primal perception' mentioned in this passage to Clark's statement, in 'Jouissance', that 'the first of all pleasures is that things exist in and for themselves'.⁵⁵ Like the 'primal perception' revealed by meditation, the knowledge revealed through pleasure is for Clark fundamental and 'first'. It is not a knowledge that tells us anything about what we see, apart from the fact that we are seeing something. This fact of seeing, which is not an idea but a sensation, is what I take to be the redemption aimed at in Clark's poetry of attention.

The Ecosystem as Attention

How to explain the points of difference between Weil's philosophy of attention and Clark's poetry of attention, when both consider attention the most fundamental and vital practice? In part, the differences arise from the distinct ontological assumptions that both thinkers bring to their respective methods of attention. Weil's understanding of the world is similar to Descartes' and is broadly dualistic.⁵⁶ For Weil, body and spirit, mind and matter, are different in kind. It thus makes sense to claim that attention should be fixed principally on thought, which belongs to mind, rather than on things or bodies, which belong to matter. Clark's understanding of the world, by contrast, makes no claim to dualism, but imagines bodies and minds connected in a vast network of living things. It thus makes sense to suggest, as Clark does, that attention should be fixed on bodies and things as well as thoughts and ideas; it also makes sense to practise attention by looking principally at particular things.

Attention to particulars is one of the most characteristic features of Clark's work, which is often referred to as landscape or nature poetry,⁵⁷ and might best be described as a form of ecological thought.⁵⁸ In fact, Clark himself describes poetry in these terms, at one point comparing verse to a 'functioning ecosystem'.⁵⁹ For Clark,

in the same way that an ecosystem breaks down old bodies and recycles them as new living things, so a poem breaks down old texts and recycles them as new poems and ideas. In Clark's work, moreover, both ecosystems – the ecosystem of the page and the ecosystem of the planet – tend to feed each other, with things giving birth to ideas and ideas in turn making things possible. For instance, in this stanza from the collection *Yellow & Blue* (2014), what begins as an observation of gems turns into an observation of words-as-gems and becomes a performance of the thingly quality of words in general:

on the open hill
is granite debris
are crystals
of feldspar and mica
the word gems
blue topaz
green beryl
smoky quartz⁶⁰

There are many more examples of the ecosystem in Clark's poetry – examples of persons turning into animals,⁶¹ of landscapes becoming sentient,⁶² of pronouns turning into concrete nouns,⁶³ and so on – but the following excerpt, from *The Path to the Sea* (2005) makes explicit the double movement of the ecosystem. The passage describes the rhythm of attention, 'to attend and cease to attend'. A person who sits breathing the open air experiences a feeling of oneness with the air; this feeling leads her to question whether she really has a self that is separate from her surrounding environment:

to sit in the air
and take the shape of the air
its cool spaciousness and precision
and never mind what comes to mind

but attend and cease to attend
remaining cool and spacious
this is the prize of being alone
to be one and no other
and at the same time to discover
your shape as a mere integument
that is less shape than a notion⁶⁴

The passage summarises the way in which, for Clark, while the ecosystem pre-exists attention the ecosystem becomes apparent only through the exercise of attention. Attention imitates the movement of the ecosystem by travelling between particular things and general ideas, or between difference and identity. In *The Path to the Sea* the 'shape' of the air is what identifies me with the air but when I pay attention to the air my own shape also becomes that which differentiates me from the air, for I am not air and moreover the air has no definite shape, being ubiquitous as well as invisible.

It is in light of this movement between different perspectives – the perspective of the particular and the perspective of the whole – that one commentator has compared Clark's poetry to a combination of Aristotelian love of particulars on the one hand and Platonic regard for unity on the other.⁶⁵ But one might also compare Clark's poetry to the ancient method of philosophical dialectic more generally. Like Socrates, Clark divides the whole into particulars but also gathers particulars together into a whole.⁶⁶ In Clark's work the two sides of philosophical method are linked in the practice of attention which purports to describe the whole system in a particular moment of sensation. This theory is presented in a number of ways, such as 'waiting', 'pleasure', 'redemption' and 'meditation'. These are dramatizations of ideas, for what Clark is attempting to show – the nature of attention – is undermined by any name or definition; and yet it is because his poetry continues to name things and persists in attending to them, even where names are inadequate and attention imperfect, that there can be attention at all.

Notes

- ¹ Alec Finlay, 'Editor's Preface' to Thomas A. Clark, *Distance & Proximity* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2000), p. 11.
- ² Simone Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God' in *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1950), p. 58.
- ³ On the paradoxes of writing about attention while also paying attention, see P. Sven Arvidson, *The Sphere of Attention: Context and Margin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).
- ⁴ Weil's opinions on attention, formulated at different points in her career, are summarised in *Lectures on Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 205, and *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 116–122.
- ⁵ Weil, 'Hesitations concerning baptism' in *Waiting on God*, pp. 1–7.
- ⁶ Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies' in *Waiting on God*, p. 58.
- ⁷ Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies' in *Waiting on God*, p. 58.
- ⁸ Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies' in *Waiting on God*, p. 57.
- ⁹ Before attending the ENS Weil studied with Alain (Émile Chartier), who wrote extensively on attention and was a formative influence on Weil's philosophy. For the link between Alain, Weil, and attention, see Emmanuel Gabellieri, *Être et Don: Simone Weil et la philosophie* (Peeters: Leuven, 2003), pp. 83–104.
- ¹⁰ René Descartes, *Meditations AT VII*, p. 70 [*Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)].
- ¹¹ Simone Weil, 'Science and Perception in Descartes' in *Formative Writings 1929–1941*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina van Ness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), pp. 21–87 (pp. 79, 78–79). The connection between attention and Cartesian philosophy is discussed by David Marno, *Death be Not Proud: The Art of Holy Attention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 218–228.
- ¹² See for instance Weil, 'Science and Perception in Descartes' in *Formative Writings*, p. 61: 'As long as it is a matter only of my thinking, and not of the things I think, the will is effective in itself', etc. Weil rejects the *cogito* and argues that the first awareness is will-power, not thought (because thought demands reflection and so is not primary whereas will-power is spontaneous). Though this is a departure from Descartes it is not a departure from the method of introspection and indeed does not claim to be; Weil argues that while will-power represents the irreducible link between mind and body the two are still separated and belong to essentially different spheres. On Weil's dualism and the legacy of Cartesian philosophy, see Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (London I.B. Tauris, 2014).
- ¹³ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 8.
- ¹⁴ Simone Weil, *Notebooks*. 2 vols., trans. Arthur Wills (New York: Putnam's, 1956), p. 399.
- ¹⁵ Weil in *Notebooks*, p. 399. I am quoting Weil's paraphrase. The original form of the *ko'an* is: 'Hear the sound of one hand', and is attributed to the seventeenth-century Zen master Hakuin. A probable source for Weil's reference is D. T. Suzuki, whom Weil was reading at the time.
- ¹⁶ Weil, *Notebooks*, p. 406.
- ¹⁷ Simone Weil, 'The Pythagorean Doctrine' in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, trans. Elisabeth Chase Geissbuhle (London: Routledge, 1957), pp. 151–201 (p. 178).
- ¹⁸ Weil, *Notebooks*, p. 396.
- ¹⁹ A. Paire (ed.), *Joë Bousquet dans les Cahiers du sud: anthologie* (Marseille: Rivages, 1981), p. 74.
- ²⁰ On the necessity of training, see for instance Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 123–127.

- ²¹ Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies' in *Waiting on God*, p. 57.
- ²² On Weil's style, see Sharon Cameron, 'The Practice of Attention: Simone Weil's Performance of Impersonality', *Critical Inquiry* 29/2 (2003): 216–252.
- ²³ J-M Perrin and G. Thibon, *Simone Weil As We Knew Her*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- ²⁴ David McLellan, *Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil* (New York: Poseidon, 1990), p. 266.
- ²⁵ On the contradictions of Weil's asceticism, see McLellan, *Utopian Pessimist*, and Gillian Rose, 'Angry Angels—Simone Weil and Emmanuel Lévinas' in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 211–223 (pp. 222–223).
- ²⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 164–252.
- ²⁷ For the connection between dualism and Cartesianism in Weil's philosophy, see Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), pp. 213–239.
- ²⁸ Simone Weil, 'To Déodat Roché [23 January 1941]', *Seventy Letters*, ed. and trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 130.
- ²⁹ Weil's source was the scholar and neo-Catharist Déodat Roché, who also published Weil's letter in his journal, the *Cahiers d'études Cathars*, No. 2, April–June 1949. The historical documentation of Cathar beliefs is very poor and Roché's reconstruction is speculative. Weil's involvement with Roché's neo-Catharism is discussed by Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 203–225.
- ³⁰ As Alain Birou points out, Weil's understanding of Gnosticism ignores completely its appreciation for the dynamic interaction between good and evil principles in the world; for Weil, matter is not only evil but non-existent when compared to the Good. See 'Simone Weil et le Catharisme', *Cahiers Simone Weil* 6/4 (1983), pp. 340–5.
- ³¹ Paire, *Joë Bousquet dans les Cahiers du sud*, p. 74. Weil's two exemplars of attention were the Dominican priest Jean-Marie Perrin and the writer Joë Bousquet, to whom the letter is addressed.
- ³² Paire, *Joë Bousquet dans les Cahiers du sud*, p. 75.
- ³³ Alec Finlay, 'Standing Still and Walking in Strath Nethy: An Interview with Thomas A Clark', *Edinburgh Review*, No. 94 (1995). <<http://www.cairneditions.co.uk/thomasaclark/interview.pdf>> (Accessed 10/09/16).
- ³⁴ Clark, 'In Praise of Walking' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 16.
- ³⁵ Clark, 'Of Shade And Shadow' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 35.
- ³⁶ Clark, 'On Looking At The Sea' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 34.
- ³⁷ Thomas A. Clark, *Poor Poetry* (Pittenweem: Moschatel Press, 2016), [recto].
- ³⁸ Alice Tarbuck, "'An old frog/jumps in": Chinese and Japanese poetry in the work of Thomas A. Clark and Cid Corman'. Unpublished paper presented at 'A Place Apart: Thomas A Clark Symposium'. Edinburgh, 7 May 2016. See also her forthcoming study, *The Poetry and Practice of Thomas A. Clark*.
- ³⁹ Good introductions to Clark's work and its place in contemporary poetry are: Tom Jones, 'Equivalence: Thomas A. Clark' in *Poetic Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 161–174, 194; and Harriet Tarlo, 'Introduction' to *The Ground Asland: An Antology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), pp. 7–20.
- ⁴⁰ Clark, 'Of Shade And Shadow' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 53.
- ⁴¹ Clark, 'Of Shade And Shadow' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 52.
- ⁴² Clark, 'Of Shade And Shadow' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 57.

- ⁴³ Clark, 'Jouissance' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 42.
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- ⁶⁰ Clark, *Yellow & Blue* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), p. 32.
- ⁶¹ Clark, *The Path to the Sea* (Todmorden: Arc, 2005), p. 59: 'again I was a goldcrest', etc.
- ⁶² Clark, 'The Blue of Flax' in *Distance and Proximity*, p. 71: 'When the blue of flax is over, the distant hills remember'.
- ⁶³ Thomas A. Clark, *Yellow & Blue* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), p. 65: 'one in constant/modulation/may be a tree/a bird a stone/startles/in the light/of recognition//or/the golden word/ripple of variation/lever of possibility/an oar'.
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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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