

TIME TRAVELS:
METALEPSIS AND MODERNIST POETRY

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURES AND CULTURES
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

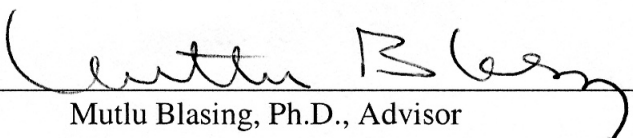
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MAY 2008

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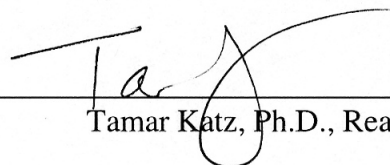
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Date 5/13/08

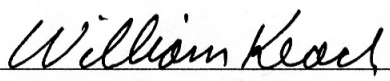

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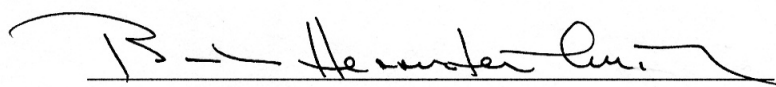
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David has published work on Lord Byron, Isaac Nathan, and Jewish Orientalism, and has three articles forthcoming: one, in the *James Joyce Quarterly*, on Joyce, Albert Einstein, and interdisciplinary study; a second, in *The Journal of Modern Literature*, on vision and revision in W. B. Yeats; and a third, with Robert Scholes in *PMLA*, on the “War Poems from 1914.” Recently completed work includes conference papers on Kenneth Burke, prosody, and the relationship between modern physics and modernist literature; as well as articles on detection in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, figuration in Wallace Stevens, and metaleptic narratives.

Currently, David is completing an Introduction to the Modernist Journals Project’s digital edition of Poetry magazine. David has taught courses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature both in the Department of English at Brown University and the College of Letters at Wesleyan University. His most recent classes include: “Aesthetic and Politics: the Case of Poetry,” “Metaphor and Modernity,” and “Joyce’s Irish Odyssey.” He will join the English Department at Buffalo State College as an Assistant Professor of British Literature and Theory in the fall of 2008.

Acknowledgements

Because we can't quite footnote our gratitude....

I want to begin by thanking Mutlu Blasing who is always showing me how to read poetry the way that poets write it. When I thought it was all about metaphor, she insisted I have another look at synecdoche, and when I thought it was all about irony, she insisted I have a look at metalepsis; now that I think it might all be about metaphor again, I worry what figure she'll throw at me next: maybe hypozeuxis or mesodiplosis or paralipsis. While I cannot adequately articulate my debt to her manners of reading and thinking, I can thank her for her personal generosity, ever-mindful critical eyes, and patience—or, perhaps, it was faith.

My gratefulness to Tamar Katz, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Bill Keach cannot be overstated. It was in Tamar Katz's modernism seminar that everything started to come together. Speaking with her, academic work in general becomes infused with a new vitality. Barbara Herrnstein Smith continually introduces me to texts I hadn't encountered and questions I hadn't imagined. The kindness and understanding she showed us in her dissertation seminar made us feel at home not only with our work but also with the processes of writing. Bill Keach's courses, which offered the possibilities of reading theory and poetry hand-in-hand, opened up a range of new avenues. It took a while, but he finally got me "thinking" and "inking" on a whole new level. I hope someday to be able to repay the untiring support of all four of my committee members.

My time at Brown University would not have been possible without the help of many colleagues and friends. I envy the prickly ears of Stephen Koelz, but I am thankful that they've always been attuned. While I one day hope to get closer to the critical mind of Manu Chander, I know that I will never be able to catch up to his spirit. I want to thank Stephen Foley, Coppélia Kahn, and Larry Stanley not only for their help with work but also for their mentoring during those first years as a teacher. I am grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon foundation for sponsoring our graduate workshop on "Form and History," which inspired wonderful discussions and incredible ideas. The workshop would not have been possible without the kindness of Ellen Rooney, and it would not have been successful without her copious mind. Jacque Wernimont has kept me aware of the historicity of form and has always been able to suggest alternative paths to critical dead ends. The insights of Corey McEleney (who will soon hexagonate the Poe-Lacan-Derrida-Johnson-Irwin quincunx) have been invaluable. I would also like to express my

thanks to Daniel Block, John Funchion, and Laurel Rayburn, as well as all of the other participants, for their thoughtful reflections and ever-measured critiques.

Parts of chapter 3 are forthcoming in the *Journal of Modern Literature*. I am grateful to its readers, particularly Daniel O'Hara, who read the chapter and offered advice on how to proceed. Susan Bernstein, Catherine Gallagher, Berel Lang, Khachig Tölölyan, and Susan Wolfson have all read sections of the dissertation, shining their flashlights brightly on the hidden possibilities of the dark corners. For their constant encouragement, especially on the days I seemed most lost, I thank Brian Ballentine, Timothy Bewes, Eugenia Brinkema, Stuart Burrows, Christopher Holmes, Lorraine Mazza, Ravit Reichman, Raymond Sultan, Ellen Viola, and Jay Zisk. I wish also to express my gratitude to Bianca Theisen, Avrom Fleishman, Richard Macksey, and John Plotz, whose unwavering mentorship kept me afloat as an undergraduate student. I would not be where I am today without the continual questions and inquisitive minds of my students. I thank all of my friends and family, with the understanding that the two are not exclusive. For others not mentioned here, I hope the next few hundred pages serve as an acknowledgement.

I owe Bob Scholes a very special thanks. In my own selfishness, I assumed him as a mentor years before I was able to put his face to the books on my shelf. When I finally met him, I found that he was as charitable with his time as with his counsel. During my days at Brown University, he has been a perpetual advocate. As a reader of his and then a student and then a friend, I can simply say that his energy motivates and his ideas inspire.

Now, the difficulty of thanking three people who make every narrative meaningful. I am continually in awe of the scope of Keri Holt's imagination. She has taken one of the greatest metaleptic narratives of all—federalist America—and re-envisioned its dynamic social and literary possibilities. I thank Keri, personally, for the two most important things that a friend can do: keeping one honest and keeping one dishonest.

The more I've rang up on my parent's tab, the more of it they've forgotten. I would sign the bill now, but I know that I'd only be adding to it in the morning. For their relentless support, honest questions, and two very different sets of reader's eyes, I can merely offer an oversized pocket of gratitude. I am still learning from them, much more than they realize.

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Time Travels:
Metalepsis and Modernist Poetry

David Ben-Merre

In Place of a Forward: Lines Composed a Few Miles Above the Dissertation

“I thought I recognized [Kafka’s] voice, or his habits, in the texts of various literatures and various ages.... The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.”¹
--J. L. Borges, “Kafka and his Precursors”

It is an unusual statement, yet not perhaps for its author, who always and very meticulously seems to be hand-carving his own tradition. There is a bit of illogic, here, a sense that what comes later not only influences but, moreover, produces what has already been before. Understood in its cultural guises, time does not necessarily assume the one-way “arrow”—to borrow Stephen Hawking’s metaphor—of thermodynamic or cosmological or even psychological time.² This is not to say that one can go back, as a Connecticut Yankee sometimes does, to King Arthur’s Court, but that, in a manner of speaking, we’re already there, because our present, our here and now, is already determined by what will come after. Time might move in one direction, but literary history moves in another, because it necessarily sees disordered arrays of cultural texts through the reading glasses of a later ordered narrative, be it nation or ego or history or whatnot. My glasses are the rhetorical and poetic *Time Travels*.

The title is a bit misleading and, unfortunately, not as exciting as it sounds. My text is not about the possibility of extra-terrestrial spaceships or wormholes in deep space but, rather, about modernist literature. I examine how notions of time play out rhetorically in the work of Wallace Stevens, W. B. Yeats, James Merrill, and T. S. Eliot. I focus not so much on the relationships of poetry to cosmological or subjective time—both very important to modernist conceptions of the world—but, instead, on how literary forms alter how we’ve come to understand cultures of temporality, such as what we mean

by revision, by literary memory, or by the lyric subject. The central trope I focus on is metalepsis. Unlike most other tropes, which are generally confined to a kind of synchronic, conceptual space, metalepsis reworks presumptions of causality by improbably substituting causes for effects. The causes—Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, and Browning—might have influenced the effect, Kafka, but only because the other cause, Kafka, is able to create the cultural text that is his precursors.

I turn to metalepsis, because it helps figure an important paradoxical relationship between the ways we talk about history and the ways we talk about forms. My first chapter is about three very different sounding but structurally similar paradoxical forms, which themselves span across historical, literary, and philosophical disciplines. The first is a critical problem with how modernism and modernity are conceived; the second is a bind between past and current historicist and formalist critical approaches; and the third is a very old problem of logic, which gets re-imagined by philosophers and mathematicians in the early twentieth century. Consider, for a moment, the formal relationship among these three statements, one about modernity, another about theoretical paradigms, and the third about... well... liars:

- Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process.... Modernity and history seem condemned to being linked together in a self-destroying union that threatens the survival of both.
--Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*
- Always historicize! This slogan the one absolute and we may even say “transhistorical” imperative of all dialectical thought.³
--Fredric Jameson, *Political Unconscious*
- “Cretans are always liars.”
-- Epimenides, a Cretan

Modernity, for Paul de Man, is paradoxically the historical condition of being outside the historical. While Fredric Jameson would undoubtedly take issue with de Man's pronouncement, his famous call for a return to historicizing formally parallels the paradox of de Man.⁴ What Jameson takes out of history is not modernity, but History. His historicism thus paradoxically becomes a "'transhistorical' imperative," which, like Borges's Kafka, motivates everything that comes before. Both the de Man and the Jameson passages share something in common: each is a complicated version of the liar's paradox, because each arrives at a paradoxical dead end when asked to legitimate its own system through its own rules.⁵ These formal paradoxes, which relate both to modernist poetry and the way we talk about it, will be discussed further in my first chapter.

In the spirit of modernist criticism, which always seems to pick its subjects in fours, I too will be offering a modernist quartet. My viola, cello, and two violins will be made up of a temperamental Connecticutian who would not be found in King Arthur's Court, a British poet who wasn't British, a second Connecticutian poet who often embarked for London on the QE2, and another British poet who was not-so-secretly an American. I look at metaleptic moments in the work of these poets, but discover more about the possibilities of metalepsis from them as I discover about them from the frame of metalepsis. My second chapter, on Wallace Stevens, is composed of four short interlocking essays which all explore the metaleptic relationship between metaphor and metonymy. The following chapter, on W. B. Yeats, is about revision and what it has to do with history, nationalism, and critical reading. Next, is a chapter on James Merrill, which considers how typos and cultural memory are each material events thrust onto earlier texts. Finally, I consider the metaleptic lyric subject of T. S. Eliot's later work,

especially as it relates to problems conceiving the here and the now. I read these modernist poets not so much in terms of totalizing nationalistic contexts, but across rhetorical ones. By this transatlantic and interdisciplinary approach, I do not mean to disregard national or disciplinary borders, but rather to turn them around as questions of form—forms of nation, forms of knowledge, forms of history.

1

Don't begin here.

A quick interlude which focuses on a formal problem regarding the relationship between the way history might be conceived and the form that such a conception might take:

After four hundred pages of re-determining G. W. F. Hegel's dialectic so that it would never resolve itself in the Absolute, but remain an always negating process, Theodor Adorno very quickly and very frustratingly offers the following negative "resolution":

Without a thesis of identity, dialectics is not the whole; but neither will it be a cardinal sin to depart from it in a dialectical step. It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total.⁶

It was at the same time the most unexpected and the most predictable thing that Adorno could have written. The title of his tome, *Negative Dialectics*, itself a redundancy of negation, challenges the notion of dialectics as "achiev[ing] something positive by means of negation," and it can be (ironically!) summarized by some words from his introduction: "Total contradiction is nothing but the manifested untruth of total identification."⁷ That two negatives never make a positive for Adorno is not something new. Such ideas echo and explain the famous line from *Minima Moralia* that "[t]he whole is the false," stated later in the same text as the more playful: "If a dialectician, for example, marked the turning-point of his advancing ideas by starting with a "But" at each caesura, the literary scheme would give lie to the unschematic intention of his thought."⁸

In his epistemological-ethical critique of totalizing systems, Adorno continually elevates philosophical analysis over a materialist one while also refusing to see the

dialectic as something that resolves contradiction.⁹ But there is still a problem for Adorno, the logical philosopher, which causes him to turn his critique upon himself. A dialectical system which flouts totality must still paradoxically embrace its own anti-totalizing method totally. “Once dialectics has become inescapable,” Adorno writes, “it cannot stick to its principle like ontology and transcendental philosophy.”¹⁰ Thus, after another two-hundred-fifty or so pages, Adorno can boldly claim that “[i]t lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total.”¹¹ In order to claim that everything is dialectical, Adorno must posit a historical end to dialectics itself, which would then in turn undo his initial claim. It is an impossible position and one that exploits the logic that positive and negative systems themselves are both positive or totalizing in their systemization and negative or paradoxical in their application.

Adorno is oddly caught between two contrary impulses: one claims an anti-totally while another rhetorically enacts one, specifically by disclaiming it. I began with this metaleptic paradox, because it sheds light on the formal relationships among philosophy, history, and literature, which will be discussed further in this chapter. Metalepsis allows us to reconsider the uneasy relationship between formalist and historicist critical approaches and between formal systems and mediating factors. It also helps to explain what many critics (Adorno included) feel is the central paradox of modernity—the historical condition of being outside the historical. Adorno is not alone in this reading, but his words are perhaps the most succinct: “The modern has really become unmodern. Modernity is a qualitative not a chronological category.”¹²

That certain conceptions of modernism, the contradictory challenges of literary criticism today, and a problem of logic may share the same formal structure is not surprising. Forms configure the very possibility of our understanding. This is not to say that they are not political, ideological, or historical, but rather that they complicate these mediating narratives by claiming that such narratives already presuppose, in a negative dialectical fashion, their own formal shapes—politics works like x, ideology works like y.... I am concerned, here, more with the structural relationship between formalisms and historicisms—how they mediate each other—than with the critical narratives themselves. My dissertation is formalist in so far as it works from the premise that the very “bind” between historicisms and formalisms, which I will discuss in this chapter, is a formal and not a historical matter, and one which allows us to imagine the rhetoric of time.

This first chapter is divided into five sections, each of which considers the formal relationships among modernity, literary criticism, and philosophy. The next section is about the relationship between modernism and critical ordering and disordering. The third and fourth sections further explore the weirdness of the diachronic trope *metalepsis*, which, like Hegel’s dialectic, has both positing and negating functions. In the third section, I examine the relationship between the spatial configuration of narrative *metalepsis* and the temporal configuration of *metaleptic* narratives. The fourth section details philosophical approaches to paradox and relates them to self-referential problems of critical theory. Finally, because *metalepsis* poses a critical problem for the positing form of the dissertation itself, the final section will self-reflexively consider the relationship between the trope and literary criticism today.

A. A violent order is disorder; and
 B. A great disorder is an order. These
 Two things are one. (Pages of illustrations.)
 --Wallace Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos"

II. Modernism and Critical Disorder

Order and disorder. Attempts to define that cultural event termed Modernism have invariably tried to tackle two questions: *what is it?* and *when was it?* Answers to the first vary widely and are often opposite in nature: modernism is order, modernism is chaos; modernism is progress, modernism is disruption; modernism is the inner psyche, modernism is urban detritus; modernism is the mythic, modernism is the new.¹³ Modernism is a totalizing system or it resists totalization; it is part of an Enlightenment project that sees history, science, and reason as progressing or it provides the space for a critique of the Enlightenment; there is a center, there isn't a center.¹⁴ The second question, which pits Modernism against modernity, has not fared much better: it begins with Descartes' *cogito* or with Enlightenment reasoning; it begins after 1848 or at the turn of the century with the death of Friedrich Nietzsche or Queen Victoria; it begins "[o]n or about December, 1910," with the advent of the Great War, or, in 1922; it has never existed, or it has always been a part of our lives.

Modernist criticism, by its very nature, tautologically answers one question by pointing to the other—for instance, modernism is progress, because it is part of an enlightenment project, or modernism is the culture of a socio-industrial complex, because it occurs after 1848. By linking the thematic with the chronological, the various critical enterprises have assumed, either consciously or unconsciously, a translatable relationship between historical moments and cultural phenomena. This, however, depends upon a

belief in a unified historical culture, a metaphysical order that many theorists claim gets complicated by the very notions of modernism and modernity.

Wallace Stevens's poem "Connoisseur of Chaos" echoes the critical dilemma of modernism and modernist studies, which asks us to distinguish not only between order and disorder but also between an ordered disorder and a disordered order. So what is the difference between the two? If we were to follow Stevens's connoisseur, then we would presume that "these two things are one." What we have with modernist studies is a necessary failure of ordering both order and disorder. While most literary definitions, critical classifications, and cultural eras have undergone intense debate and continue to undergo reconsideration as a matter of course, modernist studies is unique in that it seems to assume disputation as its ontological character.¹⁵

I turn, here, briefly to two critics of modernity, Paul de Man and Susan Stanford Friedman, who, respectively, read modernism as a disordered order and as an ordered disorder. Like Theodor Adorno, Paul de Man sees modernity as a paradoxical system that is historical in its ahistoricity. To explain this historical condition of being outside the historical, de Man turns to Friedrich Nietzsche's "willful forgetting":

Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process.... Modernity and history seem condemned to being linked together in a self-destroying union that threatens the survival of both.¹⁶

History, paradoxically, is what modernity tries to overcome, but, by doing so, it immediately gets "swallowed up" into history. Earlier I wrote about the two questions of modernist studies: *what is it?* and *when was it?* Reading ironically, Paul de Man turns

these questions in on themselves, arguing that the modern condition exists in the aporia between history and trope: “‘modernity’ is not used in a simple chronological sense as an approximate synonym for ‘recent’ or ‘contemporary’ with a positive or negative value-emphasis added. It designates more generally the problematical possibility of all literature’s existing in the present, of being considered, or read, from a point of view that claims to share with it its own sense of a temporal present” (166).

In her essay, “Definitional Excursions,” Friedman offers a glimpse into how competing readings of modernity might be formally quite similar. In this respect, she counters de Man’s ironic reading with a synecdochic one:

to some, Locke or Rousseau are the supreme embodiments of Enlightenment modernity; to others, Joyce is the defining icon of modernism. Similarly, some might characterize western modernity in terms of the rise of the bourgeoisie, democracy, and science; others might define modernism in terms of utopian social planning or the poetics of disruption. Common to all such definitional generalizations is the heuristic tendency to characterize the whole in terms of what the historian retrospectively believes to be its most influential or significant components....¹⁷

Friedman’s modernisms are examples of the *modus operandi* not only of the predominant New Historicism, but also of academic analysis in general. Reading a text in terms of larger pictures and reading larger pictures in terms of a text—a two-way substitution of part for whole—is the domain of synecdoche, the trope which dominates current knowledge production. Whereas, for Kenneth Burke, metonymy allows only the one-way movement from universal to particular (reduction), synecdoche always provides for the back-and-forth translation of universals and particulars, and it is thus able to order discourse on a cosmological level.¹⁸ Schenectady is metonymous for small-town New York. Synecdoche is not.¹⁹

In the following two sections, I turn to the possibilities of future time—that which unfortunately but necessarily gets suppressed when we approach literary history critically—and consider the diachronic trope metalepsis, which exists somewhere between the positing or ordering mode of synecdoche and the negating or disordering mode of irony. Friedman and de Man show how the two tropes of synecdoche and irony play out on a critical level and, how, together, they articulate the dilemmas of modernist studies. Although they approach the problem of modernity from two different paths, Friedman and de Man seem to agree, in a Nietzschean manner, about what gets suppressed in such a willful way and why. The “definitional excursion,” for Friedman, plays into a “politics of definition,” wherein the epistemological breakdown of the term “modernism” is symptomatic of an ethical crisis *today*. What we wish modernism was depends upon how we want to live at present—a metaleptic backwards-reading of a new *now* that seeks to replace the old *now*, an endlessly repeating modernist configuration, which always seems to suppress the question of time.

It is the nature of *metalepsis* to form a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition. It is a *trope* with which to claim acquaintance, rather than one which we are ever likely to require to use. The commonest example is the following: *cano* is a synonym for *canto* and *canto* for *dico*, therefore *cano* is a synonym for *dico*, the intermediate step being provided by *canto*. We need not waste any more time over it.²⁰
 --Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*

III. Metalepsis as a Positing Trope

First, an interesting meta-narrative problem with the second *Star Wars* trilogy by way of that little Richard Wagner piece *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, but, before that, a passage from Charles Dickens:

As brisk as bees, if not altogether as light as fairies, did the four Pickwickians assemble on the morning of the twenty-second day of December, in the year of grace in which these, their faithfully-recorded adventures, were undertaken and accomplished. Christmas was close at hand, in all his bluff and hearty honesty; it was the season of hospitality, merriment and open heartedness; the old year was preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him, and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly away. Gay and merry was the time; and right gay and merry were at least four of the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming....

But we are so taken up, and occupied, with the good qualities of Christmas, who, by the way, is quite a country gentleman of the old school, that we are keeping Mr. Pickwick and his friends waiting in the cold, on the outside of the Muggleton coach, which they have just attained, well wrapped up, in great coats, shawls, and comforters (334-5).

As Mr. Pickwick and his cohorts gather beside their coach to head off on their pre-Christmas jaunt, the narrator gets so wrapped up describing the spirit of the season, that he ends up “keeping Mr. Pickwick and his friends waiting in the cold,” as if they were listening to him tell his tale. What makes this passage so humorous is the matter of narrative overstepping, the conceit that Pickwick and company really had to wait for the narrator to finish, as though they were right there with the reader turning pages, waiting “outside” not just the inn but the narrative itself. In the playful manner of much

twentieth-century fiction, Dickens conflates embedded narrative levels, casting his characters into our world and ourselves into theirs.

Next. The production chronologies of George Lucas's *Star Wars* and Richard Wagner's *Nibelungenlied* are backward writings of a sort. The middle three episodes of the *Star Wars* nonology were filmed and released into theaters about twenty years before the "first" trilogy. The original is later in narrative time but comes earlier, while the sequel is earlier in narrative time but comes later—not unusual for prequels. Wagner's tetralogy—or, as the Wagnerites call it, three operas and a *vorabend*—has a similarly odd production timeline. It was only after the composer began planning his opera, *Siegfrieds Tod*, that he realized he needed a *Siegfrieds Leben*, and so he accordingly began to plan the earlier opera, *Der Junge Siegfried*. But, as he soon understood, the story of Siegfried was the story of Siegfried's parents, and the story of Siegfried's parents was the story of the gods. While the four operas were written in chronological order—according to the tale's linear narrative—the story was planned out in reverse, with the eye of the composer-librettist always looking back in mythological time.

Almost all of Wagner's motifs signal the heavy weight of fate—the prophesizing of the Norns as they spin the golden rope, the sleeping Brunnhilde who will awake to a hero, the sword Nothung left in a tree to be used generations later, and the curses, oh the curses. The shadow that fate casts over the operas can be seen most notably in Act Two of *Siegfried*, when the Wanderer (the head god, Wotan) and Alberich, the dwarf-king, speak outside Fafnir the giant-turned-dragon's cave. Following Fafnir's weary "lasst mich Schlafen" [let me sleep], Wotan warns the dwarf:

Diess Eine, rath'ich,
achte noch wohl:

Alles ist nach seiner Art:
an ihr wirst du nichts ändern.

One thing I read thee,
think on it well:
all things in their nature act,
nor aught may'st thou alter.²¹

The operas' thematic fatedness mirrors the backward planning of Wagner's external composition. Siegfried *will* fall victim to the curse of the Rheingold because he *must* die at the end—his fate had been set both narratively, within the fictional world, and, materially, outside it.

If Wagner's operas are all about fate, then *Star Wars* sets itself up allegorically as a confrontation between fate and freedom. The whole force of "The Force" is predicated on the guarantee of free will, of choice. The Jedi embrace conflict, not the physical sort but rather, like Adorno's "negative dialectic," the theoretical or methodological kind, that which disrupts the existence of a totalizing order, actualized here as the Empire. Luke Skywalker, the Jedi hero, tells his evil father, Darth Vader, "I feel the good in you... the conflict."²² To which Vader responds, "There is no conflict." The dark side is characterized by fate, by a lack of agency, and by an anger driven toward a unitary will. At the end of *Return of the Jedi*, Luke Skywalker confronts the Emperor, hoping to convince Darth Vader that there is "still good" in him. An aura of fate surrounds everything the Emperor says: "Welcome, young Skywalker. I have been expecting you.... I'm looking forward to completing your training. In time you will call me Master." After Skywalker defeats Vader, slicing off his hand in the same manner Vader had done to him, the Emperor says, "Good! Your hate has made you powerful. Now, fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side!" The resolute Jedi responds, "Never! I'll never turn to the dark side. You've failed, Your Highness. I am a Jedi, like

my father before me.” Skywalker then turns his dying father good. Easy yet straightforward. The promise of the Jedi is the promise of an existential freedom. The future might be motivated by the past, but it is not bound to it.

The release of the second *Star Wars* trilogy (the one earlier in narrative time) brings about a problem, which is one part narratological and one part meta-or-para-filmic or what I have been calling “material,” regarding the tale’s fate/freedom binary. In the second trilogy, we’re shown Anakin (der junge Vader) first as a gifted young boy, then as an apprenticed Jedi with a potential for good limited only by an incredible temper. Anakin’s anger soon overwhelms him, and he is thrust (or thrusts himself—the difference is important) onto the path toward the dark side where we will meet him again sixteen years earlier.

We know that the last episode of the second trilogy must match up with the first episode of the earlier trilogy—that’s just how the texts of both history and the fiction are supposed to work. And, there is indeed a smoothing out of narratives between the trilogies but with a certain linear or causal prejudice. Here is where things get interesting. Where Wagner embraces fate, the Lucas films disavow it; both narratives are bound by the “future,” but, unlike the Wagner operas, the Lucas films ultimately promise something they cannot deliver. What we have is a future history (the released films) controlling the possibilities of the present, a para-textual requirement which goes explicitly against the Jedi doctrine of freedom, conflict, and choice at the center of the story. Literally, the films tell us that choice exists, while para-textually we discover that such freedom was all along an illusion. Ah, but to bring back the conflict: have Anakin *not* turn into Vader, have the films’ narratives *not* match up—what an interesting and apt

twist that would have been narratively speaking, but it would have been too costly in the end. Stand up to the bottom line, Jedi doctrine cannot do.

Sometimes when we look at a spatial arrangement of a narrative, we'll find a problem, and that problem is temporal. Sometimes when we look at a temporal arrangement of a narrative, we'll find a problem, and that problem is spatial. I bring together the witty Dickens passage and the existential crisis (may we call it?) of *Star Wars* in order to suggest that these problems are really two sides of the same narratological coin. *The Pickwick Papers*—which is supposedly atemporal in its position (the joke is that no time really passes while the narrator narrates a fixed scene)—refigures a spatial or formal matter temporally; *Star Wars*, on the other hand, refigures the temporal—specifically the tension between real production time and fictional narrative time—in a spatial or formal way. It is here, in this cloud of narratological smoke, where form and its historical or material mediation come together. And, where there is smoke... there is metalepsis.

Metalepsis, or its Latin equivalent *transumption*, has many different but interrelated meanings. Whether it is a narrative transgression, as in the Dickens passage above, a “kind of intermediate step” of linguistic development like catachresis as Quintilian saw it, a metonymical substitution for an already figurative term, or “some disconnected pre-text,” metalepsis always engages with what George Puttenham called “the farrefet,” or the farfetched, “as when we had rather fetch a word a great way off...”²³ The “great way off” has both a temporal and a spatial dimension, each lending itself to a different type of metalepsis. The passage from *The Pickwick Papers* brings together different conceptual spaces of the narrative, and, in doing so, it “transgress[es]

the boundaries between the world *in* which one tells and the world *of* which one tells.”²⁴

It is a good example of what Gérard Genette calls narratological metalepsis, or “[t]he transition from one narrative level to another... the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation.”²⁵

There is an oddness about other types of metaleptic narratives (as evinced by the *Star Wars* problem), which we usually do not find in other rhetorical figures—the diachronic quality.²⁶ Metalepsis introduces causality to the very concept of the trope, something which is seemingly not supposed to be in time. We typically consider figural substitution as acting in a kind of abstract space. For example, in that ever-tired idiom “the pen is mightier than the sword,” “pen” can be metonymically substituted for writing and “sword” for warfare or physical combat. The figural understanding does not depend upon a future sense of what “sword” and “pen” might actually be. Even though we might now say “the PC keyboard is mightier than the stealth bomber,” the meaning of the original idiom hasn’t really changed over time. Following Genette, we might call the Dickens excerpt an instance of narratological metalepsis and the *Star Wars* problem an example of a metaleptic narrative. In each instance, a “higher” or totalizing power—one “outside” the level of narration, the other part of a “later” history—not only determines what occurs in the particular instance, but does so *counter to the conventions of its own system*. In a sense, both types of metalepsis can be considered later in time. Since we never have access to the motivating factor of that totalizing system we call History, we must always project a telos onto it, which retroactively and paradoxically determines everything that comes before.

On a metaphysical level, metalepsis reworks presumptions of causality by illogically substituting the effect for the cause. There can be a fire, only because we know there will have been smoke. According to Mutlu Blasing, “Metalepsis is an intentionalizing trope that ‘motivates’ time and, in the broadest sense, history itself. A ‘meaningful’ history is a typological history, where historical lateness is motivated as an earliness, as the fulfillment of a precursor, the antitype of type. Indeed, historical and narrative meaning in general... rests on metalepsis.”²⁷ A meaningful history includes, for some, religiously preordained events—Moses will wander in the woods until Jesus gives him meaning—but it also includes any teleological narrative, be it Marxist, psychological, political, or philosophical. Scientists will project as yet undiscovered laws back across time for all history, motivating the then-world’s physical nature and all of our biological impulses. The metaleptic narrative is a destiny manifest in “America,” human rights, our one and only’s, or the 1998 Yankees according to some folks I know. Late at night, when we ask the ontological question *who am I?* and substitute, if you will, an “I” for an “I,” we are metaleptically rereading pages of our pasts through the bindings of future selves.

It is not *metalepsis*, but *prolepsis* which becomes the diachronic trope par excellence for Mark Currie. Midway between narrative prolepsis (flash-forwards) and rhetorical prolepsis (textual apologia based upon anticipated objections), Currie introduces a third type of prolepsis, what he terms “structural.” So as not to meet a charge of unintelligibility, I’ll provide an ice-breaker and a case in point. As an example of narrative prolepsis (or flash-forward), I offer some well-known opening lines from Gabriel García Márquez: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel

Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.”²⁸ As an example of rhetorical prolepsis, we might consider the oft-heard lines from many an opening: “you’ve already heard preliminary arguments from me... now the defense will argue that....” One part narrative and one part rhetorical, Currie’s “structural” prolepsis is a philosophical-cum-literary problem regarding time.²⁹ He borrows the phrase “anticipation of retrospection” from Peter Brooks, arguing that fiction helps us see how the present tense—what we think of as the “now”—is only a “teleological retrospect” or “an object of a future memory.”³⁰ When narratives provide a future-orientation, they are, in effect, trying to give us a remembrance of things present.

In a sense, this temporal conceptualization relates to the inside/outside narrative leveling of the earlier excerpt from *The Pickwick Papers*. By imagining ourselves and our particular “free” actions as historical entertainment for future narratives, we begin to reposition ourselves in what we thought were fictional cultural spaces—as though, as one performer once wrote, we ourselves were “merely players.” This hollowing out of a meaningful history can be a difficult stance, not only ontologically, but also ethically, with dangerous implications for activist commitments. If all we are doing is “acting,” why act? On the other hand, the consequences need not be so dire. A proleptic sense of time is not to say that the future is determined, but rather that there already exists a future in which the now of “now” is a “then.”

Currie locates his proleptic trope somewhere between Martin Heidegger’s “anticipatory resoluteness” and Jacques Derrida’s “logic of supplementarity.” Heidegger’s being-towards-death is a “mode of anticipation” where “the envisaged future marks the present, structures the present, so that the very being for which presence is

supposed to act as a foundation is structured by the non-being which it anticipates.”³¹ In Derrida, an authority of presence gives way to an authority of repetition and the word becomes the actualized postponement. “[T]he strange structure of the supplement,” he writes, “produces that to which it is said to be added on.”³² As a figure of *différance* or supplementarity, prolepsis disavows the binaries “before and after” and “inside and outside” at the same time it embraces them; or, rather, it disavows them by embracing them. While the logic of supplementarity undermines both the inside/outside narrative leveling of *The Pickwick Papers* and the before/after chronological problem of *Star Wars*, it also partakes in the same binaries.

Shifting the discussion onto another critical-narrative level, I turn for a moment to Paul de Man who takes up Gayatri Spivak’s exhortation to “deconstruct Derrida’s text beyond what Derrida as controlling subject has directed in it.”³³ In *Blindness and Insight*, de Man writes,

The only literal statement that says what it means to say is the assertion that there can be no literal statements.... Derrida had to interpret [Rousseau’s] chapter on metaphor as a moment of blindness in which Rousseau says the opposite of what he means to say.... Rousseau’s text had no blind spots: it accounts at all moments for its own rhetorical mode. Derrida misconstrues as blindness what is instead a transposition from the literal to the figural level of discourse.³⁴

Turning the Derridean model against itself, de Man rightly and wrongly critiques Derrida’s own presumptions of insides and outsides; here, de Man specifically takes Derrida to task for presuming a presence in the literal language of Rousseau rather than seeing the rhetorical mode of Rousseau’s text for what it is. Unfortunately and understandably, though, de Man’s own critique of Derrida presumes an “inside” in what might very well be Derrida’s rhetorical mode, where, instead of literally critiquing Rousseau’s philosophy of language, Derrida is simply performing Rousseau’s

literal/figurative moment. Yet even here, I must stand corrected, for I am now misreading a literalness in de Man, as you are misreading a literalness in me. The whole system of *différance* or supplementarity could be seen, in Currie's terms, as structural-rhetorical prolepsis—a critique that necessarily anticipates its own critique and infinitely but necessarily builds into its paradoxical structure the very “later-earlier” or “inside-outside” binaries it continually dismantles. Even those systems like Derrida's which stress temporal mediation depend upon a method of back-reading, which would effectively ground the system in a future teleology.

Stepping back into my own narrative frame, I propose a difference between prolepsis and metalepsis.³⁵ Prolepsis is more of a “looking back” than an “acting back.” In the Charles Dickens and George Lucas narratives, it is not so much the anticipation of retrospection which interests me but the notion that a future narrative can have a causal relation to things that come before it. Unlike prolepsis, metalepsis is both an epistemological and ethical figure. Being part of a “meaningful history” means being understandable, but it also means being part of an iterable cultural narrative; it means “fitting in” or risking exclusion. A meaningful history flattens particulars into a totalizing picture. Yet there is something different about metalepsis that we do not find with synecdoche or metonymy, two tropes of which it is often considered a subset. We think we understand cause-effect narratives, or “plots” in E. M. Forster's terms: the king died and then the queen died of grief. Fire then smoke. When we turn this around, we reopen associative spaces and are able to reexamine the cultures from which they derived.

Metaleptic narratives are anachronistic, but they remind us that to say something is anachronistic is to say that its critical form of history doesn't match up with a critical

form of history now, where now is not the present but, instead, the possibilities of the future. Claims of anachronism ignore the possibility that a future time might say *no, that wasn't an anachronism at all*. Metaleptic narratives, as Carla Freccero writes, “embody the spirit of queer analysis,” because they are “willful perversion[s] of notions of temporal propriety and the reproductive order of things.”³⁶ The “meaningful” history of metalepsis always questions the narrative of a meaningful history. Whether singing or chanting or speaking, we need waste time over it.

A paradox still remains: there exists a future, which projects its narratives back, in order to allow us to question our current narratives of the future. The Star Wars problem does this by “matching up” materially what it can’t match up theoretically. A metaleptic narrative is illogical, impossible, a Whig history, and leaves no room for ethical-political commitment. Then again, this is the rhetorical mode of any totalizing system—it pretends its “future” or outside narrative doesn’t keep us waiting in the cold.

After all the pretty contrast of life and death
 Proves that these opposite things partake of one
 At least that was the theory, when bishops' books
 Resolved the world. We cannot go back to that.

--Wallace Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos"

IV. Metalepsis as a Negative Trope

In the previous section, I detailed the aspects of metaleptic narratives, which posit meaningful histories. Such narratives, in a sense, assume a synecdochic form, because they relate particular events to the presumed insides and outsides, before and after of a future and total world view. In this section, I will consider what happens when we look at what has been presumed in such narratives and then turn these presumptions back upon the totalizing system itself. The result is often a paradox of self-referentiality, a negating system, which can be viewed as the other face of metalepsis.

I have already mentioned two such paradoxical moments of critical theory. The first would be Theodor Adorno's negating claim that the whole of dialectics would undergo its own dialectical *Aufhebung*: "It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total." We might find a second, parallel moment in Paul de Man's literal reading of Jacques Derrida reading literally, whereby de Man performs the exact misreading of which he accuses Derrida: "The only literal statement that says what it means to say is the assertion that there can be no literal statements.... Derrida misconstrues as blindness what is instead a transposition from the literal to the figural level of discourse." These paradoxes of self-referentiality are not exclusively the domain of Adorno and de Man's negative systems. Consider the following statements:

Brecht, last night: ‘There can’t be any doubt about it any longer: the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology.’³⁷

--Walter Benjamin

*New Historicizing the New Historicism; or, Did Stephen Greenblatt Watch the Evening News in Early 1968?*³⁸

--Ivo Kamps

Another group of Nietzsche’s readers has been disturbed by the fact that his view that there are no facts but only interpretations seems to generate a self-referential paradox. [I]f every view is in fact an interpretation, this would apply to [Nietzsche’s writing which thus] seems to have refuted itself.³⁹

--Alexander Nehemas

The two major Marxian studies [Lukács’s and Marcuse’s] of Hegel have for one thing argued convincingly that Hegel’s ‘conception’ of absolute spirit is little more than a symptom of a historical situation in which his thinking could go no further.⁴⁰

--Fredric Jameson

...if someone tries to turn our awareness inward... our whole organization resists – just as, for example, the oesophagus and the urethra resist any attempt to reverse their normal direction of passage.⁴¹

--Sigmund Freud

To this list we could add: assigning Louis Althusser’s “I.S.A.” essay in a classroom, finding Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* on a bookshelf labeled “Poststructuralist Theory,” or reading Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” in the collection *Image - Music - Text*. It could go on.... This is a game that could be played with any manner of epistemological system, sometimes cleverly, sometimes not so. There are two ways to understand these self-referential paradoxes, and each returns us to the before/after, inside/outside binds of the Dickens and *Star Wars* problems. On the one hand, we might view these paradoxes as problems of time—each master narrative listed above hopes to excise time, particularly the particulars of a future occasion for which it can neither account nor predict; on the other hand, we might see them as paradoxes of form—what all these instances have in common is that each arrives at a dead end when asked to legitimate its own system through its own rules—a shadow of irony in the heart

of synecdoche. I argued earlier that these views are two sides of the same coin. It is this latter one—the paradox of form—which I will focus on for this section.

The twenty-five-hundred-year-old logical gridlock has had many guises. The paradox of the court,⁴² the barber's paradox,⁴³ and Grelling's Paradox⁴⁴ are each popular examples, but the most famous one would have to be the liar's paradox. Depending upon whom you believe, the liar's paradox originates in the 6th century B.C. with Epimenides or two centuries later with Eubulides. It is claimed that Epimenides, a Cretan, once said "Cretans are always liars." If he were telling the truth, his statement would be false, and, if he were lying, his statement would be true. The liar's paradox, a logical impossibility, illustrates a problem with self-reference and asks us to consider what happens when a statement is applied to itself. The paradox is essentially of the same logical type as both W. V. O. Quine's fancy: "*yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation* yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation" and the kindergarten lessons of "never say never" and "every rule has an exception." The referential function of language points us back to the world. Metalinguistic speech points us back to itself. Something odd happens when they collide. Essentially, the liar's paradox takes the meta-linguistic as its object but applies the rules of the referential. Taking Jacob Bronowski at his word, we might see how "...the range of reference of any reasonably rich system necessarily includes reference to itself. This creates an endless regress, an infinite hall of mirrors of self-reflection."⁴⁵

While this logical problem is millennia old, it does undergo an important modern spin. Along with the crises of culture, the crises of politics, the crises of nation, the crises of self, and the crises of technology in which modernity always seems to find itself,

comes a very interesting, very academic, and very paradoxical crisis in the halls of modern logic, where, on a widespread and fundamental scale, the imperative to order leads to disorder. The commotion starts quite innocently with the *Begriffsschrift* (concept script) of Gottlob Frege who, at the end of the nineteenth century, attempted to devise the first self-sufficient logical system since Aristotle. His project, the beginnings of axiomatic predicate logic—in which the whole of mathematics could be derived from simple logical statements—was based upon a notion of what would later be termed “naïve” set theory.

Set theory, the logical study of collections of objects and their members, became the mathematical rage at the end of the nineteenth century with the work of Georg Cantor.⁴⁶ Sets are manners of classifying, of ordering. Along with mathematical sets such as the positive and negative numbers are more commonplace ones such as the set of mammals or the set of books on my dining room table. Some sets’ members overlap: 47 is both a member of the set of whole numbers and the set of rational numbers. Some sets are empty (the set of mammals on my dining room table) and some sets contain only one member (currently the set of mammals under my dining room table). Sets either contain themselves as members or do not. The *set of sets with more than one member*, which contains the set of mammals and the sets of whole and rational numbers, by definition contains itself as a member. It is here, at the meta-level where one considers self-referential sets that naïve set theory and, consequently, part of Frege’s logical project begin to break down.

Corresponding with Frege on the eve of the publication of the *Begriffsschrift*, Bertrand Russell—both a devotee and critic of Frege’s logical methodology—noted a

problem, which ran to the core of Frege's set theory. Russell's Paradox, as it came to be known, asks whether *the set of all sets that do not contain themselves as members* is a member of itself. The answer is simple: it is if it isn't and isn't if it is. Frege's problem was that he did not discriminate between *types* of sets.

A few years later, Russell presented his version of set theory in his collaborative tome on the logical foundations of mathematics, the *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13). He avoided the problem of self-referentiality by claiming that sets are always of a "higher" type than their components. Russell's undertaking—important for the subsequent work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolph Carnap, and J. L. Austin—drew up the logical basis of different levels of language, leaving, on the one hand, a referential language and, on the other, a meta-language. What follows from Russell's distinction between sets of members and sets *as* members is an attendant dissimilarity between the rules of a system and the rules under which the system itself operates. Paradoxes of self-referentiality can, thus, be avoided by putting an entire system under metaphorical quotation marks.⁴⁷ Even though Russell was able to exile the matter of paradox, he was never able to construct a complete logico-mathematical system that would be self-legitimizing. No one could.

Contrary to what Russell believed, paradoxes are not the illegitimate children of logical systems. Instead (and quite paradoxically!) they are the necessary conditions for the functioning of any given system. "The Epimenides paradox," writes Douglas Hofstadter, "is a one-step Strange Loop.... But how does it have to do with mathematics? That is what Gödel discovered. His idea was to use mathematical reasoning in exploring mathematical reasoning itself."⁴⁸ In 1931, Gödel published his

two incompleteness theorems: the first is that, given a logical system that includes arithmetic, it is possible to create a statement that is at the same time true yet not provable within the system; the second argues that a consistent logical system will necessarily never be complete, and thus cannot prove its own consistency. The implications of Gödel's theorems for epistemology are as revolutionary as they are startling, to the point that they allow themselves to be read in both a negative and positive manner. "[T]he unwritten aim that the physical sciences have set themselves since Isaac Newton's time cannot be attained," Bronowski declares, because "[t]he laws of nature cannot be formulated as an axiomatic, deductive, formal, and unambiguous system which is also complete."⁴⁹ Contrary to some misreadings, Gödel's incompleteness theorems do not abrogate truth. In fact, they do just the opposite—truths exist even though they might not be verifiable. The theorems illustrate not only that systems cannot be sheltered from paradox, but moreover that the figure of paradox is at the center of every epistemological venture.

At the heart of these logical and critical paradoxes lies a similar bind between history and form. The liar's paradox, which is a logical exercise, is very much not in time. Many of the critical systems quoted earlier (Kamps, Adorno, Jameson) are about history and thus very much in time. What I mean to suggest, here, is that these two "binds," one critical and the other logical, are formally similar. Consider, once more, the famous opening statement of Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious*: "Always historicize! This slogan the one absolute and we may even say 'transhistorical' imperative of all dialectical thought." Jameson asks us to historicize everything, except his own historical imperative—which is "transhistorical." Again, we see a liar's paradox

type of contradiction that arises when a system turns in on itself—history becomes the ahistorical, essentialized master narrative. Jameson is able to make a transhistorical claim for historicism, because he is able to extract a “form” of history from history—History is “outside” or comes “later,” and it motivates everything that is “inside” or “before.”⁵⁰

Central to this problem lies a notion of causality: do unknown and unpredictable material particulars determine the path of cultural history or does the larger (and later) path of social history determine everything that is earlier? Jameson claims, paradoxically, that it is both, but in doing so he inherently and anachronistically reads a modern philosophical system *back* into histories and cultures in which it did not exist. A material Marxist history, we might say, would not be part of any club that would have it.

But suppose the disorder of truths should ever come
 To an order, most Plantagenet, most fixed ...
 --Wallace Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos"

V. A Note on the Dissertation:

This chapter has been about relating three forms of paradox, which themselves span across historical, literary, and philosophical disciplines: the first is a critical problem with how modernism and modernity are conceived, the second is a bind between historicism and formalism in current critical approaches, and the third is a very old problem of logic, which is re-imagined as an important crux of set theory in the early twentieth century. Because each of these paradoxical structures attempts to suppress the mediating element of time, I argue, each can be seen as in terms of the unusual rhetorical figure *metalepsis*.

I have looked at *metalepsis* mostly as an epistemological trope, one which figures the relationship between synecdoche, or totalizing structures, and irony, or self-defeating ones. My second chapter turns the matter around, as Wallace Stevens does, into a question of ethics. For Stevens, knowledge is often the byproduct of the failure to represent experience. Cognition, which mediates knowledge, is itself mediated by the complicated interplay of metaphor and metonymy—each of which in its own way relates the subject to a cultural network which gives him or her meaning. The chapter is composed of four short interlocking essays which all explore the complicated interactions of these tropes. The first essay follows Stevens as he offers a different way to understand the paradox, which becomes not so much a logical proposition but rather a cultural one. The second essay is about the role of hidden sounds, and the third is about nonsense in

the cognitive performances of the “Magnifico.” The final essay links “Anecdote of the Jar” to theories of the aesthetic and asks about the ethics of reading insides and outsides in textual artifacts.

My third chapter is about the relationship among history, nationalism, and the work of W. B. Yeats, who, despite a persistent drive toward a mythic unity, always seems to embrace an aesthetic of conflict. I offer an extended reading of the poem “The Scholars” in the context of Yeats’s continual reworking of myth into history and history into myth. The two versions of the poem—one written in 1915, the other in 1929—come out of different chapters in both the narrative of the poet’s life and Ireland’s national story. The poem is about the difference between two literary personas—the poets, who “rhyme... out in love’s despair” and the critics who “edit and annotate the[ir] lines.” The speaker clearly seems to favor the poets over the parasitic “scholars.” That is, until we consider that Yeats, in the act of editing his own poems, has stepped into the role of the scholar. This changes not only our initial reading of the poem, but also how we conceive of the process of revision. Instead of reading revision as a corrective measure, I argue that Yeats treats it as a poetic device. In doing so, he is able to shift the expected positions under which poets and critics operate. At stake is nothing less than the process of how we go about reading critically.

My chapter on James Merrill focuses on the relationship between typos and cultural memory, which can both be seen as later material events—one in terms of a publication history, the other in terms of a national heritage—thrust onto earlier texts. In the first part of the chapter, I consider the typo seriously as a type of rhetorical figure. The second part is an extended close reading of Merrill’s poem “Losing the Marbles,”

which itself circles around the question of composing lyric poetry and asks, in vastly different ways, whether the modern lyric poem is an act of inspiration or of recovery. The final section considers Merrill's lost marbles in the context of the "Elgin" or "Parthenon" Marbles, and asks what happens when two nations claim the same cultural history—an important question for a poet whose literary memory is not bound by national borders.

In my final chapter, I consider T. S. Eliot's later poem, *Four Quartets*, which is much closer to the experiences of uncertainty that we find in the poetics of Stevens, Yeats, and Merrill than to Eliot's earlier pounding verse. The poem, which continually looks "[t]oward the door we never opened," is able to re-imagine the lyric speaker as one who could revisit and revise an earlier poetics in terms of its "imaginary footfalls." Revising an earlier poetics, for Eliot, means revising an earlier lyric self. In this regard, the poem takes up metalepsis as an ontological category—the present sense of "being" is continually read back into its earlier histories. It is difficult not to read this poem metaleptically: "...time future contained in time past." Just, though, when we think Eliot's metaleptic narratives are totalizing, they turn back upon themselves. I argue that while *Four Quartets* is often understood in terms of a meaningful history—as trying to locate "The point of intersection of the timeless / With time"—it necessarily circles around its continual failures to approach the timeless and grasp the present, especially as these two anxieties coincide in a ghostly lyric voice that is continually meeting itself.

In this chapter, I have detailed how metalepsis can describe both the totalizing picture of synecdoche and the contradictory one of irony. All of the following chapters are concerned with this push and pull between harmony and disharmony. Wallace

Stevens embraces an “All/But” poetics which affirms even as it denies. W. B. Yeats continually finds himself caught between the “cry of the heart” and “necessity.” James Merrill’s “dual impulses” are framed, according to Stephen Yenser, by the poet’s other state—Connecticut, which pretty much places an *I* between the “antithetical imperatives” *connect* and *cut*.⁵¹ Finally, T. S. Eliot’s poetic presence is located in the metaphysical wasteland between the elusive now/here of the present and the omnipresent nowhere. Metalepsis plays up these contradictory poetic impulses. But to say “contradictory” is not even quite right, because that would assume an ironic or disharmonious overview of it all. Real contradiction, as Adorno’s “negative dialectic” paradoxically suggests, assumes non-contradiction as part of its domain.

It is not just the contradictory impulses that allow us to read these poets together. The work of each is meditative, slow, topped off with a little melancholic flavor. Each poet is interested in the sounds of words—how they might jump to other similar sounds in dissimilar places, how they seem to hide and then seek and then always go where they’re not supposed to.

Whether they go by the name of New Formalism or aestheticism, many recent essays—such as those collected in Susan Wolfson and Marshall Brown’s *Reading for Form*, Mark David Rasmussen’s *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements*, Michael P. Clark’s *Revenge of the Aesthetic*, and George Levine’s *Aesthetics and Ideology*—try to envision how formalist readings could be reconceived today within cultural and historical contexts.⁵² By integrating history and form, both New Historicists and New Formalists seek to move away from “naïve” readings of history or form—

readings that understand texts solely as allegories of larger historical moments or as universal forms divorced from their historical contexts. My dissertation is invested in two types of formalism: one a close-reading methodology—“ek[ing] out the mind,” Stevens calls it—and the other a manner of relating similarity and causality.⁵³ My “form” of new formalism attempts to relate the two formalisms without necessarily bridging the methodological gap between them. Specifically, I am concerned with types of tropological forms—how the very structures or possibilities of relation themselves relate to thematic or critical problems. In the end, I would characterize my project as formalist not because it disavows historicism but because it holds that the crux itself between history and form takes a formal shape. Replacing Jameson’s critical imperative with my own, I offer: “Go figure!”

In part, I have attempted to structure the dissertation in a way that challenges the synecdochic mode of critical production, which seeks quantifiable and articulable unities, and which are influenced, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith notes, by a type of “scientism... with [its] stated aim of making our otherwise amateurish, impressionistic efforts intellectually respectable.”⁵⁴ Conventional or “synecdochic” models strive toward totalizing methodologies—for example, the argument of my first dissertation chapter, stating the “whole,” is supposed to determine the possibilities of each of its parts, or other chapters. It is odd, given the textual objects that we choose to study, why we have adopted a synecdochic critical model rather than, say, a metaphorical one, which would be more in keeping with the literary object. What I am calling a metaphorical method, others have called “nonlinearity” or “rhizomes,” two such critical models which in their own ways hope to undo the hold of synecdoche.⁵⁵ In the words of Michael Gillespie,

“The viewer does not automatically exclude any response because it does not fit an already determined pattern of criticism, nor is any response privileged because it complements a particular linear reading.”⁵⁶ As in Adorno’s negative dialectic, there will be no movement, no proportion, no line between the instance and totality, between part and whole.

Best wishes notwithstanding, there arises, as in Adorno’s model, that metaleptic problem of self-reference. By rejecting the synecdochic model, I would just be embracing another synecdochic model of rejection; this is the difficulty of getting outside a meaningful or metaleptic history. Thus, without abandoning this model, I try to move away from its part-whole imperative; my second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters do not affirm what I argue in the first chapter, but hopefully move it, shape it, reformulate it. I look at metaleptic moments in the work of certain poets, but I learn as much about metalepsis and the possibilities of time from the poets as I learn about the poets from their relationships to the bind of “form and history.” That said, my project is about metalepsis, even though the word itself won’t pop up at the climax of every chapter. I hope to turn around the trope of turning-around, so that what comes in the later chapters will undoubtedly alter what comes before.

¹ J. L. Borges, “Kafka and his Precursors” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, 1962, Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, eds., James E. Irby, trans., (New York: Modern Library, 1983), 199-201.

² Stephen Hawking, “The Arrow of Time,” in *A Brief History of Time*, (Toronto: Bantam, 1988), 143-53.

³ Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity” in *Blindness and Insight*, 151; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 9. I will discuss these passages at greater length in my first chapter.

⁴ Modernism ideologically suppresses history. Jameson writes, “the impressionistic strategy of modernism... is to derealize the content and make it available for consumption on some purely aesthetic level” (214).

⁵ For John Vignaux Smyth, the matter of lying is a matter of fictionality, which always raises questions relating to jurisprudence and its political causes: “the problem of fiction casts the opposition between truth

and falsehood in a particularly provocative light, showing not only that the issue of falsehood is central to both fictional theory and practice, but also that any attempt to rescue fiction from questions of truth and falsehood only recasts the problem in terms of the even more general opposition between law and arbitrariness.” Smyth, *The Habit of Lying: Sacrificial Studies in Literature, Philosophy, and Fashion Theory*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 2-3.

⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 1966, E. B. Ashton, trans., (New York: Continuum, 1990), 406.

Adorno’s “negative” understanding of Hegel gets revived by Slavoj Žižek: “Hegelian ‘reconciliation’ is not a ‘panlogistic’ sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept itself is ‘not-all’ (to use this Lacanian term).” Žižek then offers his own metaleptic thesis, positing Hegel as “the first post-Marxist.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), 6.

⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xix, 6.

⁸ Adorno, “Dwarf Fruit” and “Memento” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, 1951, E.F.N. Jephcott, trans., (London: Verso, 2002), 50, 85. See also “Bequest”: “Dialectical thought is an attempt to break through the coercion of logic by its own means. But since it must use these means, it is at every moment in danger of itself acquiring a coercive character...” (150).

⁹ In doing so, he opens himself up to charges that he is neither a real Marxist nor a real Hegelian, as critics like Georg Lukács have suggested; those critics, Adorno smirks, might now say they “knew it all the time” (*Negative Dialectics*, xxi).

¹⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 136.

¹¹ Ibid., 406. He writes: “The question is whether metaphysics as a knowledge of the absolute is at all possible without the construction of an absolute knowledge—without that idealism which supplied the title for the last chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Is a man who deals with the absolute not necessarily claiming to be the thinking organ with the capacity to do so, and thus the absolute himself? And, on the other hand, if dialectics turned into a metaphysics that is not simply like dialectics, would it not violate its own strict concept of negativity.

Dialectics, the epitome of negative knowledge, will have nothing beside it; even a negative dialectics drags along the commandment of exclusiveness from the positive one, from the system” (405).

¹² Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §140, 218.

¹³ Modern mythologizing, for T.S. Eliot, meant a “way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” This structuring role—the “it” of history and tradition—is often what gets lost in Pound’s oft-cited “make it new.” Any endeavor to make new must already conceive and incorporate a notion of tradition. T. S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 1923, in *The Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, Frank Kermode, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 177.

¹⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, in his capacity as the editor of a foundational work on the subject, has paradoxically embraced the dual natures of modernism. In one essay, he recounts how modernists sought the “pattern and wholeness which makes art into an order standing outside and beyond the human muddle, a transcendent object, a luminous whole,” while in another essay he notes the “cataclysmic upheavals of culture” with a propensity to “question an entire civilization or culture.” Bradbury and John Fletcher, “The Introverted Novel” in *Modernism*, 407; Bradbury and McFarlane, “The Name and Nature of Modernism” in *Modernism*, 19.

¹⁵ Tamar Katz notes the “difficulty of disentangling those aspects of modernism that acknowledge its debt to history and those that try to efface it; those aspects of modernism that register the intractable specificity of place and those that seek a universalizing transcendence” (199). Katz, *Impressionist Subjects: Gender, Interiority, and Modernist Fiction in England*, (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000).

¹⁶ Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity” in *Blindness and Insight*, 151. In Nietzsche’s words (referenced through de Man): “For the impulse that stands behind our history-oriented education—in radical inner contradiction to the spirit of a ‘new time’ or a ‘modern spirit’—must in turn be understood historically; history itself must resolve the problem of history, historical knowledge must turn its weapon against itself—this threefold ‘must’ is the imperative of the ‘new times,’ if they are to achieve something truly new, powerful, life-giving, and original.” Nietzsche, “Of the Use and Misuse of History for Life,” quoted in de Man, 150.

¹⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*,” *Modernism / modernity* 8:3 (2001): 507-8. Looking at such studies and their patterns of exclusion, Friedman asks meta-critically: “who is producing these... histories[?] Who and what has been left out?”

For what purposes? With what effects?” In doing so, she asks in the manner of Nietzsche or Foucault whether such a classification is essentially an exercise of the will-to-power, and she raises concerns about epistemological systems which are mediated by cultural apparatuses.

¹⁸ Metaphor, metonymy, irony, and synecdoche are the four master tropes, which, according to Kenneth Burke, are more than mere “literary” terms; they are the very possibilities of relation. Burke’s “primary concern with [the four master tropes is] not... with their purely figurative usage, but with their role in the discovery and description of ‘the truth.’... Give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon the other three.” These four tropes also form the basis of Hayden White’s historicism—history rooted in the necessity of relation, where “Metaphor is essentially *representational*, Metonymy is *reductionist*, Synecdoche is *integrative*, and Irony is *negational*.” Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 503; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1973), 34.

¹⁹ A famous example of synecdoche would be the frontispiece to Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, which depicts the figure of the king as a composite of his sovereign subjects. The synecdoche of Hayden White exists in the tension between quantity and quality: “it is possible to construe the two parts in the manner of an *integration* within a whole that is *qualitatively* different from the sum of the parts” (35). This is possible because the correlation of part to whole in synecdoche includes both metaphoric and metonymic aspects. Synecdoche is both metaphor and metonymy; irony, on the other hand, is the negation of each. Contrary to my usage here, synecdoche is often understood as a subset of metonymy, where it is used to designate only one-way part/whole relationships. *Fifty sails* for *fifty ships* is a type of this common usage in which no integrative aspect exists. Another interesting understanding of synecdoche can be found in Todorov. For him and his quasi-monadology where questions of quantity are embedded in matters of quality, synecdoche becomes the fundamental trope. He sees both metaphor and metonymy as the set of all possible “semes.” For him, the metaphorical and metonymical operations entail an increase or decrease of semes, and it is this quantitative aspect that he calls synecdoche. Wallace Martin, “Synecdoche” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia*. Todorov, “Synecdoques” in *Communications* 16 (1970).

²⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII, vi, 37.

²¹ *Siegfried*, Act II, in *The Authentic Librettos of the Wagner Operas*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1938), 213.

²² All quotations taken from: *Return of the Jedi*, VHS, written by George Lucas, directed by Richard Marquand, (20th Century Fox, 1986).

²³ Quintilian, *Institutes* VIII, vi, 37. Quintilian’s “intermediate step,” which now seems more a type of transitive logic, can be seen in the movement from *cano* to *canto* to *dico* [sing to chant to speak] in my initial epigraph. For John Hollander and Angus Fletcher, examples of a “disconnected pre-text” (760) include Harold Bloom’s trope of influence—a ratio that is one part revision and one part prevision. See: Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975). Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, III xvii, (at London: Printed by Richard Field, dwelling in the black-Friers, neere Ludgate, 1589), 152. Puttenham’s “farrefet” is peculiarly gendered, purely ornamental, and it acts as a type of pick-up-line: “And it seemeth the deuifer of this figure, had a defire to please women rather than men, for we use to say by manner of Prouerbe: things farrefet and deare bought are good for Ladies: fo in this manner of speech we use it, leaping ouer the heads of a many great words...” (152).

²⁴ John Hollander and Angus Fletcher, “Metalepsis” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Alex Preminger, T. V. F. Brogan *et al*, eds., (New York: MJF Books, 1993) 760.

²⁵ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin, trans., (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 234.

²⁶ Eric Wilson locates Emerson’s metaleptic “electricity” between the synchronic (Quintilian’s rhetorical substitution) and diachronic (Angus Fletcher and Bloom’s revisionary trope.) “‘Terrible Simplicity’: Emerson’s metaleptic style” in *Style* 31:1 (Spring 1997), 58-80.

²⁷ Mutlu Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 32.

²⁸ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gregory Rabassa, trans., (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 1.

²⁹ In order to show how literary narratives reshape the philosophical problem of the non-existent present—as Augustine, Husserl, and Heidegger talk about it—Currie turns his attention to temporally-themed twentieth-century fiction. “[I]n life,” he writes, “the future does not exist yet, but in narrative fiction, it does,” and although “we are narrated to in the preterite... we experience the past tense in the present. But

because it is the past tense we know that there is a future present, in relation to which the present of the narrative is past" (18, 5). Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007).

³⁰ Ibid., 33, 41. The term "anticipation of retrospection" comes from: Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).

³¹ Currie, 14.

³² Quoted in Currie, 42. The Derrida quotation originally (that's probably not the right word) comes from *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, David B. Allison, trans., (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1973), 89.

³³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, 1974, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997), lxxvii.

³⁴ Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness" in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 1971, rev. 2nd ed., (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983), 133-9.

³⁵ Walter Benjamin's angel of history (describing Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus") is a proleptic figure. Timothy Bahti, looking at a similar problem of history to mine, but using slightly different terminology, calls Benjamin's history not a proleptic (which he defines forward-looking, as "an anticipation of a future event") but a metaleptic one, or a "retrospective assignation of a relationship between present and past" (9). Or, rather, he terms it "metaleptic prolepsis" to signify the "two-way street" of return. I would call Benjamin's history proleptic, for two reasons: first, it is concerned with "looking back" (here, from a future rather than a present time); second, I understand metalepsis to be more of an "active" or "causal" force, where prolepsis has to do more with witnessing. See: Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253-64; Timothy Bahti, "History as Rhetorical Enactment: Walter Benjamin's Theses 'On the Concept of History,'" *Diacritics* 9:3 (Autumn 1979): 2-17.

³⁶ Carla Freccero, *Queer / Early / Modern*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 2.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, July 26, "Conversations With Brecht" in *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London: Verso, 2002), 97.

³⁸ Suggesting that New Historicism might just as well be the product of late twentieth-century discursive/power structures, Kamps argues that "the television of the Tet Offensive of 1968 exercised an emotional as well as an intellectual influence on new historicism's eventual foregrounding of a structural tension between synchronic and diachronic history; its intense concern with the particular, its deployment of anecdotes, its distrust of official voices, and its ambivalent relationship to the historical 'real'" (161). Kamps, "New Historicizing the New Historicism; or, Did Stephen Greenblatt Watch the Evening News in Early 1968?" in Peter C. Herman, ed., *Historicizing Theory*, (Albany: State U of New York P, 2004) 159-208.

³⁹ Alexander Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), 65-6.

⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 51.

⁴¹ Freud, quoted in Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, "'No Greater, Richer, More Mysterious Subject. Than the Life of the Mind': An Early Exchange of Letters between Freud and Einstein," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 76 (1995): 117. I am indebted to Eugenia Brinkema for this reference.

⁴² There was the time the student, Euathlus, and his crafty teacher Protagoras got into a dispute. The Sophist Protagoras, it seems, had promised to teach Euathlus how to be a lawyer, and Euathlus had promised to repay his teacher as soon as he had won his first case. After learning everything his teacher had to tell him, Euathlus decided to give up the law, doing so before winning his first case. Incensed, Protagoras sued his former student to claim payment for his lessons. He told the court that if it should find in favor of Euathlus, that would mean that his student had won his first case, and thus would have to pay. Euathlus countered, claiming that if the court ordered him to compensate Protagoras it would mean that he still hadn't won his first case and was thus not obliged to pay. Recounted in Roy Sorensen, *A Brief History of the Paradox*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 62-3.

⁴³ Then there was the barber of that small town who was obligated by an obscure law to shave everyone except those who shave themselves. He shaves everyone in the town and then goes home. As he is washing up for supper, he realizes that he, himself, needs a shave. Just as he is about to put the razor on his face, he remembers that he is not allowed to shave himself. He calls his brother in and explains the situation, and asks would his brother mind shaving him. Just as the brother picks up the razor, though, he realizes that, by law, only the barber is allowed to shave someone else.

⁴⁴ Certain words have a type of magic. Autological words or phrases, being both referential and self-referential, are those that are self-applicable. *Trochee*, for instance, is trochaic; *polysyllabic* is polysyllabic; *misspelled* is misspelled; and *noun* is a noun. Longer phrases and sentences can also be autological: *two words* is two words; *This sentence is short* is short; *This sentence holds thirty letters* holds thirty letters; *Queste parole sono nel italiano* sono nel italiano. Or, we can go all-out as in Lee Sallows's amusing: "This pangram contains four a's, one b, two c's, one d, twenty-six e's, six f's, three g's, six h's, eleven i's, one j, one k, two l's, two m's, seventeen n's, fifteen o's, two p's, one q, eight r's, thirty s's, seventeen t's, four u's, four v's, six w's, six x's, three y's, & one z." Heterological words or phrases, on the other hand, are those that are not self-applicable: *iamb* is trochaic; *monosyllabic* is polysyllabic; *misspelled* is not misspelled; and *verb* is a noun. The philosopher Kurt Grelling asks whether the term *heterological* is heterological. It is if it isn't, and it isn't if it is. Grelling's Paradox—for which we must conclude that the term heterological is neither autological nor heterological—resembles the court and barber paradoxes and the epigraphic critical statements in that we arrive at a stalemate when a system turns in upon itself. The quasi-pangram comes from: Lee Sallows, *Word Ways* (August 1992).

⁴⁵ J. Bronowski, *The Identity of Man*, revised ed., (Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, 1966), 129.

⁴⁶ For further reading, the classic text on these matters is Jean van Heijenoort's *From Frege to Gödel*.

⁴⁷ Sometimes, as in the case of a linguistic system, actual quotation marks are used. Normal linguistic statements, when acting referentially, exist within a framework they do not name; but, by being put in quotation marks, such statements may move outside the system, in effect "naming" it, as though they were aware of its existence. Because the metalinguistic statements move outside the system, they do not necessarily play by the system's rules. Let me offer an example: a) *roses are red*; b) *"roses" is plural*. In the first instance, "roses" holds a referential function—the focus is on the content of the message; it is a statement about a reality in which something is described using a linguistic system. In the second instance and in the sentence before the last one, the word "roses" is being discussed not referentially but, instead, metalinguistically, as it occurs (for Russell, but not for, say, Derrida) "outside" a linguistic system, by being involved in a discussion of the linguistic system itself. In reality, roses can be red but not plural—plural is a definition used by a linguistic system to explain a reality. Because the second statement is outside this system, it need not adhere to its rules, particularly not to the one it is discussing. If it did, the second sentence would read: *"roses" are plural*.

⁴⁸ Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979) 17.

⁴⁹ Bronowski, 124.

⁵⁰ Jameson's famous call for a return to historicizing is not a return to earlier historiography and not quite what would become Stephen Greenblatt's brand of New Historicism—it is Lukács's history, in which the "essential social factors that determine the world [are] depicted." Over the last thirty years, the dispute between history and form has played out rather dramatically in the writings of Fredric Jameson and Hayden White. History, according to Jameson is not represented *by* a text, but rather enacted *in* it—the text being is a product of its own historicity. Jameson clings to a notion of causality wherein the texts, events, or other products of history remain integrative with the master narrative of History: "...social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another" (40). Jameson's Lukácsian or Hegelian understanding of history resolves the contradiction between material and discursive production. History is a "ground" and an "absent cause"; it resists reification or the "transformation back into one optical code among others" (101). For Hayden White, on the other hand, such historicizing is precisely only one optical code among others. What Jameson and Hegel presume to be History, is really synecdochic relation à la the form of the romance. White writes, "It would not, then, be unjust to characterize the final vision of history which inspired Marx in his historical and social theorizing as a Romantic one..." (281-2). And then, in turn, Jameson can translate this form back into a historical cause: "The association of Marxism and romance therefore does not discredit the former so much as it explains the persistence and vitality of the latter, which Fry takes to be the ultimate source and paradigm of all storytelling. On this view, the oral tales of tribal society, the fairy tales that are the irrepressible voice and expression of the underclasses of the great systems of domination, adventure stories and melodrama, and

the popular or mass culture of our own time are all syllables and broken fragments of some single immense story (105).” The Lukács quotation comes from his *Studies in European Realism*.

⁵¹ Stephen Yenser, *The Consuming Myth: The Work of James Merrill*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 7.

⁵² Susan J. Wolfson writes: “Amid what James E. B. Breslin has termed ‘an historically informed formalist criticism,’ our essays exercise readings for form with a sophisticated yet unembarrassed sense of literary value” and they “share a concern both with how poetic form is articulated and valued... ‘with the changing theories and practices of poetic form’” (12, 13). Confronting the charge of anachronism up front, Mark David Rasmussen believes the essays in his collection—in Stephen Cohen’s words—refute “an argument frequently made against formal readings of Renaissance literature: that since the very notion of the literary is a modern invention, to apply it to early modern texts is anachronistic” (4). By returning to the question of literariness, Michael P. Clark revisits the Russian formalist notion of “defamiliarization,” and believes, alongside Murray Krieger that “[t]he sociopolitical function of literature in its aesthetic dimension, then, is to destabilize the dominant culture’s attempt to impose its institutions by claiming a “natural” authority for them” (225-6). The essays in George Levine’s collection, *Aesthetics & Ideology* attempt to “locat[e] in the realms of historical particularity and contingency something of the specialness of literature,” its “peculiar power to move and engage” (4). The aesthetic, for Levine, “provides a space where the immediate pressures of ethical and political decisions are deferred, so it allows sympathy for, and potential understanding of people, events, things otherwise threatening” (17). Wolfson and Marshall Brown, eds., *Reading for Form*, (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2006); originally published in 2000 as a special issue of the *Modern Language Quarterly*; Rasmussen, ed., *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Clark, ed., *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000); Levine, ed., *Aesthetics and Ideology*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994). The Breslin quotations to which Wolfson alludes come from his *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), xiv; and the Krieger quotation is from, “My Travels with the Aesthetic” in Clark, ed.

⁵³ In slightly different senses, Richard Strier and Marjorie Levinson also note two completing formalisms. For Strier, the two are “formalism as an ideology” and “formalism as a practice” (208). For Levinson, this means an “active formalism” (a phrase she borrows from Wolfson) and a “normative formalism” (559). I have something closer in mind to Ellen Rooney’s two formalisms, one a methodology, the other an object of study: “form [as] both the enabling condition and the product of reading” (26). Strier, “How Formalism Became a Dirty Word, and Why We Can’t Do Without It” in Rasmussen; Levinson, “What is New Formalism?” *PMLA* 122:2 (March 2007); Rooney, “Form and Contentment” in Wolfson.

⁵⁴ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Figuring and Reconfiguring the Humanities and the Sciences” in *Profession* (2005), 22. Herrnstein Smith details the viability of non-normative epistemological systems in *Scandalous Knowledge: Science, Truth and the Human*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2005). Part of my project has also been to critique what Gerald Graff calls the “They say, I say” argumentative approach: “Most people in the field believe _____. My own view is _____.” My critique of this intervention approach—which always seems to be more “venting” than “inter”—takes two forms, the first more ethical, the second more formal. I think that it is unethical to pretend that a thousand new projects every year reformulate the foundations of their fields across the humanities and social sciences. Even if they do (every year), there’s just no room and no market for it all. Gerald Graff, “Our Undemocratic Curriculum” in *Profession* (2007), 131.

⁵⁵ I borrow the term rhizome comes from: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “Introduction: Rhizome” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans., (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987), 3-25. Other non-synecdochic models for them are “de-territorialized” or “metamorphic.” Because we are using different binaries, what I mean by “metaphoric,” they mean by “metamorphic.” Thus, I see no real contradiction in their shying away from metaphoric models, which I am here calling synecdochic.

⁵⁶ Michael Gillespie, *The Aesthetics of Chaos: Nonlinear Thinking and Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2003), 36. He writes, “My aim here is simply to show the way cause-and-effect logic blunts the possibilities of even the most creative interpretive approaches” (5).

Connoisseurs, Magnificos, and Anecdotalists: The Insides and Outsides of Metaphor and Metonymy in Wallace Stevens

A great disorder is an order. Now A
And B are not like statuary, posed...
--Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos"

I. I will be more concerned with the first of these lines. First, though, that odd opening of the poem:

A. A violent order is disorder; and
B. A great disorder is an order. These
Two things are one. (Pages of illustrations.)

Stevens's "Connoisseur of Chaos" is about paradoxes, but, unlike those detailed in the first chapter which are about epistemological claims, Stevens reads them as cultural signifiers. This, however, takes a while for Stevens's persona, the connoisseur, to develop. *Connoisseur*, itself bearing the etymological stamp of a time when judgment could be derived from knowledge (*cognoscere* to *connoisseur* to *connoisseur*), is an interesting word to use when describing one who meditates on the scope of chaos. Along with the object of knowledge that connoisseurship presupposes, there comes an expertise of classification. To be a connoisseur of disorder is initially to mark a gap in epistemology, where reason would seem to turn against itself, shirking its own logical system. But this is the very crux of Modernism—which finds itself and its relationship to history between the opposing poles of order and disorder.

What are supposed to be demonstrations of the universal in terms of its parts (pages of illustrations) turn out to be complications of the universal due to unforeseen particulars (pages of illustrations). (A) is (A) and (B) is (B), nevertheless (A) is also (B). The antimetabole asks us to consider their unity: “These / Two things are one.” While A / and B might occupy different lines, the speaker later confesses that they are “not like statuary”; they mutate and morph into each other, into themselves, two becoming one, becoming two again. Bold statements about truth are made and then withdrawn: “...Proves that these opposite things partake of one, / At least that was the theory... / ... We cannot go back to that.” These are not the ordered signs of a logic problem with an answer about A and B that could be located at the back of the book. Even that which is proverbially written in stone—“They are things chalked / On the sidewalk”—can be washed away with the April showers.

While the opening lines seem to confuse the reader with their violent orders of A and B, the fourth stanza’s recasting of them offers some clarification: “A. Well, an old order is a violent one. / This proves nothing. Just one more truth.... B. It is April as I write....” The violent ordering is the making of universals out of particulars, while the great disorder is the particular itself, that present and future event which will always undo the universal order. There is a fear, though, of this unknown future:

All of this, of course, will come to summer soon,
But suppose the disorder of truths should ever come....

“Of course,” acts rhetorically to incorporate an audience into an already known situation, into an already known order. It is also a mode of quiet surrender—the future will arrive as a matter of course. The line beginnings here—“All” ... “But”—seem to stand out,

echoing the poem's mathematical variables in an interestingly non-mathematical way:

(A)ll (B)ut. A and B—the first is an imperative to order, *all*, and the second is a conjunction of contradiction, *but*. Again, we may notice the poet's contrary impulses, one harmonious and the other disharmonious. Stevens's As and Bs are not part of an axiomatic system. They are, instead, the very linguistic grounds—complete with error, accident, and misunderstanding—of that system. We see the dancing As and Bs once more a few lines past the all/but: “A great disorder is an order. Now A / And B are not like statuary....” This initial line begins and ends with A, and yet the meaning of each A differs. The first use is referential, pointing to the indefinite article modifying “great order”; the second use is meta-linguistic, referencing solely the “A” of the earlier logical statement. The partial line “...great disorder is an order. Now...” is enclosed by these two non-synonymous but identical signs. Now, while the problem is one of meaning in the *now*, the line's “now” is not the *now* of the “B. It is April as I write” but rather a rhetorical *you see...* like the earlier “of course.” The *now* is not a particular instant of reference. It is a moment of lyric discourse, which, like Paul de Man's modernity, seems continually trying to consume its own historical moment.

The *nows* of the poem, (A)pril and the (A)lps borrow as well from that old order of the A, “one more element in the immense disorder of truths.” Since the floating As and Bs are not quite mathematical, we might just as well assume they are those celebrated poetic variables. The opening could then be reread simply as it looks: AABA, which is not a logic problem, but, instead, a nod to the Rubaiyat stanza and perhaps Robert Frost's “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Where, though, Frost takes up that American idiom of personal choice and freedom within an unforeseeable future, Stevens

denies those ever-popular possibilities, just as the poem will return again and again to its ordered A, “All this, of course, will come to summer soon.”

Once Stevens turns his own paradoxes of logic around as historically mediated paradoxes, we might reconsider the opening lines. That the two things are one is not, as it turns out, a claim of verity reminiscent of a philosophical statement but, rather, the rumination of a mind in meditation, a judge embroiled in the current political and cultural climates. What had been a formal unity of two paradoxes is soon seen as a culturally-forced paradox of unity. (A) is the more pessimistic of the two, because of the violence attached to the act of ordering. “Connoisseur of Chaos” asks us to find where the “violent order” is coming from. Written in the “particular bough” of 1938 on the eve of the Second World War, the line takes on a different significance: it becomes an anti-fascist assertion brought about by the anxiety over the coming violent order. For Stevens, the “poet of reality” as termed by J. Hillis Miller, the violence is indeed from the outside, from the particular. As Stevens writes,

Reality then became violent and so remains. This much ought to be said to make it a little clearer that in speaking of the pressure of reality, I am thinking of life in a state of violence, not physically violent, as yet, for us in America, but physically violent for millions of our friends and for still more millions of our enemies, and spiritually violent, it may be said, for everyone alive.⁵⁷

The source of this violence, though, is not unilaterally from the outside: “a violence from within... protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives.”⁵⁸ Like the winged horses of *Phaedrus*, to which Stevens notably alludes, there is always something holding flight back. In “Connoisseur of

Chaos,” for example, ontological truths will always be chained down by the specifics of reality. The poem’s logical violence is its separation and the inability to separate between truths and nows, between a) general forms or representations outside time and b) descriptions in time or particulars of history.

A quick paradoxical interlude: Nelson Goodman writes of three jewelers who are each presented with the same emerald. The first, an English speaker, says “this emerald, like all the thousands of others I’ve ever seen, is green. Thus, every emerald is the world is green.” The second, a Choctaw Indian, notes that the emerald is *okchamali* (a bright green or blue) as opposed to *okchakko* (a pale green or blue). Similarly, the jeweler, having seen thousands of emeralds over his lifetime, reasons that all of the world’s emeralds are *okchamali*. The third jeweler, who speaks only “gruebleen” (a word Goodman borrows from *Finnegans Wake*), looks down at the emerald and says “this emerald is grue.” Translated into English, something is “grue” if it is green prior to midnight on December 31, 1999 and blue from then on. Goodman then asks: what color will the emerald be on January 1, 2000? For the three jewelers, it will be green, *okchamali*, and grue, respectively. But being grue, means that it will be blue. None of the definitions of the gem’s color have changed, and yet we now have a logical contradiction.⁵⁹ Goodman’s Paradox introduces the one thing missing in most of the paradoxes discussed so far—the element of time. The ontological nature of the emerald now—its “is”-ness—depends upon the knowledge of a future attribute being read back into the present.

“If all the green of spring was blue, and it is.” Thus, we return to the second stanza of Wallace Stevens’s “Connoisseur of Chaos,” which reformulates the pseudo-philosophical opening lines into a paradox not of logic but of a culture very much in time. The speaker, concerned with the paradoxes of the attribute, pages his own illustrations:

If all the green of spring was blue, and it is;
If the flowers of South Africa were bright
On the tables of Connecticut, and they are;
If Englishmen lived without tea in Ceylon, and they do;

The anaphoric “ifs” and epistrophic “are,” “is,” and “were” are reminiscent of the *if* → *then* proposals of a logical problem, but, unlike a logical problem, they complicate rather than verify the truthful statement. The lines identify how two things can at once be singular and multiple, ordered and disordered. The green of spring, as captured in the brush strokes of the stanza, indeed was blue on the painter’s palette before it was mixed with a drop of yellow. As the metaphor is extended to geographical space, the speaker, conjuring up his flowers, observes that they are now *of* Connecticut as much as they are *of* South Africa. After visual and spatial attributes of identities are called into question, the speaker then takes apart national ones: how are Englishmen Englishmen if they live in Ceylon, especially if they do so without their defining characteristic—drinking someone else’s tea in their own backyards? And only time, in this instance extra-textual, can bear witness to the chipping paint of Ceylon—an old almanac page that can no longer be found on the map.

The *ifs* turn into posited claims: green *is* blue, the flowers of Connecticut *are* the flowers of South Africa, Englishman *are* still Englishman even without their tea at four. Two things become one, and a great disorder—of color, of space, of nation or time—

becomes ordered. Each of the connoisseur's hypotheticals is bound up within a bind of A and B so far as each makes a claim to be both general (for all time) and specific (historically true). Throughout the entire poem, the speaker shifts his focus back and forth between the theoretical and the actual, in essence between the forms of things and their histories. When he describes the bough, for instance, ("As pleasant as the brush-strokes of a bough, / An upper, particular bough in, say, Marchand"), we move from an idealized form presumably captured on a canvas to a "particular" thing outside a local window, where we must wonder in the coldness of April *just which of the two is the representation?*

When Stevens's connoisseur puts his monocle on, he is able to see what hides behind the violent orders of the logical paradox—cultural particularity and other suppressed facets of time. For Stevens, $A = A$ is not a statement of identity but a performance of metaphor. What does it say about our cultures when we posit such an equation? Once the temporal and the cultural are introduced into the predicate, the poem becomes an unraveling of the "is" into an "as." These painted forms of things interest Stevens:

...And yet relation appears,
A small relation expanding like the shade
Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill.

"A" is the mountain at the foot of all the Alps, but it is always shaded a different color by "B." My first chapter addresses how metalepsis mediates the relationship between synecdoche and irony. What follows are three short essays on how metalepsis lets us understand the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, between a supposedly "natural" relation and a cultural one. Stevens's logic is a logic of relation, and relation

always seems to draw upon those failures of cognition and accidents of sound—two very real aspects of experience not found in the logical proof.

In the end, “Connoisseur of Chaos” re-imagines logical paradoxes as historically-mediated ones, and, by doing so, it ironically provides us with a rhetorical structure that is able to relate critical history, logic, and modernism. For the poet who writes “the mind begets in resemblance as the painter begets in representation,” modes of relating become the primary colors of the cognitive canvas.⁶⁰ We recognize the metaleptic bind of insides and outsides and before and afters, not somehow to negate or devalue an epistemological system but rather to help us see how such a system came to be and how it could change with time. The poem, for Stevens, very importantly partakes of this critical process. As he writes in 1948,

Poetry is almost inevitably one of the effects of analogy. This statement involves much more than the analogy of figures of speech, since otherwise poetry would be little more than a trick. But it is almost incredibly the outcome of figures of speech or, what is the same thing, the outcome of the operation of one imagination on another through the instrumentality of the figures.... There is always an analogy between nature and the imagination, and possibly poetry is merely the strange rhetoric of that parallel: a rhetoric in which the feeling of one man is communicated to another in words of the exquisite appositeness that takes away all their verbatim.⁶¹

As to the temporal shapes of form and formal shapes of time, Stevens shows how “the two things are one,” and then how they are not, and then how they might be again. And, if we believe his brand of liar’s paradox, we just might see how poetic forms paint for us the world, even during those sad and troubling times when the green of spring is blue.

A pear is a pear is a pear—and not a metaphor.⁶²
 --Bart Eeckhout

...eke out the mind
 On peculiar horns, themselves eked out
 By the spontaneous particulars of sound.⁶³
 --Stevens, "The Creations of Sound"

II. Too exact, perhaps, is the opening phrase of Stevens's "A Study of Two Pairs," and too typical of scientific categorization, yet it is still a metaphor: *Opusculum paedagogum*. All of the opusculua paedagogum and/or all of the opusculum paedagoga are in a sense metaphorically related by the sole virtue of having a nomen communis. "To call something by a name," Jonathan Culler writes, "...is to ascribe to it some properties, to bring it under some loose heading... as soon as we speak we engage in metaphor."⁶⁴ The idea famously finds its form in Friedrich Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" and Giambattista Vico's *New Science*, and a version of it can also be found in John Locke's great treatise.⁶⁵ Stevens's pears are not viols, nudes or bottles; they are not flat surfaces and are not seen as the observer wills. They resemble nothing else, and, yet, they too are metaphors if for no other reason than they are self-similar constructs of a linguistic order. But then they are things again, not metaphor and not language—curves, bulging, hard. And then they are colors—yellow, touched red, bits of blue, citrons, oranges and greens. And then they are images—forms, modelled, with blobs for shadows. Stevens's metaphor is not consumable. It is unstable, existing somewhere between words and things, between perception and representation, in that intangible window of cognition. Instead of pointing inward to one idea or one form, as metaphors often do, Stevens's metaphors point outward, as though they were always in "the act of finding / What will suffice."

In the previous section, I considered how “Connoisseur of Chaos” presented a logical language that was mediated by the temporal and cultural particulars of a poetic language that it continually tried to suppress. Poetic language has classically been deemed improper, because it is politically dangerous. It collapses reference and upsets social orders, undoing how we are supposed to see the world. This is why the poet and his metaphorical language, a clone of a clone, were famously expelled from Plato’s Republic. The poet’s words, for Plato, are too often “neither true nor beneficial,” and “the more poetic they are, the less they should be heard by children or by men who are supposed to be free and to fear slavery more than death.”⁶⁶ Politics and poetry come together in a premature *live free or die*, where freedom here means living a socially prescribed life. Poetic language is metaphorical; it embellishes; it is an aberration. It uses words for what they weren’t intended. It misfires language. For John Locke, it acts only “to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment.”⁶⁷ Opposing poetic or metaphorical language is the “literal” language of philosophy and, later, the sciences. This literal language makes poetic language its other; because we can locate what is rhetorical, what is an embellishment, the story goes, we can supposedly locate what isn’t. At stake here is nothing less than what counts as truth.

If philosophical discourse had in the past instituted itself by suppressing language—its particularity, its metaphoricity, its poetic—then the twentieth century (or the early nineteenth for the Germans, or the pre-Christian era for the poets) was awakened to a different possibility—that language does not reflect but instead creates the world around it.⁶⁸ Philosophy becomes a subset of language, not the other way around. Ludwig Wittgenstein is perhaps the most interesting figure in the philosophy of language,

because his early work affirms and later work unravels of one of its basic doctrines. The whole weight of the *Tractatus* lay on the ladder the philosopher had so keenly tried to discard.⁶⁹ The change in the status of language from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* can be considered a movement from one hierarchical system to the other. The implications are overwhelming. Not only does language prefigure how we experience the world, but this language is metaphorical.⁷⁰

It is not even that commonly-held narratives and the logical identities of $A=A$ are threatened by metaphorical language. It goes deeper and hits at the very conceptions of self. As the speaker of “The Creations of Sound” notes:

We do not say ourselves like that in poems.
We say ourselves in syllables that rise
From the floor, rising in speech we do not speak.⁷¹

Names, identities, what it means to be me—those very precious American idioms of freedom—are merely sounds from the heavily trodden floors of someone else’s house. Subjects are inscribed by language, and, as Stevens very importantly suggests, such inscription is not wholly semantic. As Mutlu Blasing puts it, “...the words that articulate the discursive subject have a dimension other than discursive.... The lyric subject is one who negotiates—or who is negotiated as—a historical and historicizing passage between physiology and discourse.”⁷²

In order to understand how Stevens refocuses poetic language on the discursive subject, it is important to consider how he understands the relationship between those ever-changing pairs of metaphor and metonymy. My first chapter examines epistemological metalepsis and how it brings together the synecdochic and ironic tropes. Metalepsis also mediates the relationship between metaphor and metonymy in an ethical

manner. I say “ethical,” because the questions surrounding first, the theories of metaphor, and second, the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, map onto questions of subjectivity, particularly as they arise as functions of linguistic/cultural communities in the twentieth century. Where metonymy notes those relations which are socio-culturally mediated, metaphor presumes the possibility of relation outside a communal will. Most theories of the subject tend toward one pole or the other, stressing either the freedom implicit in subjectivity (as in Jean-Paul Sartre) or the determinant conditions of being (be they religious, scientific, socio-historical, economic, or psychological). It is not my place, here, to argue for one or the other, but rather to stress that the possibilities of each relate in a metaleptic manner, because they each create meaningful histories out of later narratives.

Metaphor, which asks us to consider what a thing is, occupies a type of ontological position. Metonymy, which asks us how a thing relates to other things, positions itself socially. Paul de Man recounts the hierarchy as follows: “The inference of identity and totality that is constitutive of metaphor is lacking in the purely relational metonymic contact: an element of truth is involved in taking Achilles for a lion but none in taking Mr. Ford for a motor car.”⁷³ Against the common assumption of reading metonymy as a type of metaphorical substitution—say, crown for king—Roman Jakobson believes metonymy to be of a different kind, which “finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit” (98-9).⁷⁴ Once we understand contiguity not just syntactically but also culturally, combination becomes an inherently social act. According to Umberto’s figurative Eco-system:

A metaphor can be invented because language, in its process of unlimited semiosis, constitutes a multidimensional network of metonymies, each of which is explained by a

cultural convention rather than by an original resemblance. The imagination would be incapable of inventing or recognizing a metaphor if culture... did not provide it with the subjacent network of arbitrarily stipulated contiguities.⁷⁵

Metaphor is no longer about recognizing the essences of objects. Instead, it is but a potentiality, made possible because cultural conventions or “metonymies,” filtering individual perspectives, are already in place. Eco’s metonymical theory echoes almost exactly the thrust of the interaction theory of metaphor. For Max Black, when the subsidiary subject and the principle subject come together as the “focus,” or the figural expression, each brings with it a “system of associated commonplaces,” which are not properties of the essentialized object but, rather, signs of certain cultural conventions.⁷⁶ The difference between (Aristotle’s) metaphor and (Black’s) metaphor is really the same difference between metaphor and metonymy.⁷⁷ Wallace Stevens’s take on the whole thing is quite interesting, because, for him, what counts as metaphor and what counts as metonymy is often determined by sounds rather than by essential or cultural contiguities. Perhaps “Re-Statement of Romance” might shed some moon light upon the various interactions:

The night knows nothing of the chants of night.
It is what it is as I am what I am:
And in perceiving this I best perceive myself

And you. Only we two may interchange
Each in the other what each has to give.
Only we two are one, not you and night,

Nor night and I, but you and I, alone,
So much alone, so deeply by ourselves,
So far beyond the casual solitudes,

That night is only the background of our selves,
Supremely true each to its separate self,
In the pale light that each upon the other throws.⁷⁸

It is a love poem of sorts. With three players—"I" and "you" and "night"—or maybe just two, or one. The night plays the background music, but cannot hear its own song. It seems to hide behind the speaker, who in turn distances himself from the night—"it is what it is as I am what I am." The inner world of the subject and the outer world of the object cannot reach a mystical union. Yet, by distancing himself from the night, the speaker ironically draws himself closer to it: "It is what it is *as* I am what I am." While the *as* marks the boundary between the it and the I, it does so by invoking itself as simile, in effect showing how the it and the I are like each other in their distinctness.

If the opening lines present a oneness out of a metaphorical doubling, then the next few lines present a doubling out of a metaphorical oneness. As the speaker distinguishes himself against the backdrop of the night, he also identifies a "you." Semantically, the lines read "I best perceive myself and you." But that is not quite how the lines appear—"I best perceive myself / and you" with the "you" cast not only onto a different line but onto a different stanza as well. The "you" which is supposed to become the "one" is presented at first from afar at the same moment it is being drawn near. What is semantically or literally "one" becomes rhetorically "two" due to the sound of an enjambment, or, rather, the gesture of hesitation in such a sound. By constructing the relationships among subjects, the semiotic element constructs just what it means to be the subject—an object of perception existing both at one with and apart from other subjects.

The poem is all about the hidden meanings of sounds. We are given what is spoken but not heard, what is offered but not intended. Listening in the shadows in line one, we learn that the poem is about the *chance* of night, the storybook possibility of union. If we listen for the words, we can hear in the line "Only we two may interchange"

only we too may interchange. The movements between harmony and discord, between being one and being two are sounded by these chants of night. How we read the opening lines depends upon how we perceive these sounds.

The possibilities of a sexual union, two entities becoming one, are like the possibilities of metaphor. The tension is approached in the poem's oxymoron: "so much alone, so deeply by ourselves." If the "I" and the "you" are the metaphoric parts, then the night might be the metonymic counterpart, the cultural-linguistic backdrop against which the metaphoric subjects can have any meaning—"only the background of our selves." Because it is unclear, though, how the entities define each other (the light "that each upon the other throws"), it is unclear just what is metaphor and what is metonymy. This rhetorical knot is symbolized by the ambiguous word of the poem *only*, which can mean either "merely" or "solely." Either the night is the sole ground of ourselves, or the night is merely a reflection of ourselves. One is a metonymic statement of quantity, the other is a metaphoric statement of quality. One moves from the object to the subject, focusing on how the former mediates the latter, the other moves from the subject to the object, focusing on the essential nature of the "I." How we read the relation among the "I," the "you," and the night relates to how we read the rhetorical figures of the poem. The very act of calling the night like metonymy and the "I" and "you" like metaphor, is a metaphor... or a metonymy of its own, depending upon a given perspective. Stevens's poem belies the chance distinction between accidental relationships and essences, between "casual solitudes" and what is "supremely true."

Although we are often given examples of metaphors ("my luv is like a red, red rose") and examples of metonymies ("the White House said today..."), the distinction

between the two is contextually dependent. We can see this play out in one of David Lodge's examples:

Those favourite filmic metaphors for sexual intercourse in the pre-permissive cinema, skyrockets and waves pounding on the shore, could be disguised as metonymic background if the consummation were taking place on a beach on Independence Day, but would be perceived as overtly metaphorical if it were taking place on Christmas eve in a city penthouse.⁷⁹

Lodge, in a Stevensian manner, destabilizes the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, by showing how their difference exists as a function of cultural space.

Alongside the penthouse on Christmas eve, we might also question the significance of Roman Candles for a culture that does not shoot fireworks into the sky with every home run or parade. Lodge's example says something not about fireworks, but about being or not being part of a certain discursive community, or, we might say, part of a "meaningful history." And, while distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy might seem like an unassuming rhetorical exercise, there exists a real danger of possibly attributing an essence or naturalness to a syntactically or culturally determined object.

In the end, the possibility of the subject depends upon whether he or she embodies the metaphoric or metonymic trope. As Jonathan Culler states, "To maintain the primacy of metaphor is to treat language as a device for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, truth. To posit the dependency of metaphor on metonymy is to treat what language expresses as the effect of contingent, conventional relations and a system of mechanical processes."⁸⁰ Sometimes, the answer depends simply upon how we read *only* when we see ourselves against another's backdrop. If only we could better read those casual solitudes of the night....

Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
 The forms of things with an unworthy eye.⁸¹
 --William Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage"

The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
 And repeats words without meaning.⁸²
 --Wallace Stevens, "The Motive for Metaphor"

...Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course
 With rocks and stones and trees.⁸³
 --Wordsworth, "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal"

There are no rocks
 And stones, only this imager.⁸⁴
 --Stevens, "Jumbo"

III. The No-Bull Writer and the Sound of Wordsworth

Philosophically speaking, at least in those philosophies that follow A. J. Ayer and Co., having something called "nonsense" is a fate worse than having it called a lie, for a nonsensical statement, neither true nor false, denotes the very impossibility of comprehension and a banishment from the realms of relevance. In "Wallace Stevens, or the Hedonist's Progress," Yvor Winters, rather underhandedly and a bit too hastily, refers to "Metaphors of a Magnifico" as some of Stevens's "most willful nonsense."⁸⁵ While Winters's criticism of Stevens was not warranted, it was also not singular. In Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era*, his five hundred-plus page tome on modernism, Stevens merits but a few entries, once of which naturally comes through Pound:

One evening on the Chestnut Ward TV Ezra Pound heard of Stevens's death. "Poetry owes him a memorial issue," was his immediate response; and would someone, preferably of Doc Wms, take the occasion to say what it was that Wallace Stevens's work had been all about.⁸⁶

As if the ideogram told all. Pound's reservation is not, perhaps, as frivolous as Winters's rejection of "willful nonsense." It leads to an inquiry that, according to Marjorie Perloff,

goes to the heart not only of Stevens but also of modernism and its relationship to literary history, specifically Romanticism.⁸⁷ Stevens's modernism depends upon how he treats the image. "Indeed a good deal of the best modern criticism," Frank Kermode writes, "is interesting as evidence of the oscillations and tensions in the mind of the critics between the claims of the Image and the claims of ordinary discourse."⁸⁸ On the one hand, Stevens "confronts the romantic tradition head-on," modestly continuing the romantic way of talking about images. On the other hand, as J. Hillis Miller writes, Stevens always "questions the assumption that twentieth-century poetry is merely an extension of romanticism"; it is, "a poetry which grows out of romanticism, but goes beyond it."⁸⁹ For Hillis Miller, "[i]nstead of making everything an object for the self, the mind [of the modern poet] must efface itself before reality, or plunge into the density of an exterior world, dispersing itself in a milieu which exceeds it and which it has not made."⁹⁰

David Butt divides early Stevens criticism into two camps: "the qualified, negative view," epitomized by Winters, and the "positive interpretation," exemplified by R. P. Blackmur. For members of the first camp, the degeneration of Stevens's work after *Harmonium* "is related to a para-philosophical, discursive mode of verse which is abstract and repetitious by comparison with the lyrical profusion of the earliest work."⁹¹ Helen Vendler explains the positive interpretation using the term "mitigation," which offers rumination on the requirement of having to say something. Stevens's choice: "repetition over revelation, life's nonsense over evangel," Vendler argues, "is reflected in the tendency... to close his poems on a mitigation, a minor key, rather than on declaration or outright dismissal."⁹² This shows not an inability to represent the real but,

rather, a celebration of sorts of some of life's nonsensicalities, where what is real is not necessarily what is meaningful in a positivist sense.

Much of the grumpiness surrounding Stevens surrounds what might be termed his “mystical defensiveness” of literary metaphor. The poet himself even warns against a retreat into nonsense and the hopeless ambiguity that ensues: “[t]he imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real. When it adheres to the unreal and intensifies what is unreal, while its first effect may be extraordinary, that effect is the maximum effect that it will ever have.”⁹³ Stevens, his own insights notwithstanding, is still able to recognize the worth of “non-sense.” In recognizing “Plato’s pure poetry,” he writes, “...we recognize what Coleridge called Plato’s dear, gorgeous nonsense.”⁹⁴ It’s not quite non-sense, which interests Stevens, but sound, which is just not the apperceptive sensibility to which we’ve become accustomed. According to Anca Rosu, Wallace Stevens’s understanding of sound “form[s] part of a more important opposition to the dominant philosophical position of [his] day”: “Sound is normally supposed to be only the carrier of meaning, and to consider sound meaningful in itself is implicitly to attack epistemology and an entire philosophical and linguistic tradition.”⁹⁵ Rosu continues:

The earliest comments on Wallace Stevens relate sound to nonsense in arguments that either directly compare him to Lewis Carroll or attempt to demonstrate that nonsense is only an unfulfilled possibility, a matter of flirtation. Some time later, Stevens’s flirtation with nonsense and his way of associating words on the basis of sound similarity began to be perceived as an unsuccessful effort to make language coincide with reality. Situated in the context of modernism, where imagist theories prevailed, Stevens’s poetic performance appeared to some as one more attempt to make language do the impossible.⁹⁶

Sounds work against the intentionality of a totalized semantic system, where they are able to participate in a very different hermeneutic marketplace—one which values suggesting, gesturing, hesitating. They combine with images of the real, its perception, and

representation to give a different understanding of experience, one which can be both meaningful and non-sensible. Rather than describing what is perceived, Stevens is engaged in performing perception.⁹⁷ As the actions of the mind-in-representation become the center of Stevens's poetry, the verse tries to make meaning of itself, and Stevens is left, in Mutlu Blasing's words, cognizing "the rhetoric of analogies—the language of resemblance, the figuration of metaphor—as the link between mind and nature, just as it is the link between thought and the sound of words."⁹⁸

- A. "Metaphors of a Magnifico" unsuccessfully employs metaphor to order the imaginative.
- B. "Metaphors of a Magnifico" is about the great disorders of the real and thus cannot employ metaphor.

A metaphor is like a metaphor. "Metaphors of a Magnifico" is like (or unlike) a poem about metaphors. It is a "strange poem," "a wry statement on the limitations of metaphor"; it is "a poem about perception, understanding, and the failure of the intelligence to organize reality"; it is about "double seeing," or how "information is created by combining two patterns of different kinds, two languages of different logical types, or two ways of seeing, as in binocular vision"; it is located in "the nebulous no man's land where the intelligence struggles, unsuccessfully, to encompass a brute reality beyond its reach."⁹⁹ Without further ado:

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
 Into a village,
 Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
 Into twenty villages,
 Or one man
 Crossing a single bridge into a village.

This is old song
 That will not declare itself...

Twenty Men crossing a bridge,
 Into a village,
 Are
 Twenty men crossing a bridge
 Into a village.

That will not declare itself
 Yet is certain as meaning...

The boots of the men clump
 On the boards of the bridge.
 The first white wall of the village
 Rises through fruit-trees.
 Of what was it I was thinking?
 So the meaning escapes.

The first white wall of the village...
 The fruit-trees....¹⁰⁰

The first stanza plays two philosophical theories of perception off against each other. As twenty men crossing one bridge become twenty men crossing twenty bridges, the focus is outward on the particularity of multiple perceptions. Following the contrary thesis, that the mass is but one man crossing one bridge, the focus is inward on a single but universal perception. Bruce King reads the former as indicative of eighteenth-century idealism, where “reality exists only when it is perceived by the mind” (hence, twenty perceptions by twenty minds), and the latter as indicative of nineteenth-century idealism, wherein the world exists solely as the “subjective experience of the individual agent” (hence, only the “mental experience of one man can be considered real”).¹⁰¹ Because the problem of subject/object relations has not been answered through words to the satisfaction of a singular perspective, the speaker declares that “that”—whichever experience, we suppose, is truer—“will not declare itself.” By doing so, the second stanza shifts the emphasis from the modes of perception to those of representation. The “this” of line seven refers not to the men crossing a bridge but to the attempted

documentation of the event—stanza one. The old “song” takes the label of philosophical triteness and reissues it as an essentially poetic question.

The third stanza, perhaps out of the pages of a logic handbook, seems the natural answer. This tautology, nevertheless, draws as much upon the repetition of sound as it does of sense: twenty men crossing a bridge into a village are *not* a score of males traversing an overpass into a town. Yet, it “is certain as meaning.” Yet still, as the first three stanzas make certainly clear, the meaning of “certain” isn’t certain and the meaning of “meaning” isn’t clear. The vowel difference between *is* and *as* seems essential here. The *is*, a matter of identity, is contrasted with the *as*, a question of resemblance. The word *as* as Jacqueline Vaught Brogan notes, is significant because it refigures the “as if” of the simile, conjoining the different entities of identity and potentiality into one word. This word *as* becomes “a way of sustaining and entertaining contradictory possibilities at once... exposing language, both in its tendency to unite and in its necessarily simultaneous tendency to divide.”¹⁰² Again, we might note Stevens’s *All/But*. To say, then, that the tautology of the third stanza “is as certain as meaning” is to say oddly that it both *is* meaning and resembles whatever it is that meaning is.

Like the inconclusive perspectives of the first stanza, the tautology “will not declare itself,” because it cannot handle the weight of the image. Boots are clumping... the bridge has boards... there are fruit trees. None of these images or sensations, though, can have meaning, for the speaker has moved from the outside, where things are sensed, to the inside, where things are perceived—experience being the movement from sense to non-sense. The first white wall of the village does not actually rise—it does not have the capacity to reflexive verb itself; it only appears to rise from the perspective of the speaker

who is now moving with the boots. This movement echoes the *as if* of aesthetic judgment, which repositions subjective experience into the object. The perception that is attempted at the end of the stanza must inherently fail, because the speaker no longer has the necessary distance for self-reflection.

The poem seems to offer up a series of cognitive options, each of which provides a different way to understand experience. For B. J. Leggett, the choice is between the sensations of experience and the conceptualization of perception, neither of which presents meaning in its entirety, for “[t]he experience cannot be captured by the abstractions of philosophy, which are ‘old song,’ or the most careful phrasing, which becomes tautology” while the movement into images loses “the *meaning* of the experience, which is contained not in the physical sensations... but in an abstract formulation such as those the poem has dismissed.”¹⁰³ Margaret Peterson and Frank Lentricchia are also troubled by the ambiguity, but, I believe in their cases, the problem lies in the fact that they read the poem outside-in instead of inside-out. Peterson declares the poem a philosophical parody—because the poem “will not declare itself,” its reasoning is shown to be fallacious.¹⁰⁴ Lentricchia, in a similar reading, considers “[t]he moral of the story... to be that though the image yields only itself, the metaphor yields even less,” leaving Lentricchia with the idea that “Stevens does not hold that metaphor is a valid way of understanding reality.”¹⁰⁵ For Joseph Carroll, on the other hand, the questions are answered in (and as) their un-answerability, “[a]s in many other of Stevens’ poems, the failure to achieve conceptual closure becomes itself the subject of a completed poetic statement, a new song that does, paradoxically, declare itself.”¹⁰⁶ The choice is not between experience or perception; the experience of the poem is the failed perception

of experience, which is both a real experience and valid perception. Rather than a vehicle able to capture the image, the lyric speaker is shown to be an image himself, one mediated by language, by experience, by metaphor, and by sound.

For the readers who focus on the movement at the end of the poem, which is away from perception and toward experience, any attempt at meaning-making is already caught up in the actualities of the real, not in the possibilities of language.¹⁰⁷ As Eleanor Cook writes,

With a title like “Metaphors of a Magnifico,” we expect a series of metaphors, perhaps magnificent, certainly magnified. But the point about the magnifico’s metaphors seems to be that he has none. Or more precisely, that he cannot reach any, for he keeps trying to get his men across a bridge, like some officer in charge of transport. (This is a wartime poem, and the scene is European.)¹⁰⁸

The violence of the war can indeed be sensed in the clumping of the boots as the soldiers cross over the boards of the bridge into the town.¹⁰⁹ That much is as certain as meaning. What none of the critics seem to mention, though, is that the whole poem is the literalizing itself of the term *metaphor*, or bearing across. While getting men across the bridge is crucial for the sergeant, it is also the imperative of the magnifico, who, incidentally, is being held up by the linguistic and philosophical tenors of meaning-making. I tend to read this poem, therefore, as describing what happens when the poet’s vehicle gets a flat.

“Metaphors of a Magnifico” gives us a model of metaphor which, unlike most of the dominant theories of metaphor, departs from questions of veracity and translatability, focusing instead on the actual cognitive act—not what it means but, rather, how it sounds. Stevens’s poem is actually more sense than non-sense, and it illustrates how metaphorical language performs cognitively—that the language of experience is itself an

experience of language. Neither has meaning without the other, and yet they can only exist within an is/as metaphorical relationship of their own. The poem asks of us the Herculean task of mapping one experiential sphere onto another. Rather than just being an allegory of the metaphorical process, the poem asks that we partake of this impossible hermeneutic endeavor, that we too, in a sense, try to get Stevens's men across the bridge.

IV. There's a line in a poem I've never understood—the line that is, not the poem, although I can't say I really understand the poem much either. And there's an essay about the poem, which I was given to read when I read the poem for the first time, and which has something to do with the poem, except for a section which I've also never quite understood. And, at the time, the essay was quite strange—for me at least—because it was unlike all of the other essays that we were reading both generally about literature and literary theory and specifically about the poem, in that it started with a personal anecdote, which was unnatural given its critical surroundings but which suited quite well the poem which it was about. It wasn't even that the essayist started with an anecdote—which they often do—but that he maintained it throughout, unburdened by the hermeneutic weight of the poet's intention, here writing of his grandfather, here writing of an unrelated book he had read, here writing of Vietnam. And I'm pretty sure now that the line of the poem, the bizarre section of the essay, and how the essay fits in with its peers have all something to do with each other, or not, or do in that they do not. To borrow an expression from the poem—they are like nothing else in Tennessee. The culprits: the line, “and of a port in air”; the poem, Stevens's “Anecdote of the Jar,” which is all about not belonging; and the essay, Frank Lentricchia's “Someone Reading,” which, concludes his widely popular and mass-circulated (in introductory English classes at the very least) prolegomenous anthology to literary criticism and theory, by keeping, shall we say, one I open.

The complete title of Lentricchia's essay, “In Place of an Afterward—Someone Reading,” is interesting, because it assumes and denies the place of “place”—that such “places” can be identified, naturalized, and exchanged, in effect that they are parts of a

cultural economy. Here there were two “places.” The first was an afterward—which was supposed to grasp what came before it in a synecdochic manner. The second was the classroom where we were newly exposed to the discipline of literary theory and cultural studies. In this classroom, we were learning what the current academic institution valued, or, (as we learned) in Louis Althusser’s words, we were being interpellated by a certain communal ideology. The reconceived or rather re-conceiving discipline, itself, was also becoming its own “place,” but in an extraordinary way—by expanding into the intellectual territory of other disciplines. We were seeing modernity in action.

As per Michel Foucault: “Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations.”¹¹⁰ At issue here are the relationship of the subject to disciplinarity and the status of the “I,” which occupies a discursive place as both subject and object. Part of Foucault’s project of reassessing the modern subject as the very physical place of discourse entails reexamining the illusion that we write about what there is rather than about what we notice there is. The epistemic rupture that brought about modernity concerned the formation of and demarcation between objective and subjective spheres of knowledge and the attendant effects upon the subject, one which is now dependent upon a history that all the while it is erasing. We see this in Lentricchia’s description of anecdotes, which “though they appear by their very nature to depend upon stable outside narrative, given and known, in fact—and most dramatically in their written, high literary style—work at critical turning points of cultural crisis when the outside narrative seems to be slipping away and its binding power is almost extinguished.” The anecdote, for

him, must thus always point toward “something outside the text,” namely history, which includes those places of history we call subjects.¹¹¹

Of all the disciplines in the nineteenth century, perhaps none was more theoretically conflicted amid the growing split between the arts and the sciences than the emerging field of historiography, which found that it was very cleverly able to negotiate between the objective and subjective by way of grammatical maneuvering. Detailing this effort, Jacques Rancière turns to Emile Benveniste, who distinguishes between the descriptive modes of discourse, in which the speaker, the “I,” is present and has a rhetorical motive for communication, and narrative, which is marked by an absence of the speaker.¹¹² Rancière writes, “...The discourse of the scholar becomes a narrative... so that the narrative may become a discourse, so that its autonomous unfolding—the unfolding where, says Benveniste, ‘no one speaks’—may hold in the same register the evocation of the past event... and the explication of its meaning.”¹¹³ Historical accounts must look large and small, turning both to factual occurrences and the underlying grounds for them. As both a cause of historical discourse and the effect of its narrative storyline, the subject naturally gets tangled up by this web of causality.

If, in Benveniste’s terms, the repositioning from discourse to narrative is a symptom of modernity, then the institutions of modernity—English departments and cultural studies programs included—would more and more value the narrative method and its “truth...where the distinctions of tense, mode, and person disappear, the distinctions that place the truth in question by relativizing the event or the position of the narrator.”¹¹⁴ Although they move between discourse and narrative, literature and history, text and context, the current historicist trends in the humanities can hardly be said to

promote the later or anachronistic reader as a hermeneutic agent. Given this current valuing system, Lentricchia's essay and its very conscious narrator, or personal anecdotalist, seem particularly unusual.¹¹⁵ Even more unusual is his "historical horizon," within which he attempts to place the poem and *its* Tennessee. "How far back does it go? To the Cherokee Indians? How far forward? Maybe all the way to Vietnam" (439). Aside from the noticeable temporal incongruity, my immediate question was why, in an essay about Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar," Lentricchia would be writing about the place of Vietnam and the politics of the war.

First, though, that line from the poem: "And tall and of a port in air." It is a difficult line, unlike some of the other ones in the poem ("I placed a jar in Tennessee," "The jar was round upon the ground"), because the meaning of *port* is unclear. It could mean a haven, a town, a gateway, the manner in which one bears oneself (deportment), a means of carriage, that which is brought in (like a tithe), the left-hand side of a ship, a vivacious tune, or a dark red wine from Portugal; it could also mean to load and unload, to carry, to bring to port, to shut in with a gate, or apparently to drink that drink of the same name. None of these designations quite fit. Could it have something to do with that line from "Connoisseur of Chaos" and its "...law of inherent opposites, / Of essential unity, [which] is as pleasant as port..."?¹¹⁶ Just what could it purport to portend?

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill,
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild,
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere

The jar was gray and bare.
 It did not give of bird or bush,
 Like nothing else in Tennessee.¹¹⁷

To borrow a phrase from Stevens, the two realms of the poem—the artificial and the natural—take dominion everywhere. Although the speaker tries to depict them as distinct places, they overlap both in theme and in sound, in the semantic and semiotic realms. The whole poem, a ballad offshoot, is composed of iambs, except the word “slovenly,” which thus ironically stands out as unnatural, because it is the only word that doesn’t appear to be metrically plotted. The easiest line in the poem (“the jar was round upon the ground”) sounds the most spurious. For that matter, all four of the “ound” sounds seem unnaturally grouped as they are in the first seven lines—they point outside the referential space of the anecdote and seem to announce “Look here! This is a poem!”

One of the reasons that the jar is unnatural, is that it does not produce: “it did not give of bird or bush.” The alliteration is odd, sounding more like a sales pitch than a straightforward description. It gestures also to a discrepancy between a literal statement and a rhetorical one: are we to believe that nothing else in Tennessee did not give of bird or bush? While the jar “might not give,” the poem does—it produces sound and produces meaning, the one being linked to the other. Like the narrative mode of Benveniste, the poem has a disappearing lyric speaker and no sense of motivation. After the first word, we never hear of the “I” again, but we do get five “it”s, including the one that rather awkwardly ends line five. The “it” takes over as the center of discourse: “the wilderness rose up to it.” It is an agent which “made” the wilderness surround that hill, and which “took” dominion everywhere. This taking over and its resemblance to an imperialist project is what Lentricchia links to the institutional discourse surrounding the Vietnam

War. He is interested as much in the sounds of the war as in its politics, and in how meaning is lost amid official and nonsensical jargon. “Surround that hill” reads the only dimeter line in the poem, as though it were an order barked from the front. But this is not the only imperative of the poem.

If we read the *port* as a refuge, a sanctuary—“base” as we used to call it when we were kids—the jar in effect would be a safe haven, untouchable, out of bounds to interference from the outside world. The jar would seem only to point to itself, impervious to what is around it. Ironically, though, it is the jar—or the non-natural—that orders the scene by naturalizing the natural, taking, we are told, the wild out of *wilderness* and putting the round in *ground*. The jar, or the “it,” represents the aesthetic or cultural artifact, in the middle of the wilderness, disturbing the order, disrupting what has been naturalized. But this is tricky, as the jar, existing in contrast to what is around it, is also always pointing outside itself—to its ground, its hill, its air, and its wilderness which is creeping ever near.

Lentricchia’s criticism is metaleptic. He takes what comes later and recasts it earlier as always having been there as an agent. In a sense, if the first-person writing is just a rhetorical gesture, which takes the grammatical “I” and embodies it, then the imperative to “go outside” is just another form of metalepsis, a transgression of the narrative mode of one level with the discourse from another. I think now that 1) the anecdotal “I,” Lentricchia’s trans-cultural intertext, and the “Anecdote of the Jar” all have something to do with each other—namely, that they are all concerned with the relationship between aesthetics and ethics; that 2) the sforzando *port* signals both an inner

haven and an opening; and, that 3) the “and tall and of a port in air” signifies the untenable position of the aesthetic, as it exists in its quasi-autonomous space.

Moving outside for a moment... a short anecdotal digression: Paul de Man maintains that the aesthetic, Kant’s in particular, has been typically misread as a decadent, apolitical, ahistorical entity, which overemphasizes the role of the imagination at the expense of cognition:

It echoes a well-established opinion among American historians of the Enlightenment, of Romanticism, and of the transition from the one to the other—the genealogy which allows for a lineage that is supposed to lead from Kant, by ways of Schiller and Coleridge, to decadent formalism and aestheticism. The extreme version, bordering on caricature, of this filiation, the juxtaposition of Kant and Oscar Wilde, is a commonplace of literary history.... In careless hands, this sort of thing results in a misunderstanding of the category of the aesthetic as well as of the present-day concern with language and poetic form.¹¹⁸

The ideological critique of Kantian aesthetics is usually directed toward an aestheticism that situates the aesthetic or art outside politics. It denies the role that art has in constructing subjects and inscribing them with a certain class ethic. As the critique goes, the aesthetic, which is not supposed to attach itself to any determinate concept, is always part of a discursive system, always part of someone else’s will. “The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artifact,” Terry Eagleton writes, “is... inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order.”¹¹⁹

Because the aesthetic is part and parcel of bourgeois ideology, many critics reject its autonomy on ethical grounds, denying the possibilities of disinterestedness, the universal subject outside history, the idea that an object or experience could be without purpose, and finally that the aesthetic could ever subvert dominant discursive structures.¹²⁰ This

notwithstanding, the aesthetic, “an implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought,” is “radically double edged,” even for Eagleton: “if on the one hand it provides a central constituent of bourgeois ideology, it also marks an emphasis on the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes, in the work of Karl Marx and others, the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility” (9).

This paradoxical formation occurs when we demand a quasi-autonomous space for the aesthetic, while at the same time maintaining that every aesthetic artifact or aesthetic encounter is a product of the discourse of a larger cultural history. This tension between a form and a history finds itself at the juncture between the aesthetic and ethical spheres. In order to be valued in itself, the aesthetic needs to be outside the will and, in a sense, outside ethics. At the same time, though, in order to be valued, and accordingly promulgated, there needs to be a utility to the aesthetic, such that there exist applications of it in the ethical sphere. The relationship between the aesthetic and history is complicated. That the bourgeois ascendancy went hand in hand with aesthetic *discourse*, I would argue, does not necessarily preclude the existence of the aesthetic. Aesthetic experience is not contingent upon its discursiveness. Here again we might see metalepsis and its paradoxical blend of form and history. Something must underlie the possibility of cognitive experience and the judgment that attaches itself to it, yet we cannot talk about that something until we have certain other discursive structures in place. Then, we talk about it as though it had always been there, even when we want to pretend that it hasn't.¹²¹

As much as it is an imperative to go inside an imaginary space of form, the aesthetic is also the *portal* through which we might go outside, and thus open the jar onto the wilderness. Such an imperative—this will-to-opening—is not announced but spoken in the opening line of the poem: “a jar.” Stevens’s poem, an anecdote of the cultural artifact, and Lentricchia’s reading, an anecdote of the insides and outsides of literary criticism, engage this imperative to open. In doing so, they also echo Paul de Man’s reading of Proust. For de Man, when Marcel, sitting in his room reading, is told by his grandmother to go “outside,” the whole hermeneutic of reading is at stake: “The passage on reading has to attempt the reconciliation between imagination and action and to resolve the ethical conflict that exists between them.”¹²² Bringing together the inner space “governed by ‘imagination,’” and what is outside it, “dependent on the ‘senses,’” Proust’s text reveals reading to be “an inner, sheltered place... that has to protect itself against the invasion of an outside world, but that nevertheless has to borrow from this world some of its properties.”¹²³ Language is always pointing us outside. In doing so, it gives us the model for a criticism that goes outside the poem into other cultural texts and geographies: it moves into history, into politics, from the Cherokee *Tanasi*, all the way to Vietnam. Ultimately, Stevens’s aesthetic shows us how the form of history is particularized and continually re-imagined *by* history. Quasi-autonomy is that metaleptic space, its own “law of inherent opposites,” which, despite our tendency to read what’s in as out and what’s out as in, can still find itself “and tall and of a port in air.”

⁵⁷ Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), 26-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁹ Recounted in William Poundstone's *Labyrinths of Reason*, 44-9. The attribute "grue" is not as ridiculous as it sounds. Poundstone terms "grue" a counterfactual—something that "would happen even though it hasn't" (48). As an example, he notes how the sun's color will change in a few billion years—a scientifically accepted counterfactual.

⁶⁰ Wallace Stevens, "Three Academic Pieces" in *The Necessary Angel*, 76.

⁶¹ Stevens, "Effects of Analogy," 1948, in *The Necessary Angel*, 117-8.

⁶² Bart Eeckhout, *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing*, (Columbia, Missouri: U of Missouri P, 2002), 162.

⁶³ Stevens, "The Creations of Sound," ll. 22-4 in *Collected Poems*, 311.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Culler, "The Turns of Metaphor" in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 202-3.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche writes, "we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities" (82-3). Vico contends that poetic or metaphorical speech is not improper and not a deviation from the literal: "...these expressions of the first nations later became figurative when, with the further development of the human mind, words were invented which signified abstract form or genera comprising their species or relating parts with their wholes. And here begins the overthrow of two common errors of the grammarians: that prose speech is proper speech, and poetic speech improper; and that prose speech came first and afterward speech in verse" (131). Locke writes, "All things that exist being particulars, it may perhaps be thought reasonable that words, which ought to be conformed to things, should be so too, I mean in their signification: but yet we find quite the contrary. The far greatest part of words that make all the languages are general terms: which has not been the effect of neglect or chance, but of reason and necessity.... Words become general by being made the signs of general ideas: the ideas become general by separating them from the circumstances of time and place, and any other idea that may determine them to this or that particular existence." Words, for Locke, are inevitably but arbitrarily related to ideas. Although he does not call language metaphorical—other times deploring the figurative as an impediment to knowledge—Locke basis his notion of ideas upon the likelihood of relation. Things are particular, ideas are general, and the link between the two is a matter of convention. The next question, which much of twentieth-century linguistic theory takes up, goes to how such conventions are set in place. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans., (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979); Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, 3rd edition, § 409, 1744, Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, trans., (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976); Locke, "Of General Terms" in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter III, 1690.

⁶⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, Book III, 386b, 387a, G. M. A. Grube, trans., C. D. C. Reeve, ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992), 61-2.

⁶⁷ John Locke, "Of the Abuse of Words," in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, X. Remarkably, and showing just how much the assumptions of other discourses can influence even literature, the "cutting the fat off" language often gets projected even onto the *poetic* sphere, where literary texts can abridged such that only what is deemed important will be supplied. For the latest glimpse, see: Motoko Rich, "Writers Take Out Their Knives," *The New York Times*, section 4:3 (Sunday May 20, 2007).

⁶⁸ We cannot trace precisely where the "linguistic turn" derives from, because it derives from various places, different cultures and different histories: some point to Wittgenstein, some to Walter Benjamin's study of translation, many to the general work of the Structuralists following Saussure, many to Poststructuralist work following the Structuralists; the analytic philosophers often trace it to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis; but, then again it has always been right there in the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, J. G. Herder, and J. G. Hamann; some find it in the work of John Locke, and, if we read the *Republic* correctly, we might say it goes all the way back to Plato's Athens.

⁶⁹ Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was the culmination of many centuries' worth of thought which assumed that the only impediment to knowledge was not having a precise language. But the *Tractatus* was its own undoing, its philosophical predisposition coming apart in the famous lines: "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*" (56). This meant something different in 1921 than it did forty years later,

than it did forty years after that. It meant something different in German than it did in English. And it means something different now depending upon who is reading it. Michael North takes the difficulty of translating this particular line and translating the *Tractatus* in general as symptomatic of the “linguistic turn” following philosophy’s inability to consume language. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6, 1921, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans., (London: Routledge, 1997), 56. North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 31-64.

⁷⁰ While perfect-language theorists and their twentieth-century offspring, the Logical Positivists, reason that truth rests in the possibility of literalness, Friedrich Nietzsche famously calls truth “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer coins” (84). As time more and more erodes the face of the coin, man deceives himself that he has grasped truth, forgetting that he has been confusing language with a knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans., (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979).

⁷¹ Stevens, “The Creations of Sound,” ll. 22-7 in *Collected Poems*, 311.

⁷² Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 140.

⁷³ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 14. Paul de man takes up a self-referential paradox of metaphor as he considers how a text like “On Truth and Lies,” which “presents itself legitimately as a demystification of literary rhetoric,” can remain “entirely literary, rhetorical, and deceptive itself” (113). Nietzsche’s work, for him, becomes an escape “from the pitfalls of rhetoric by becoming aware of the rhetoricity of language” (110).

⁷⁴ David Lodge explains the nuance by asking his reader to conceive of metonymy as a type of syntactical “deletion.” In an example, he lists *keels* as synonymous with *ships*. Rather than an act of substitution, *keels* contextually signifies “the keels of the ships,” and, since the last three words are “deleted,” the metonymy is shown to operate on the syntagmatic axis (73). For Jakobson, and subsequently Lodge, the various binaries of the system of language tend to stack up on each other, read as either inherently metaphoric or metonymic. Jakobson’s metaphor/metonymy binary was, for a time, quite popular with various Structuralist models (like Roland Barthes’s fashion system) that hoped to classify the personalities of twentieth-century texts. Jakobson noticed a relationship between two types of linguistic disorders: the first, in which patients could not form contiguous sentences, was called Broca’s aphasia, and the second, in which patients were unable to find the correct word, was called Wernicke’s aphasia. By combining the work on aphasias with Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic model, Jakobson was able to see all language as a mixture of selection and combination: words are first selected from a set of synonyms and then combined with other words. Malfunctions of syntax, working on the syntagmatic axis of combination, are related to metonymy, while malfunctions of diction, which operate on the paradigmatic axis of selection, are related to metaphor. Barbara Johnson, following some of Jakobson’s own revisions, shows how substitution and combination, rather than being overlapped onto the binary of metaphor and metonymy, instead engage the duo in a type of matrix. Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” in *Language in Literature*, Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, eds., (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987); David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977); Roland Barthes, *Fashion System*, Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, eds., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Barbara Johnson, “Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” in *A World of Difference*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 155-71.

⁷⁵ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979), 78.

⁷⁶ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1962).

⁷⁷ The “similarity” theory derives from Aristotle’s notion of metaphor, wherein the qualities of one object are consigned to or substituted for another. The metaphorical is essentially a simile, meaning that it can be translated into a straightforward literal statement without any loss of information. It is important that the objects of comparison are presumed to have certain essential qualities, which exist prior to the cognitive act of metaphorizing. The “interaction” view, on the other hand—arising from the philosophical and literary studies of Max Black and I. A. Richards—foregoes the unilateralism of the similarity theory, promoting

instead a bilateral transformation in which the two objects of comparison mutually influence each other. Unlike it is for the similarity theory, the qualities of comparison are brought out by the very act of metaphorizing. For Richards, a word does not have a clear-cut meaning; it has meanings, connotations, and denotations. Because the predicates of the objects in question do not exist as essential qualities prior to the act of cognition, questions of veracity or of the literalness or the figurativeness of the metaphor become irrelevant. The metaphor is not simply a rhetorical embellishment of an otherwise literal statement, but rather a device that lets us reexamine what is being said and the conditions under which it can be said. I. A. Richards, "The Command of Metaphor" and "Metaphor" in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1936), 87-112 and 113-38.

⁷⁸ Stevens, "Re-Statement of Romance" in *The Collected Poems*, 146.

⁷⁹ Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*.

⁸⁰ Culler, "The Turns of Metaphor" in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 202.

⁸¹ William Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage," 510-11, in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, Stephen Gill, ed., (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 43-4.

⁸² Stevens, "The Motive for Metaphor," 3-4, in *The Collected Poems*, 288. As to the repetition of words without meaning: consider the reoccurrence of 'wind' in "Man and Bottle": "The poem lashes more fiercely than the wind, / As the mind, to find what will suffice, destroys / Romantic tenements of rose and ice." Stevens, "Man and Bottle," ll. 18-20, in *The Collected Poems*, 239.

⁸³ Wordsworth, "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal," ll. 7-8, in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, 147.

⁸⁴ "Jumbo," ll. 17-8, in *The Collected Poems*, 269.

⁸⁵ Yvor Winters, "Wallace Stevens, or the Hedonist's Progress," 1943, in *In Defense of Reason*, (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), 446.

⁸⁶ Hugh Kenner, "The Jersey Paideuma" in *The Pound Era*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971), 516.

⁸⁷ Perloff notes how the split between two factions of modernism, between "Bloom, Hillis Miller, Helen Vendler, Frank Kermode in the Stevens camp" and "Kenner, Donald Davie, Guy Davenport, Christine Brooke-Rose among Poundians," is "neither an idle quarrel nor a narrow sectarian war between rival academics." The stakes are nothing less than the meaning of modernism and the "meaning of poetry itself." If, as the first camp has it, Stevens is the modernist, then modernism is a really a latent romanticism; if, on the other hand, Pound is the modernist, then modernism becomes a historically conditioned break from romanticism. Marjorie Perloff, "Pound/Stevens: Whose Era?" in *New Literary History* 13 (1982), 486. Arguing that the choice between Stevens and Pound is unnecessary and, perhaps, unmindful of its own historico-aesthetic construction, Mutlu Blasing writes that: "If we approach Pound and Stevens with the idea that the relevant predecessors for American poets are the English romantics, we would have to agree with Harold Bloom that Stevens is a 'stronger' poet at mastering the tradition—or the 'prior plenitude of meaning'—than Pound. Yet while Stevens confronts the romantic tradition head-on and Pound evades it, such a basis of judgment is not adequate to evaluate a poet of Pound's achievement and influence, for, unlike Stevens, he responds to a global tradition and fully engages the implications of modernism..." (12). Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of its Forms*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), 12.

⁸⁸ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, (New York: Vintage, 1957), 153.

⁸⁹ J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality*, (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 1. Hillis Miller continues: "In romantic literature, [e]xperience is divided into two realms, heaven and earth, supernatural and natural, the 'real' world and the derived world. It is also divided into subjective and objective realms. Man as subjective ego opposes himself to everything else. This 'everything else' is set against the mind as object of its knowledge.... [The romantic poets] must try through the act of poetry to reach the supersensible world by bringing together subject and object (1-2). Stevens is neither a realist poet nor a romantic one for Frank Lentricchia, but a type of symbolist: "Symbolism is the effort to create poetry outside romantic or naturalistic aesthetics. By anchoring himself in the naturalist's materialist universe, the symbolist poet rejects Schelling's version of the coherence of imagination and reality (which necessitates an idealistic transparency of the poetic object), but he will not accept the naturalist's secretarial imagination either (which necessitates a materialistic transparency). His ideal for poetry is not transparency, but opacity. If a poem is to exist opaquely, ...then the role of language must be reconceived." Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968), 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8. Hillis Miller writes, “At the heart of Stevens’ poetry there is a precise vision of reality. According to this vision, ultimate being is not in some transcendent realm, above and beyond what men can see. It is within things as they are...” (281). Still, though, he allows for the ‘combined oscillation of mind and things, as the mind wanders here and there seeking to capture a reality which is itself eternally changing. Imagination and reality are like two charged poles which repel one another as they approach and can never touch, though the relation between them creates a vibrant field of forces” (233).

⁹¹ This echoes Randall Jarrell’s assertion that “the habit of philosophizing in poetry – or of seeming to philosophize, of using a philosophical tone, images, constructions, of having quasi-philosophical daydreams – has been unfortunate for Stevens.” Randall Jarrell, “Reflections on Wallace Stevens,” 1951, (Qtd. in Butt, 283). David Butt, “Wallace Stevens and ‘Willful Nonsense’” in *Southern Review* 18:3 (November 1985), 279. Stevens is also rather banally attacked for a manner of inwardness. As Butt writes: “Stevens’ themes are relatively straightforward: relating to the interplay of imagination and reality and involving an aestheticism which borders on dandyism and solipsism, and a style which reflects a perversity in the poet’s attitude to his audience” (279).

⁹² Helen Hennessy Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens’ Longer Poems*, 1969, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971), 171. Frank Doggett might add that Stevens’s ideas “are not developed as arguments but are given unsupported, as though they existed in simple immediacy without need of dialectic. Frank Doggett, “Stevens’ Later Poetry” in *Critics on Wallace Stevens*, Peter L. McNamara, ed., (Coral Gables, Florida: U of Miami P, 1972), 119.

⁹³ Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” 1942, in *The Necessary Angel*, 6.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁵ Anca Rosu, *The Metaphysics of Sound in Wallace Stevens*, (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1995), 16. For more on sound in Stevens, see the special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal: Stevens and the Structures of Sound* (Fall 1991); and Mutlu Blasing, “Wallace Stevens and the Less Legible Meanings of Sounds” in *Lyric Poetry*: 133-48.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 32. As an example, Rosu lists J. Hillis Miller whose “haste to declare the poet’s attempt a failure is motivated by his own skepticism about any poet’s power to make words stand up as things, which is, in turn, rooted in the idea that language functions primarily as a means of representing reality. But this positivist view of language (Stevens sometimes calls it ‘realist’) is precisely what comes under attack in Stevens’s poetic performance, where not language but the conception that it is a reflection of the real is put to such a severe test that it naturally fails.” Rosu also turns to B. J. Leggett, who “seems to see Stevens’s penchant for nonsense and obscurity as the expression of a desire to transcend the normal possibilities of language rather than a failure to exploit its capacity to represent” (33).

⁹⁷ Frank Kermode asserts that “Stevens... provides a unique, perhaps un-repeatable, solution to the image-and-discourse problem, by making the problem itself the subject of poems” (153). Along the same lines, Frank Doggett writes: “...[I]n a letter written two year[s] before the much quoted line, ‘Poetry is the subject of the poem,’ [Stevens] said that ‘one’s subject is always poetry, or should be.’ By saying poetry is always his subject, he means that it is always his object, for, as he explained, ‘my object in all this is simply to write poetry, keeping it as true as possible to myself and as near as possible to the idea I have in mind.’” Joseph Riddell’s proclamation that Stevens’s work is the movement “from a poetry of perception to a poetry of the act of the mind,” is important when considering the dynamic effect of the real and the immeasurable achievement of sound. Merle E. Brown, in quite the chiasmic manner, recognizes that “[t]he very movements... of [Stevens’s] poems... have to do with the act of discovering the significance of the discovery that poems are ‘of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice.’” And, for Harold Bloom, truth, that great symbol of what is really there, in Stevens’s work is shown to be “identical with what... he would call ‘the hum of thoughts evaded in the mind.’” Doggett, *Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 67-8. Doggett is referencing a November 5, 1935 ‘Letter to Ronald Lane Latimer,’ in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, Holly Stevens, ed., 1966, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 290-1; Joseph Riddell, *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1965), 162; Merle E. Brown, *Wallace Stevens: The Poem as Act*, (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1970), 62; Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 149.

⁹⁸ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 86.

⁹⁹ Respectively, the quotations come from Lentricchia (174), Bruce King, "Wallace Stevens' 'Metaphors of a Magnifico'" in *English Studies* 49:5 (October 1968): 451, Butt (295), and Joseph Carroll, "Stevens' *Metaphors of a Magnifico*" in *Explicator* 41:1 (Fall 1982): 45.

¹⁰⁰ Stevens, "Metaphors of a Magnifico" in *Collected Poems*, 19.

¹⁰¹ King, 451. Despite the fact that, supposedly, the listener is to choose between one of two theories of perception, Joseph Carroll makes the point that each perspective is presented as a "factual predication" ("are" is used instead of "seems to be" or "as"), such that for a moment, at least, both perspectives are real, or "true" (Carroll, 46).

¹⁰² Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, *Stevens and Simile: A Theory of Language*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 138. Brogan is working with Hans Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of "As If"*, which she believes Stevens came into contact with through his correspondence with George Santayana. Vaihinger writes, "This formula [the 'as if'], then, states that reality as given, the particular, is *compared* with something whose impossibility and unreality is at the same time admitted" (93). Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, 1924, C. K. Ogden, trans., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).

¹⁰³ B. J. Leggett, *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1992), 206.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Peterson, *Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 102-3.

¹⁰⁵ Lentricchia, 175.

¹⁰⁶ Carroll, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce King considers perception in Stevens to be unnaturally predicated on the sensible: "[t]he fragmentary nature of reality is more vivid than the intelligence and overwhelms it. What then is left? Certainly not a celebration. Rather a defeat, as the mind attempts to hold onto the fleeting images of what it has been forced to accept as reality" (452).

¹⁰⁸ Eleanor Cook, *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 177.

¹⁰⁹ Glen G. MacLeod, who also sees perception falling by way of experience, can argue that "'Metaphors of a Magnifico'...describes the failure of imaginative conceptions to withstand the pressure of reality" (61). Glen G. MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company: The Harmonium Years 1913-1923*, 1981, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983). He continues: "Stevens did not want to write war poetry, but 'poetry of a work of the imagination.' To do so in an atmosphere of 'spiritual violence' meant that the poet must take an aggressive, combative stance toward the 'pressure of reality'" (62). "The pressure of reality" is a phrase employed by Stevens: "By the pressure of reality, I mean the pressure of an external event or events on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation." Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (20).

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1975, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Vintage, 1995), 146.

¹¹¹ Frank Lentricchia, "In Place of an Afterward – Someone Reading" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 430, 432.

¹¹² Rancière writes, "Temporal distance and neutralization of the person give narrative its unfulfilled objectivity, to which is opposed the affirmative presence of discourse, its power of self-attestation" (14). Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, Hassan Melehy, trans., (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994). Rancière is referencing Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics*, Mary Elizabeth Meek, trans., (Coral Gables, Fla: U of Miami P, 1971).

¹¹³ Rancière, 48. This echoes E. M. Forster's famous distinction between story and plot, and how the latter occurs when a narrative imposes a causal structure on the former: The king died and then the queen died. The king died and then the queen died of grief. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954), 86.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁵ This is not to say that the anecdote is not a significant technique of New Historicism—only that Lentricchia's anecdote draws upon personal experience rather than a culturally intentional one. And, that is not to say that the two are unrelated. As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt write, "the anecdote as a form has often been counterpoised against more ambitiously comprehensive historical narratives" (49). The question of the reliability of the anecdote, for Gallagher and Greenblatt, complicates the synecdochic manner in which history gets extracted from texts: "When modern historians write about

individual lives or small events, they usually stress their broad historical significance or generalizable typicality. Such people and events usually come into view historically only at a distance from the trivialities and intricacies of daily life, in a cognitive retreat where the reliability of the data of experience can be weighed and proportional significance assigned" (49). See: Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, "Counterhistory and the Anecdote" in *Practicing New Historicism*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000): 49-74.

¹¹⁶ Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos," ll. 9-10, in *Collected Poems*, 215.

¹¹⁷ Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar," in *Collected Poems*, 76.

¹¹⁸ As Marc Redfield writes, this tendency and the movement from eighteenth-century notions of aesthetic judgment to nineteenth-century ones can be seen "in miniature" in the work of Immanuel Kant: "[t]he shift from the aesthetic of the First *Critique* to that of the Third—from a sensory manifold always already subordinated to the concept, to a non-conceptual sensible instance carrying the mark of the supersensible—replays in miniature the itinerary of aesthetics in its modern exfoliation as philosophical category." Paul de Man, "Kant's Materialism" in *Aesthetic Ideology*, Andrzej Warminski, ed., (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996), 119. Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), 6 n.7.

¹¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 3. The aesthetic, for Eagleton, is bound up with notions of "autonomy" and "self-referentiality," which bear on the process of reification. Art is not disinterested; there exists both a local economy of art and a bourgeois ideology of, say, "freedom," which "blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards... historical community" (9).

¹²⁰ Among the critics who have so forcefully argued against the aesthetic, two of the most vociferous voices have been those of Tony Bennett and Hal Foster. Bennett opposes a Kantian-derived transcendental aesthetics that assumes disinterestedness and a universal subject outside history. He finds no value to the double-edged aesthetic, prevalent in Marxist critics such as Adorno, Marcuse, and Althusser, each of whom to varying degrees believe that genuine art can exist outside historico-social mediation and is thus able to subvert the dominant socio-cultural narratives. "Marxist aesthetic discourse," he argues, "has proved quite irrelevant outside the academy since it impedes, in its very structure, an adequate theorization of the field of social-cultural relations within which a socialist cultural politics must intervene." Taking a page from Pierre Bourdieu, he writes, "[t]here are no necessary connections between such discourses of value and aesthetic discourse," and that when we universalize a discourse of value, we "both fetishize the object of value and deploy a discourse of disqualification in relation to those subjects who do not, or refuse to, conform to their edicts" (44, 49). Tony Bennett, "Really Useless 'Knowledge': A Political Critique of Aesthetics" in *Literature and History* 13:1 (Spring 1987): 52. Signaling that the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas, is in question, Hal Foster wants us to focus on the "anti-aesthetic," which "destructures the order of representations in order to reinscribe them." His project is a condemnation of the universalizing nature of Enlightenment rationality, taking issue with "the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose,' all but beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter)subjective, concrete, and universal—a symbolic totality." Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), xvi.

¹²¹ Recent dismissals of the aesthetic—say, those of Tony Bennett or Hal Foster—have been met with a historically-reinvigorated notion of the aesthetic which, in Michael P. Clark's terms, seeks to understand how "aesthetic values and formal characteristics specific to literary texts" might be reintegrated into poststructuralist theory (1). Clark rejects critical interpretations which tend to treat literary discourse as primarily coded history, unmediated by the formal or rhetorical characteristics of language. The essays in George Levine's collection, *Aesthetics & Ideology* are also concerned with reviving the notion of the aesthetic, by "locat[ing] in the realms of historical particularity and contingency something of the specialness of literature," its "peculiar power to move and engage" (4). Michael P. Clark, ed., *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000); George Levine, ed., *Aesthetics and Ideology*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994); See also Michael Bérubé's critique of this text, in which he questions how Levine can insist on both the separateness and interrelation of the literary aesthetic and the ethical. Bérubé, "Aesthetics and the Literal Imagination" in *Clio* 25:4 (Summer 1996): 439-53.

¹²² Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 64. He continues: The "passage from 'life' to writing corresponds to an act of reading that separates from the undifferentiated mass of facts and events, the distinctive elements susceptible of entering into the composition of a text" (60).

¹²³ Ibid., 57, 59. De Man uses the term *chiaroscuro* to describe the imperative toward the reconciliation of inside and outside that reading demands. Chiaroscuro, the illusion of depth in a two dimensional painting, depicts a representation that seems to go “outside” itself. The ethical imperative to go outside is unlike all other ethical imperatives. Werner Hamacher writes, “...it is not an imperative of habits and dominant values, but a more compulsory imperative, independent of the intentions of an agent and the contingent pressure of its historical or social position, given as the commandment of language, the command of the decision of its semantic status.” Hamacher, “Lectio: de Man’s Imperative,” Susan Bernstein, trans., in *Reading de Man Reading*, Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, eds., (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989), 176.

Stevens's words, "*themselves eked out / By the spontaneous particulars of sound,*" always get in the way of what he is trying to say. Language has its own violent orders and great disorders; its will is at the same time both politically determined and arbitrarily mapped. "*We say ourselves in syllables... rising in speech we do not speak.*" Indeed we are the arbitrary creations of sound, we are Stevens's chants, we are Stevens's rhymes. Rhymes, as William Keach writes, is that "*dimension of poetic form wrought from the mysterious arbitrariness of language*" (Qtd. in Reiman, 671). W. B. Yeats, who always sought what wasn't arbitrary through the chance encounters of what was, still knew what's at stake: "*It is myself that I remake.*" And, yet, there was still a sense of deeper meaning. As he writes in "*To Ireland in the Coming Times*": "*Because, to him who ponders well, / My rhymes more than their rhyming tell, / Of things discovered in the deep, / Where only body's laid asleep.*" Creations of sound, for Yeats, come from within, and they are like a strange witches' brew: "*I cast my heart into my rhymes.*" Ultimately, though, the heart will show that Yeats's embodied sounds dispel what rhyming more than rhymes can tell.

3

“The Brawling of a Sparrow in the Eaves”:
Vision and Revision in W. B. Yeats

Thirty-seven years after he had “compose[d] man’s image and his cry,” Yeats returned once again to the “full round moon and the star-laden sky” of “The Sorrow of Love.” Alongside the numerous revisions he made for its 1929 publication, he altered the first line: “The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves” became “the brawling of a sparrow in the eaves.”¹²⁴ “But ‘brawling’ is not perfectly right,” Thomas Parkinson observes: “can one sparrow ‘brawl’?”¹²⁵ Indeed, it is not uncommon for a quarrel to turn into a brawl after a third of a century, but it does seem rather unusual to find a sparrow brawling with itself. The brawling, as it turns out, is not so much of the sparrow as it is of what *sorrow* is echoing: the title of the poem, “*Sorrow of Love*” and the changes that such sorrow had undergone over the many years.

“The Sorrow of Love” is emblematic of a writing and rewriting practice which spans the course of Yeats’s career, and which ultimately becomes a critical concern. “As early as 1895, and it may be earlier,” Jon Stallworthy writes, “Yeats seems to have followed a pattern of composition which was to vary little for the rest of his life: prose draft, rough verse drafts, fair copy, magazine publication, and then further revisions for the first printing in book form”; perhaps most significant is Stallworthy’s indication that “[e]ven that was often not the last word.”¹²⁶ Yeats revises our notion of revision, and, in doing so, he draws attention to a fundamental concern of lyric poetry—its tricky relationship to history, to time, and to the subject they together construct. This chapter is

about re-visioning lyric poetry, but it is also about history, nationalism, and the work of Yeats, who, despite a persistent drive toward a mythic unity, constantly seems to embrace an aesthetic of conflict. I argue here that Yeats's "The Scholars" can only be understood as the product of revision, and is, hence, a lyric poem that proceeds not on the page but in compositional time. The two versions of "The Scholars"—one written in 1915, the other in 1929—come out of different histories in both the narrative of Yeats's life and Ireland's national story. Reading this revision not as a corrective measure but as a poetic device, we can see how Yeats shifts the expected positions under which poets and critics operate. What is at stake is not only the meaning of revision, but also the very basis of how we go about reading critically.

Yeats always seems trapped within a world of dualities—caught between the real and the symbolic, between the "cry of the heart" and "necessity," wishing he were part of Maud Gonne's political world while longing to escape its reality. Yeats is both a political agent of Ireland (the "sixty-year-old smiling public man" of "Among School Children") and the author of its mythology. That the political and the aesthetic turn out to be part of the same cultural project speaks to Yeats's continual and inevitably unsuccessful search for unity. "One day," he writes, "when I was twenty-three or twenty-four this sentence seemed to form in my head, without my willing it, much as sentences form when we are half-asleep: 'Hammer your thoughts into unity.' For days I could think of nothing else, and for years I tested all I did by that sentence. I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other...."¹²⁷ The possibilities and impossibilities of such a mythic unity—whether in the Great Wheel of *A Vision*, in the dialectical battle of the

objective and subjective selves in “Ego Dominus Tuus,” or in “the yolk and white of the one shell” of “Among School Children”—are always revealed to be in a position of tension. The hesitation behind the lyric voice in lines supposedly calling something to order (e.g.: “It seemed that our two natures blent”) suggests, rather than a totality, a continual state of becoming: becoming one subject, becoming one history, becoming one verse, with the understanding that Yeats’s oneness will always remain divided and conflicted.¹²⁸

Kenneth Burke, looking at “how the Many are collapsed into the One and the One is ramified into the Many,” sees Yeats predominantly as a synecdochic poet.¹²⁹ Joseph Warren Beach, on the other hand, focuses on the ironic aspects of Yeats: “It is this dialectic of idea and fact that gives their strength to the later poems—this counterpoint of ideal reality and surface character, with the vibrant tensions constantly operating in the field of their polarity.”¹³⁰ Revision fluctuates between the totalizing mode of synecdoche and the dialectical irony, as it brings about a poetic artifact whose “being” is somewhere between the supposed timelessness of the autonomous aesthetic object and the temporal pressures of the historically-conditioned object. At the heart of this all lies the paradoxical relationship of history and form or, in this instance, as Denis Donoghue writes, that “resplendent pair” of “history and symbol”—a “symbolism that... accepts the intervention of history with regret; and [a] historical sense that... longs to yield to the purity of presence, the present tense and that alone.”¹³¹ Metalepsis takes the shape of revision for W. B. Yeats self-critic, for whom “brawling” means reinventing his verse as much as he reinvents himself. As the poet writes in *Anima Hominus*, “We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”¹³²

Drumcliff and Rosses were, are, and ever shall be, please Heaven! places of unearthly resort. I have lived near by them and in them, time after time, and thereby gathered much faery lore.... At the northern corner of Rosses is a little promontory of sand and rocks and grass: a mournful, haunted place. Few countrymen would fall asleep under its low cliff, for he who sleeps here may wake 'silly', the Sidhe having carried off his soul.¹³³

--W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*

I. Vision: "Flights into Fairyland"

Yeats seems to have a critical history of two personalities—early and late. The first is usually understood, in the words of Edmund Wilson, as a symbolist, enchanted by the spell of his country's fairy tales.¹³⁴ He is also seen as "a pre-Raphaelite," an "apocalyptic... symbolist," an "escapist," "a mock or decadent romantic," and finally, by himself, as a poet of "longing and complaint."¹³⁵ In an 1888 letter to his friend and fellow poet, Katherine Tynan, Yeats writes:

I have noticed some things about my poetry that I did not know before, in this process of correction; for instance, that it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to flight... that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint – the cry of the heart against necessity.¹³⁶

Yeats's flight into fairyland begins in his early childhood with Celtic folklore, "the chief influence of [his] youth," and climaxes in his early twenties with the 1888 publication of his first book.¹³⁷ Ernest Rhys, one of the members of the "Rhymers Club"—who, along with Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and from time to time Oscar Wilde, would meet Yeats regularly at the Cheshire Cheese Pub of Fleet Street in London to eat, drink, and discuss poetry—had commissioned Yeats to gather and record the fairy and folk tales of the Irish peasantry. He did just that, not surprisingly titling his anthology *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (hereafter cited *FFT*).¹³⁸ The collection includes descriptions of witches, giants, a rather exhaustive taxonomy of

the class of fairies, an early gloss of the legend of Tír na nOg (T'yeer-na-n-oge) and one of Yeats's own poems, "The Stolen Child." In the introduction, Yeats notes that the "folk-tales are full of simplicity and musical occurrences, for they are the literature of a class for whom every incident in the old rut of birth, love, pain, and death has cropped up unchanged for centuries: who have steeped everything in the heart: to whom everything is a symbol."¹³⁹ Yeats contrasts the Irish peasant who lives "unchanged for centuries" with a type of trooping fairies called "Changelings" (otherwise known as the Sidhe) who carry mortals "away into their own country, leaving instead some sickly fairy child, or a log of wood so bewitched that it seems to be a mortal pining away...."¹⁴⁰ "The Stolen Child," the poem of Yeats that he included in *FFT*, captures the allure of the Sidhe within the magic of northwestern Ireland. They are the *genius loci* of Sligo and can be found near Innisfree "[w]here dips the rocky highland / Of Sleuth Wood in the Lake," their enchantment running to "the hills above Glen-Car" and "far off by furthest Rosses." Like the early Yeats who was torn between the alternatives of two worlds, "The Stolen Child" presents as a choice whether to resist the fairies and the cry of the heart or follow them into a world beyond necessity. The chorus of the fairies marks the refrain of the poem and is the "summons to flight": "Come away, O human child! / To the woods and waters wild / With a fairy, hand in hand, / For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand."¹⁴¹ Contrary to the fairies' admonitions, the world of the mortals is easily the more desirable one, according to many of the poem's interpreters, among them Lady Jane Wilde and Frank Kinahan. Kinahan reads "The Stolen Child" as a "Yeatsian variation on one of the dominant motifs of nineteenth-century Irish fairylore: the lamia motif, the grin of malice masked by a face smiling welcome."¹⁴² The preference of

worlds—what becomes a choice between the whimsical symbolism of the fairy lands and the concrete realism of the earthly soil—is as much about aesthetic possibility as it is about ethical concerns. And, like most questions of metalepsis, it involves a confrontation between form and history, a confrontation between a world outside time and the cultural mythos that makes such a world possible. “Trapped within the flux of time,” Frank Lentricchia writes, Yeats

could, at moments, intuit release from necessity and the innumerable afflictions dealt him in the everyday world. But for all his transcendental desires, Yeats often found life in the finite world attractive enough to lure him down from the occult towers, attractive enough, in fact, to make him wish he had never engaged in otherworldly pursuits....¹⁴³

Sometimes Yeats echoes such sentiments, sometimes he doesn’t, but, most of the time, he tries to maintain a foot in each world. “Those who are carried away,” he writes in *FFT*, “are happy, according to some accounts, having plenty of good living and music and mirth. Others say, however, that they are continually longing for their earthy friends.”¹⁴⁴

The poet’s “flights into fairyland” turn out to represent some of the real political work going on in Ireland at the turn of the century. Although he didn’t quite see it at the time, Yeats’s early career of assembling Irish folktales turns out to be an attempt (not unlike Stephen Dedalus’s) to forge the national consciousness of his race. In the words of Denis Donoghue: “he invented a country, calling it Ireland.”¹⁴⁵ And, like Joyce’s work, though in a slightly different context,¹⁴⁶ Yeats’s early verse is overwhelmed by questions of escape and return, or, as Fiona Macleod calls them “echoes” and “remembrances.” In an 1899 review of “A Group of Celtic Writers,” Macleod writes, in a manner eerily similar to the early reviews of Yeats’s later mystical writing:

I could wish that... the Rosicrucian cult and everything to do with esoteric mysticism might be put aside from [Yeats]; and that in this interval he would set himself vigorously only to the determinable, the measurable, the attainable. There is enough mysticism for him in the old legends and myths of the Gael, profoundly symbolical as much as these are.... Broadly, he remembers, and as an echo of that remembrance we have his poetry.¹⁴⁷

Remembrance elevates “return” to the metaphysical level. Yeats recounts how as a young, impressionable man, he “found but one thing in Ireland that has stirred [him] to the roots—a conception of the heroic life come down from the dawn of the world and not even yet utterly extinguished.”¹⁴⁸ This “heroic life,” reawakened in the Irish literary revival, endured in the course of years through the fairy-lore of Celtic origin. Yeats finds his first comprehensive “echo of that remembrance” in the homecoming of the mythical figure Oisín [Uisneach], whose tale is “old like the wandering moon.”¹⁴⁹ Yeats could not but be reminded of how “Oisín after old age, its illumination half accepted, half rejected, would pass in death over another sea to another island.”¹⁵⁰

One of the poet’s early descriptions of the Oisín myth comes in *FFT*. He writes:

There is a country called Tír-na-n-Og, which means the Country of the Young, for age and death have not found it; neither tears nor loud laughter have gone near it. The shadiest boskage covers it perpetually. One man has gone there and returned. The bard, Oisín, who wandered away on a white horse, moving on the surface of the foam with his fairy Niamh, lived there three hundred years, and then returned looking for his comrades. The moment his foot touched the earth his three hundred years fell on him, and he was bowed double, and his beard swept the ground....¹⁵¹

A year after the publication of this passage, Yeats took up this tale as his first extensive dramatic poem, entitled *The Wanderings of Oisín*. According to Terrence Brown, Yeats’s *Wanderings* “sets the magic power of enchantment against history; secret lore, the hermetic, against what is conventionally known of life and destructive time.”¹⁵² In a rather fascinating way, Oisín’s personal travels mirror the cultural portability of his

mythology—the sole exception is that every time the myth passes on, it seems to find yet another island.

The inspiration for Yeats's visit to the Land of Youth was most likely Micheál Coimín's celebrated 1750 adaptation of the Ossianic legend: *Laoi Oisín i dTír na nÓg*, or the *Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth*.¹⁵³ Although Yeats's familiarity with James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*—the other great “forging” of the Celtic national consciousness—was minimal, the romantic impulses which each share cannot be ignored.¹⁵⁴ For Micheál Mac Liammóir and Eavan Boland, Yeats's poem offers “all the pleasant colours and forms of conventional nineteenth-century romanticism... [along with] a sense of loneliness, of mystery, of a passionate search for some undiscoverable truth, perhaps for some half-remembered wisdom.”¹⁵⁵

The Oisín myth provided for Yeats what Harold Bloom calls “the most illuminating of his many insights into his own poem.”¹⁵⁶ This mythology, though, comes at a heavy price. Echoing his own earlier self-critiques, Yeats dubbed his *Wanderings of Oisín* “things under disguise of symbolism.”¹⁵⁷ Such self-persecution appears at times as a critical evaluation and at other times as an aesthetic instrument. However it should appear, it always turns out to be just another romantic myth: “[t]he poet finds and makes his mask in disappointment, the hero in defeat.”¹⁵⁸

As the bridge spanning the Otherworld and the Highlands, *The Wanderings of Oisín* formulates itself at the junction of the symbolic and the real. The epic tale becomes the “summons to flight,” and this flight into fairyland from the real world cannot but predicate itself on the half-remembered wisdom of the poetic subject in the moment of surrender, in the moment of romantic sublimity. The instrument of the fairylands, a way

of “unreason,” shifts the burden of insight to the psyche of the poet, in whose clutches we might find the tender shadow of poetry. “We will not too severely judge these creatures of the imagination,” Yeats writes:

There are worse things after all than to believe some pretty piece of unreason, if by so doing you keep yourself from thinking that the earth under your feet is the only god, and that the soul is a little whiff of gas, or some such thing.

The world is, I believe, more full of significance to the Irish peasant than to the English. The fairy populace of hill and lake and woodland have helped to keep it so. It gives a fanciful life to the dead hillsides, and surrounds the peasant, as he ploughs and digs, with tender shadows of poetry. No wonder that he is gay, and can take man and his destiny without gloom and make up proverbs like this one from the old Gaelic—“The lake is not burdened by its swan, the steed by its bridle, or a man by the soul that is in him.”¹⁵⁹

The influence of the fairy world “upon Yeats’s youthful life and work was precisely that of the moon upon the tide,” Frank Kinahan recapitulates: “[a]t times its strong pull draws him out towards mystic depths; then the influence wanes, and an earthly counterpull brings him, as it brought Oisín, back to the shores on which the frailer tents are pitched.”¹⁶⁰ *Wanderings* captures the dilemma of the early Yeats, caught between the “flight into fairyland” and the “real world,” between the “cry of the heart” and “necessity.” Harold Bloom points out that Yeats gives his reader a sense “that the poet himself is being stalked by his own nature, and must be victimized by its revenge.”¹⁶¹ This tragic sense of “return” means coming back to oneself, like Oisín did after three hundred years in the Land of Youth. In Yeats’s hands, this poetry of return becomes an allegory of revision.

The friends that have it I do wrong
 When ever I remake a song
 Should know what issue is at stake:
 It is myself that I remake.¹⁶²

--W. B. Yeats, epigraph to *Collected Poems*

II. Revision: "The Scholars"

In his 1889 review of *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Oscar Wilde notes how Yeats "speaks of his giants with the air of a child."¹⁶³ The wonderment with which the early Yeats encounters his countryside and its folklore gives way, after Maud Gonne's wedding in 1903 to John MacBride, to the more "real world" responsibilities of theater management and political engagement. The result was stunning. "By 1925 Yeats had so far grown out of sympathy with his early manner," Thomas Parkinson writes, "that he could not approximate the original conditions of their composition or look on his early poems with anything but distaste."¹⁶⁴ *Distaste*, perhaps, is not strong enough a word, for when in 1936 Yeats assembled his controversial *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, he failed to include any of his own poems written before 1914.¹⁶⁵

As Yeats's attitude toward his cultural landscape changes, his tone toward its mythology also changes. Compare, for instance, (1) the early rendition of the Oisín myth in *FFT* quoted earlier (1888) and (2) the later one depicted in the "Introduction" to the play, *The Resurrection* (1927):

- (1) There is a country called Tír-na-n-Og, which means the Country of the Young, for age and death have not found it; neither tears nor loud laughter have gone near it. The shadiest boskage covers it perpetually. One man has gone there and returned. The bard, Oisín, who wandered away on a white horse, moving on the surface of the foam with his fairy Niamh, lived there three hundred years, and then returned looking for his comrades. The moment his foot touched the earth his three hundred years fell on him, and he was bowed double, and his beard swept the ground. He described his sojourn in the Land of Youth to Patrick before he died....¹⁶⁶
- (2) [Oisín] rides across the sea with a spirit, he passes phantoms, a boy following a girl, a

hound chasing a hare, emblematical of eternal pursuit, he comes to an island of choral dancing, leaves that after many years, passes the phantoms once again, comes to an island of endless battle for an object never achieved, leaves that after many years, passes the phantoms once again, comes to an island of sleep, leaves that and comes to Ireland, to Saint Patrick and old age.¹⁶⁷

Although both passages are alliterative—(1) “wandered away on a white horse” “surface of the foam with his fairy”; (2) “across the sea with a spirit” “hound chasing a hare” “emblematical of eternal”—the phrasal measure of each differs: the first seems overly efflorescent, the second excessively terse. Whereas the later version is characterized by repetition and asyndeton: “he comes to an island... leaves that... passes the phantoms... comes to an island... leaves that... passes the phantoms... comes to an island... leaves that,” the earlier account varies its cadence, partakes of the softness of polysyndeton, and has the general semblance of an oral history: “...and he was bowed double, and his beard swept the ground.” The storyteller of *FFT* tells his tale beside a fireplace. The reporter of “The Introduction” is short and indignant—there is a story to be told, complete with answer key (“emblematical of eternal pursuit”), and once it is told, it is over. Viewing the two portrayals together, we learn not so much about the story of Oisín as about the teller of his tale and *his* quarrel with himself.

There were indeed two “myths” with which Yeats was occupied. The first was of the fabled story of Oisín, and the second was of an image of his own creation. It took the poet many years to discover that he had inextricably subordinated the first to the second. In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” one of the *Last Poems*, the speaker’s lamentation arrives alongside the poet’s self-persecution:

What can I but enumerate old themes?
First that sea-rider Oisín led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,

Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
 That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;
 But what cared I that set him on his ride,
 I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?¹⁶⁸

There was another Troy for her to burn. John Harwood writes, “Maud Gonne did not overpower [Yeats’s] imagination; his imagination overpowered ‘Maud Gonne,’ and he then began, in life, to enter into a relationship ‘with the image he had made.’”¹⁶⁹ No longer able to create a national identity with the tales of old, the speaker can only “enumerate old themes.” Underscoring the speaker’s embittered self-reflection is the realization that all along he had confused the poetic act with its object of desire, mistaking, so to speak, the dancer for the dance.

In 1976, Russell K. Alspach, co-editor of the Yeats *Variorum*, contacted Richard J. Finneran who was compiling a new edition of the collected poems: “Mrs Yeats assured me in conversation that the 1949 two-volume edition fully warranted the word ‘definitive’: that WBY had corrected the proof and arranged the poems in the order he wanted. She clearly implied that his were the final corrections.”¹⁷⁰ As Finneran finds, though, the 1949 *Poems* “was in fact defective in contents, in ordering, and in text,” adding that for Yeats, especially, “a truly ‘Definitive Edition’... will always remain elusive.”¹⁷¹ This state of affairs is due in large part to Yeats’s revisionary technique, or, as we might put it, his inability to put down his own poems.¹⁷² “The total revisions show what Yeats could do with an uncompromising early poem,” Thomas Parkinson observes, noting that Yeats “could clarify his theme, specify his imagery with greater physical force, embrace a wider range of experience in a more inclusive attitude and a more definite technique.”¹⁷³ But then again, as Jon Stallworthy reminds us, “[e]ven that was often not the last word.”¹⁷⁴

Rewriting plays off the romantic notion of immediate revelation by setting the revisionist against the visionary.¹⁷⁵ In order to understand Yeats's revisionary technique, I argue that we should abandon the commonsensical notion of revision as a corrective process—one predicated upon a chronology—so that in its place we might read revision synchronically alongside other poetic devices of likening. Revision is an “echo of that remembrance,” thirty-seven years later, of that sparrow brawling in the eaves.

Where visioning is the realm of the young poet, and revising is the province of the older poet, “vising,” if you will—mechanically squeezing a poem tighter and tighter to get a better grip on it, with the danger that under so much pressure it might burst apart—comprises the prefecture of the critic. In Yeats's “The Scholars,” two of these literary spaces, shall we say, come head to head, before the third joins the fray:

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

They'll cough in the ink to the world's end;
Wear out the carpet with their shoes
Earning respect; have no strange friend;
If they have sinned nobody knows.
Lord, what would they say
Should their Catullus walk that way?¹⁷⁶

There are three personas in the poem—young poets, old literary critics, and the speaker who comments on their relationship. The young poets of the choleric temperament are portrayed as the clear-cut good guys when compared to the phlegmatic critics. The speaker prefers the emotive—that which relishes the moment—over the intellectual act of editing or the intertextual act of annotating. Meaning in the poem depends upon the

speaker's disparaging view of the scholars, who, in not hearing the poem for its words, seem to miss the point of the poetic enterprise. The "scholars" are sarcastically called "learned" and "respectable," and they are presented as heads on which nothing can grow. They are "learned" without knowing, "respectable" but not treasured. The speaker is bitter, chastising the scholars not only for their parasitism, but also for forgetting that they themselves had ever been young. There is no "echo of remembrance."¹⁷⁷

Tossing on his bed, as it were, Yeats confesses his artistic despair to Katherine Tynan:

Some thing I had to say. Dont know that I have said it. All seems confused incoherent inarticulate. Yet this I know I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a mortar as it were. I have brayed in it youth and fellowship and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying while I stood alone with myself – commenting, commenting – a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I have buried my youth and raised over it a cairn – of clouds.¹⁷⁸

Yeats assumes an attitude similar to the speaker of "The Scholars," except that, here, the "ignorant ear" is of the poetic act. He is also concerned with the relation of the poem to the poet, but, unlike "The Scholars," he seems to have conflicting sentiments: on the one hand, his "life has been in [his] poems," but, on the other hand, he is basically just reflecting something or someone else as a "mere dead mirror"—a phrase not unsuited for the scholars. For the adolescent poet, the tragic mask of verse arises as if by breaking existence in an alchemic vessel. However, as a second sense of "mortar" implies, there must also be a piecing-together, a rebirthing, a notion of return, of being "buried... and raised." The boundary soon becomes blurred between the visionary romantic overcome by the moment and the voice of the disaffected modernist.¹⁷⁹ At times, though, the two go hand-in-hand, especially with that paradoxical figure we call the modern poet. As

Allen R. Grossman observes, “[m]odern poetry begins with a rejected vision that Yeats recapitulated in his own person.”¹⁸⁰

Even though he died with quite the head of hair, Yeats at times was one of the scholars, declaring in the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, “passive suffering is not a theme for poetry.”¹⁸¹ While Yeats, the youthful poet, was, shall we say, rather maudlin, Yeats, the older self-critic, became, at least self-professedly, quite impersonal, bending verse to fit rhythm rather than desire. “In the majority of Yeats’s poems,” A. Norman Jeffares argues, “the initial impulse was a personal emotion, often written down in the first person. As he revised the poem Yeats often removed the direct personal statement and contrived to generalize the experience slightly.”¹⁸² This older poet, for Jon Stallworthy, was “capable of a detachment rare, if not unique, in a self-confessed romantic poet, who wrote so constantly out of his own experience.”¹⁸³

Strangely enough, Yeats wished his poems to be both “all emotion and all impersonal.”¹⁸⁴ Wanting it both ways characterizes his earlier synecdochic imperative—“hammer your thoughts into unity”—while, at the same time, it typifies his drive to “sing amid [his] uncertainty.”¹⁸⁵ It epitomizes the bind in Yeats between the synecdochic and the ironic tropes—he wants the unity of contrary states to play out on a grand metaphysical stage. Yeats’s verse is inundated with unfulfilled imperatives of unity, which arise on the textual level in the “yolk and white” of the one poem, on the schematic level as competing poems within a collection, and, and Richard Finneran attests, on the para-textual level as that “elusive” definitive edition.

These unfulfilled imperatives of unity, for Paul de Man, also arise in a meta-linguistic arena. His celebrated reading of the final lines of “Among School Children” takes up the question of rhetoric and how it engages the presuppositions of a literal, or semiotic, language. Not only can we not know whether the final line *how can we know the dancer from the dance?* is a rhetorical or a literal question, but the not-knowing goes to the heart of how we read the poem: “The two readings have to engage each other in direct confrontation, for the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it.”¹⁸⁶

Whether it occurs in “the yolk and the white of the one shell” or as “the leaf, the blossom, or the bole” of the chestnut tree, “Among School Children” is suffused with suggestions of unity and indications of synecdochic relation.¹⁸⁷ The possibility of such harmony depends upon how we read the final line. The conventional rhetorical reading of the final line “reveals that the thematic and rhetorical grammar of the poem yields a consistent reading that extends from the first line to the last and that can account for all the details in the text.”¹⁸⁸ The literal reading, on the other hand, leaves us in a bind, asking “...since the two essentially different elements, sign and meaning, are so intricately intertwined in the imagined ‘presence’ that the poem addresses, how can we possibly make the distinctions that would shelter us from the error of identifying what cannot be identified.”¹⁸⁹ One is tautological, the other is paradoxical, and, illogically, choosing which reading is correct depends upon knowing which reading is correct.

This is the epistemological bind of metalepsis. There is a system, which is incomprehensible in its totality, and there is an imperative toward knowing; at the end of the poem, we get the “key” which is supposed to organize and give meaning to

everything that comes before it. The only problem, here, is that the key, like the paradoxes chronicled in the first chapter, is self-negating—it locks itself out every time it opens the door. What de Man claims the poem really is asking is labyrinthine: how can we know “*how* can we know the dancer from the dance?” from “how *can* we know the dancer from the dance?”? Essentially his question is about emphasis. Are we to read the first foot as a trochee or an iamb? It boils down to the matter of prosody, which, for all practical purposes, is the realm of those insufferable bald heads....

To borrow one of de Man’s terms, “The Scholars” is semiologically about a discrepancy between the romantic poets “tossing on their beds” and the critics who “edit and annotate the[ir] lines.” As the distance between the two grows, the scholars seem increasingly out of touch not only with their former selves but also, and more significantly, with how they should interpret the poem. Ironically, though, while the speaker of the poem aligns himself with the young poet, Yeats was becoming more and more like one of those bald heads. George Bornstein writes:

Having served as both poet and editor, W. B. Yeats keenly appreciated the link between the two activities. The editions he produced throughout his long career display persistent attention to the poetics of editing—to the effect of selection, arrangement, layout, design, production, and even annotation. Yeats’s favorite author to edit was, of course, himself....¹⁹⁰

Knowing that Yeats will take the poem up again, we need to ask *which way will he walk?*

This is where things get interesting, because, as the revised poem reiterates the hierarchy between the young men and the scholars on a literal level, it challenges it on a meta-critical one, in the sense undoing itself all the while as it sings amid its uncertainty. In

short, something curious happens when Yeats revises his poem, whether or not, by design, the William Butler did it.

From the first major publication of the poem in 1915 to the second in 1929, the first stanza went unaltered. The second stanza, however, underwent many changes. The two versions of it are provided below:

They'll cough in the ink to the world's end;
Wear out the carpet with their shoes
Earning respect; have no strange friend;
If they have sinned nobody knows.
Lord, what would they say
Should their Catullus walk that way?
(1915)

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;
All wear the carpet with their shoes;
All think what other people think;
All know the man their neighbor knows.
Lord, what would they say
Did their Catullus walk that way?
(1929)¹⁹¹

The sentiments of the newer version remain the same, but the way they are expressed rhythmically varies considerably. The first four lines of the 1929 version incorporate anaphora and feature an unyielding iambic meter.¹⁹² Aurally, the effect is stunning—its (visual) depiction:

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In Yeats's later verse and revisions, Jon Stallworthy writes, "[r]hythm becomes servant rather than master of meaning: stress falls more on the significant words, and no longer with the regularity of the metronome."¹⁹³ In "The Scholars," the effect is reversed. What, in the first five feet, had been the rather exciting metrical traffic of iamb, anapest, pyrrhic, spondee, and trochee, becomes: iamb, iamb, iamb, iamb, iamb. The revised lines, an example of what is called "representative meter" or "metrical mimesis," echo the perfect tedium in which the scholars work.¹⁹⁴

Metrical schemes were central to Yeats's technique and, when he changed his aesthetic style, he changed the way he handled the sounds of his poems.¹⁹⁵ Harvey Gross and Robert McDowell find "a characteristic use of the monosyllabic and counterpointed foot" in Yeats's later work, as he "moves away from syllable-stress to strong-stress metric."¹⁹⁶ Their words on Yeats's *The Resurrection* seem applicable to the revised edition of "The Scholars": a "meter of absolute iambic regularity enforces the rigid syntax.... The subject of the song is the violence... paradoxically rendered in regular metric and closely ordered syntax."¹⁹⁷ The formal "joke"—if we can call it that—of the poem is on the listener-cum-critic. To get it, the listener—the older Yeats included—must become one of those unbearable bald heads, editing and annotating those lines with prosody, willfully forgetting that they had been rhymed (and then apparently re-rhymed) out in love's despair.¹⁹⁸ The poem clouds our critical function. In effect, to get the trick, we have paradoxically to misread "The Scholars" by stressing its rhetorical-metrical qualities at the expense of its literal ones.

Revision toys with the gap between two histories, each mediating the subject in a different way. The two histories of "The Scholars" are 1915 and 1929. Yeats, still a bachelor in 1915, was spending his time in Sussex, England with Ezra and Dorothy Pound. Ireland was at a turning point. The Third Home Rule Act (1914) had just been postponed pending the end of the Great War, a war to which the Irish populace was ambivalent about sending its children.¹⁹⁹ Then, in 1916, a year after the initial publication of "The Scholars," all was changed, "changed utterly." After John MacBride was executed for his participation in The Easter Rising, Yeats's world was dramatically transformed on both a personal and national front. He proposed once again to Maud

Gonne and, after he was rejected, he courted and proposed to her daughter, Iseult. She refused, whereupon he offered his hand to George Hyde-Lees who enthusiastically accepted. Yeats soon became a political statesman and a global public figure, winning the Nobel Prize in 1923 “for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation.” Countrywide, what had been small skirmishes between the IRA and British auxiliary forces escalated into the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21), whose ill-fated treaty set in motion the Irish Civil War (1922-3). Yeats’s reaction to the “terrible beauty” of Easter, 1916 and its aftermath is conflicting. He had a desire to face its reality, but, at the same time, he was repulsed by its unnecessary violence. “Meditations in Time of Civil War” demonstrates not only his circumspection, but also his dissatisfaction of sorts with public life. His resignation from the Irish Senate comes a year before the revision of “The Scholars” is published, and, as his health started to deteriorate, he resolved more and more to withdraw into a private world.

Having, as it were, two histories, “The Scholars” fractures any notion of what we presume might be a unified lyric voice. It is as if the poet, like Oisín coming back from Tir na nÓg after many, many years, were thrust back into a history in which he no longer belonged. In a sense, we might regard the two versions of “The Scholars” as a type of refrain within some larger poem, for which we might ask “What is it to mean *this* time around?”²⁰⁰ The mapping of the two poems as though they were refrains might, in John Hollander’s words,

reveal an interesting relation to the rhetoricity of the lyric form as such—the refrains of what Yeats called “words for music perhaps” have, as historical revisions of the burdens of song texts, a special structural, or quasi-musical, “perhaps”-ness of their own. But in all these taxonomies, historically belated or locally troped refrains would seem to have the property of remembering: their own previous occurrences in the poem, their distant ancestry in song and dance, and their more recent poetic parentage are recollected at each return.²⁰¹

Revision triggers a rhetorical “echo of remembrance” where interpretive capital appreciates *in* time. Poems, for Hollander, “embody some kind of nexus of presence and memory that requires both synchronic and diachronic discussion.”²⁰² The matter-meter problem of “The Scholars” enacts this nexus of presence and memory, providing that organism which is caught between timelessness and history, between the cry of the heart and necessity, between love’s despair and critical annotation. It is that spectacle which we call the aesthetic artifact.

We might also look upon “The Scholars” as a kind of palimpsest—one dance with two dancers or one song with two ideas as to how it is to be sung. According to George Bornstein, the palimpsest is a meta-critical figure, which “stress[es] both the multilayered character of major monuments of our culture and the broader process of their cultural transmission.”²⁰³ For him, the desire for an aesthetic “monument” might say something more about the values of our contemporary culture and its reading practices than about the specific poetic object. At the heart of the matter is a notion of authorization, which not only sanctions the intentional artwork but also produces authentic versions of history. Here again, we may see the intricate relationship, hovering somewhere between synecdoche and irony, of history and form. Noting the change in his own sound, Yeats writes of such a relationship, bringing together prosody and history:

When I speak blank verse and analyse my feelings, I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement is of the past.... The contrapuntal structure of the verse, to employ a term adopted by Robert Bridges, combines the past and present.... What moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exorcise the ghostly voice. I am awake and asleep, at my moment of revelation, self-possessed in self-surrender; there is no rhyme, no echo of the beaten drum, the dancing foot, that would upset my balance.²⁰⁴

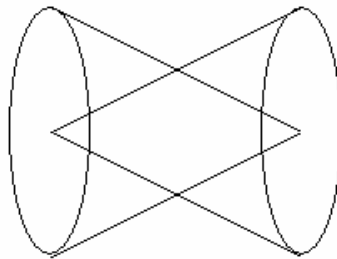
There is a different type of romanticism here, more tentative, more introspective, more mature. If the poet of these words were to “toss... on his bed,” he would do so “self-possessed in self-surrender.” His motivation, “beauty’s ignorant ear,” would no longer be the metonymical Gonne but rather the anthropomorphic manifestation. Above all, this poet would no longer have to choose between the past and its “flights into fairyland” and the present, because, for a modernist who combines the music of the past with the sounds of the present, the only thing that matters is that he “not exorcise the ghostly voice.”

On the afternoon of October 24th 1917, four days after my marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences.²⁰⁵

--W. B. Yeats, "Introduction" to *A Vision*

III. re: *Vision*

Yeats's later years are characterized by an infatuation with what he calls his "incredible experience," or what R. P. Blackmur calls his "magic."²⁰⁶ The earlier tension between the imperative to harmonize and the magic of uncertainty resurfaces as a historical-symbolic becoming of the highest order. "The system of *A Vision*," according to Michael J. Sidnell, "...constitutes a new understanding of the image, which subsumes Yeats's early symbolist poetics and its imagistic tempering; and the system draws so heavily on artworks for its explanations of historical and supernatural processes that one may suppose that aesthetic reflection has generated a spiritualist pseudo-poetics."²⁰⁷ Sure enough, Yeats's later philosophy, which echoes his earlier attempts, is a metaphysics of return. Its "principle symbol" is captured in the famous gyre:



The double conic figure is based around an axis of time, which itself incorporates emotion and subjectivity. Intersecting each point on this axis is the plane of space, which includes the intellectual and the objective. A. Norman Jeffares writes, "the end of an age,

which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction.”²⁰⁸ This causal history takes a metaleptic shape—re-visioning what comes *before* within the kingdom of what happens *after*. At the center of Yeats’s metalepsis is the matter of return and that monstrous figure, *time*.

We still do not know which is the motivating factor for Yeats’s “form” of history—whether it is an actual history or a symbolic one. As Denis Donoghue writes, Yeats possesses a “symbolism that... accepts the intervention of history with regret; and [an] historical sense that... longs to yield to the purity of presence, the present tense and that alone.”²⁰⁹ The friction between the two goes back to that paradoxical matter of tradition and what it has to do with modernism. Yeats, of course, finds himself on both sides of the discussion. For the poet who quite famously declared, “I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional,” the symbol—the eternal—becomes the prime mover.²¹⁰ But for the poet “of the monstrous,” in Donoghue’s words, “the inconceivable event... humiliates history [write large] and makes nonsense out of finite order.” The other history—the actual, the particular—seems to have a life of its own.²¹¹

The monstrous figure is that “rough beast,” born out of the widening gyre of the historical present, but it is also the “uncertainty” of that echoed past—the symbolic enchantment of the countryside. The “resplendent pair” of history and symbol was, for Yeats, never separable.²¹² In a sense, his earlier flights into fairyland were always already bound up with the “real world,” whether as an involvement in political life or the fashioning of a national culture. At the center of his paradoxical energy is the matter of

return and that other monstrous figure *time*. The early Yeats, of “The Man who dreamed of Faeryland” (1891), can be characterized by a speaker able to declare “[t]hat time can never mar a lover’s vows.”²¹³ The later Yeats, on the other hand, of “The Wild Swans at Coole,” presents a speaker who is forlorn precisely *because* time has marred his vows: “his primary awareness,” for Harold Bloom, “is not of a dismal, almost ridiculous continuity, between an earlier and a later self. Discontinuity dominates, for the depression of nineteen years was at the [marriage] refusal, but the depression of 1916 is for *not* feeling depression at the continued refusal.”²¹⁴ Revision and return: losing the feeling of loss but getting the feeling back as a loss of that loss.

In his poetic memorial to W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden writes that Time

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honors at their feet.²¹⁵

Time is not entropic. It absolves the one who looks back: the coward (from *coward* – one, pejoratively, of the tail) and forgives the one who dares to look ahead: one of conceit (from *conceive* – the flight of the imagination). Part cowardice, part conceit, revision negates the past by resurrecting it, and it is within this “echo of remembrance” that we might find Yeats’s modernist poetics. “[F]or, in poetry as in life,” Auden states, “to lead one’s own life means to relive the lives of one’s parents and, through them, of all one’s ancestors; the duty of the present is neither to copy nor to deny the past but to resurrect it.”²¹⁶ I would only add that one of Yeats’s ancestors was that tentative young sparrow in the eaves—himself.

¹²⁴ “The Sorrow of Love,” l. 1, 1892, in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, Peter Allt, ed., (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1957), 119. Roman Jakobson, perhaps a bit too closely, chronicles the revisions of this poem—all of the different grammars, syntaxes, and sounds, and all of the ‘emes’ (phoneme, morpheme, etc.)—in his “Yeats’ ‘Sorrow of Love’ Through the Years.” Stephen Rudy, in *Language in Literature*, Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, eds., (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 216-49.

¹²⁵ Thomas Parkinson, *W. B. Yeats Self Critic: A Study of His Early Verse and The Later Poetry: Two Volumes in One*, 1951, (Berkeley: U of California P), 1971, 168.

¹²⁶ Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats’s Poetry in the Making*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 4.

¹²⁷ Recounted in Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, 1948, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), 237-8. Yeats’s early notion of metaphysical synecdochic natures comes out his essay, “Magic,” where he states that “the borders of our mind are ever shifting and that many minds can flow into one another... and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy... [and] that our memories are a part of one great memory.”

¹²⁸ Lines taken from Yeats’s “Among School Children.”

¹²⁹ Kenneth Burke, “On Motivation in Yeats,” in *The Southern Review* VII:3 (Winter 1942): 547. He points to the system of *A Vision*, which “involves a basic distinction between ‘solar’ and ‘lunar’ motivations.... [A] great wheel is designed on the basis of this distinction, yet this Great Wheel itself is divided into twenty-eight phases of the moon. Thus, though we have sun and moon as antithetical, the fact that both are treated in terms of the moon would... mean that... the sun would be under the sign of the moon” (549).

¹³⁰ Joseph Warren Beach, in *The Permanence of Yeats*, James Hall and Martin Steinmann, eds., (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 197; originally published in *A History of English Literature*, Hardin Craig et al, ed., (New York: Oxford UP, 1950).

¹³¹ Denis Donoghue, *William Butler Yeats*, (New York: Viking, 1971), 6.

¹³² Yeats, *Anima Hominis in Mythologies*, 331.

¹³³ Yeats, “Drumcliff and Rosses” in *Mythologies*, (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 88.

¹³⁴ The symbolist poet is one who “make[s] the stabilities of the external world answer to the individual’s varying apprehension of them” (76). Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*, 1931, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 26-63; W. Y. Tindall also sees Yeats as a symbolist, but oddly enough as one who couldn’t quite understand Arthur Symons properly. Tindall, “The Symbolism of W. B. Yeats,” in *Accent* V:4 (Summer 1945), 203-12.

¹³⁵ T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, (New York: Faber & Faber, 1957), 302; Michael J. Sidnell, *Yeats’s Poetry and Poetics*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 4; V. K. Narayana Menon, *The Development of William Butler Yeats*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1942), 14; Harold Bloom, “Yeats and the Romantics” in *Poetics of Influence*, John Hollander, ed., (New Haven: Henry R. Schwab, 1988), 44-5.

¹³⁶ Alan Wade, ed. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1954), 63. Yeats is referring to the chorus of “The Stolen Child.” Spelled ‘necessity’ in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, Vol. I, John Kelly and Eric Domville, eds., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 54-5.

¹³⁷ Yeats, “To the Editor of the *Daily News*” in *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats*, vol. II, John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, eds., (London: Macmillan, 1975), 328.

¹³⁸ R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 76.

¹³⁹ Yeats, “Introduction” to *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, ed. and selected by W. B. Yeats, (London: Walter Scott, 1888), xii. Hereafter cited as *FFT*.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 47. Yeats calls these trooping fairies “kidnappers” in an 1889 article for the *Scots Observer*. Reprinted as “Kidnappers” in *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth*, (London: Penguin, 1993), 39-43.

¹⁴¹ This 1888 version is a copy of the 1886 one, originally published in *The Irish Monthly* (December 1886), 646. Not surprisingly, Yeats reworked the refrain over the years until it ended up in the 1950 *Collected Poems* as it is now mostly reprinted: a) italicized, b) with a changed second line—“To the waters and the wild,” and c) spelled “faery.”

¹⁴² Kinahan writes: “To see the sidhe for the lords of deception that they are, and to see their happy other world as genuinely enticing but ultimately fatal to man, is to acknowledge that there is little really glamorous about their glamouring of the human child” (63). Kinahan’s reading follows alongside Lady Wilde who understands a clear hierarchy between man and the Sidhe: the countrymen “look on the sidhe as a race quite inferior to man,” while it is the fairies who “look on mortals as of much higher race than

themselves.” On the same note, William T. Gorski maintains that “Yeats is loathe to enter this ‘other’ world. By representing the passage into the spiritual dimension as an act of kidnapping, Yeats highlights the inimical and hazardous aspects of the human relation to the superhuman. In effect, the higher world poses a threat to the lower world: it can overcome and override human life. Its power is fatal.” Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism: Contexts of the Early Work and Thought*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman Inc., 1988), 62-3; Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, (London: Ward and Downey, 1888), 39, 73; William T. Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy*, (Albany: State U of New York P, 1996), 52.

¹⁴³ Frank Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968), 89.

¹⁴⁴ Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, 47. Two years later in an article published in *Leisure Hour* entitled “Irish Fairies,” he writes, “[o]thers will have it that they [mortals] are always wretched, longing for their friends, and that the splendor of the fairy kingdom is merely a magical delusion, woven to deceive the minds of men by poor little withered apparitions who live in caves and barren places. But this is, I suspect, a theological opinion, invented because all goblins are pagans. Many things about fairies, indeed, are most uncertain....” *Uncollected Prose I*, 177.

¹⁴⁵ Donoghue, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Yeats’s aesthetic: “The esthetic [Yeats] propounded was to be less ethical, less Salvationist than that of Matthew Arnold... lies are better than truths, whims than sobrieties, masks than faces. The truest poetry is the most feigning.” Ellmann, *Eminent Domain*, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Fiona Macleod (William Sharp), “A Group of Celtic Writers” in *Fortnightly Review*, lxxv (January 1899): 40-2. Referenced through Giles W. L. Telfer, “Yeats’s Idea of the Gael” from *Yeats Centenary Papers* iv, (Dublin: Dolmen Press Ltd., 1965), 105-6.

¹⁴⁸ Yeats, “To the Editor of the *Daily News*” in *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats*, 328.

¹⁴⁹ Yeats, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Book I, ll. 11-12, 1889, in *The Collected Poems*, 355.

¹⁵⁰ Yeats, *Explorations*, 393.

¹⁵¹ Yeats, *FFT*, 200.

¹⁵² Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 46.

¹⁵³ R. F. Foster writes that Yeats “... trawl[ed] through back numbers of the *Transactions of the Ossianic Society*, where in 1886 he found not only the story ‘Oisín in the Land of Youth’ but an account of the legendary Irish chieftain Fionn MacCumhail.” Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life I*, 56. Jeffares lists the reference as Michael Comyn’s “The Lady of Oisín in the Land of Youth,” trans. Brian O’Looney, (1859). Jeffares, *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 432.

¹⁵⁴ The exaggeration of the Irish genealogical line—we see it also in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*—is legendary. Telfer writes, “An interesting sidelight on Yeats’s attitude to Irish Gaeldom is shown by his attempt to provide Blake with an O’Neill ancestry” (Telfer, 107). Yeats’s indebtedness to Macpherson’s notion of the Celt wavers from time to time. In an August 1895 article, Yeats called Standish O’Grady “Ireland[’s]... one historian who is anything of an artist,” because Mr. O’Grady’s characters are (rather ironically, though unintentionally so) as “Celtic as the heroes of MacPherson’s ‘Ossian,’ with the something added that made them Irish also.” At another occasion, Yeats could be seen as rather pleased that “a man down the country who know[s] well all old Irish legends finds [his] ‘Oisín’ gives better idea of mingled savagery and nobility ‘of ancestral Irish’ than McPherson’s Ossian.” Yeats, “Irish National Literature, II: Contemporary Prose Writers—Mr. O’Grady, Miss Lawless, Miss Barlow, Miss Hopper, and the Folk-Lorists” in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. I, 367, 368; Yeats, *Collected Letters, Vol. I*, 142.

¹⁵⁵ Micheál Mac Liammóir and Eavan Boland, *W. B. Yeats*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971), 33.

¹⁵⁶ Bloom, 100. Yeats reflected over the influence in the “Introduction” to his play, *The Resurrection* (1927): “For years I have been preoccupied with a certain myth that was itself a reply to a myth. I do not mean a fiction, but one of those statements our nature is compelled to make and employ as a truth though there cannot be certain evidence. When I was a boy everybody talked about progress, and rebellion against my elders took the form of aversion to that myth. I took satisfaction in certain public disasters, felt a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin, and then I came upon the story of Oisín in Tir na nÓg and reshaped it into my *Wanderings of Oisín*.” Yeats, *Explorations*, 392.

¹⁵⁷ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, Vol. 1, 1865-1895.*, John Kelly, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 98. Letter to Katharine Tynan.

¹⁵⁸ Yeats, *Anima Hominis* in *Mythologies*, (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 337.

¹⁵⁹ Yeats, "The Fairies" in *Uncollected Prose I*, 181-2.

¹⁶⁰ Kinahan, 63.

¹⁶¹ Bloom, 92.

¹⁶² 1908 epigraph to *Collected Works in Verse and Prose*, in *The Variorum Edition*, 778.

¹⁶³ Oscar Wilde, *Pall Mall Gazette*, July 12, 1889. Reprinted in *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, James Pethica, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000), 321.

¹⁶⁴ Parkinson, 176.

¹⁶⁵ The poet's shifting aesthetic prompted a series of revisions which, Thomas Parkinson writes, "are the product of Yeats' considered objections to the quality of his early verse, ...display[ing] in a heightened manner the difference between his sense of poetry in 1901 and his sense of poetry between 1925 and 1933" (123).

¹⁶⁶ Yeats, *FFT*, 200.

¹⁶⁷ Yeats, *Explorations, Selected by Mrs. W. B. Yeats*, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 392-3.

¹⁶⁸ Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" in *Last Poems* in *The Variorum Edition*, 629. Giles W. L. Telfer writes that Yeats's "earlier work, against which he reacted, is a poetry of withdrawal and enchantment: the Gaelic sources upon which he drew were concerned with life and with fate, even though they dealt with these things symbolically. We cannot think of his poems as translations, or even as transcriptions. The best among them are beautiful in their own right: solemn, dedicated, melodious, consistently sincere. His 'idea of the Gael' must, in the final issue, be seen to lie in his own impressions and poetic talent." Telfer, 103-4.

¹⁶⁹ John Harwood, "'Secret Communion': Yeats's Sexual Destiny" in *Yeats Annual* 9 (1992): 18.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Russell K. Alspach to Richard J. Finneran, 30 September 1976. Quoted in Finneran's *Editing Yeats's Poems: A Reconsideration*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁷¹ Finneran, 1.

¹⁷² Compare this to Yeats's own proclamation that "[t]he correction of prose, because it has no fixed laws, is endless, [while] a poem comes right with a click like a closing box." Letter to Dorothy Wellesley in Dorothy Wellesley, ed., *Letters on Poetry*, (London: Oxford UP, 1940), 24. Referenced through Stallworthy.

¹⁷³ Parkinson, 176.

¹⁷⁴ Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Harold Bloom's "influential" poetic mythology is predicated upon a revising of sorts. He writes: "Few notions are more difficult to dispel than the 'commonsensical' one that a poetic text is self contained, that it has an ascertainable meaning or meanings without reference to other poetic texts.... poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and *those* words refer to still other words, and so on, into the densely overpopulated world of literary language. Any poem is an inter-poem and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading. A poem is not writing, but *rewriting*..." (121). Bloom, "Poetry, Revisionism, Repression" in *Poetics of Influence*, 121. His general theory: "strong poets make that [literary] history by misreading one another, so as to clear an imaginative space for themselves" (5). *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 1973, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford UP, 1997).

If the poem is "not writing, but *rewriting*," then revision becomes vision for the very reason that it knows itself as re-vision. Threatening the very possibility of the mimetic act by calling it a forgery, if you will, of nature or history, re-vision always performs as a counterfeit to the past, somewhere between rediscovering a dynastic theme and envisioning revelation in the prophetic voice. The weightiness of tradition can be seen in the ubiquity of the dynastic theme, which heavily informed the Irish literary revival. Genealogies such as the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* [*Book of Invasions*] and the mid seventeenth-century *Leabhar na nGenelach* [*Book of Genealogies*] by Sligo's Dubhaltach Mac Fhir Bhisigh—himself a descendant of Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh who composed the genealogical treatise *Leabhar Fiachrach*—testify to the importance of a dynastic tradition that tracks Irish lineage back through Japhet to Adam. "Like a sailor establishing his position by the bisection of longitude and latitude," Stallworthy writes, Yeats "looked to his ancestors and to his descendants to discover where he stood." Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision in Yeats's Last Poems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 18.

¹⁷⁶ Yeats, "The Scholars" in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 337.

¹⁷⁷ What would Yeats say, should his Catullus walk that way? For one, Yeats called T. S. Eliot "the most revolutionary man in poetry during my lifetime," and though he welcomed the "satiric intensity" of the

other's work, he nonetheless still professed that "[w]e older writers disliked this new poetry." Heard through Yeats's ears, this 'new,' post-Great War verse had "[n]o romantic word or sound"; because it was poetry that "resemble[d] prose... accept[ing] the vocabulary of their time... [without] any special subject-matter." Yeats concluded that the verse subsisted under the premise: "[t]he past had deceived us: let us accept the worthless present." Yeats, "Modern Poetry" in *Essays and Introductions*, 499.

¹⁷⁸ Yeats, *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, 93-4.

¹⁷⁹ ...where emotion, as T. S. Eliot reminds us, "has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet." Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *The Sacred Wood*, 1920, (London: Methuen, 1966), 59. Not surprisingly, in his short monograph on Yeats, Eliot can write: "The taste of an adolescent writer is intense, but narrow: it is determined by personal needs. For this reason the poetry of the young Yeats hardly existed for me until after my enthusiasm had been won by the poetry of the older Yeats." Eliot, "Yeats" in *On Poetry and Poets*, (New York: Faber & Faber, 1957), 252.

¹⁸⁰ Allen R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of The Wind Among the Reeds*, (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1969), xviii.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 6.

¹⁸² A. Norman Jeffares, "W. B. Yeats and His Methods of Writing Verse" in *The Permanence of Yeats*, 304; originally published in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, CXXXIX, 829 (March 1946): 123-8. Thinking along the same line, Jon Stallworthy notes that "[a]lthough many of [Yeats's] poems spring from a subjective seed, they open out into an objective flower." Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision in Yeats's Last Poems*, 246.

¹⁸³ Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 6. Whether getting a handle on his objective self meant abandoning his unrequited love, heeding his part-time amanuensis's (Ezra Pound's) aesthetic advice, or just getting older, it also entailed answering—from without—the question *who is thy master?* Yeats writes: "How could I have mistaken for myself an heroic condition that from early boyhood has made me superstitious? That which comes as complete, as minutely organized, as are those elaborate, brightly lighted buildings and sceneries appearing in a moment, as I lie between sleeping and waking, must come from above me and beyond me. At times I remember that place in Dante where he sees in his chamber the 'Lord of Terrible Aspect,' and how, seeming 'to rejoice inwardly that it was a marvel to see, speaking, he said many things among the which I could understand but few, and of these this: ego dominus tuus'" (*Anima Hominis* in *Mythologies*, 325-6). In "Ego Dominus Tuus," Yeats thrusts his "unresolved antinomies" (Qtd. in Lentricchia, 89) into a dialectical battle, opposing the objective self, or *Hic*, to the subjective anti-self, or *Ille*. The reader is left wondering who has come out on top: the critic Yeats wary of "passive suffering" or the bitter young man tossing on his bed? But this is a matter that cannot be resolved, even by the poet himself, for Yeats, according to George Bornstein, "built his new aesthetic upon the tension between balanced contraries rather than upon the intensity of exclusive devotion" (113). George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970). Edward Larrissy points out that even Yeats's personally organized collections, like *Crossways* which includes the poems "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and "The Sad Shepherd," are "full of juxtapositions of contrary states." Larrissy, *W. B. Yeats*, (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 7.

¹⁸⁴ Wade, *Letters*, 758.

¹⁸⁵ Yeats, *Anima Hominis*, in *Mythologies*, 331.

¹⁸⁶ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 12. The rhetorical-semiological bind poses a problem not only for the synecdochic critical imperative—make meaning!—but for the imperative of epistemology as well. Anita Sokolsky summarizes: "Most interpretations of the poem in effect fetishize its final lines, reading the whole poem as if its essence were condensed in them. The poem is understood teleologically; its interpretation rests on the synecdochical reliability of its culminating image. When, as in the final lines of "Among School Children," the image refuses such assimilative tactics, it also undoes the postulate of epistemology which Aristotle and Plato lay down, the subordination of part for whole. The final lines not only upset a conciliation of artist and creation, image and referent, but also disrupt the precarious status of the fetishized object. Not only is such subordination deranged, but the very distinction between part and whole is debilitated. An epistemological quest is undone by the lines in which that quest should culminate." Sokolsky, "The Resistance to Sentimentality: Yeats, de Man, and the Aesthetic Education" in *Yale Journal of Criticism* 1:1 (1988): 78.

¹⁸⁷ Yeats, "Among School Children," ll. 16, 62, in *The Variorum Edition*, 443-6.

¹⁸⁸ de Man, 11.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁰ Bornstein, "What is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?" in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams, eds., (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993), 167.

¹⁹¹ Yeats, *The Variorum Edition*, 337. Other versions of this poem (which Yeats almost titled "At the British Museum") will be listed in the appendix. I am not going to consider them in the body of this chapter, as I am more interested in comparing two different versions of the "same" poetic artifact rather than chronicling a specific history of revision, although this might be a little shortsighted. George Bornstein notes that the word publish can mean both making public and making public specifically by printing. His idea of the poetic artifact, thus, includes a much larger set of texts. "Certainly," he writes, "a working draft seen only by the author is not public. But what if the author shows it to a consultant or confidant, as Yeats often did... [or] a fair copy... [or] an elaborate manuscript.... In short, at what point does manuscript circulation of a work constitute publication?" Bornstein, "What is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?" 187.

¹⁹² I wish to thank both Louis Schwartz, who rightly challenged my initial claim that the iambic line is "utterly" unyielding, and Catherine Gallagher who suggested that I was, perhaps, reading the jocular ballad lines a bit too seriously. For my own revision, I would tend to agree with both critics, though I think my final interpretive result remains the same—Yeats the self-critic reading against the romantic impulses of the young poet.

¹⁹³ Stallworthy, *Between the Lines*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ John Crowe Ransom argues that "[t]he composition of a poem is an operation in which the argument fights to displace the meter, and the meter fights to displace the argument." Here there is no disagreement. Ransom, "Wanted: an Ontological Critic" in *The New Criticism*, (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941), 295.

¹⁹⁵ "Metrical composition," he writes, "is always very difficult to me; nothing is done upon the first day, not one rhyme is in its place, and when at last the rhymes begin to come, the first rough draft of a six-line stanza takes the whole day." Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 153. Jeffares writes: "The prose draft of a poem was usually followed by a succession of versions of the poem written in verse, which was often faulty in metre and rhyme. Yeats always chanted his verse aloud as he wrote, seeking always the right word, which would convey his meaning and yet fit into the sound effect which he desired to create." A. Norman Jeffares "W. B. Yeats and His Methods of Writing Verse" in *The Permanence of Yeats*, 271; originally published in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, CXXXIX, 829 (March 1946): 123-8.

¹⁹⁶ Harvey Gross and Robert McDowell, *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry*, 1968, 2nd ed., (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999), 49. This musical shuffling echoes the poet's contemporary reading of Milton. Scanning the opening twice, the first time in iambic pentameter as Milton might have done, and, the second time as a type of sprung rhythm as one might read it in the present-day, Yeats is able to resolve, in his own way, the strain between the traditional and the modern: "If I repeat the first line of *Paradise Lost* so as to emphasize its five feet I am among the folk singers—'Of mán's first dísobéidience ánd the frúit,' but speak it as I should cross it with another emphasis, that of passionate prose—'Of mán's first dísobéidience and the frúit,' or 'Of mán's first dísobedience and the frúit'; the folk song is still there, but a ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility, an unconscious norm." Yeats, "A General Introduction for my Work" in *Essays and Introductions*, 516.

¹⁹⁷ Gross and McDowell, 49.

¹⁹⁸ The new rhyme, ink/think, which metaphorically draws upon the relationship between literary conception and production, replaces the old one, end/friend. On the interesting relationship of ink and think, see: Sheila Emerson, "Byron's 'one word': The Language of Self-Expression in *Childe Harold III*" *SIR* 20 (1981): 363-82; referenced through William Keach, *Arbitrary Power*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 24.

¹⁹⁹ Fran Brearton writes, "Irish involvement in the Great War was and has remained, a problematical subject precisely because the issue was entangled from the beginning with Irish domestic politics." Even though up to 200,000 Irishmen fought and 35,000 Irishmen died in the war, the Irish involvement was never nationally memorialized for the first eighty years of the state's existence. It would have meant honoring what many believed was a British imperialist cause at a time when such collaboration was no longer possible. Yeats is usually seen as closing his eyes to the war, in part because he published little

about it with the exception of “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” (1918). Still, this poem is much more meditative, more, say, Wordsworthian than much of the other “real world” war poetry being written by observers. Brearton sees Yeats’s non-responses as already part of an Irish cultural project of withdrawal. She writes: “Yeats is culpable, not for ignoring the war, since he did not do so, but for helping in his prose criticism to consolidate the view that the tragedy of the Great War was primarily an English not an Irish tragedy, and, as such, that it was remote from Irish cultural life.” Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W. B. Yeats to Michael Longley*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 4, 44.

²⁰⁰ John Hollander, “Breaking into Song: Some Notes on Refrain” in *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), 133.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 135.

²⁰² Hollander, “Necessary Hieroglyphs” in *Melodious Guile*, 113.

²⁰³ Bornstein, “Introduction” in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, 1.

²⁰⁴ Yeats, “A General Introduction for my Work,” 1937, in *Essays and Introductions*, 524.

²⁰⁵ Introduction to “A Vision,” II. Reprinted in *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, 298.

²⁰⁶ R. P. Blackmur, “The Later Poetry of W. B. Yeats,” in *The Southern Review* II:2 (Autumn 1936): 339-62.

²⁰⁷ Sidnell, 10.

²⁰⁸ Jeffares, *A New Commentary*, 203.

²⁰⁹ Donoghue, 6.

²¹⁰ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 522.

²¹¹ Donoghue, 94.

²¹² For F. R. Leavis, the younger, symbolist Yeats and the older, realist Yeats weren’t so different. The “paradoxical energy” of Yeats’s “dream-world” means that it is “something more than private, personal, and literary; that it has, as it were, an external validation.” Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932). Quoted in *The Permanence of Yeats*, 150.

²¹³ Yeats, “The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland,” l. 11, in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 43-4.

²¹⁴ Bloom, 191.

²¹⁵ Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” ll. 50-3, 1940, in *Selected Poems*, Edward Mendelson, ed., (New York: Vintage, 1989), 82.

²¹⁶ W. H. Auden, “Yeats as an Example” in *The Kenyon Review* X:2 (Spring 1948): 187.

Spellings and misspellings are not solely the practices of the magical fairyland. “Yeats commented that when he wrote most of the poems in Poems... he had hardly considered seriously the question of the pronunciation of the Irish words. He had copied at times somebody’s fanciful spelling, and at times the ancient spelling as he found it in some literal translation, pronouncing the words as they were spelt” (Jeffares, 1984, 520). Even though Yeats eventually regularized most of his Gaelic spelling, he did not necessarily keep them in line with their common English renderings. Many of his variations (faery, Aengus) had little to do with a mythic Irish past. Instead, their importance lay in helping to reclaim an Irish cultural distinctiveness within the space of the English language. Fairy faery fairy faery – it’s just a letter moving around the page and yet there’s so much more at stake. James Merrill’s “Losing the Marbles” is also about letters that get scattered across the page—some are recovered, some are not. The letters show us how to play games, but they also show us how to build cultural histories. And, so long as they’re remembered, they’ll never quite be lost.

4

O Sing the Marbles: Typos, Losing, and the Portable Cultural Histories of James Merrill

“What happens to a culture when its people lose the distinctions of language, when the richness and diversity of language disappear under conformity?”

“Without being melodramatic—it dies. It doesn’t collapse, but it withers, because the final resort of any intelligence is utterly clear precise, and honest utterance. A culture also collapses if its words are interchangeable. We all know militaristic euphemisms for destruction. ‘Taking out’ someone is not quite the same thing as ‘take-out’ Chinese food—but if we can accept a language that says ‘taking out’ does not mean death or annihilation, if we accept that as a conventional public metaphor, something happens to morality and to the ethic contained in the word as well.”²¹⁷

--Derek Walcott

--IF U CN RD THS
u cn gt a gd jb w hi pa!
So thinks a sign in the subway.
Think twice when letters disappear
Into Commodity’s black hole—
No turning back from that career.
This counterspell may save your soul.²¹⁸

--James Merrill

I. Where else in the eight-hundred-fifty-plus pages of the *Collected Poems* of James Merrill would there be a typo but in that epic poem of misplaced episodes, “Losing the Marbles”?!

Morning spent looking for my calendar—
Ten whole months mislaid, name and address,
A groaning board swept clean...
And what were we taking about at lunch? Another
Marble gone....²¹⁹

The line, published years earlier in *The Inner Room* (1988), should read: “And what were we *talking* about at lunch?” It seems that when the diners met again years later, their lunch plans had been changed. Rather than talking, conversing, sharing, they would now

be possessing, in effect “having” words. The typo, which jumps out like a bad pun on a Christmas card—“no el, no el”—ironically literalizes the exchange of words that had originally been the diners’ objective. But, as we soon learn in section two of “Losing the Marbles,” this is a poem that will always be “exchanging the wrong words.” Between the intended “talking” and the unintended “taking” lies the difference between conversation and violence, between what we expect of meaningful language and what we know of social behavior. “Losing” and “taking” are both forms of dispossession, separated on the one hand by force and on the other by intention. What is at stake here is a type of literary criticism which would take seriously the question of a non-intentional but literalized irony—saying one thing and meaning another.

Unlike other acts of irony, though, the difference between the saying and meaning of the typo comes about because of a type of typographical mediation. This might lead us to reconsider the typo seriously in terms of theories of translation or in the larger history of the book field. Two recent articles, one by D. F. McKenzie and another by Steven Mailloux, call attention to the essential materiality of textual reproduction and, accordingly, read the various networks of particular texts—including unforeseen results, such as typos—as meaningful interpretive structures.²²⁰ Texts, for McKenzie, mean under “different historical imperatives,” not only because of their materiality and varying typographies, but also because of the socio-cultural institutions that diversely give them such meanings. “[A]ny history of the book,” he writes, “...must be a history of misreadings.... Every society rewrites its past, every reader rewrites its text, and, if they have any continuing life at all, at some point every printer redesigns them.”²²¹ Where McKenzie reads textuality and the typo as types of a material bibliography, Mailloux

reads typos in terms of the archive. According to Mailloux, “a kind of editing takes place—by omission or commission—in every textual interpretation.” Conversely, rather than being an objective venture, interpretation takes place in every act of textual editing. Such editing “demonstrates several characteristics of the interpretive process: (1) its materiality; (2) its embeddedness in the traditions of theory and practice; (3) its institutional and cultural locations; and (4) its involvement in rhetorical politics constituted by arguments over ideologies.”²²²

The typo lets us examine the question of meaning in a way we hadn’t been able to before. We might see how language “means” outside its intentional frames, and understand how readers actually encounter textual language, not how they ideally ought to. Authors make meaning of typos—whether in those of others, as in Elizabeth Bishop’s diagonal “Man-Moth,” or possibly in those of themselves, as in James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus who can famously boast “A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.”²²³ Some typos are more meaningful than others because they exist within an interpretive frame that sheds light upon the interactions of cultural networks.²²⁴

In James Merrill’s case, I feel as though I am caught between “taking” and “talking,” between wanting to claim that meaning cannot be reduced to the poet’s intention, while also wanting to claim that he would have shot his marbles in the direction of this very fortuitous typo. Merrill was acutely aware of the dangers that disappearing els can bring: “Or when aphasia skewered / The world upon a word,” the speaker of “Losing the Marbles” later writes in a Joycean moment of his own. Lost els make this poet merry. In a poem that is all about losing, the typo cannot help but name itself as

“taking,” and, in turn, it gets us “talking” about culture, modernity, and those very loud and very timely trains of thought that run overhead. Merrill’s metaleptic moment has word enough and time.

The technical term for Merrill’s “lost marble” is *syncope*, from a Greek combining-form meaning together-cutting. Syncope, or cutting down, is the omission of a letter or sound from the middle of a word. It is responsible for such places as Gloucester and o’er the ramparts and for Hamlet’s “pangs of dispriz’d love”; it is also the term for a temporary circulatory failure resulting in fainting or loss of consciousness, as in those early bouts of Jane Eyre: “The light that had long ago struck me into *syncope*, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling.”²²⁵ In both cases, the term signifies a loss, a having been “taken.” Syncope, *aphaeresis*—the omission of a letter from the beginning of a word (“And yet ’tis almost ’gainst my conscience,” *Hamlet*, V ii 300)—and *apocope*—the omission of a letter from the end of a word (“so oft have I invoked thee for my muse” Sonnet 78, l.1)—are all types of rhetorical subtraction. Subtraction, along with addition, transposition, and substitution, comprises one part of what Quintilian calls “quadripertitam volunt esse rationem” or what most rhetoricians call “the four categories of change.”²²⁶ Like subtraction, addition can come at the beginning, end, or in the middle of a word, as in Shakespeare’s “Lie blist’ring fore the visitating sun” (*Two Noble Kinsmen*, I i 146).²²⁷ The transposition of letters is called *metathesis* and their substitution rather aptly has two names, called either *antisthecon* or *antistoecon*—for the transposition, we might watch the American troupe in England as it adjusts to the litres

and metres of British theatres, and, for the substitution, we might note how “a pun is its own reword.”²²⁸ The four categories of change extend to speech, as in those *Wednesdays* in February. And now there is that ever-popular nuclear option.²²⁹

So far, we’ve only considered the metaplasms or metaplasms, which includes all rhetorical changes regarding the letter or syllable.²³⁰ The four categories of change go beyond the law of the letter. Each can be considered on the larger textual level of the sentence, the paragraph, or the tale: *anthimeria*, substitution of a part of speech (noun for verb), *anastrophe*, a type of phrasal transposition, *anantapodoton*, subtraction in the guise of thematic ellipsis (“or else...”). Each rhetorical mode is also part of the critical enterprise—poems lose marbles so we add more on, moving beyond the literal, adding history, biography, psychology. What I mean to suggest here is that these rhetorical modes of criticism, which often forsake authorial intention, run counter to our understanding of rhetoric. Whether we understand rhetoric as the study of figures (a mode of talking) or as the study of persuasion (a mode of taking) or as a mix of both, at the center of the study is always that matter of intentionality. *Solecism*, *barbarism*—these are the names for rhetoric without intention, for rhetoric that isn’t rhetoric.

When we look for the causes behind such rhetorical forms—why do we perform them and how do they occur?—we are already bridging the gap across intentional and unintentional linguistic manipulation. Sometimes the changes are the result of a conscious desire to fit formal models and sometimes they are made for rhetorical effect as in the three R’s of reading, writing, and ’rithmetic. Other times they are the result of unanticipated population changes—a possible reason for “The Great Vowel Shift”—or they are due to natural developments of a language, particularly as it exists across various

geographic and cultural regions, sort of like Charles Darwin's Galápagos finches. While many rhetorical transformations, such as those designed to fit a word into an iambic line, can be seen as decorative, other changes may be much larger in scope. Following Quintilian, we might conclude that knowledge of such rhetorical devices is socially important, because it produces "[t]he man who can really play his part as a citizen and is capable of meeting the demands both of public and private business, the man who can guide a state by his counsels, give it a firm basis by his legislation and purge its vices by his decisions as a judge" (I i 10). While we no longer hold onto the ethical imperative of Quintilian (general humanistic education has, for all intents and purposes, replaced the study of rhetoric), his remark remains interesting, because it says something about the relationship between language and culture that forms the basis of much cultural study today—that alongside linguistic changes come attendant changes in culture and subject formation.

Words and their variant spellings are markers not only of nation and locality, but also of class and, depending upon one's view, education. We see this every time we consider what is really up for grabs in the decisions of usage panels. Is it really wrong to unnecessarily split an infinitive or use a preposition to end a sentence with? Many grammarians would have us believe not only that it is wrong, but that there is much more at stake than just a petty squabble. In his essay, "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell takes issue with the notion that "any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes."²³¹ (For those not in the know, *aeroplane*, following an antisthecon and syncope is *airplane*.) Orwell's struggle is with the deadening of language, and he

takes in his crosshairs dead metaphors, clichés, jargon, and five-dollar words, which in today's economic market are probably worth about \$37.83. For Orwell, nothing less than the very future of “[o]ur civilization” is in the balance. His essay boasts a conservative politics, but it is one which is not just aimed at the “decadent” left. Writing in 1946, his crusade also targets the fascist right—when we stop writing critically, we stop reading critically and stop thinking critically, with the danger that everything will get absorbed under one sign or a singular resolve.

We see the importance of the arresting characteristic of language also on the left. The Derek Walcott quotation, which I cited as an epigraph to this essay, echoes somewhat Orwell's anxiety without subscribing to his ultimate conclusion. Walcott commends “clear precise, and honest utterance” and warns that a culture “collapses if its words are interchangeable.” Where usage is concerned, though, Walcott can at the same time challenge both accepted rules and popular convention, cautioning us that each carries with it the ethical implications of a public will.

On the other end of the spectrum, we might look at the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who reminds us that grammatical rules enact power relations within a social and institutional linguistic field. Bourdieu writes, “In the collective labour which is pursued through the struggles for what Horace called *arbitrium et jus et norma loquendi*, writers—more or less authorized authors—have to reckon with the grammarians... who take upon themselves the power to set up and impose norms... by... fixing a language censored and purged of all popular usages.”²³² Words are political—they are markers of a culture and its values reproducing themselves; they are remnants of an aristocracy ossified into language. If you had to look up the Horace quotation (as I did), you would

be forced to play by the rules of someone or, in Bourdieu's case, something else's game. And, yes, it could all be faked—we see this with Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) or with the character Paul in John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* (1990). In the end, socio-linguistic rules might just as well be considered types of rhetorical maneuvering.

On the one side, we have a violence done to language, to the universal, to the linguistic structure holding up a nation and its values; on the other, a violence done to speech, to the particular, to the possibilities of progress through change. This, though, is not as clear-cut a political question as conservative vs. liberal use of language and everything that would follow with it—social and cultural rules, our relationship to public institutions, and our status as cultural subjects constructed by language.²³³ If rhetoric plays upon the relationship between accidental language use and meaningful social acts, James Merrill might be said to play upon such rhetoric. He is interested in the meaningful accident, which is neither a formal property of language nor a historical occurrence but both at once. He writes,

Two winters ago in Key West, we were talking at dinner about memory lapses, a topic increasingly relevant to everyone present. John Brinnin quoted Lady Diana Duff Cooper, who stayed young and beautiful for nearly ninety years. It seems that whenever a fact or a name slipped her mind, she would shrug and say cheerfully, 'Oh well—another marble gone!' In a flash the image of the Acropolis in Athens appeared on my inner screen, and with it the history of Lord Elgin in the early nineteenth century, removing and carrying off to London most of the Parthenon sculptures.²³⁴

The poet senses in the idiom that lost memories could be given a materiality, as though they could be preserved in a pouch or a museum. Someone else could find this memory. Someone else could take this memory. Relating the capacities of personal memory to the politics of cultural memory is no accident, but it draws upon an accidentalness in a

linguistic code. As though perpetually sitting at his Ouija board, James Merrill finds the memories of the world in letters: m a r b l e, which ramble into the mind, into Athens. Yes, yes, letters are Merrill's own figural monads—they are the basic permutations of experience. Acting as marbles, they move around the page and provide the wherewithal to access not a personal but a cultural intentionality—language takes Merrill where it wants to go.

According to Stephen Yenser, Merrill's aesthetic is twofold with both harmonic and disharmonic impulses: "opposing principles must be one... [and] any single principle will double."²³⁵ Addition and subtraction, or, like, Merrill's early childhood, tales of marriage and divorce. The movement between these impulses prompts Yenser to locate Merrill's cat's eye somewhere between a neo-Hegelian evolution and flux. He turns our attention to Merrill's first dramatic work: "Our cold virtues, once thought durable, / But now abstract and frail as snowflakes / Alter to lazy water in the sun. / Fluidity is proof against major disasters. / The marbles melt and wink at me."²³⁶ While melting and winking are both figures of disappearing, the wink implies that something unseemly is going on—that the issuer and issuee are both on the inside of some joke gone astray. Looking at Merrill's anagrams and pangrams ("the vapid quiz man begs for lockjaw x-ray"), we find the poet constantly winking at us, never more so than in his puns.²³⁷

"Merrill's distinction," for Mutlu Blasing, "is his ability to register at once the textuality and the historical nature of writing. His polyvalent literalism and his fondness for 'accidents' and puns in general foreground the play of the signifier and approach an internalization of history within poetic language."²³⁸ Puns give credit where credit is due; they locate intentionality not with an author but within language itself, which is

always giving events, texts, and people more meaning than could possibly be assimilated into a singular narrative. The marbles of language are chipped with cultural memories, even before the poet sits down to play. And sometimes, when nobody's paying attention, when we "have but with a cursorary eye O'erglanc'd the articles," a marble gets lost. This is the typo, which we may call that pun of the symbolic order... depending, of course, on what we are blasing our readings.

“The modern game of marbles, as played by junior schoolchildren, is only a shadow of the game of the past. The decline in skill and the desuetude of many rules has left the game without its former excitement. The polarities of winning and losing have disappeared now that, in an affluent society, it is no longer ‘nice’ for children to play for material gain; and the loser no longer suffers a physical punishment.”²³⁹

--Iona and Peter Opie, *Children's Games With Things*

II. I taught I taw...

Elsewhere, in a moment of linguistic alchemy, Merrill's "Processional" sonneteer watches the polar winds get blown into polar wands, which in turn transform droplets into snowflakes and back into droplets.

Think what the demotic droplet felt,
Translated by a polar wand to keen
Six-pointed Mandarin—
All singularity, its Welt-
Anschauung of a hitherto untold
Flakiness, gemlike, nevermore to melt!

But melt it would, and—look—become
Now birdglance, now the ginkgo leaf's fanlight,
To that same tune whereby immensely old
Slabs of dogma and opprobrium,
Exchanging ions under pressure, bred
A spar of burnt-black anchorite,

Or in three lucky strokes of word golf LEAD
Once again turns (LOAD, GOAD) to GOLD.²⁴⁰

The winds, a natural force, and the wands, a supernatural power, both move and alter the matter of the earth, but only one of them represents an active will behind change. Like the "[s]ix-pointed Mandarin" snowflake, the structurally formal language ("[s]labs of dogma") cannot withstand the solar wand. Under pressure, the "slabs of dogma"—that which does not move, does not transform—turn away from themselves, away from the world, and withdraw into "anchorite." *Anthracite*, not anchorite, Stephen Yenser reminds us, is what we should be finding in the "burnt-black" aftermath of terrestrial pressure.²⁴¹

But the polar wand has struck again, magically “[e]xchanging ions,” nature’s combinatorial letters. Anchorite is anchored in *chorein*, the Greek “to retire,” and what does the retired poet do but exchange irons and play word golf?

The “ions under pressure” here are those of a cultural idiom, which in the fairy tale story turns lead (the *pb* perhaps of “**p**ressure, **b**red”) to gold (conceivably hiding in the *Anschauung* of the total world view). Again, the transformations are both linguistic and natural. After centuries of failed attempts to turn lead into gold, the speaker has found the secret: three touches of the wand transform E to O and L to G and A to L. Poof. Gold. Auden couldn’t have done it better. “LEAD” we read two ways: one rhymes with “read” the other with “read.” Why do we read it with a short e? In part, because of the pressures of cultural narratives, like the fairy tale which promises that we always find gold at the end, but also because of the pressures of a literary history—those memories of a sonnet form, from which we have a different type of pressure, one which insists we rhyme “LEAD” with “bred.” And, like everything else in the poem, the sonnet’s rhyme scheme has been transposed.

Merrill’s metamorphoses, what Yenser calls his harmonic and inharmonic impulses, catch the poem between natural and unnatural forces of change. The singularity, that which cannot be assimilated into a narrative, bumps up against the *Weltanschauung*. Even what is supposed to be the most comprehensive of cultural harmonies—this “*Weltanschauung*”—is broken in two: “Welt / *anschauung*.” The world is alienated from our perceptions of it. That never-changing ever-changing refrain of Poe’s black bird makes its way into the den: “nevermore to melt! / But melt it would.” O how the turn can turn. Refrains, John Hollander writes, “are, and have, memories—of

their prior strophes or stretches of text, of their own preoccurrences, and of their own genealogies in earlier texts as well.”²⁴² Refrains are also like rhymes, which themselves carry the phonic memories of their prior events. In this sense, the “word golf” is not the only links of the poem. Rhyme becomes a processional of its own, a substitutive illogic with a professional rhetoric of addition and subtraction: “untold” becomes “old” becomes “gold.” “Processional” follows the movement from geological pressures to cultural or linguistic ones. Melting is a positive form of movement, dependent as much upon a dynamic cultural memory as upon a polar wand. And, while they may be flaky, Merrill’s misplaced six-pointed letters are never quite lost. “Losing the Marbles” is another story. Perhaps.

The linguistic game of “Losing the Marbles” antecedes by a few pages “Processional’s” alphabetic parade. “Losing the Marbles” circles around the question of composing lyric poetry and asks, in vastly different ways, whether the modern lyric poem is an act of inspiration or of recovery. But the poem has other concerns. As Guy Rotella writes, it “is in part a catalogue of time’s erosions of permanence in private and public realms: the loss of memory that accompanies age, the death of friends, forgotten versions of heaven, a temple so abraded that it has become featureless, whole cultures displaced and dissolved.”²⁴³ To these songs, we might add the half-notes of: Charmides, verse forms, poetic inspiration, acrobatics, oubliettes, constellations, skies, looking up, and one more thing which I can’t quite seem to put my dactyl on. The poem begins as a confessional: “Morning spent looking for my calendar— / Ten whole months mislaid....” The speaker re-imagines time as having a material or quantifiable nature, as though a

month could be mislaid with a pair of glasses. The punctuation in the first stanza is interesting. The movement: — , ... ? We get an em-dash promising further examples; a comma promising further clarification; followed by an ellipsis, the grammatical mark signaling something missing or lost; followed by the uncertainty of the question mark. Together, they point to the failures of re-collection, which is then rhetorically overshadowed by a casual but material reading of loss: “[a]nother marble gone.” No matter.

When combined with the specter of loss and the threat of old age, the memory of the youthful Charmides points the speaker toward heaven; it is not a sacred or spiritual heaven but, instead, a mock sexual one. “Mine was to be an acrobat in Athens,” the speaker writes, bringing us back to Socrates addressing the youthful Charmides. Similar to the marble, the acrobat leaps over and “[t]umbles,” enacting with his body the rhetorical moments of transposition and substitution, and then later, we assume, the more private addition, and subtraction. The acrobat combines the bodily and formal impulses of an older time, where sexual and intellectual life were part of the same philosophical culture. Two whole millennia mislaid, the speaker brings us “Back when the Parthenon... dwelt / Upon the city like a philosopher.” Architectural monuments and spaces are introduced as part of a cultural history—they, “like a philosopher,” house knowledge about social practices. Athens’s particular cultural memory, though—that of the Parthenon—has been lost or, rather infamously, “taken.” At issue, here, is what losing marbles, whether as the metaphorical years or the literal carved stone, has to do with poetry’s role in that ever-fraught relationship between aesthetics and politics. Merrill pokes a little fun at the ability of really really sincere poetry to change both

biological weathering and dominant cultural narratives. Dylan Thomas's villanelle does not quite do it: "But really—rage?" And just as raging poetry fails to ward off the seasons and turn back the clock, so too does modern-day diplomatic and national rhetoric fail to return the Parthenon to its pristine condition. Such rhetoric, a refrain that (unfortunately) gets tired over the years, just further mars the cultural memory. So like the Athens press, breathing fire to get the marbles black. Again, the tension in the poem is somewhere between losing and taking.

Our old friend anantapodoton (thematic subtraction) returns with a vengeance: "...and what were we talking about?"; "well, you have seen"; "if I may say so"; and the final "hold on, don't tell me... What?" The loss or failures of speech are not so much forms of political censorship as they are consequences of aging. These lost marbles are "dreamy blinkings-out," referring back to the speaker's imaginary "heaven" and lost stars of the night sky—the word *marble* derives from the Greek *marmaros*, a cognate of *marmairein*, which means "to shine." Seeing a star "blink out" means recognizing that we've been thinking of and looking at something that, for many millennia, wasn't ever really there.

As both the traveling sojourner and the mild punsters might note, Merrill has a wild thyme in Athens. After visiting Greece in the mid-nineteenth century, the travel writer Jane Anthony Eames writes: "The hills and plains over which we walked were covered with thyme, and the fragrance of it loaded the air with rich perfume. All up the sides of the Hymettus, these beds of thyme, 'the long, long summer gild,' and from them the bees gather the sweets, which give the honey of Athens such a peculiarly delicious flavor."²⁴⁴ The "Losing The Marbles" speaker momentarily loses his sense of humor

while thinking of the thyme.... The “human stuff” he writes, consciously aware of his upcoming pun, “Tumbles, one last drum-roll, into thyme, / Out of time.” Capital punishment. The capital punishment, as the final stanza declares, can signify many things: the pun-ishment endured by the reader, the sentence of mortality which lurks everywhere behind the poem, the punishment on the capital (Athens), and the punishment enacted to the top parts (capitals) of the Athenian columns by Lord Elgin. It’s also a pun on the initial capitalization of the verse line, that non-semantic capital of the poetic marketplace. Finally, it refers to the abuse Merrill suffered by the pointed hand of Ouija board, whose transcripts, he claims elsewhere look “[l]ike first-grade compositions. Drunken lines of capitals lurching across the page, gibberish until they’re divided into words and sentences.”²⁴⁵ Merrill shoots his marbles widely—per capita punishment.

The Man from Porlock comes storming by silver car through the poet’s window at the beginning of the second section:

...The storm mapped a new country’s dry and wet—
 Oblivion’s ink-blue rivulet.
 Mascara running, worksheet to worksheet
 Clings underfoot, exchanging the wrong words.

The polar wand returns, here, to the poet’s study, blowing notes and worksheets around, bleeding words into each other, into oblivion. The ink no longer shows what was once trying to be said but rather memorializes its own destruction, flooding, as a small river, the desk and the page. A “new country,” the speaker calls this, a “mapping” of sorts, but one which points not to the violence and complexities but rather the absurdity and capriciousness of new national borders. The poem draws on both the immaculate losing

of Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn" and the aesthetic cartography of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map," a poem which reestablishes boundaries of its own: "The names of seashore towns run out to sea."²⁴⁶ The boundaries of Merrill's original map exist somewhere between the material ink "rivulet" and the imagination, between the "storm" that opens the section and the "brainstorm" that preceded it.

The acrobatics once used to describe Merrill's heaven, which were in a sense always the rhetorical marble games of substitution and subtraction, result in another unintentional exchange. The storm, more formidable than that typographic glass slipper, exchanges "the wrong words," while the lost poem "[c]lings underfoot"—a prosodic pun in the midst of the epic flood. The speaker offers two more puns relating to return, one familial, the other sexual: "[t]he right ones [words], we can only trust will somehow / Return to the tongue's tip." The word trust—a belief or faith of return—also connotes the Merrill family trust, the means, perhaps, of getting the bank verse right again. We also read the idiom of remembering (*on the tip of my tongue*) as a type of physical recovery linked to the sexual kiss of the "mouth-to-mouth." Reading back into the sentence before, we might find these sexual connotations illustrating the incommunicability between failed lovers, those who are continually "exchanging the wrong words."

The hypothetical kiss is also a meeting of rivulets—the "mouth-to-mouth"—which we know is the processional of that running poetic language. Saved from drowning, the "[g]asping, shivering" wrong words still cannot find their equilibrium in that river delta of all classical poetry, Francis Palgrave's 1861 anthology, the *Golden Treasury*. "They feel their claim / On *us* expiring," the speaker puns—the "claim" a

reference to Palgrave's gold. The claim is also a means of socio-political legitimization, or, here, specifically a means of aesthetic authorization. The italicized *us*, a forced iamb in a rare iambic pentameter line, gets us counting again, so that when we encounter those remaining wind-blown words, we are not surprised to see that they are "starved to macron, breve." Is Merrill staking a claim for prosody regarding its awkward relationship to his contemporary verse? The prosodic symbols macron and breve, are described as having "a beggar's frame" and being "fleshless ribs." In one sense, they are poetry hollowed out, but, in another sense, they, like Edenic Adam's fleshless ribs, are even a source of creation and quite nearly the backbone of all human life. If the second section is about recuperating antediluvian verse, before oblivion's ink-blue rivulet overflowed the page, it is also about reinvigorating older verse forms—we know a Merrillian scheme when we see one. Saving such forms is brave, we might say, or the stanza might almost say, misremembering the anticipated rhyme of "save" in "breve."

After the "[l]ong work of knowing and hard play of wit" (parts of colloquial phrases are still jumping around the page), comes the expected surcharge—the work and play "take their toll." But, contrary to its literal meaning, this idiomatic "toll" is not "taken" from the subject but is instead introduced into his body, "like any virus." The flood has now reached heavenly proportions, for the "[o]ld timers, cured, wade ankle-deep in sky." They are cured, on the one hand because they are preserved and, on the other, because viruses no longer afflict the dead. This celestial mirror of the pool returns Merrill's aquatically-revised poetry up to the realm of the imagination—the brainstorm always one "far cry" away from a terrestrial Xanadu—and the old timers (the old

“timers” are also the macron and the breve, now “cured”), become heavenly constellations, pointed specs of lost mythologies.

The third section is a nonce rendering of Merrill’s wind-blown verse. The spacing is reminiscent, perhaps, of the constellations which close the previous section, and, similar to the task bequeathed to that section’s speaker, we are asked here to connect the dots. Misplaced words become mis-spaced words in this mock Sapphic verse—fragmented verse, one should note, that was later filled in by the critics. “[D]eliberately incoherent” is the phrase Merrill uses to describe this section: “But don’t be alarmed: the [missing] page will return fully restored in Section 5.”²⁴⁷ Section three and section five are to be read together, even though the versifier “forgets” to juxtapose them. The question is which comes first—is section five a reconstruction of the remains of the original lost brainstorm, or is section three merely completed verse reduced to whimsy?

Without stomping, Merrill very subtly leaves his short footprint in the long postmodern poetical politics of macron and breve. If the Beats and the Confessional and Black Mountain schools, “challenged the academic claim to present universal truths by impersonal and formalist means,” then, according to Guy Rotella, James Merrill challenged them.²⁴⁸ Poets such as Merrill, Rotella writes, “doubt the existence, coherence, and authenticity of the self” claimed by many postmodern schools of poetry, and instead “assert the constructed rather than essential or necessary nature of all human systems (including poetry), suspect that we are more produced by language than producing it, and insist that art conspires with power even when it seeks to chastise it.”²⁴⁹ As Ross Labrie writes, “the artist should refrain from serving ‘uncooked’ his ‘bloody

tranche de vie,’ as Merrill put it in *Scripts for the Pageant*.”²⁵⁰ Merrill’s pun works the metaphor two ways: in one breath he can suggest a half-baked poetics while also (Britishly) damning those who do otherwise. What is at stake is what counts as proper lyric subjects of the latter half of the twentieth century, and the relationship to these subjects of a language and a literary tradition that are only partially theirs. Dismissing objections to the outright formalism of Merrill, Mutlu Blasing suggests that the poet gives us another way to understand poetry after modernism:

Merrill’s formalism should be seen... as a *rhetoric* of formalism. His forms, posed as artificial gestures in their exaggerated artificiality, decorum, and anachronism, register his awareness of the marginality to what are in fact the prevailing modes of post-World War II American poetry. Such formalism questions the historical and metaphysical authority of conventions as much as it challenges free forms that appeal to “experience” – whether personal or sociopolitical – for their legitimation and authority.²⁵¹

Again, while he treads lightly, Merrill is lampooning the notion of lyric freedom that much of his contemporary poets assumed. In questioning why certain bared poetry, like the “empty Cézanne oil sketch” of section four, has a cultural currency, Merrill in a sense questions whether hitting tab a few times on the typewriter, a poem makes.

Although the third section is “deliberately incoherent,” the right words seem to be left in, and by that I mean that it reads almost grammatically. The few words that weren’t lost catalogue the visual nature of its “vital frenzy”: “peaks,” “stiffening,” “decrepitude,” “plunders,” “flawed.” The section is “Unutter[able]”; the harrowed turns of the verse’s field lie “white as / sliced turnip.” Best of all is the final “[.]”—we don’t even know when this performance of poetry is over, as if the whole thing were like a bad speech which goes on endlessly and the speaker has to say *thank you* twice to get his applause. There’s an uncanny feeling, here, similar to the one we get hearing Merrill’s Ouija board,

which, one might note, seems to have an astonishing gift for rhyme. We know that another worksheet clings underfoot.

The fifth section is a liberal rendering of the downbeat Sapphic form, complete with the visual Doric column of the final adonic. Its method may be described by some words from the sixth: “filled in the sorry spaces with pattern and intent.” *Pattern* refers to both a form and a tradition. *Intent*, I intend to read a little more ironically, because the “bloody tranche de vie” of personal intent does not matter to Merrill so much as that of a capricious linguistic system over which he has no control. Besides “fully restoring” the third section, Merrill’s Sapphic rewrites some of its words: the divider “or” is shown to be squeezed out of the ethereal and perhaps sexual fluid of “ichor”; the emptiness of a “wanderings / home” becomes the Homeric celebratory “wanderings into / homecoming”; “fancy”—echoing “frenzy”—becomes “infancy,” a falling into silence that at the same time re-voices the earlier concerns of aging. Two of the more interesting revisions shed the brackets around: “Unutter[able]” and “Ch[arm]ides.” Stephen Yenser calls Merrill a “poet so charmed by logograph that, for instance, he has discovered in the two words ‘Begin. Carnation’ the command to ‘beg incarnation.’”²⁵² Just as the opening flower hides the sounds of the solicited embodiment, so “unutter” hides another and so Charmides is a combination of arm and chides—cross words, perhaps, for the *Times*.

We might see the vast differences between the two sections in the arrangements of their opening stanzas:

Section 3:	body, favorite
	gleaned, at the
	vital
	frenzy—

Section 5: The body, favorite trope of our youthful poets...
 With it they gleaned, as at the sibyl's tripod,
 insight too prompt and vital for words.
 Her sleepless frenzy—

What the third section promotes as an experimental poetic method, the fifth section disavows, making sure that we know the dancer from the dance. Sibyl the Pythian seer is needed to fill these sorry spaces, spaces where there is just too much body: “body, favorite” and later “body everywhere.” It is too personal; there is not enough sense. Merrill does not play a part in this postmodern body politic. Instead he disparages the *frenzy*, the word that Edgar Allan Poe had warned against in his poetry-by-numbers essay “The Philosophy of Composition”: “Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a series of fine frenzy.”²⁵³ When the “insight [is] too prompt and vital for words,”—“deeply deep,” Stephen Dedalus would self-mockingly call this aesthetic—experience becomes more important than language, and something gets lost.

Like the marbles on which the poem is based, the words “gleaned” and later “gleam” bring together what happens to be shiny with questions about the act of collecting. The third section is shiny but uncollected. Iona and Peter Opie point to the arbitrariness surrounding what gets collected and how it all gets arranged, looking at what one culture rhetorically filed in the sorry spaces of another:

In the British Museum there are many small spherical objects of unknown use: stone spheres, about half an inch in diameter, found in early Egyptian tombs; clay balls from Petsofia, in Crete, from the Minoan period, 2000-1700 BC, one red clay, one red-brown; ‘trays full’ of glass balls (some in ravishing mixed colours, blue, yellow, red, and green), clay balls, marble balls, from the Roman Imperial period, from places such as Capua, Syria, Ephesus, Oxyrhynchus, and Cnidus in Asia Minor. They look like marbles, and the curators say, ‘We called them marbles because we couldn’t see what else they could be. They didn’t seem right for perfume-bottle stoppers.’²⁵⁴

The speaker of “Losing the Marbles” writes: “From then on veining summer nights with / flickering Ichor, / he had joined an elite scornful—as were Charmides, / your first, chiseled verses—of decrepitude / in any form.” While the “veining” brings us back to more earthly mineral deposits (“veins”) and the politics of golden claims and marble artifacts, the flickering Ichor returns us to the mythic constellations of the night sky. The difference between the sections is the difference between two mythos—that of Narcissus and that of Pygmalion; one revolves around the self, the other around “chiseled verses.” Merrill’s poetic agalmatophilia—his love of sculpting, carving, chiseling, is always part of a greater cultural history, and it always comes with sexual overtones—puts him in the latter camp. The section closes with the muses des beaux arts, Homer and Auden, looking over Merrill’s shoulder: “Humbly our old poets knew to make / wanderings into / homecomings of a sort—harbor, palace, temple, all / having been quarried out of those blue foothills.” Like the opening section and the one that will follow, this section can only end in silence, with the foothills “no further off... than infancy.”

If section two is a description of the lost poem, and sections three and five are the staging and restaging of this poem, then section four tells us how the poem will be remembered. Is the “will- / To-structural-elaboration,” it asks, more a rhetorical building up, like a “crazy quilt” (“crystal skeins,” “unknit”), or a rhetorical chiseling down, like marble (“Glints of a future colonnade and frieze”)? The danger of sculpting is the danger of the childhood classroom exercise of Rhetoric, a cutting away which will always “White out the sense and mutilate the phrase.” The quilt provides an alternative poetic

model, one which ties things together, connecting, if you will, the dots of the constellation and giving it a mythology. As Rotella delightfully argues, Merrill likes his statues, but he likes them worn. Focusing on the line “All stone once dressed asks to be worn,” Rotella points to the double nature of *worn*: “wearing well as well as wearing out.”²⁵⁵ According to him, Merrill brings together the quilt and the stone in order to show how unchanging monuments might still be “dressed” up by the ever-shifting seasons of fashion. Neither the poetics of the stone nor the poetics of the quilt wears the pants, so to speak.

Merrill’s monuments include those marbles big and small. Whether he is talking about specific poems or a literary history, the possibility of “wearing away” shapes and molds all of his stones, chipping them, polishing them, and then chipping them again. The erosive nature of forgetting, it is implied, is ethically important, because it wears down our intransigent narratives and allows fresh rivulets to carve out new historical landscapes in what had previously been uninhabitable territory. The wearing continues:

Besides, Art furnishes a counterfeit
 Heaven wherein ideas escape the fate
 Their loyal adherents—brainwashed, so to speak,
 By acid rain—more diatribes in Greek—
 Conspicuously don’t.

Counterfeits (etymologically *contre-faire* or “made in opposition”) erode a currency, brainwashing (opposed to the earlier “brainstorm”) erodes a mind, acid rain erodes everything else, and diatribes (Greek for “wear away”) erode popular narratives that have worn out their welcome. These words, on the other hand, are not quite complementary. Diatribes are unmediated rants, brainwashing causes uniformity, and counterfeits just end up making more of the same. These lines point again to what Yenser calls Merrill’s

double impulses—things coming together and things falling apart, as a formal and not a political matter. The menacing form of the diatribe does not distinguish between the mainstream and the opposition. This has something to do with that apolitical charge often leveled at Merrill. “The poetry of protest,” Ross Labrie writes, that Merrill “observed in unpublished notes written during the 1960s, is no less nor more interesting than the sermons and hymns it replaces in the lives of the public.”²⁵⁶ As much as Merrill parodies the popular sermon, though, he is able to make fun of his own hymns. He sees himself as part of a similarly worn away but inexplicably devoted culture—“We diehard few / embark for London on the *QE2*.” When ideas wear thin, Merrill can roll the linguistic dice and turn to chance.

The relationship among possession, mental inspiration, and literary history is just the aleatory slippage of another marble: “My text is Mind no less than Mallarmé’s.” If the third section pokes a bit of fun at some of Stéphane Mallarmé’s typographies, then the fourth section borrows somewhat self-consciously from the French poet’s couplets. Merrill’s couplet presents the symmetrical façade and epigrammatic quality of the monument amid a mix of end-stopped and more quirkily enjambed lines. The rhymes play chance semantic relationships against necessary semiotic linkages. Only certain marbles can be tossed at the initial rhyming word, but the poet doesn’t know what those marbles will be when he or she sits down to play. Intention, ideas come after accident. Beside working with somewhat idiosyncratic rhymes (“phrase” / “Mallarmé’s”; “few” / “QE2”; “frieze” / “Pericles”) which elicit rather interesting metaphorical associations, the section makes use of slant or eroded rhymes and two irregular quatrains. “[F]ate” and “counterfeit,” provide a counter-fit while also falsifying the expected phonic closure.

The almost rhyme “high wire” / “haywire”—the high wire being somewhere in “[b]etween the elegiac and the haywire”—recalls the rhetorical and sexual acrobatics of the speaker’s loves. The non-couplets (ABAB and ABBA) each offer a different type of symmetry: “rock” / “frieze” / “block” / “Pericles” moves from matter to monument; “back” / “pile” / “smile” / “black” replays in miniature Merrill’s epic poem. Some of the rhymes depend on pronunciations which differ cross-culturally.

Here mornings can be spent considering ours
Of long ago, removed and mute, like stars
(*Unlike* vociferous Melina, once
A star herself, now Minister of Stunts).

The words “ours” and “stars” only rhyme when “ours” is pronounced “ars,” a phonetic substitution which, in bringing possession and art together, gives the line a whole new meaning. The “removed and mute” might recall the “cured” stars of the second section. The loud trochaic inversion *Unlike* describes rather well the vociferous Melina. (Melina Mercouri Italian star of such films as *Stella*—or star—and *Never on Sunday*—a Pygmalion-esque gloss, not sermon, on cultural erosion. Merrill’s acrobatic stars, both like and *unlike* Melina, are removed a further “stage”; they perform and perform falsely. By the time “Losing the Marbles” was written, Melina had become the Greek minister of culture. In 1983, she was sent to England in order to pass along the Greek government’s demands for the return of the Elgin Marbles, a crusade which occupied much of her governmental tenure.²⁵⁷ She is called here “Minister of Stunts” to denote the publicity-hounding and seemingly futile aspects of such public art-crusading. “Stunts,” furthermore, refers to the gimmicky nature of poetic stunts on both sides of the

postmodern high wire—both the “Unutter[able]” performance of section 3 and Merrill’s linguistic puns, *passim*.)

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra canzone, the poem connects its own dots and names its structural method. Its back-and-forth tightrope walking is “like a palindrome” with plans, akin to the Athens press, “for stealing back.” Section four lies in the middle, sections three and five are each versions of the recuperated poem, sections two and six explain how the poem was lost and then recovered, and sections one and seven present, respectively, the morning without the marbles and the night with them. The palindrome operates thematically, as rocks are made into statuary and then erode back into “wave-washed pebbles.” We might espy a palindromic form in the arrangement of the checkerboard which closes the section. “Topless women smile” knowing that their “rose-flawed” men will not be kings until they are allowed to double back for their homecomings. The section ends fluidly: “to use as men upon their checkerboards”—and for the beach sirens, perfectly stressed desserts for getting their marbles.

Section six opens with a short ballad:

Who gazed into the wrack till
Inspiration glowed,
Deducing from one dactyl
The handmaiden, the ode?

Or when aphasia skewered
The world upon the word,
Who was the friend, the steward,
Who bent his head inferred

Then filled the sorry spaces
With pattern and intent,
A syntax of lit faces
From the impediment?

The owlishly anaphoric quasi-riddle poem *Who...? Who... Who...?* opposes the *me! me!* of the very confessional proclamations of the opening section (“looking for my calendar” ... “mine was to be an acrobat” ... “if I may say so” ... “don’t tell me”). The tortuous wrack describes both the hollowed-out Parthenon and the lost poem that still needed to be stretched out. Racking his brain, perhaps, until “[i]nspiration glowed,” the disembodied speaker is able to build up the body—dactyl, or finger, becomes “hand”—of the ode. I can’t help but think that the auratic glow comes not from a reconstituted Delphic oracle but from the ashes of a backyard barbeque, and that the inspiration—or “breathing in,” as the poetry critics frequently like to point out—comes from the smoke of the grill rack. Aphasia, as though it were a spit poking through a slab of meat, “skewered / The world upon the word.” This syncope, which forces the extra-textual onto the literary, recalls the political imperatives sought by many of Merrill’s contemporary poets; but this imperative itself can be seen as a loss, violent and skewing, like the outside storm that bursts in the poet’s study. Moreover, as the speaker seems to suggest here, it is never really more than just another linguistic maneuver. In the beginning was the word, a linguistic Atlas which can shoulder the world so long as the it doesn’t get too heavy.

The final word of the ballad *impediment* brings together many of the section’s themes. The impediment denotes an obstacle, specifically that of the rain-washed poetic words, while pointing to the *pediment*, the decorative triangle on the upper façade of the Parthenon. The impediment also goes back to the aphasia, or “speech impediment,” mentioned earlier, in which the difference between actual and intended speech, between saying and meaning, leaves the poet quite unable to put things into words. A few words

return, though, with the speaker in his own quiet way “breathing fire to get the marbles back.” The dancing words—“fussed over, fêted,” the pun on “fated” might recall the fate/counterfeit rhyme—are termed “saltimbanques” or acrobats with the ability to “flip / Hourly from someone’s upper story... / And come to, clinging to the net.” *Come to* implies both a homecoming and a reawakening, or, as the speaker once put it, the “invigorated” words.

The speech impediments continue toward the end of the section in a more meditative manner. Here, as earlier, words are lost but not because they have been swept down the page: “That writer... no, on shipboard... wait... Charmides?” The ellipses recall the opening section (hold on, don’t tell me... What?) as well as Wallace Stevens’s “Metaphors of a Magnifico” and its fruitless attempts to translate experience into words: “Of what was it I was thinking? / So the meaning escapes. / The first white wall of the village... / The fruit-trees...”²⁵⁸ In Merrill, as in Stevens, the failure to decode experience is not a failure of language but rather language at its best, as its own experiential moment. The lost marbles—stones of a writer’s block—along with the “infancy” which closes the fifth section and the aphasia in the sixth, provide Merrill with ways to understand and give meaning to language outside its intentionality, language, which, in a sense is outside memory.

The section ends by falling into the silence of its own infancy. The palindromic form or “stealing back” places the dim light of the afterglow against that of the earlier gathering dusk and asks that we stay ourselves more modestly against the night.

Section 1: Here in the gathering dusk one could no doubt
Rage against the dying of the light.

Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
 Wasting of old Time....²⁵⁹

--John Keats, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles"

Aviaries aside, there are no nightingales in North America. Perhaps you didn't know that, it never having occurred to you to itemize your homeland's non-beings. In fact, I can think of only one country about which a statement is commonly made. Everybody knows that there are no snakes in Ireland. We know this because the Irish have told us a story about it, the story being that there used to be snakes galore until someone, St. Patrick, chased them out. It is a story about an absence, made possible by the assumption that such an absence must have resulted from an act of subtraction. That something is not there means that someone took it away.²⁶⁰

--John Gordon, "*Dubliners* and the Art of Losing"

III. Marble Wry

Merrill's linguistic constellations continually make light of the marbles. It's difficult after too many pages of marble games to say now that he (and others) make light of things that perhaps aren't funny or to say that the political questions he so patiently tries to avoid should not be avoided. Whether the "Elgin" or "Parthenon" Marbles should be returned to Greece (which they should) is not a question we will find planted across Merrill's poetic landscape, for his is a poetics less concerned with political answers than with the nuances of critique. He is interested in how the marbles sneak into the crevices of our culture today, and how they then arrange themselves between where they might fit—normal conversation—and where they won't—on the shelves of someone else's museum. Again, this might bring us back to that odd relationship between "taking" and "talking," between discourse and power, that ideological realm where "talking" always seems subconsciously to rationalize and validate a "taking."

Taking as such is the one common stone of all the marble games. "First," as Iona and Peter Opie write, "it must be decided whether the game is to be played 'Keepsies'...

or ‘Lendsies’... that is, whether the winner may keep the marbles he has won, or whether he must give them back to the loser.”²⁶¹ Here are four descriptions:

- Long Taw:* “If he hits it, the taw is taken, or the owner must pay one, and the game ends....”
- Ringy or Flicks:* “Draw a circle with chalk, and players each put a set of marbles into the ring.... If any person bowling up lands his marble in the ring he sticks and is out of the game. The boys then take turns to flick marbles from the ring. All they knock out they keep.”
- Three Holes, Killer:* “If he knocks the marble more than six times the length of the boy’s feet and then rings the hole, the boy has to give him a marble, and he is out of the game.”
- Holie:* “...you can shoot at the other person’s marble. If you hit it you keep it.”²⁶²

What is the game of marbles, but addition, subtraction, substitution, and transposition on a material level? The object of marbles is to win another’s marbles; it is an easier game to play when you are fortunate enough to be one of the diehard few embarking for London on the QE2. For the poet Merrill, marble rolls are all syntactical, and marble games are all rhetorical—addition to the circle and subtraction from the circle, where the circle is sometimes no larger than a Ringling Bros. tent and the risk is no greater than a tightrope walk above a net.

On the other side of the “taking,” there’s the “talking”—the playground incantatory which overrides the laws set in stone: “a shout of ‘Clears’ (or ‘Clearsies’) permits [the shooter] to clear [a stone, stick, or lump] away... ‘Backs’ allows a boy to move his marble back as far as he likes... [and] if a marble barely touches the target marble, and does not hit it with the required audible ‘crack,’ a cry of ‘Clicks’ or ‘Clinks’ is needed to validate the hit.... As they said in Salford, ‘You’ve got to ’ear it click before they can ’ave it.”²⁶³ Regional laws for regional games are all governed by their own

dialectal synopes. But then there are those times when the slippage between taking and talking is more than just gamesmanship. Enter the Elgins:

Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis of Greece said yesterday that the pending completion of the new Acropolis Museum and recent repatriation of antiquities from the United States, Sweden and Germany ‘evaporate the vague excuses’ for Britain’s refusal to return the Elgin Marbles, Reuters reported. Cultural Minister George Voulgarakis expressed confidence that the government’s efforts to reclaim the 2,500-year-old reliefs, known in Greece as the Parthenon Marbles and exhibited in the British Museum in London, would someday lead to their return.²⁶⁴

The fate of the Elgins, which are neither art nor culture but part of what James Clifford calls an art-culture system, remains unresolved.²⁶⁵ For the legal scholar John Henry Merryman, they “symbolize the entire body of unrepatriated cultural property in the world’s museums and private collections. Accordingly, the preservation and enjoyment of the world’s cultural heritage and the fate of the collections of the world’s great museums are all in some measure at stake in a decision about the marbles.”²⁶⁶ Unlike personal claims that hope to recover, for example, the Nazi-looted artworks, the claim on the Elgins is a national one, but one which harkens back to a pre-national culture. The obvious question: *what right does England have to the cultural memory of Greece?* The problematical answer is that this cultural memory is also claimed by England, which challenges the right of Greece to be the sole proprietor of an Athenian cultural heritage.

The battle over this taking today takes the form of talking, as legitimacy is marshaled discursively across various public media. Melinda Mercouri’s oft-traveled lectures and Greece’s much publicized perennial claims on the marbles have been met more subtly by the staid manner of the British Museum. In 1984, a year after Greece’s first official request for the marbles, the British Museum, which “holds in trust for the nation and the world a collection of art and antiquities,” published a small booklet

describing everything about the Elgins but their controversy.²⁶⁷ The only public criticisms mentioned dealt with the aesthetic arrangement of the works—that they were initially displayed in too cramped a space. Just how Lord Elgin assembled his artifacts is subject to much debate. Christopher Hitchens recounts the words of the travel author Edward Daniel Clarke, who witnessed their removal:

“After a short time spent in examining the several parts of the temple, one of the workmen came to inform Don [Giovanni] Battista [Lusieri] that they were then going to lower one of the metopes... a part of the adjoining masonry was loosened by the machinery; and down came the fine masses of Pentelican marble, scattering their white fragments with thundering noise among the ruins... The disdar [a Turkish official], who beheld the mischief done to the building, took his pipe out of his mouth, dropped a tear, and in a supplicating tone of voice said to Lusieri, ‘Τέλος.’²⁶⁸

Sadly and ironically, one of the foremost rationales stated for Lord Elgin’s removal of the marbles was the goal of preservation, as recounted on the British Museum’s website:

It was the continuing destruction of classical sculpture in Athens that prompted Elgin to rescue for posterity what sculptures he could. The Parthenon had been reduced to a ruin over a hundred years previously, in 1687, during the Venetian siege of the Acropolis. The defending Turks were using the Parthenon as a gunpowder store, which was ignited by the Venetian bombardment. The explosion destroyed the roof and parts of the walls and the colonnade.²⁶⁹

We might note that, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, Lord Elgin was saving the marbles not only from “the Turks” but also from museums in Paris. The “rescue for posterity” argument no longer justifies (if it ever did) the continued ownership of the marbles today. As Merrill might have put it, “They feel their claim / On us expiring.” Current claims, therefore, have had to refigure themselves according to a different notion of cultural history. “The sculptures from the Parthenon,” the museum’s website maintains, “have come to act as a focus for Western European culture and

civilisation, and have found a home in a museum that grew out of the eighteenth-century ‘Enlightenment,’ whereby culture is seen to transcend national boundaries.”²⁷⁰

We can see this cultural transcendence in John Keats’s aesthetic encounter with the Elgins, part of which I took as an epigraph to this section. In that poem, we might hear echoes of Keats’s less-melancholy “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” which embraces the same portable culture but without the same material heft. Keats’s “On seeing the Elgin Marbles...” “mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude / Wasting of old Time.” Lord Byron’s, on the other hand, as we might say, mingles British grandeur with the rude wasting of old Greece. He writes, in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* that of “all the plunderers of yon fane... the worst...[is] England!”: “Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed / By British hands, which it had best behoved / To guard those relics ne’er to be restored.”²⁷¹ ...the dangers of a trust in perpetuity.

In their recent critical collection on the relationship between cultural property and national and ethnic identity, Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush argue that the Elgin Marbles, “although purchased as simple property, in fact functioned in both the Greek and the British worlds to anchor fluid identities whose shadow extended well beyond the definitions of the marketplace or the courts... [as they] constituted priceless symbolic vessels of group ethos and carried the seeds of renewal for both Greece and Britain.”²⁷² Rather than being testimonials to a continuous cultural heritage, the marbles, for Barkan and Bush, “highlight the historical processes by which cultural and group identities are reconstructed over thousands of years.”²⁷³ The marbles became at once, part of an English cultural memory that had just defeated Napoleon and, as Timothy Webb writes,

“an inspirational center to the growing British empire and to conceptions of Englishness itself.”²⁷⁴

The danger occurs when such artifacts, themselves, turn into mythologies, or, in Rotella’s terms “monuments,” and any actual connection to their material nature is lost. Monuments, for Rotella, have a twofold function, one which builds up a culture, the other which helps it erode. On the one hand, monuments “certify a culture’s present by securing its past and pledging its future... [and] assume art’s power to maintain what’s held in common by joining the particular and the general and by making transient things persistent.”²⁷⁵ On the other hand, though, monuments, “[e]mbedded in political, artistic, and social contexts... reflect the faults and fissures of all three; they raise as well as answer questions about who decides what persons or events should be remembered, in what form and to what ends” (1). The monument carves the meaningfulness of a cultural history into stone. Consider, as Rotella asks us to do, “the unsettled and unsettling political, aesthetic, and more broadly cultural issues monuments condense: the relations of those who are vested in a culture’s ideology to those who are not....”²⁷⁶ Being part of a meaningful national history—a metaleptic one—means subscribing to its cultural narratives. The problem with the Elgin Marbles is that two nations are claiming the same cultural memory, one which is ironically housed not simply in the British Museum, but in the marbles themselves. “Some monuments are preserved,” Rotella writes, “if only in pieces, out of context, and under assumptions apt to be honorable and dubious at once (those of British imperialism, say, or Greek nationalism, or the sort of respect for history, tradition, and art that gets mixed up with manipulation of and by them.”²⁷⁷

Shortly before the line of “Losing the Marbles” on which Rotella focuses (“All stone once dressed asks to be worn”), the speaker observes the “[g]lints of a future colonnade” hiding within the “dregs of would-be rock.” The future-oriented path of the rock-matter, as a teleology of sorts, is likened to notions of a literary tradition. The lines ask us to imagine what future culture—national or other—would appropriate the artifacts of our time and for what end. The speaker continues: “Ah, not for long will marble school the blood / Against the warbling sirens of the flood.” Describing the relationship among rhetoric, violence, and cultural memory, the speaker warns against “schooling” the blood—getting people excited and angered leads to violent ends. The sirens are alarms but also represent seductively dangerous rhetoric. The ambiguous reading of “not for long” coupled with the quasi-apostrophe of resignation “ah,” show on the other hand that none of it might matter come the flood. Noah’s two by twos are here recalled by the couplets, which seem to imply that, in the end, the earth will take back her stones.

The rivulets of Merrill’s literary memory run through Ireland, England, and Greece. His poem takes, as a starting point, both Plato’s dialogue *Charmides* and Oscar Wilde’s poem of the same name. Plato’s eponymous character, who is a philosopher and a poet and is remarkable for his beauty—Plato’s “heaven”—, offers “quietness” as the first answer to the play’s query: “but what is temperance?”²⁷⁸ Wilde (as usual) flips the story around, so that it is the Grecian sailor who takes sexually a statue of Athena—he “pressed / His hot and beating heart upon her chill and icy breast.”²⁷⁹ The sacrilege is repaid once Athena makes Charmides, unanchored against the warbling sirens of the flood, drown himself. Interestingly enough, two whole stanzas were taken out of the 1882 edition of Wilde’s works.²⁸⁰ Ironically, it was the “talking” and not the unsaid

“taking” that got both Wilde and, a few years earlier, Socrates in trouble. Talking dangerously revises a cultural consciousness and is thus as much implicated in the politics of possession as a taking.

Both Charmideses are about sexual acrobatics, specifically the danced-around topic of “Losing the Marbles”—homosexual love; one is about being lost, the other about being taken. James Merrill takes from both but loses himself along the way. His is a level of consumption unparalleled by most other poets; but once he has appropriated another culture’s memory, it is then moved, misplaced, lost. He teaches us that a literary history is a typo of cultural borrowing or a stealing, a guarding of another’s marbles with the crafty awareness that they will never be returned. Merrill’s literary history is bound neither by national borders nor by the material geographies of which such borders are made. He is interested in the borders, because they have memories, not because they have insides and outsides.

Merrill’s handling of the Elgins is difficult to classify, and not just because he is playing his marble games. His demeanor is Keatsian, but his subject matter is Byronic. He avoids the tone and political declamations of Byron, though keeps the Byronic wit. His awe is not at the Marbles themselves but with the cultural narratives to which they’ve become attached—in this sense, he is a metonymic rather than a metaphoric poet. Why some cultural memories are “property” and others are not might ultimately be a question of material form. Merrill’s literary history is virtual, in a way that other cultural monuments, like the Elgin Marbles, cannot be. In the end, the poet’s waking tour through inspiration and recovery asks us not to forget that the memory of a national culture far outlasts the nation.

²¹⁷ Derek Walcott, interview with Bill Moyers, reprinted in Moyers, *A World of Ideas*, (New York, Doubleday, 1989), 427.

²¹⁸ James Merrill, *Collected Poems*, J.D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, eds., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 538.

²¹⁹ Merrill, "Losing the Marbles" in *Collected Poems*, 572. I would particularly like to thank the priceless eyes and ears of Mutlu Blasing and Stephen Koelz who read this poem with me so many years ago.

²²⁰ Mailloux reads the significance of a possible typo in Paul de Man's "Shelley Disfigured" which, similitude aside, substitutes "line" for "like." Mailloux turns to Thomas Tanselle who argues that the typo "illustrates the necessity for deciding on the makeup of the text as a part of the act of reading" (Qtd. in Mailloux, 585). Similarly, McKenzie reads meaning in a very fortuitous misreading by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley who, in "The Intentional Fallacy" mistakenly misquote a revised passage of William Congreve. Steven Mailloux, "Archivists with an Attitude: Reading Typos, Reading Archives" in *College English* 61:5 (May 1999); Tanselle, "Textual Criticism and Deconstruction" *Studies in Bibliography* 43 (1990), 31 n. 16; D. F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form" in *The Book History Reader*, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., (London: Routledge, 2002). The de Man essay may be found in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom, et al, ed., (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 39-73; and the original Wimsatt and Beardsley essay may be found in *Sewanee Review* (Summer 1946), 468-88. I want to thank Lisa Berglund for suggesting these articles.

²²¹ McKenzie, 33, 35.

²²² Mailloux, 585, 586.

²²³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Hans Walter Gabler, ed., (New York: Vintage, 1986), 156, (or U9.228-9 for those Joyceans out there).

²²⁴ Some typos, on the other hand, belie the very fragile nature of our critical enterprise—I think of the fuss surrounding interpretations of Ernest Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-lighted Place," interpretations which depend upon an apparently misplaced line ending. See: F. P. Kroeger, "The Dialogue in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place'" and William E. Colburn, "Confusion in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place'" in *College English* 20:5 (February 1959), 240-41 and 241-42; Otto Reinert, "Hemingway's Waiters Once More" in *College English* 20:8 (May 1959), 417-8. Twenty years later, the commotion starts all over again, and, again, not to be resolved. See: Warren Bennett, "The Manuscript and the Dialogue of 'Clean, Well-lighted Place'" in *American Literature* 50:4 (January 1979), 613-24; and C. Harold Hurley, "The Manuscript and the Dialogue of 'Clean, Well-lighted Place': A Response to Warren Bennett" in *Hemingway Review* 2:1 (Fall 1982), 17-20. We are currently a few years overdue for our generational reexamination.

²²⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, (New York: Penguin, 1982), 321; emphasis is my own.

²²⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, I v 38, H. E. Butler, trans., (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 96.

²²⁷ Prothesis, paragoge, and epenthesis, respectively. The quotation from *Two Noble Kinsmen* is alluded to by both Lanham and Quinn.

²²⁸ Alas, I cannot take credit for that one. Gideon O. Burton, *Sylva Rhetoricae* <http://rhetoric.byu.edu>.

²²⁹ For detailed explanations of the nuclear effect, see: Geoffrey Nunberg, *Going Nuclear: Language, Politics, and Culture in Controversial Times* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

²³⁰ Henry Peachum: "Metaplasms are the transformation of letters or syllables in single words, contrary to the common fashion of writing or speaking, either for cause of necessity, or else to make the verse more fine" (Qtd. in Lanham, 101).

²³¹ "Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our common purposes." Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," 1946, in *The Norton Reader*, 9th ed., Linda H. Peterson, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996), 617.

²³² Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language" in *Language and Symbolic Power*, John Thompson, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 58-9. I was reminded of this passage by William Keach's discussion of it in *Arbitrary Power*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 72.

²³³ Instead, it all might go back to those superintendents of linguistic theory: *langue* and *parole*, whose wrangling casts a shadow over both the pedantic grammarian and the avant-garde poet. The chicken-or-the-egg relationship between *langue*, the structure of language, and *parole*, language as that dynamic space of the particular, asks whether cultural-linguistic actualities determine structures of language or whether the

structures of language allow for the possibility of cultural particulars. Following Jakobson and others, Jonathan Culler links metaphor with “*la langue* and metonymy with *la parole*, since relations of contiguity are manifested in the actual combinations of speech sequences.” Where contiguity is not just syntactical but also cultural, combination becomes an inherently social act. Jonathan Culler, “The Turns of Metaphor” in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 201.

²³⁴ “An Interview with Jordan Pecile” in *State of the Arts* (Winter 1987); reprinted in *James Merrill: Collected Prose*, J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, eds., (New York: Knopf, 2004), 144-5. Merrill continues, “I remembered that individual consciousness had virtually begun in Greece; I thought of the periodic angry efforts made by the modern Greek government to get the marbles back from England—and so forth. Having already written poems called ‘Clearing the Title’ and ‘Stopping the Leak,’ I suspected that I’d presently find myself embarked upon ‘Losing the Marbles,’ and shamefully said so, then and there. For my birthday a month later one of the evening’s guests gave me a little bag of marbles from the supermarket. That present in turn gave me the last section of my poem” (emphasis in original).

²³⁵ Stephen Yenser, *The Consuming Myth: The Work of James Merrill*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 4.

²³⁶ Ibid., 30. The lines come from Merrill, *The Bait* (1953).

²³⁷ Referenced through: Jason Stumpf, “‘best not shown too widely’: James Merrill’s Combinatorial Texts” in *James Merrill, Other Writings: An Exhibition from the Special Collections of Washington University*, (St. Louis: Washington University Libraries, 2001), 22.

²³⁸ Mutlu Blasing, “Rethinking Models of Literary Change: The Case of James Merrill” in *American Literary History* 2:2 (Summer 1990): 312. And later: Merrill “dissociates the lyric from notions of a coherent lyric self with absolute power over words, and inscribes his ‘voice’ and personal past as a convention of a variety of intertextual discourses—both literary and extraliterary. And he conveys his postmodern understanding of the poetic self as textual, and all authority as rhetorical...” (316).

²³⁹ Opie, 47.

²⁴⁰ Merrill, “Processional,” ll.7, 9-14, in *Collected Poems*, 583.

²⁴¹ Yenser, 30.

²⁴² Hollander, “Some Notes on Refrain,” in *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), 138.

²⁴³ Guy Rotella, *Castings: Monuments and Monumentality in Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004), 83.

²⁴⁴ Jane Anthony Eames, “Letter LVI” in *The Budget Closed*, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 100.

²⁴⁵ Merrill, *Collected Prose*, 107.

²⁴⁶ Elizabeth Bishop, “The Map,” l. 14, in *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), 3.

²⁴⁷ Merrill, “The Education of the Poet” in *Collected Prose*, 18. Originally printed in *Envoy* (September 1988).

²⁴⁸ Guy Rotella, ed., *Critical Essays on James Merrill*, (London: G. K. Hall and Co., 1992), 3.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁵⁰ Ross Labrie, *James Merrill*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 15. Merrill’s words come from *Scripts for the Pageant*, (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 214.

²⁵¹ Mutlu Blasing, *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 157.

²⁵² Yenser, *Consuming Myth*, 7.

²⁵³ Edgar Allan Poe, “Philosophy of Composition,” *Selected Writings*, G. R. Thompson, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 676.

²⁵⁴ Opie, 17.

²⁵⁵ Guy L. Rotella, *Castings*, 83.

²⁵⁶ Labrie, 7.

²⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 5/24/83. In another interview, Mercouri states that the marbles “are the symbol and the blood and the soul of the Greek people... [who] have fought and died for the Parthenon and the Acropolis...” “[W]hen we were born,” she continues, “they talk to us about all this great history that makes Greekness...” Quoted in John Henry Merryman, *Thinking About the Elgin Marbles: Critical Essays on Cultural Property, Art and Law*, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000), 25-6; originally published in “Q & A: Melinda Mercouri” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1984.

²⁵⁸ Stevens, “Metaphors of a Magnifico” in *Collected Poems*, 19.

²⁵⁹ John Keats, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" in *Poetical Works*, H. W. Garrod, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 478.

²⁶⁰ John Gordon, "Dubliners and the Art of Losing," *Studies in Short Fiction* (1995): 343-52.

²⁶¹ Opie, 42.

²⁶² The quotations are all from Opie, pp. 19, 31, 35, and 36.

²⁶³ Opie, 42, 43, 44.

²⁶⁴ "And Now the Elgins" *New York Times*, March 30, 2007.

²⁶⁵ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), 224. The history of the Elgin Marbles follows their transformation from material culture to art.

²⁶⁶ John Henry Merryman, *Thinking About the Elgin Marbles: Critical Essays on Cultural Property, Art and Law*, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000), 35.

²⁶⁷ B. F. Cook, *The Elgin Marbles*, (London: British Museum Publications, 1984).

²⁶⁸ Christopher Hitchens, *The Elgin Marbles: Should they be returned to Greece?* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 30.

²⁶⁹ "Lord Elgin and the Parthenon" from the British Museum website; 3/27/08

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/l/lord_elgin_and_the_parthenon.aspx. See also B. F. Cook: "On one occasion a house near the Parthenon was purchased and demolished. The site was excavated to the bedrock, but no sculptures were found. The former owner (a Turk) laughed, saying that he had burnt the pieces of statues found on the spot to make lime for the mortar to build the house" (58).

²⁷⁰ "The Elgin Marbles: Ownership" from the British Museum website; 3/27/08

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/e/the_elgin_marbles_ownership.aspx

²⁷¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, xi, xv in *Selected Poems*, Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning, eds., (London: Penguin, 1996), 98-100.

²⁷² Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, "Introduction" to *Claiming the Stones / Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity*, Barkan and Bush, eds., (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002), 3. This was published, we should note, with money from the Getty Trust, overseer of the Getty Museum, which has recently returned some its artifacts to Greece.

²⁷³ Ibid., 3.

²⁷⁴ Timothy Webb, "Appropriating the Stones: The 'Elgin Marbles' and English National Taste" in Barkan and Bush, 52.

²⁷⁵ Rotella, Castings, 1. Subsequent references will be parenthetical.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 84.

²⁷⁸ Plato, *Charmides, or Temperance*, 159, B. Jowett, trans., (New York: Random House, 1937), 8.

²⁷⁹ Oscar Wilde, "Charmides," ll. 125-6, *Complete Works*, vol. I, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1923), 128.

According to Richard Ellmann, Wilde considered this his best poem. Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, (New York: Vintage, 1988), 141.

²⁸⁰ See: Olivier Alexis, "Two Cancelled Stanzas in the 4th and 5th Editions of Wilde's *Poems*" accessed through *The Victorian Web*: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/alexis1.html>.

Storms blow on both sides of the Atlantic. The speaker of Merrill's "Losing the Marbles" should have known that the rain and wind might "map... a new country's dry and wet" across his desk, because it had done so before, years earlier and in another land: "Men and bits of paper [are] whirled by the cold wind" in T. S. Eliot's midwinter spring (BN 104-5). Recovery, for each poet, means bringing things—letters and words and marbles—back home: "(where every word is at home, / Taking its place to support the others...)" (LG 217-18). At times, though, when the poet regains a sense of things, he finds, slightly embarrassed, that he has recovered the wrong sense. Sounds of words linger in the air, and when the poet tries to hold onto them, he knows that he can only grasp their echoes. Self-conscious about his wit—"a fossil quirk"—and his own echoes, James Merrill's speaker can still "Tumble... one last drum-roll, into thyme, / Out of time...." Eliot's, similarly searching for "the moment in and out of time," suddenly loses it all "in a shaft of sunlight, / The wild thyme unseen" (DS 209). Unlike Merrill, Eliot plays his marble games for keeps. Perhaps that is why he tries to hold on just a bit longer.

5

“The Eyes of a Familiar Compound Ghost”:
The Lyric Subjects of T. S. Eliot’s *Little Gidding*

...what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves.... [T]he past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.²⁸¹

--T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.²⁸²

--T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton”

I. The Present Nowhere

Though the epigraphs seem literally to be expressing similar metaleptic sentiments—that the future shapes what has come before it, and that both time and its monuments form “an ideal order”—if we take them at face value, we would, in a sense, be misreading what they are trying to tell us. The second epigraph, from 1935, reaffirms the first, from 1920, when instead, if we believe it, it should be altering the first. But, then again, a future meta-narrative might control its past without continually altering it... one difference, perhaps, between teleological histories and the literary brand of tradition. Eliot’s tradition cannot predict its own new order, but it knows it will be there. His teleological or messianic time can predict its new order, but knows not when it will arrive. Such time recalls the Augustinian paradox of the vanishing present, a negative version of which follows the passage I quoted above from “Burnt Norton.”²⁸³ The speaker meditates, “If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable,”

unredeemable because it is not part of a meaningful future narrative. Again, an echo from time past: “This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.”²⁸⁴ Here, the self-reaffirmation seems appropriate. One present is as eternally present as another. But this too is meaningful history, this too is theology, and this is why time and time again critics have found “religious certainty” and a “Christian sanction” in Eliot’s late poetic mind.²⁸⁵

That *Four Quartets* has a necessary theological underpinning is a notion that finds its voice in early reviews of the poetry, such as that of D. W. Harding.²⁸⁶ This is a record that gets replayed atop various other critical Victrolas, whether in the den of Northrop Frye, or Grover Smith, or most famously in Helen Gardner:

“Because consciousness within the poem becomes increasingly the consciousness of the past within the present, the consciousness finally of history, the subject, as the poem proceeds, finds its definition increasingly in the historic Christian terms... the subject of each poem and of the whole poem is Christ, Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, Author and Finisher of our faith.”²⁸⁷

While the religious subject matter of “our faith” cannot be ignored, it can be mythologized, as I believe Eliot’s speaker believes. A few lines from “Little Gidding” show, on closer examination, a conflicted theology:

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying (LG 43-8).

At first the lines seem to suggest religious obeisance. The speaker neither asks nor records; he is there as a matter of faith: “You are here to kneel / Where prayer has been

valid.” Very carefully, though, the speaker does affirm that prayer *is* valid, merely that he has entered a cultural space where it *has been* valid. Prayer, he insists, is “more / Than an order of words,” yet it the word order that keeps bringing the prayer back: “Where prayer... And prayer... Of the praying... of the voice praying.”

Eliot was not so much interested in theological answers, but, as Hugh Kenner writes, in “patterns of meaning”: “‘Our first world’ [where Eliot takes us in his imaginary garden], by not insisting, establishes itself in a pattern of meaning, whether we accept it as the world of childhood and ‘they’ as departed elder presences, or as the garden of Eden and ‘they’ as our first parents, or as the garden at the Burnt House in ceremonial use, and ‘they’ as seventeenth-century specters whom the imagination conjures into a scene now deserted.”²⁸⁸ Christian theology, like music and like words, has a pattern, and it is the repetition of such patterned sounds to which Eliot the poet pricks his ears.

There is more to this poem than the determinate future visions of theology, but what that is seems always to be filtered through that paradoxical pattern of time, which insists we understand the now through the eternal, but only gives us access to the eternal now. For Edward Lobb, “The great themes of Four Quartets – love, poetry, and eternity – all involve transcendence of the limitation of self and individual perception; the mediations on poetry deal with the impermanence and inevitable imprecision of our attempts to communicate.”²⁸⁹ Other critical approaches have focused on what is found in the poem, *time*—including philosophical questions with which Eliot was familiar, notably the writings of F. H. Bradley, and those with which he wasn’t, such as the Heideggerian problem of being-in-time²⁹⁰—and what we expect to hear in its words, *music*.

Eliot is always making sure that we listen for “[t]he unheard music hidden in the shrubbery” (BN 27).²⁹¹ “It is impossible to ignore the materiality of language in reading *Four Quartets*, for it is directly pitted against philosophical abstractions,” writes Mutlu Blasing.²⁹² As an example, she considers how the philosophical statement in the opening lines about “a coherent Christian model of history” gets undermined by [t]he very semantic indeterminacy of ‘perhaps’ [which] introduces ‘chanciness’ into the deterministic model.”²⁹³ The speaker is “Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure” (EC 174-5). He is utterly self-conscious and unabashedly playful, because his language is also: “the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at” (BN 28-9); “Distracted from distraction by distraction” (BN 101). Words, ghostly echoes of their earlier presences, move about the page: “You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. Shall I say it again?” (EC 133-5). Statements are turned around as questions. Assertions which seem to be making truth claims and which appear to be fatalistic and overtly metaleptic turn out to be not quite accurate. Reading literally, for example, the lines which open “East Coker”—“In my beginning is my end”—we would expect to find a similar sentiment at the end. The end, however, changes what comes before, not in a philosophical or theological sense but in a linguistic one. The closing line of the poem reads: “In my end is my beginning” (EC 209); the same words are spoken, but the different word order presents a renewed sense of time. The way up and the way down are the same. And then, suddenly, they are not.

Words change over time, and they get in the way of future determinations. We see this when one of Eliot’s ancestors, Sir Thomas Elyot, reappears in the poem as he

might have in the sixteenth century: “In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie— / A dignified and commodious sacrament” (EC 28-9).²⁹⁴ By the mid 1930s, as Ronald Bush writes, “Eliot had affirmed his faith in another kind of self. In the *Quartets*, being is not ‘contained in time past’; the river is transfigured as it flows into the sea... our existence is not a timeless authenticity but a project, in play until death.”²⁹⁵ “The detail of the pattern,” the *Quartets* speaker similarly espouses, “is movement” (BN 159). Flux notwithstanding, the particular moment is still mediated by the pressures of a future or eternal time: “To be conscious is not to be in time / But only in time can the moment in the rose garden... / Be remembered” (BN 84-8).

The Augustinian paradox in the second part of “Burnt Norton”—“At the still point of the turning world... / ...neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity, / Where past and future are gathered” (BN 62-5)—is transformed into what Hugh Kenner calls the paradox of the wheel.²⁹⁶ The speaker professes, “...the light is still / At the still point of the turning world” (BN 135-6). The word *still* is interesting, because it means something different in each instance, contrary to the very continuity it professes. One still is in space, the other is in time. The paradox here is one of language: How can the eternal word be used in the here and now where it means something it didn’t before? I shall say it again. Because it is caught between timelessness and time, *Four Quartets* is noticeably concerned with the performance of its own discursive moment, its own now and here. Like the still *still* that isn’t still, the opening of the poem presents a present that isn’t present: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future.”

The present is a gift-wrapped illusion of a unified now and here, where what we have are

actually two distinct *presents*—one temporal and the other spatial. “Here” time says, or “present,” raising its hand, as though called upon in class.

It is this problematic here and now, and the failed possibility of the lyric subject existing within it that Eliot’s poem takes up. Contrary to the many critical readings of *Four Quartets* which find an ultimate unity in the difference between particular histories and eternal times, I argue that the poem necessarily circles around the continual failures of the timeless, and its own inability to capture the present, especially as these two anxieties coincide in a ghostly lyric voice that is continually meeting itself. I have written of metalepsis as an epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic trope. Eliot raises the problem of an ontological metalepsis, that the being of present instances is determined by future memories. “Here, the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere” (LG 52-3). In a slight stutter of “nowhere,” we might hear “now” “here”—the presence of a lyrical nowhere that the speaker cannot ever seem to take hold of. There is an ever-present fear, though, captured in “East Coker” of “When here and now cease to matter” (201). Ceasing to *matter*, we might read as the end of importance or meaningfulness, but it also connotes, like Augustine’s vanishing present, a being without any material extension. *Now hear this*, we might imagine the speaker saying, but there is no now, no here, and no this “where past and future are gathered” (BN 65).

When *Ash Wednesday* first appeared the contrast with the earlier poetry naturally impressed readers most. It seemed as if Mr. Eliot had broken with his own past. But the development of the new style, coming to perfection in *Four Quartets*, makes it possible to see what unites his earlier and his later poetry, and makes all his work unmistakably the product of the same personality, expressing itself in a voice, which, though its tones alter, is still the same voice. The essential unity of his poetry, in spite of change and development, arises from the integrity with which he has explored his own vision of life.²⁹⁷

--Helen Gardner

I can never re-read any of my own prose writings without acute embarrassment: I shirk the task, and consequently may not take account of all the assertions to which I have at one time or another committed myself; I may often repeat what I have said before, and I may often contradict myself.²⁹⁸

--Eliot, "The Music of Poetry"

II. Disturbing the Dust

Although we can't quite take the poet at his word—the passage I quote above is a rhetorical gesture: adynaton, here acting as a defense by false humility—his word does seem to contradict not only himself but critics like Helen Gardner who find an “integrity” in the poet’s vision.²⁹⁹ Like time, like words, Eliot’s self and *its* manufactured vision is indeed whole, yet it also is not. This is what happens when that tricky matter of being-in-the-present, is likened to, say, Augustine’s paradox of time or Derrida’s paradox of différance. When the poet says “I may often repeat what I have said before,” there is a sense of crossed “I”s, that the now/here of the left I is not the same as that of the right.

“The Music of Poetry,” published in 1942, the same year of “Little Gidding,” asks that when we re-explore Eliot’s vision we look beyond repetitions and contradictions and listen for the fluctuating footfalls of an earlier poetics. As A. Walton Litz reminds us, Eliot was conscious of “a new method, where the source or personal reference is folded under the surface of the poetry, reinforcing the emotion without appealing for conscious identification.”³⁰⁰ Litz brings us to an encounter, recounted in Gardner, between Eliot

and John Hayward, where Eliot defended his phrase *Autumn weather* “only because it was autumn weather,” that it actually happened that way.³⁰¹ This doesn’t contradict, but rather revise his earlier dictum of “significant emotion” into the later “impersonality,” which, becomes a “general truth” derived from “intense and personal feeling.”³⁰²

According to Michael Levenson, “The problem of Eliot’s relation to his own past writings, as he himself well realizes, raises the question of the consistency, coherence and integrity of the self – specifically the integrity of the self as it is obliged to live through time.”³⁰³ When we assume an integrity in Eliot, we are, in a sense, assuming one in ourselves, and this, perhaps, has less to do with being than with a desire of being. “Self-parody,” for Ruth Abbott “has been a way of re-enacting a past self throughout *Four Quartets*, and Eliot’s shame [“of motives / Late revealed”] here makes ‘Little Gidding’ feel like an act of recognition and subsequent purgation of that self.”³⁰⁴ Abbott sees Eliot the *dramatis persona* as performing and re-performing such an embodied self: he “...takes the stage... as the ghost, the ghost of himself that has lurked behind the arras of his previous verse... a ghost that is far enough from himself to be dramatized in conversation with ‘himself,’ the ‘I’ of ‘Little Gidding.’”³⁰⁵

Eliot’s speaker opens the second section of “Little Gidding” with a couplet:

Ash on an old man’s sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave (LG 54-5).

As Helen Gardner notes, the initial manuscript drafts of the lines read: “Dust on a threadbare sleeve / Is all the dust the roses leave.”³⁰⁶ *From ashes to ashes and dust to dust...* no more. Eliot takes his lines from *dust*, the mark of a past undisturbed, to *ashes*, the remnants of a past destroyed. Although the “burnt roses” still refer to the opening of

“Burnt Norton,” they no longer invoke the vibrant imaginary memories of “the door we never opened / Into the rose garden”:

But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know (BN 15-7).

The revised lines suggest a revised poetics, a dusting not so much of the floors of Eliot’s four quarters, but of his earlier homes—I think specifically of “Prufrock” and “Ash Wednesday.” The “old man’s sleeve” recalls Prufrock’s not-so-clothed anxiety over aging: “I grow old... I grow old... / I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.”³⁰⁷ The sounds of each couplet differ, as does the energy behind them. Prufrock can change his pants as fashion sees fit. No such possibility exists for Eliot’s later speaker.

The contrast with “Ash Wednesday” is all the more interesting, not only because “Ash Wednesday” is usually considered part of Eliot’s later “conversion” aesthetic, but also because what he has to say there seems to get completely revised by the time and roses of “Little Gidding.” Two passages from the ashes of Ash Wednesday:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place....

The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end....³⁰⁸

Time the concept is displayed upon the actual, which is only for one time and place. Here we have no intersection with the timeless moment but, contrary to the Augustinian model, a continual present. And, rather than being a space of potentiality, of perpetual possibility or imaginary footfalls, the garden produces only the single Rose. The garden

of “Ash Wednesday,” a thorny bed of renewal, becomes a still point, yet it is unlike that of the wheel. Here, “all loves end.” “Little Gidding,” on the other hand, shows us the poet re-sprinkling his ashes, as though he were encountering himself at the banquet he once called tradition.

“Though the poet yearns to affirm an eternal still point that harmonizes time,” Eric Wilson writes, “the majority of the poem explores time’s fluxes and insecurities.”³⁰⁹ One of the most important fluxes of the poem is the lyric subject himself, who continually meditates on his own discursive relationship to time. It is as though Eliot’s speaker is caught in the pull of his earlier three voices: “the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody,” “the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small,” and the poet acting as “one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character.”³¹⁰ The lyric voices of *Four Quartets* continually shift between the supposed poet and the dramatic mask such a poet would seem to wear, including those earlier masks long hanging on the wall.³¹¹ These voices, though occasioned through the present instant of writing, concern themselves with both the tradition of the past and the poetic vision of the future. The question is whether these elusive temporalities and illusive voices can ever quite come together.

What are these three poems, “Burnt Norton,” “East Coker” and “The Dry Salvages” ‘about’? It is not easy to say what they are about, but what they appear on the surface to be about is certain localities in England and America with which Mr. Eliot has ancestral connections. Mixed up with this is a rather gloomy musing upon nature and purpose of life... Life has a ‘meaning,’ but it is not a meaning one feels inclined to grow lyrical about; there is faith, but not much hope, and certainly no enthusiasm.³¹²

--George Orwell

Old men ought to be explorers.

--T. S. Eliot, EC, 202

III. The Second Violin

“We have,” you and I, writes Hugh Kenner, “very nearly stepped into some world where happenings are simultaneous, the past actual, what might have been really so, our first world still here, ‘that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation’ sensibly co-present with our restricted sphere of experience.”³¹³ The world of *Four Quartets* is both ancestral and local, real and fictive, yet the experience of constructing the tale seems to remain all the more real than the tale itself. We hear patterns of sound but do not immediately grasp patterns of meaning. What we have in *Time Rose Present Beginning End* are not so much eternal truths but, rather, notes to be played on various violins. *Four Quartets* is a musical exercise, and one which is usually seen as influenced by the modern sounds of Bartok or the lyrically meditative ones of Beethoven’s quartets.³¹⁴ “The theme, development and recapitulation of musical form,” according to Jewel Spears Brooker, “are perfect for the interplay between pattern and movement which is at the heart of *Four Quartets*. Musical structure is at once diachronic (temporal, linear, related to melody) and synchronic (simultaneous, vertical, related to harmony) and thus contains within itself one of the primary mysteries Eliot is working with in *Four Quartets*.”³¹⁵

“My purpose here,” writes Eliot, “is to insist that a ‘musical poem’ is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one.”³¹⁶ *Four Quartets* makes clear that while these two patterns—sound and meaning—might weave in and out, they are certainly not “indissoluble and one.” Their indissolubility depends upon that paradoxical present and its vanishing still point: “...at the still point, there the dance is... and do not call it fixity” (BN 63-4). I have called it “weaving”; Eliot’s term is counterpoint: “I cannot help suspecting that to the cultivated audience of the age of Virgil, part of the pleasure of poetry arose from the presence in it of two metrical schemes in a kind of counterpoint.”³¹⁷ Here, Eliot describes the interplay between the formal exercises of rhyming verse that, with some exception, make up the second and fourth parts of each quartet and the more lyrical free verse of the first, third, and fifth sections. His words, moreover, are also applicable to the counterpointed harmony between the poem’s sounds and meaning.

In the title, *Four Quartets*, or four of four, we might hear a resonance of *four* in *quartet*—one violin playing off another. The instruments’ sounds are always complicating the ultimate or eternal meaning. Each reader is even invited to identify his or her own sound, for, as Eliot writes, “[a] poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant.”³¹⁸ Like echoes of earlier melodies, words and ideas from one section flow into others, are recast and rearranged. I am repeating something I have said before. The meditative mind of the poet is at work, constructing and restructuring his words into the music of poetry:

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only... (BN 137-45).

Words and music both exist with a temporal framework. Because they are not that which is living, they do not only die—"The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated / Of dead and living" (EC 191-2). Instead, as the music and words of years ago are repeated, reread or replayed, they somehow still manage to reach into the silence. The lyric, for instance, moves, "only by the form" that has carried it through time to its imagined timeless state. Words themselves are given a similar pattern and move perpetually in their stillness. One would assume that they remain in the air like the note held from the violin. Not so, the speaker states, or, rather, not only. Words themselves, as afterthoughts, find their way into the stillness of the air where they linger to be heard again. The internal rhyme and enjambed pause following "speech, reach" play into this pattern. "My words echo / Thus in your mind"—it's the words, not their meaning that lingers. The materiality of such lingering complicates Augustine's vanishing present. We have a still point that is no longer still. The interesting line break between the oxymoron "still / moves" accentuates the very paradoxical present of this drawn out sound.

Very often, the speaker doesn't quite like how his words have lingered: "That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion" (EC 68-9). Even with his trousers rolled, the speaker finds himself lost—lost in

sound, in tradition, in time—and must ironically find himself in someone else’s lingering words:

So here I am, in the middle way, having twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l’entre deux guerres*
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a whole new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say... (EC 172-7)

In Dante’s beginning is Eliot’s end. The restaging of the opening of *The Divine Comedy* has Dante playing Virgil to Eliot’s Dante, who “more than any other poet, has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory... or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something *perceived*.”³¹⁹ Now, though, the speaker has become both Dante and Eliot, both tradition and individual talent, subject to the timelessness of words in the air and yet still accountable to the time in which he is writing. The middle way is that path between the hells of two world wars, where lyrical gestures become a different kind of failure. “Getting the better of words” is shown to be an oddly imperialistic gesture, one of violence, which the speaker readily admonishes his reader to stay away from: “If you do not come to close, if you do not come too close” (EC 25). The speaker is also and always warning himself, using that first lyric voice “the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody.” This is the metaleptic lyric subject—the future self that is always imposed upon earlier selves. Do not come too close, one warns, or you might get lost in the door that was never opened: “...I am here / Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning” (EC 49-50).

The movement of time, in “East Coker,” from the philosophic into the historical, reemerges in “The Dry Salvages” as a pattern out of linear time: “the past has another

pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence” (DS 86). The temporal, “here and now cease to matter,” and the spatial, “here and there does not matter,” are no longer concerns in themselves (EC 201, 203). Rather, they are experiences produced in the meaning of the other:

We had the experience but missed the meaning
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness. I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only... (DS 93-8).

While it is tempting to say that the meaning of this meditation is “beyond any meaning,” it does relate to the paradox of the present and has to do with an impossibility of the aesthetic—that of translating the experience of the “now” “here” into the “nowhere” of eternity. “[T]hough aesthetics certainly has an irreducible commitment to phenomenal or sensory appearance,” Marc Redfield writes, “its entire rationale lies in the *articulation* of phenomenal appearance with the supersensible realm of cognition or spirit.”³²⁰ I can’t help but think of how this also relates—or translates—to Walter Benjamin’s writing on Charles Baudelaire. The possibility of lyric poetry is the possibility of articulating the experience of the non-metaleptic *now*. Benjamin distinguishes between immediate, lived experience of the now, *Erlebnis*, with the reflected upon, communicable experience of the now, *Erfahrung*. The two are inversely proportional: “Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense,” Benjamin writes, “may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents.”³²¹ The problem of the lyric is the problem of the present, and both run counter to the notion of a metaleptic history.

The lyric's value is in the actual *now*, not in a retrospective *now*, even though it does at times ask the impossible—to translate the experience of the now/here into a future narrative of which it was never a part. Because Eliot is always trying to resituate such shock or immediate experiences—experiences without meaning—within time, within tradition, he always ends up grasping empty-handedly. The experience can be lived, but its meaning can be approached with “only hints and guesses, / Hints followed by guesses...” (DS 212-3).

It is a clear, open countryside of low hills and occasional wide prospects, the villages clustered in little scattered groups. Eastward, for miles and miles, stretches the wide mysterious expanse of the Fens.... There were many travellers, 300 years ago, who, posting along that highway, would turn aside to break their journey at Little Gidding. Some came in a spirit of piety to join, it might be, for a day or two, in the life and worship of the community, as a man might make a short retreat. Others came in mere curiosity, and others again as personal friends of old days. And as there were many who came in peace and goodwill, so there were some who came with hatred and treachery in their hearts—spies and deceivers to whom Gidding was a vile nest of Popish superstition and secret iniquity. As the years passed, we gather that nearly every day would bring some unexpected visitor to their doors; and for one and all there was the same quiet welcome, the same courtesy, the same ready hospitality.³²²

--A. L. Maycock, *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding*

IV. Little Gidding

As a village in the outskirts of Huntingdonshire, England, it wasn't much—a church, a farmhouse, some surrounding land—even in its time, but it did provide a haven of sorts outside the pressures of a changing world: “If you came this way, / Taking any route, starting from anywhere, / At any time or at any season, / It would always be the same” (LG 39-42). For a small religious community in the seventeenth century and its deacon Nicholas Ferrar, who purchased and restored the church at Little Gidding, the land meant a new beginning. “Eliot did not just happen upon Little Gidding,” Richard Schuchard writes, “it was a symbolic place of mind long before his pilgrimage to the chapel in 1936, well before he began to write the poem in 1941... [H]is mind was fixed on the Anglican example of Nicholas Ferrar, whose stark renunciation of worldly preferments and whose friendships with George Herbert and Richard Crashaw had struck Eliot’s imagination.”³²³ Little Gidding also aligns rather well with Eliot’s aesthetic and monarchical leanings.³²⁴ His speaker tells, “If I think, again, of this place, / ...Of no immediate *kin*... / If I think of a *king* at nightfall” (LG 169-175; emphasis is my own). The community provided sanctuary to a fleeing King Charles in 1645—“if you came at

night like a broken king” (LG 26)—before it was ransacked by anti-monarchists and religious zealots the following year.³²⁵

If Little Gidding, as A. L. Maycock describes it, was always a stopover for someone’s travels, the middle way on life’s journey, if you will, we might ask how Eliot arrived there: in a “spirit of piety,” “curiosity,” as a “personal friend,” in “peace and goodwill” or with “hatred and treachery” in his heart? And then, once he is situated there, as its poetic deacon, we might ask who *his* unexpected visitor will be. “Little Gidding,” Schuchard writes, “returns [Eliot] to England, and the Church of England, and brings the temporal cycle round from the sixteenth century to a disastrous Now.”³²⁶ It is not just the history and religion that cycle back in Eliot’s final quartet. For a speaker all too eager to follow the perpetual possibilities of passages never taken, the earlier quartets return, their words lingering as though in air. Hence the cycles of “Little Gidding”—the words themselves are almost two palindromes.

Eliot visited “Little Gidding” in “midwinter spring” when the sodden recollections of time and the suspension of timelessness seem to blanket the world:

Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic (LG 1-3).

Seasons are geographical and time, that unmovable instant, has been spatialized. Like the opening part of “Burnt Norton,” the opening section here is all about potentiality, and paths that might, perhaps, still be taken.³²⁷ What might have been in this immortal season presages the “white again” of May:

If you came this way,
Taking the route you would be likely to take
From the place you would be likely to come from,

If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges
White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness (LG 20-5).

There is a hope here, that something will come after the cruelest month. Words, like the seasons, change: “For last year’s words belong to last year’s language/ And next year’s words await another voice” (LG 118-19). In the passage quoted above, “in may time” becomes “in May,” as the words acclimatize themselves to an underlying pattern. Dante, a shadow in an earlier quartet, returns with the season:

In the uncertain hour before the morning
Near the ending of interminable night
At the recurrent end of the unending
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
Had passed below the horizon of his homing
While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin (LG 78-83).

The arrangement of the poem as a tercet is reminiscent of Dante’s terza rima form, an echo of which can even be heard in the feminine off-rhymes of “morning,” “ending,” and “homing,” and in the consonance of “night,” “tongue,” and “tin.” The gerund endings also recall an earlier, more jarring use of such line breaks—Eliot’s own. The opening lines of “The Waste Land” are evoked—the “breeding,” “mixing,” “stirring,” “covering,” and “feeding” of the land. The deep-rooted tradition sprouts widely in these passages, as though finally receiving the warm face of a May sun. In what is, perhaps, the most famous passage of “Four Quartets,” the speaker meets tradition head-on:

I caught the sudden look of some dead master
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled...
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost
Both intimate and identifiable.
So I assumed a double part, and cried
And heard another’s voice cry: ‘What! are *you* here?’
Although we were not (LG 92-9).

Through time and timelessness, the speaker finds the forgotten eyes of “some dead master.” Just who this “familiar compound ghost” is has caused much flutter. The ghost has been read as Sir Thomas Elyot, Eliot himself, Dante, Dante’s “dead master” Brunetto Latini who appears in Canto XV—an already alluded to canto—of the *Inferno*; the ghost is “partly [Jonathan] Swift, but primarily Yeats, who tells Eliot in harshly moving words of ‘the gifts reserved for age,’”³²⁸ George Herbert “the spiritual architect” of Eliot poem,³²⁹ and, though she never says so, I think Cleo McNelly Kearns makes a convincing case that the ghost could be Jacques Derrida.³³⁰ The “What! are *you* here?” which abruptly echoes Bernardo’s opening words of *Hamlet*—“Who’s there”—suggest a few more possibilities: Shakespeare, with whom Eliot had a strained relationship, and his phantom-like progeny, Hamlet and the ghost of King Hamlet. We might also consider for the part Eliot’s one-time roommate John Hayward, the man who suggested revisions for many of the passages of *Four Quartets*. In a letter to Hayward dated August 27, 1942, Eliot writes:

I think you will recognize that it was necessary to get rid of Brunetto for two reasons. The first is that the visionary figure has now become somewhat more definite and will no doubt be identified by some readers with Yeats though I do not mean anything so precise as that. However, I do not wish to take the responsibility of putting Yeats or anybody else into Hell and I do not want to impute to him the particular vice which took Brunetto there....”³³¹

Eliot goes on to explain that, although the scene indeed recalls Dante and Brunetto, he wanted the overall effect to recall the end of Purgatory “where the poets are found” (Qtd. in Gardner, 65). Looking at the manuscript drafts of the lines, Helen Gardner concludes that the ghost was initially T. S. Eliot and then Yeats. In the first versions, “...the ghost speaks with Eliot’s own voice. It is, in a profound sense, a meeting with himself when he

encounters ‘a familiar compound ghost’ who is ‘Both intimate and unidentifiable.’”³³²

According to Hugh Kenner, the ghost “is ‘compound’: Yeats, Mallarmé, Hamlet’s father, Ezra Pound, Dante, Swift, Milton, ‘some dead master,’ ‘both one and many.’ He embodies also that simultaneity of *literary* past which has been Eliot’s theme since 1917....”³³³ While Kenner is not incorrect, as none of the critics are, his interpretation is too democratic and a bit too easy. His reading makes everyone happy. Everyone should not be happy. I will throw my lot with Gardner’s initial reading, which I like for various reasons.

First, and without imputing any particular vices to Eliot, I would argue that the only poet he is willing to take responsibility for “putting into Hell,” is himself. Second, this moment is what the whole poem has been about: the encounter with the self. Third, the ghost, like Eliot, “left [his] body on a distant shore” (LG 125). Fourth, the term *familiar*, derived from the same root of *familial*, implies something or someone known; it also implies a *familiar spirit*, the magical avatar which acts as a material double of the self. The ghost, “assume[ing] a double part,” is both Eliot and not Eliot, the voice of the lyric subject and the voice of its object. When one opens his mouth, the other speaks. He is the “we” of the opening, the “we” that enables footfalls to “echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take.” One wants to think that the subject is a timeless unity of past ghosts, a metaleptic “I” that can be read back in time across its various appearances. That, as Eliot is suggesting here, the self is not the “I” but the indefinite article “a,” and that metaphysical being is a compounding of all the other present but ghostly selves, might be difficult ontological positions to accept, but they are neither for

us nor our future selves to accept. You say *I* am repeating, but this *I* is only a musical note.

Little Gidding concludes with this passage:

Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one (LG 252-9).

And the fire and the rose are one. Most readings of the *Four Quartets*, even the ones which stress movement and flux, seem to agree that, by the end, Eliot has finally located what he had been seeking: “The point of intersection of the timeless / With time” (DS 201-02).³³⁴ The poet, in effect, has turned the “nowhere” into the “now here.” This reading, “a condition of complete simplicity,” is unfortunate, because it unnaturally displaces onto a magical unity everything that has come before—all of the earlier indecisions and hesitations, all of the potentialities, gardens and footfalls, of the present moment. *Four Quartets* is a poem about the continual failures to capture unities and unified visions. In a poem where words continually change and the lyric subject is continually meeting his ghosts, there can be no unity because there can be no ever-present present. “Quick now, here, now....” We can never be quick enough, for as soon as “now” is spoken, it is lost, lost in the “here,” which is then lost in the “now,” which is nowhere. “All shall be well,” the lines promise, “[a]ll manner of thing shall be well.” The repetition seems rhetorically odd, as though the lines were being spoken to convince the speaker. Most critics understand the final union of rose and fire as a mythic harmony of time and timelessness, of meaning and experience. But the ending is not about

theological or epistemological truth—it is still about a lyric speaker repeating his lost words: “...no other sound was / Between three districts whence the *smoke arose*” (BN 84-5; emphasis is my own). What happens when the fire and the rose are one? We get the answer in section II: “burnt roses.”³³⁵

The tongues of flame—that language of fire—here, usually understood in a positive light, recall and re-contextualize an earlier moment where what the flame had to say was not so welcome. At the end of the first section of “Little Gidding,” the speaker laments:

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always (49-53).

This timeless moment, “beyond the language of the living” is a “nowhere”—a failed utopia. Throughout this chapter, I have been concerned with the mis-spacing, may we call it, between “nowhere” and “now here,” because I believe that it has something to do with an impossible position of lyric poetry.

First, though, a quick dialectical interlude. The knowledge of self-certainty for G. W. F. Hegel depends upon a “here” and a “now,” which only exist because they are mediated by an “I” who can point to them. If we want to understand the past experience of the once-present moment, we must be able to point to the here and the now of this other I. “Since, then,” Hegel writes, “this certainty will no longer come forth to *us* when we direct its attention to a Now that is night, or to an ‘I’ to whom it is night, we will approach *it* and let ourselves point to the Now that is asserted. We must let ourselves

point to it; for the truth of this immediate relation is that truth of *this* ‘I’ which confines itself to one ‘Now’ or one ‘Here.’”³³⁶

If we follow Jonathan Culler’s view that “the fundamental aspect of lyric writing... is to produce an apparently phenomenal world through the figure of voice,” then we might also understand how the possibility of lyric poetry is captured by one of its own figures—apostrophe. Culler writes,

“Apostrophe resists narrative because its *now* is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a *now* of discourse, of writing. This temporality of writing is scarcely understood, difficult to think, but it seems to be that toward which the lyric strives. Proverbial definition calls the lyric a monument to immediacy, which presumably means a detemporalized immediacy... a fictional time in which nothing happens which is the essence of happening” (152).

Although he continually points to his own discursive moments (“shall I repeat myself?”), Eliot’s lyrical speaker cannot quite grasp his own immediacy (“That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory”). As soon as they are uttered, “Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break... [they] will not stay in place, / Will not stay still” (BN 149-53). Once actualized, the “[q]uick now, here, now” of the speaker’s present moment leads to its own lyrical nowhere: “And what you thought you came for / Is only a shell... the purpose is beyond the end you figured / And is altered in fulfillment” (LG 30-35). Eliot’s is a poem of failed apostrophes, failed attempts to transform the *now* of writing into a timeless monument. “Failed,” I understand not pejoratively, but as sort of a *felix culpa*, which doesn’t deny the present so much as deny our ability to possess it.

“Where is the summer, the unimaginable
Zero summer?” (LG 19-20).

“Zero summer” like “zero hour” is a point of orientation, a still point, with no heat and no movement—an absolute zero. “[T]he reference point,” Spears Brooker writes, “is both there and not there.... In the face of the aporias opened by human experience, [Eliot] cultivates and masters a poetic involving an acceptance of absence (gaps) as openings to transcendence in life and in art.”³³⁷ Indeed, zero summer is both there and not there—both “now here” and “nowhere.” If anything, though, it is not an opening to transcendence—this is what it denies. If transcendence is sought, the lyrical lines should begin not *where is the summer*, but rather: *O summer*.... Ø summer—or zero summer—is a negative apostrophe, a failed attempt to conjure the summer; it is “unimaginable” because its now/here cannot be imagined, even as the speaker points fervently. Eliot does not deny summer, and he doesn’t deny midwinter spring. He just cannot capture a presence at the still point of the turning world, one with duration, one which will remain.

A final passage, and one I always enjoy coming to in the poem. But be forewarned—it is very funny and very sad.

“You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,
That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here” (DS 131).

Out of everyone, we would assume that the patient would be the one who remains. Time, though, ensures that he or she, like the you—my I—though addressed, cannot be held. The lines play upon the future possibility that time is no “heeler,” that words too will be “no longer here.” Only the sounds linger, but not for too long. Time is no healer for a poet who would not even have the last word.

²⁸¹ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 1920, (London: Methuen 1966), 49-50.

²⁸² Eliot, "Burnt Norton," ll. 1-3, 1935, *Four Quartets*, 1943, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1971), 13. Subsequent references to the *Four Quartets* will be parenthetical with the line number; the quartets—Burnt Norton, East Coker, The Dry Salvages (pronounced to rhyme with assuages), and Little Gidding—will be abbreviated BN, EC, DS, and LG, respectively.

²⁸³ As Mark Currie recounts the paradox: "For Augustine, the present lacks extension: in its undivided form, the present is infinitely small, or without duration, and if it is given extension, in the form of some block of time to be designated as presence, that presence will be necessarily divided between elements which have been and those which are still to come." Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2007), 13.

²⁸⁴ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 49.

²⁸⁵ The subject of *Four Quartets*, for William D. Melaney, is the "journey from doubt to religious certainty" (149). Bernard Bergonzi takes issue with "Eliot's readiness, here and elsewhere in the *Quartets*, to give this state of mind a Christian sanction" (168). Whether or not the "Christian sanction" exists in the poem before it was put there critically is a matter of debate. Melaney, "T. S. Eliot's Poetics of Self: Reopening Four Quartets" *Journal of Comparative Poetics* 22 (2002): 148-68; Bernard Bergonzi, *T. S. Eliot*, (New York: Collier Books, 1972).

²⁸⁶ D. W. Harding's "Little Gidding" in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Hugh Kenner, ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 125-28; originally published in *Scrutiny* XI no. 3 (Spring 1943): 216-19.

²⁸⁷ Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1959), 184. See also: Northrop Frye, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: Grove Press, inc., 1963), 72-99; and Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1956). Some critics find in the poems not a positive but a negative theology. Looking at Eliot's epigraph from Heraclitus ("The way up and the way down are the same"), Cleo McNelly Kearns examines how Eliot's negative and positive paths may assume similar forms. Kearns, "Negative theology and Literary Discourse in Four Quartets: A Derridean Reading" in Lobb, ed.: 131-57.

²⁸⁸ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1959), 291.

²⁸⁹ Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 52.

²⁹⁰ Hugh Kenner hears echoes of Eliot's time at Harvard and sees overlapping with Eliot's thesis on F. H. Bradley in some passages of *Four Quartets*. Kenner, *Invisible Poet*, 64-66. For the Heideggerian intertext see: William Spanos, "Hermeneutics and Memory: Destroying T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*" in *Genre* 11 (Winter 1978): 523-73; and Eric Wilson, "On the Way to the Still Point: Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Martin Heidegger" in *Yeats Eliot Review* 13:3 (Fall 1995): 56-62. For general accounts of the relationship of philosophical to lyrical time in *Four Quartets*, see also: Staffan Bergsten, *Time and Eternity: A Study in the Structure and Symbolism of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets*, (Bonniers, Sweden: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1960); Rajendra Verma, *Time and Poetry in Eliot's Four Quartets*, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

²⁹¹ Compare this to the poet's pronouncement that "philosophy is essential to the structure and that the structure is essential to the poetic beauty of the parts." Eliot, "Dante" in *The Sacred Wood*, 160.

²⁹² Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 119. Blasing reads the poem as more determined by its immediate history rather than a supposed theological one. Its immediate history is the economic crisis of the 1930s which affected both "the economy of language and representation" that occurred when metaphysical statements, like money, were no longer backed up by gold (123).

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁹⁴ See: Kenner, *Invisible Poet*, 308-9.

²⁹⁵ Ronald Bush, "Modern/Postmodern: Eliot, Perse, Mallarme, and the Future of the Barbarians" in *Modernism Reconsidered*, Robert Kiely, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983): 200.

²⁹⁶ Kenner, *Invisible Poet*, 297. For Morris Weitz, the "still point" is "the symbol of the Christian God" or the Logos. Weitz, "T. S. Eliot, Time as a Mode of Salvation" in *Four Quartets: A Casebook*, Bernard Bergonzi, ed., (London: Macmillan, 1975), 147.

²⁹⁷ Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, 78.

²⁹⁸ Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," 1942, in *On Poetry and Poets*, 17. A similar moment in "The Three Voices of Poetry": "In choosing a subject about which to speak," Eliot hopes to avoid saying "...anything

that [he has] said before” or “anything that somebody else has said before—and probably said better.” Eliot, “The Three Voices of Poetry,” in *On Poetry and Poets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1954), 5; Originally a speech given at the National Book League Annual Lecture.

²⁹⁹ I read Eliot’s critical words rhetorically as a type of defense, in part because he soon goes on to state “that the poet, at the back of his mind... is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write” (17).

³⁰⁰ A. Walton Litz, “The Allusive Poet: Eliot and His Sources” in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, Ronald Bush, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 145.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1978), 29.

³⁰² Eliot, “On Poetry and Poets,” 299. “Significant emotion” famously comes from Eliot’s essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” He writes, “[t]he more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates” and then later, “very few [people] know when there is an expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet” (54, 59).

³⁰³ Levenson, “The End of Tradition and the Beginning of History” in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot’s Four Quartets*, Edward Lobb, ed., (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991), 158.

³⁰⁴ Ruth Abbott, “T. S. Eliot’s Ghostly Footfalls: The Versification of *Four Quartets*” in *The Cambridge Quarterly* 34:4 (2005), 384.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 384. As Rajendra Verma notes, *Four Quartets* allows Eliot the possibility of “remaking himself through a new style” (1). Verma, *Time and Poetry in Eliot’s Four Quartets*, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

³⁰⁶ Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, 166.

³⁰⁷ Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” 1915, in *Selected Poems*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1964) 15.

³⁰⁸ Eliot, “Ash Wednesday,” I, II, in *Selected Poems*, 83, 86.

³⁰⁹ Wilson, “On the Way to the Still Point: Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Martin Heidegger,” 56. Wilson’s reading draws on the theological interpretation of the poem. “Only the one who is humble before the burning desires of time,” he writes, “is purged by vision; only to the pilgrim who travels through the dark cities of man is revealed the City of God, that the rose and the fire are one” (56).

³¹⁰ Eliot, “The Three Voices of Poetry,” 6, 6, 7.

³¹¹ As C. K. Stead has pointed out, the five-part structure of each of the *Four Quartets* mirrors the form and substance of “The Wasteland.” Referenced through Bergonzi, 164-66.

³¹² This makes the three poems quite unbearable (in a not completely bad way) for Orwell to read. Orwell, “Points of View, T. S. Eliot” in *T. S. Eliot: Critical Assessments*, Vol. III Graham Clarke, ed., (London: Christopher Helm, 1990), 58; originally printed in *Poetry London* 2:7 (October/November 1942), 56-9.

³¹³ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet*, 296.

³¹⁴ Maynard Solomon’s words on the C sharp minor Beethoven quartet seem quite applicable to Eliot’s evolving work: “structural integration,” “continuity of rhythmic design,” “six distinct main keys, thirty-one changes of tempo... a variety of textures, and a diversity of forms” (423-4). Solomon, *Beethoven*, 2nd rev. ed., (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998). See also: John Holloway, “Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Beethoven’s Last Quartets,” in *The Fire and the Rose: New Essays on T. S. Eliot*, Vinod Sena and Rajiva Verma, eds., (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992), 145-59.

³¹⁵ Jewel Spears Brooker, “From the *Wasteland* to *Four Quartets*: Evolution of a Method” in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot’s Four Quartets*, Edward Lobb, ed., (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993), 97-8.

³¹⁶ Eliot, “The Music of Poetry,” 26.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

³¹⁸ Eliot, “The Music of Poetry,” 23.

³¹⁹ Eliot, “Dante” in *The Sacred Wood*, 170-1. Emphasis in the original.

³²⁰ Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), 6.

³²¹ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., (New York: Schocken, 1968), 163. The metaleptic narrative, like Eliot’s poetics, is “indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in [conscious] memory than of a convergence in [subjective] memory of an accumulated and frequently unconscious data” (Benjamin, 157).

³²² A. L. Maycock, *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1938), 126.

³²³ Richard Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 175.

³²⁴ Ferrar's great religious concordances were so renowned, that the king himself insisted on borrowing them and having them copied. Maycock, 210.

³²⁵ One of the most interesting textual artifacts relating to the place is a short libelous pamphlet from 1641, which rather vehemently railed against the community of Little Gidding. As to the pamphlet, called "The Arminian Nunnery or, a Briefe Description and Relation of the late erected Monasticall Place, called the Arminian Nunnery at little Gidding in Huntington-Shire" John Ferrar, Nicholas's grandson had this to say: it was "stuffed with abominable falsehoods and such stories as the devil himself would be ashamed to utter" (Qtd in Maycock, 136).

³²⁶ Schuchard, 175.

³²⁷ I think, here, of Giorgio Agamben's ontological potentiality, which Daniel Heller-Roazen calls "a specific aporia... a possibility that exists" (14). Heller-Roazen, "Editor's Introduction" to Agamben's *Potentialities*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999).

³²⁸ Bergonzi, 171-2.

³²⁹ The epithet comes from Ronald Schuchard, "'If I think again of this place': Eliot, Herbert, and the Way to 'Little Gidding'" in Lobb, ed., 66.

³³⁰ See: Kearns, 131-57.

³³¹ Quoted in Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, 64-5.

³³² Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, 185.

³³³ Kenner, *Invisible Poet*, 321.

³³⁴ D. W. Harding: "[t]he life presented is one, such as Mr. Eliot's own, of effort after clear speech and exact thought" (126). "Time is, of course, the villain of the *Quartets*," Bernard Bergonzi writes "and the evil of living in time is at the heart of the poem" (167). Even the critics who do not read the poem in terms of a theological master narrative seem to share this view. Hugh Kenner, for instance, sees in these final lines a "new first world's durability" (*Invisible Poet*, 323).

³³⁵ An interesting digression: Northrop Frye writes, "Many seventeenth-century writers were fascinated by a curious experiment of burning a flower, usually a rose, to ashes and seeing the ghost of the flower hovering over the ashes, which apparently afforded a dubious argument for immortality, or, at least, the permanence of things in time. Yeats says he tried this experiment without results" (88).

³³⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §105, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 63.

³³⁷ Spears Brooker, 106.

Appendix A:

W. B. Yeats, "The Scholars" Manuscript Version

A. Norman Jeffares calls attention to the 1915 manuscript version of "The Scholars," which had, as a crossed-out opening line of the second stanza, the following: "They'll dip in the inkpots to world's end." The stanza then reads:

They'd cough in the ink till the world's end
 Wear out the carpet with their shoes
 Earn respect, have no strange friend;
 If they have sinned nobody knows;
 Lord what would they say
 Should their Catullus walk that way.

On the back of the manuscript, Jeffares notes that Yeats wrote the following comments, followed by the stanza, followed by more comments: "I am doubtful of the last verse. It began with a jerk – what do you think of this?"

There'll be their life to the world's end
 To wear the carpet with their shoes
 And earn respect; have no stranger friend;
 And only sin, when no one knows;
 Lord what would they say
 Should their Catullus walk that way.

If you choose this end, call it perhaps 'At the British Museum'. I don't like the new fourth line so well I think. Would the old men regret in the new context?" (1984, 144-5)

Jeffares attributes the emendation to the fact that Ezra Pound was no longer around to toughen up the verse.

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