LYRICAL STRAINS: 1820-1920

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ABSTRACT

ELISSA ZELLINGER: Lyrical Strains: 1820-1920
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Following John Stuart Mill, one important strain of contemporary scholarship has
understood lyric poetry to convey the voice of an "overheard" subject who expresses
private thoughts and emotions, either to herself or to an unavailable other. This work thus
assumes, with Mill, that the lyric speaker is a model liberal subject (self-enclosed, self-
reliant, self-possessed) and that lyric poetry merely communicates this subject's natural,
preexisting interiority. "Lyrical Strains: 1820-1920," however, argues that lyric poetry
does not merely reflect liberal subjectivity but also helps to construct it, fashioning what
it means to be a self in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, because this was a dynamic,
historically contingent process rather than a static given, lyric was constantly in crisis,
bearing the strains of trying to create an unchanging, universal ideal of selfhood. By
examining poetic efforts to fashion the self while assuming its stable existence, I
demonstrate that lyric engenders its own impossibility. In chapters pairing Henry
Wadsworth Longfellow and Stephen Crane, Walt Whitman and Edwin Arlington
Robinson, Frances Sargent Osgood and Edna St. Vincent Millay, and George Moses
Horton and Paul Laurence Dunbar, this project offers an insight into both genealogies of
the modern self and an anticipation of its deconstruction.

To my parents, Michael and Sandra Zellinger.

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INTRODUCTION

LIBERAL AND LYRIC SUBJECTS

This dissertation chronicles the simultaneous and interdependent consolidation of the modern lyric and the liberal self from 1820 to 1920. In this period, lyric guided readers in self making, while the political, economic, and social pressures influencing the self shaped lyric expression. By investigating the reciprocal relationship between American lyric poetry and liberal selfhood, this project forges a new understanding of lyric studies that creates connections where current criticism sees division.

Following John Stuart Mill's famous declaration "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*," one substantial trend in contemporary scholarship has understood lyric poetry to convey the voice of a fictional subject who expresses private thoughts and emotions, either to herself or to an unacknowledged other ("What is Poetry?" 12). Sharon Cameron, for example, explains that lyric poetry possesses an imaginary speaker who "plots out his concerns in the absence of both action and others"; this voice "is solitary and generally speaks out of a single moment in time" (22, 23). More recently, Mutlu Blasing argues that in lyric "an 'I' talks to itself or to nobody in particular and is not primarily concerned with narrating a story or dramatizing an action" (2). Scholars who define lyric as such believe that these subjective musings evoke a timeless mode of artistic expression that constitutes a universally recognizable human subject. Jonathan Culler concurs that "the historical study of different poetic practices should be joined to a

revival of the idea of the lyric as a poetic activity that has persisted since the days of Sappho, despite lyric's different social functions and manifestations" (202). Likewise, Blasing argues "the lyric is a foundational genre, and its history spans millennia; it comprises a wide variety of practices, ranging in the West from Sappho to rap" (4).

A counter strain of modern scholarship argues directly against lyric's universality. Virginia Jackson, for example, finds that such transhistorical accounts of lyric are a modern construction projected backwards onto all poetry; she argues lyric is "a retroprojection of modernity, a new concept artificially treated to appear old" (*Misery* 8). By collapsing poetic genres with historically distinct purposes into the idea of lyric, this retroprojection enables critics to read all poems as "a short, nonnarrative poem depicting the subjective experience of a speaker" (Jackson "Who Reads" 183). Through the example of Emily Dickinson's poetry, Jackson shows that modern notions of lyric did not exist until the end of the nineteenth century. She finds that Dickinson's poetry, which has long been read as a contextless and self-enclosed lyric utterance, actually had a historically specific mode of address. For modern critics to call this work lyric is thus anachronistic, limiting, and incorrect. Rather than countering universalizing theories of lyric, Jackson and other scholars such as Michael Cohen, Mary Loeffelholz, Yopie Prins, Elizabeth Renker, and Eliza Richards historicize the communicative function of nineteenth-century poetic genres. Because twentieth-century scholarship has persistently linked lyric to a universal form, these scholars turn to nineteenth-century poetic genres and poetry more broadly in order to study the history of poetic communication as it changes over time.

While these critical positions appear to be diametrically opposed, they share significant common ground. By arguing for lyric's transhistorical self-enclosure, the first group of critics ignores the ways this model works differently in different historical periods. Meanwhile, historicist scholarship, such as Jackson's, disallows the possibility that lyric's ideal universality was a historical construction serving poets throughout the nineteenth century. Taking Jackson's insight that lyric was historically constructed, I argue that lyric was not just a late-nineteenth-century creation. I see this historicism as incomplete; by looking to an earlier period, I trace the historical development of lyric universality. In other words, both groups fail to take into account that lyric changes over time, and that these changes are related to changes in the idea of the self. I argue that the ideal of a universal, self-enclosed lyric subject is crucial to historical transformations of selfhood in the nineteenth century. Specifically, the consolidation of liberal selfhood in the nineteenth century is inflected by lyric's fantasy of transhistorical subjectivity. The lyric ideal communicates a historically situated form of liberal selfhood.

Returning to Mill, it is then no accident that he provides the foundation of lyric theory in addition to the foundation of liberal political theory. But by overlooking the liberal subjectivity that Mill's definition of poetry presumes, contemporary scholars neglect lyric's important role in histories of the self. As Mill explains in *On Liberty* (1859), "over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (*Basic Writings* 12). In order to foster the individual's sovereign right to self-construction, liberalism "constructs and relies upon a strong definition of the modern subject as one who is free, autonomous, and capable of self-government and rational behavior" (Dillon 2). Hence the "overheard" lyric presents an independent subject who, through this

expressive utterance, constitutes sovereign selfhood in private. Lyric's representations of self-enclosure and self-possession promoted liberalism's belief in the individual's fundamental right to construct and govern oneself. Likewise, liberalism's notion of sovereign privacy drew from the lyric expression of interiority.

Yet by virtue of being "overheard," this profession of privacy had to be staged in front of a readership who helped constitute the interiority of the speaker. Mill's formulation indicates a communicative exchange in which the speaker performs interiority for an unacknowledged eavesdropper in order to construct subjectivity. The self-enclosure of the lyric subject occurs through a seemingly inadvertent exchange with an unavailable addressee that reflects the self back to itself. The liberal self also relies on a social, public space to recognize and affirm the self's autonomous enclosure. When we recast Mill's "overhearing" as an excuse to draw the listener closer, we can see that lyric address implies that the self only exists through its tacit need for communication and recognition. Lyric thus communicates and is communicative of liberal selfhood. Through its profession of self-possession, evinced by the performance of interiority, lyric is the primary technology for shaping and transmitting liberal subjectivity. Yet recent scholarship in the pattern of Mill (Blasing, Cameron, Culler) discounts this communicative imperative in lyric poetry by instead accepting the fiction that lyric expresses a universal subject. While these works do not mention the liberal self, their model of universal lyric subjectivity is compatible with nineteenth-century philosophical understandings of liberal subjectivity. On the other hand, scholarship in historical poetics (Jackson et al.) employs lyric's historically specific communication of selfhood and in

doing so overlooks a model of selfhood that aspires to a timeless, impenetrable, self-containment.

Mill's American contemporaries developed the longstanding relationship between the liberal self and the lyric subject. As participants in the so-called American democratic experiment, in which citizens' fundamental equality presumably ensured the same fundamental right to freedom, American poets were especially invested in liberalism. They elaborated the self-enclosure of Mill's overheard lyric and liberal self by depicting a self-made subject impervious to social influences. This American self forged identity through the examination and expression of interiority. The "power of liberal individualism" in the United States created "an ideology that privileges the individual; that imagines the private life as a protected zone of intimacy that is immune from politics; that assumes freedom of movement, contract, and belief; and that grants a shield of abstraction in the public sphere" (Margolis 4). Like Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson composed both a theory of poetry and a theory of liberal selfhood. Emerson's writings are at the center of both American literary traditions and American liberal philosophy. In Emerson, liberalism and lyric are always linked, yet scholarship has only focused on one side of the relationship. Whether they address poetry or personhood, Emerson's essays articulate a model of rugged American individualism. According to Neal Dolan, "Emerson preached self-reliance because the self was the locus of reason as he understood it. It was only through the independent exercise of reason that one could free oneself from the falsehoods promulgated by tradition and come to grasp real truths about nature, the self, and the cosmos" (13). In "Self-Reliance," Emerson reaffirms the liberal subject's freedom to construct interiority by advising us to disregard external influences

and "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men" (121). Like Mill, while Emerson encourages self-enclosure, he nevertheless retains the communicative imperative of lyric's "overheard" self. Originally delivered as public lectures, Emerson's essays were directed to an audience. Rather than apostrophizing to an imaged other, Emerson addressed people. As a result, his prose communicated a strong selfhood in order to assist "you," his listeners. It was Emerson's civic duty to inspire the public's belief in the ideal, autonomous self.

As George Kateb comments, "the idea of self-reliance is everywhere present in Emerson's thought" (1). We can locate the liberal subject of "Self-Reliance" in the lyric subject of "The Poet," in which Emerson aggrandizes the Poet into the ideal expression of liberal selfhood. Poetry is, for Emerson, the primary technology for communicating autonomous individualism. Like the self-reliant liberal individual, the Poet "knows and tells" (185). "By an ulterior intellectual perception," the Poet gives those symbols that name and deaden the world "a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes, and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object" (189). By relying on his own perception, he constitutes himself through self-enclosure. Emerson's self is permeable yet circumscribed; the Poet sees the world as an extension of his sovereign self by maintaining boundaries between interiority and exteriority. As Emerson argues in *Nature*, "I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (29). While transparent, the eyeball nevertheless creates boundaries to establish itself as an "eye" or "I." Yet Emerson recognizes that communication is key to the creation of the self-possessed lyric and liberal self when he argues "the man is only half himself, the other half is his expression"

("The Poet" 184). The Poet's successful self-construction makes him "representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man" (184). The Poet thus communicates to audiences a model of autonomous selfhood that Emerson saw largely lacking in antebellum American life. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson laments that "we are become timorous desponding whimperers . . . Our age yields no great and perfect persons" (131). Conversely, Poets "are free, and they make free" through their poetic expression ("The Poet" 194). These "liberating gods" assert the liberty that makes strong selfhood possible ("The Poet" 194).

Responding directly to Emerson's call for an American bard, Walt Whitman made himself emblematic of the Poet's rugged individualism when he notably declared himself "one of the roughs, a kosmos" (*Leaves* 29). Whitman's work demonstrates the coincidence and codependence of lyric and liberal subjectivity. His "Preface" to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* rearticulates an ideal poetic individuality that shares with Emerson's Poet a foundation in liberal self-possession and self-reliance: "The greatest poet is a seer . . . . he is individual . . . he is complete in himself" (v). Whitman uses lyric poetry as a technology to model the making of heroic selfhood for others. He forms and communicates this subjectivity by radically expanding the convention of lyric address. Whitman rejects the implicit eavesdropping of Mill's formulation; by directly and insistently addressing a "you" who is very much present, Whitman shatters the frame of performed solitude. The forcefulness of this address breaks through the fiction of an unavailable "you" to invoke the reader. His poetry nevertheless created a self-enclosed and self-possessed subject because he drew us into his "I." Hence, Whitman famously declares in his opening lines to "Song of Myself":

I CELEBRATE myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (*Leaves* 1-3)

Whitman's extension of lyric technology reveals that the self-enclosed subject constitutes itself through its reliance on a communicative function. In this poem, "I assume[s] you"; in other words, the "I" generates subjectivity by adopting and enclosing "you." The self-possessed lyric "I" and the liberal subject both rely on an implicit exchange that reflects the self back to itself. In his study of how poems say "you" in order to invoke their readers, William Waters explains "sounding us, poetry resonates within the particular quality of hearing we offer to it; moreover, it 'listens' to our response. The unfamiliar idea here is that our response *matters*, that we are heard when we had thought to be alone, connected when we imagined ourselves separate" (65). In order to celebrate his self, Whitman demonstrates that "you" "*matters*," that "you" is as much a part of himself as the atoms composing his body. By assuming "you" into his self, Whitman created a community of believers in strong liberal selfhood that is exemplified, most notably, by his expansive lyric self. This Whitmanian recognition of "you" is important to this project. Since I focus on the lyrical communication of liberal subjectivity as a historical phenomenon, the "you" is not only implied but also necessary for communicating those particularities.

So far, I have treated liberal subjectivity as a reality when in truth it was an unachievable concept. The self-enclosure and self-possession of liberal selfhood was unfeasible because the self was always permeable by influences beyond the individual's control. While the sovereign right to freedom was only really enjoyed by those white men who were politically recognized as equals, the perfect self-enclosure and self-possession

such liberty would ensure were unfeasible. The self was open through a constitutive, communicative exchange with others and always subject to powers exceeding the individual's command. Such paradoxes are especially poignant in the U. S., which championed the contradictory ideals of individualism and democratic union—all while actually limiting these supposed universals, and the subjectivity that subtends them, to white men. Liberal subjectivity was not a universal right; in fact, its autonomous individualism was created by excluding women and slaves. Because they did not have access to the liberty that liberalism promised, they were not granted the status of selfhood. Through chapters that chart the development of the liberal self by depicting struggles to establish the boundaries of or gain access to this ideal, I demonstrate how lyric formally bears the marks of such strain. My project thus concerns "Lyrical Strains": by examining poetic strains against and struggles to achieve ideal selfhood, I demonstrate that lyric shapes and transmits a socially useful fantasy of liberal individualism meant to encourage union. In order to depict this endeavor across the nineteenth century, I pair four turn-of-the-century poets—Stephen Crane, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Paul Laurence Dunbar—with figures not conventionally considered to be their predecessors—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Frances Sargent Osgood, and George Moses Horton. These pairings reveal that nineteenth-century poetry offered a subjectivity in dynamic relation to history.

Antebellum Liberal and Lyric Selfhood

Moving from the mutual constitution of liberal and lyric subjectivity, let us now examine how these subjects developed in response to antebellum historical influences. Lyric reveals an ongoing crisis of selfhood across the nineteenth century in which

fantasies of autonomous individualism were constantly under threat due to an ongoing tension between the sanctity of interior identity and marketplace pressure. This threat, in turn, contributes to the definition of lyric: lyric reflects the fantasy of liberal selfhood that was envisioned as a solution. Yet this problem was not new or unique to this specific historical period. By the end of the century, powerful changes in the U.S. public sphere continued to throw notions of the liberal self into doubt.

The early- to mid-nineteenth century experienced economic, political, and social shifts that challenged inherited notions of self. Massive changes such as banking reform, the establishment of an industrial economy, and an economic crash in 1837 shook notions of individual autonomy. In "the Jacksonian era in which Emerson emerged," "market forces tend to undermine authority, thwart tradition, and throw the burdens once borne by these onto the individual. Once freed from such superegos, the self can be seen to be a rather contingent, arbitrary, and instrumental affair" (West 26). Emerson's call for self-reliance may be understood as a response to this sense of lost control. An ideal selfhood that did not rely on market forces was imagined to combat this instability, constituting a fantasy of perfect privacy and enclosure.

The shift from Republicanism's philosophy of public virtue and civic interest to liberalism's pursuit of individual interests at the beginning of the nineteenth century reflected this effort to envision a subject sheltered from external influences. Antebellum culture expected a public person to have a private side; "nineteenth-century self-definitions . . . locate the individual in his or her interiority, in his or her removal from the marketplace" (Brown 3). According to Milette Shamir, "in the course of the eighteenth century, liberalism as a political philosophy reversed the republican hierarchy of public

over private, elevating the private to a position of primacy and endowing privacy with its present meaning as a moral good, a natural right, and a constitutive condition of personhood" (2). By the 1830s, middle-class values shifted "from the common good to individual pursuit of happiness and from private homogeneity to private difference, protected by a political code of public noninterference" (Shamir 233 note 4). Of course, the natural right to privacy that constituted selfhood did not apply to everyone. Thus the selfhood articulated by antebellum poets such as Emerson and Whitman was essentially identified with white, middle-class men who had a legal right to privacy and private property; according to Shamir "the disembedded and disembodied public voice favored by liberalism, the privilege of abstraction afforded first and foremost to white, propertied men, meant that other voices, belonging to 'overembodied' and excluded subjects, were privatized and silenced" (15). African Americans under chattel slavery and women were denied full personhood, and while both groups composed poetry of the self, they had to contend with an ideal of selfhood only applicable to white men. Their literature asserted the right to embody full personhood by asserting the privacy that personhood supposedly entailed; "[subaltern literature] simultaneously seeks to extend the right to privacy to those to whom it has been historically denied, realizing that the claim to full humanity involves the privilege to disappear from, not just to appear in public" (Shamir 16).

Yet fantasies of perfect privacy expressed by the antebellum lyrics of white men, women, and slaves evinced the constitutive influence of social, political, and economic pressures on the idea of the self. In other words, the antebellum self created a fantasy of enclosure and autonomy due to external energies influencing the epistemology of selfhood. According to Chris Castiglia, in the antebellum period "society was diversified

and at times disrupted by the often colliding ideological regimes—and the resulting social associations—of slavery, immigration, industrialization, urbanization, imperialism, market capitalism, and liberal humanism" (4). Liberal selfhood emerged from these conflicts by creating a fantasy of enclosure that obscured the permeability of its boundaries because, regardless, "the interior became a micro-version of the social, not simply as an individual's 'private' realm of desires, affects, and appetites, but as a realm of disruption and attempted order" (Castiglia 3). The ideal coherence and cohesion of the self-enclosed, self-possessed subject became increasingly desireable even as it was recognized as a fantasy. Castilgia argues "few seemed to believe, in the antebellum period, that the divided interiors of the antebellum citizen could be integrated once and for all into an orderly and unified whole, a psychic *e pluribus unum*" (4). While it inspired people to its achievement, the antebellum self became a myth of self-creation and self-reliance.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the "poet professor," and Walt Whitman, the self-titled "American bard," were two poets who believed in and communicated this mythical strong selfhood (Gioia 76, Whitman vii). Through these roles of representative personhood, they hoped to provide each reader with an individual national identity. Because Longfellow was adept at addressing the status of selfhood in an environment that appeared to threaten it, he was especially popular. For example, W.D. Howells, discussing Longfellow's popularity in the *New York Times* in 1907, comments:

> . . . when he first sang we were in our youth as a nation. Longfellow became at once the mouthpiece of this National efflorescence, the poet who, more than any other of his great literary contemporaries, was essentially of his time and of the American Republic whose message was awaited wherever there were human problems to be solved. "Longfellow Centenary" PS4

Fulfilling his role as the "poet professor," Longfellow's works instructed readers with examples of coherent, heroic selfhood drawn from an idealized American history. By engaging a national past, Longfellow encouraged readers to understand their own selfhood as connected to others through a shared history. In other words, Longfellow's poetry communicated belief in a strong selfhood through a nostalgic fantasy of cohesive and autonomous individuality.

Longfellow's poetry modeled antebellum American subjectivity as it set up an ideal of self-reliant selfhood. Whitman likewise articulates this strong self, but while Longfellow taught readers how to cultivate it, Whitman declared that his readers possessed it. David Haven Blake argues that Whitman's declaration acts as "an agent of conversion" that instills individuality by drawing readers into Whitman's own self: "the poems can inspire a miraculous rebirth, a transformation that will bring readers into a fuller sense of their own identity" (7). Whitman enclosed his reader in a selfhood of his making, and such enclosure allows Whitman to foster a union of people under his "I." As Peter Coviello argues, "to be properly American is thus, as Whitman conceives it, to feel oneself related in a quite intimate way to a world of people not proximate or even known" (87). Whitman cultivated a strong presence in his poetry in order to join all selves with his self; "many individuals and groups thus achieve unity with one another not by themselves but only through Whitman's identification with all of them" (Maslan 113).

Despite Whitman's professed openness, the selfhood that he constructed modeled the enclosure that constituted an ideal liberal self. By declaring "what I assume you shall assume," Whitman usurps the autonomy of "you" to enclose it within his own "I."

Although he joins all people together within his expansive "I," Whitman addresses "you" in order to constitute his "I." Addressing "you" reflects "I" back to itself; in a sense the lyric "you" is consumed to constitute "I." Whitman circumscribed all other voices, speaking through and for them to create a nation of one. While Whitman encouraged the exchange between his self and others—"every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you"—this transference occurred within his own self.

The poetic efforts of women and slaves simultaneously problematized the liberal selfhood that Longfellow and Whitman articulated. These groups posited models of selfhood that disputed the poetics of nostalgia and address that constituted Longfellow and Whitman's American subjects, revealing what Longfellow and Whitman overlooked. The constitutive privacy of selfhood proved problematic for women and slaves in ways it was not for white men. Because female identity was equated with private and domestic development, women lacked the ability to be recognized as public, autonomous selves. Meanwhile slaves were considered private property; as a possession, slaves could only constitute the selfhood of their owners. In order to locate a space for their selfhood, women and slave poets had to render public their perceived overabundance of privacy. Figures such as the poetess Frances Sargent Osgood and the slave poet George Moses Horton poetically exposed privacy in order to communicate a seemingly sincere and strong selfhood. But their public poetry was not the free expression of their innermost selves. Osgood's poetess poetry "was subject to moral expectations of white, middle-class conduct, including the ideal of femininity as a site of untainted 'privacy'" (Rosenbaum 93). As a slave poet, Horton had to prove his possession of an emotional interior in order to "try to maximize his appeal to multiple audiences, both Northern and

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Southern, white and black, military and civilian" (Barrett 340). As Osgood and Horton used lyric to assert their personhood, they simultaneously employed lyric in order to illuminate the limits and problems of liberal subjectivity. In doing so their poetry articulates "companion impetus" that located not just a public space for their selfhood but a revised privacy that constituted their autonomy (Shamir 15). Instead of offering their privacy up for public consumption, they register "the desire to find shelter from visibility and social identity, to carve out a niche of empowered privacy for the disenfranchised subject" (Shamir 15-16).

Osgood's poetess poetry reflected the vexed selfhood of antebellum women. A concealed core and psychological complexity were necessary in the construction of autonomy; however, female poets were required to reveal their interiors if they wanted to be published. According to Eliza Richards, "women were imagined to be receptacles of emotion untainted by worldly concerns"; antebellum women who wrote poetry "were portrayed as fonts of unmediated emotion . . . . Their poems were cast as identical offspring, incarnations of the poetess' intimate feelings" (Richards 16). Any sense that she was holding something back would suggest personal corruption. Such a public, poetic profession of her "soul" as dictated by the genre dispossessed the antebellum female poet of privacy precisely because she had to serve as a public figure *for* privacy. And yet this personal or individual privacy was necessary to create an abiding, autonomous literary figure. Nineteenth-century lyric expression was predicated on self-possession, on the understanding that a poet had sovereignty over the privacy he or she expressed. However, the poetess's privacy was consumable and forgettable.

Osgood's poetry, however, tried to create a public space for female selfhood by alluding to a privacy that was not consumed, but existed beyond the page. She suggested that women poets could publicly acknowledge but not expose some of the privacy necessary in constituting the self. For example, in the poem "To My Pen," the speaker scolds her pen to "Let not a thought escape you lightly, / But challenge all before they go, / And see them fairly robed and rightly" (*Poems* 14-16). By scolding her pen to robe her thoughts "rightly," Osgood reinforces the fact that the proper female is not free to say whatever she wants in public. All this robing or concealing, however, conflicts with the sincerity expected of the female self. But Osgood is able to protect her privacy by attributing autonomy to the pen. Instead of offering the female poet's privacy for consumption by the reading public, Osgood instead offers the pen while concealing the contents of the private thoughts that the naughty pen would transcribe.

On the other hand, Horton hoped to convincingly profess his privacy to prove his personhood. Horton wanted his poems to be read as reflection of his self in order to convince readers of his humanity, and therefore, his unjust enslavement. In other words, Horton required public recognition of his personhood in order to gain his freedom. While he was not freed until the Emancipation Proclamation, his early poetry had to model ideal selfhood in order to solicit the external recognition, or "overhearing," that would hopefully result in his manumission. For example, the 1829 collection of his poetry, *The Hope of Liberty*, was prefaced by an "Explanation" confirming that the poems were in fact composed by Horton. This preface legitimates Horton by fitting him to ideals of liberal selfhood. Horton was self-reliant while possessing an emotional interior and; he was "a faithful, honest and industrious" and his "heart has felt deeply and sensitively in

this lowest possible condition of human nature" (*Hope* 3). The funds raised by the collection, in addition to freeing Horton, were meant to send him to Liberia. As the "Explanation" details the work that he would do there, it outlines the myth of American self-uplift: in Liberia Horton hoped to "apply his industry and mental abilities to the promotion of its prospects and his own" (*Hope* 3). To prove Horton's personhood, the "Explanation" depicts Horton according to white, middle-class masculine ideals of interiority, autonomy, and (future) nationality.

Indeed, Horton's poetry strives to assert these qualities, but his attention to the mediation of the page suggests an alternative model of liberal self-possession and self-enclosure. Thought of as a possession, not a person, Horton emphasized and exploited the conventions of the lyric "voice" in order to communicate autonomous individualism to readers. Building on the assumption that the poem is the spoken utterance of an imaginary person, Horton used the poem to affirm to his own selfhood. But Horton's poetry had to contend with the fictional status of this "voice" while employing voice as the tool to communicate his very real self. There is no literal "voice" in the poem, no person speaking, just words printed on the page. In order to overcome the dislocation of voice from the speaker due to the mediation of the page, Horton emphasizes embodiment and phenomenological experience in the lyric to communicate his selfhood. Horton's poetry thus draws his words back to his physical experience, revising liberal subjectivity to include the black body.

Turn-of-the-Century Liberal and Lyric Selfhood

These four poets offer insight to the historical development of liberal subjectivity as shaped and transmitted by lyric from the antebellum period to Reconstruction. At the

end of the century, a new generation of poets takes up their examples in order to continue grappling with American individualism in the face of unmooring change. The crisis of selfhood extended to the end of the century, and the poetic practices that previously bolstered liberal self-possession and self-enclosure proved useless against the era's massive social, political, and economic changes. The self-doubt of the Gilded Age echoed many of the components causing antebellum instability; people still felt "the power to affect one's own destiny had been removed from the individual, the family, and the local community and concentrated in a complex maze of interdependent, impersonal forces" (Hilkey 8). The establishment of corporate capitalism by the late nineteenth century shifted the parameters within which Americans envisioned their selfhood. T. J. Jackson Lears argues "as more and more people became enmeshed in the market's web of interdependence, liberal ideals of autonomous selfhood became ever more difficult to sustain. For entrepreneurs as well as wageworkers, financial rise or ruin came to depend on policies formulated far away, on situations beyond the individual's control" ("From Salvation" 7). In other words, "the crisis of capitalism manifested . . . a deeper crisis of autonomous selfhood" (Sklansky 138). A growing divide between "individual moral agency" and "a material world that seemed increasingly governed by the impersonal laws of supply and demand and survival of the fittest" suggested the world's indifference to heroic selfhood, warranting new definitions of the self (Sklansky 138). Instead of changing the political-economic system, notions of autonomy had to change in order to fit the material interdependence, abundance, and inequalities of the Gilded Age. To do so, culture looked backwards in order to move forwards.

A nostalgic ethos affected Gilded Age institutions, from the public school system to academia, from popular publishing to the growing field of psychology. This was a culture that "that speculated on the future even when it appeared to be mourning the past" (Sorby xxiii). For example, W. D. Howells, discussing Longfellow at the centenary of his birth in 1907, commented that:

> . . . in those happy years before the great Civil War . . . men thought they had found the promise of all good in the lasting peace which was to be the solvent of every grief and every fear. The hard old creeds had softened from duty to God into duty to man; the affirmation of justice in the Judge of all earth had become the affirmation of love among men. "Art" 474

Howells articulates a characteristic nostalgia for antebellum social relations, but at the same time these supposedly lost nostalgic ideals were being imported into turn-of-the-century American lyric. As demonstrated by the continued popularity of Longfellow's works in the Gilded Age, approaches to the future were bolstered by a stabilizing and exemplary ideal of the past. The solution to the crisis of autonomous selfhood "appeared to leading American mental philosophers as a question of will power rather than labor power, much as it has in Emerson's Romantic psychology of self-reliance" (Sklansky 138). Turn-of-the-century culture relied on a nostalgic look backwards, presenting liberal selfhood as existing in the idealized past in order to inspire individual American autonomy in the present. Selfhood was constituted through what was thought to be old-fashioned "action, practice, and willpower" (Sklansky 141). For example, success manuals echoed the strong and inspirational self articulated by Longfellow and Whitman. Judy Arlene Hilkey argues that success manuals:

> . . . articulated a moralistic view of the world that projected the values and virtues of an earlier preindustrial era as the means to success in the new age of industrial capitalism. By the diligent application of virtues such as honesty, frugality,

industry, reliability, and loyalty, buttressed by the force of character and true manhood, any poor boy could find "a way to win." 5

Because lyric and liberal subjectivity were caught up in each other, poetry was likewise believed to be in crisis. According to contemporary critic Edmund Clarence Stedman, the death of many of the "elder poets," created "a cry of foreboding" (787). Conservative literary elites mourned the death of Fireside figures such as Longfellow and in doing so, articulated a nostalgia for the ideal selfhood illustrated by their poetry. Noting "a period of decline," in 1885 Stedman dubbed the era the "twilight of the poets" in his essay of the same name (787). Yet the reason for the perceived twilight of poetry was not merely the loss of great poets; the crisis affecting poetry was the same one affecting selfhood at the turn of the century. Stedman explains that:

> the influences . . . which brought poetic aims and methods into doubt" included "the radical change in the course of imagination, enforced by the advance of science,— the disturbance of tradition and convictions, — the leap from romance to realism. We must allow, too, for the diversion of genius to material conquests, adventure, the creation of fortunes. 787

Stedman's concern about the current influences affecting poetry echoes the current influences affecting the autonomous self.

The period was not an era of decline for all poetry, however, just for "a particular elite definition of the genre" (Renker 136). Elizabeth Renker explains that "the twilight simulacrum that Stedman created from his highbrow perch in fact bore little relation to the lively life of poetry in other spheres of literacy . . . the genre of poetry was vital to American culture at all social levels during this era" (136). Stedman was a member of a group of literary elites who had created and tried to continue a "genteel" culture that was entering its own twilight. Genteel taste sought to preserve a morality and propriety in literature that seemed under threat after the Civil War; "the genteel endeavor was to

create a culture for the public . . . Above all it was a reflexive culture, a culture thrown up in defense against the mobility of America" (Tomisch 24). The genteel "endeavor" was adamantly conservative; "not a single major development in American society was reflected in the literature of the genteel tradition; it remained in 1900 what it had been in 1850" (Tomisch 120). Thus, Stedman's perception of a twilight indicated the decline of genteel values and genteel ways of thinking about the self. The "twilight" that Stedman lamented actually indicated a period of innovation and realism in poetry, in which poets rearticulated the ideal, genteel self in order to fit it to the modern era.

Indeed, Gilded Age poets expanded inherited notions of liberal subjectivity to accommodate the social, political, and economic influences of turn-of-the-century life. By examining how these poets conserve and rearticulate their poetic predecessors, we can trace a genealogy of nineteenth-century selfhood in the decades that usher in the Modernist era. Ignored by Modernists and subsequent critics alike because they retain traces of nineteenth-century conventions, they make legible an overlooked continuity of lyric selfhood. Directly preceding and even coexistent with Modernism's poetics of rejection and innovation, these poets inherit and conserve nineteenth-century poetic practices in order to keep working out a strain of the ideal American self.

Stephen Crane and Edwin Arlington Robinson revealed that the heroic self that Whitman and Longfellow thought achievable was in fact a fantasy with problematic limitations. Nevertheless, they found the fiction socially useful. By emphasizing the understanding implicit in Longfellow and Whitman's poetics that the self cannot exist in isolation, Crane and Robinson employed the illusion of strong selfhood to foster poetic fraternity in a modern environment that appeared to ruin human connections.

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Rather than Longfellow's shared past, Crane demonstrated that people had in common a shared fantasy of nostalgic selfhood. Crane expanded Longfellow's nostalgic selfhood to make room for the acknowledgement of nostalgia's fantasy. Yet Crane upheld Longfellow's strong selfhood because it helped people find comfort and community in the face of the world's indifference. For example, in this fragment from Crane's uncollected poems, he parodies the opening of Longfellow's "Psalm of Life":

> Tell me not in joyous numbers
> We can make our lives sublime
> By—well, at least, not by
> Dabbling much in rhyme. (*Poems* 81)

While it has been read as a wholesale indictment of Longfellow, the fragment does not dismiss Longfellow's ethics of the self. Rather, Crane takes issue with "dabbling in rhyme," or the conventional meter and rhyme of nineteenth-century lyric. Indeed, Crane's innovative free verse poetry may reject Longfellow's form, but not his epistemology of selfhood. In this fragment, Crane preserves the ideal of "sublime" selfhood but argues that rhyme is not the way to achieve it. Such strong selfhood helps parry the world's dangers and indifference by creating a shared fantasy of the self that joins others in a human fraternity. When Crane conserves Longfellow's poetics of the self, he also conserves a shared sense of community that Longfellow's nationalism hoped to create. Crane thus expanded Longfellow's strong self to acknowledge the mutual recognition that constitutes selfhood. The surprising tenderness and concern for the human condition in Crane's poetry reflects the fact that no self is created in isolation.

Crane and Robinson's poetry possessed an investment in community inherited from their antebellum predecessors. Hence Robinson and Whitman index a struggle across the nineteenth century to create union through poetic communication. While

Whitman essayed to constitute a democratic union of disparate individuals, Robinson is concerned with the interpersonal relationships between these individuals. Whitman expanded his "I" to attract and encompass all voices within a poetic union of his making. However, Whitman recreated an enclosed lyric self by circumscribing all other voices, speaking through and for them to create a nation of one. Robinson takes Whitman's power to "assume" and shows that it has the power to usurp, rather than create, selfhood. Whereas Whitman's poetic "I" encompassed all in one, Robinson disassembles this self into limited, flawed characters, who break the speaker's solipsism because they speak not *for* but *to* other voices. He revises Whitman's capacious voice by condensing it, limiting the scope of "I" and "you": "I" is no longer capable of speaking for and channeling "you." In the spirit of Whitman's democratic union, Robinson thus revises the terms of address, shifting "I" to "we." "We" illustrates the position of Whitman's unified poetic self, but warns against the tyranny of the "I's" ability to speak for others as an act of self-enclosure. This innovation expands the ideal of the enclosed self by allowing the voices that Whitman speaks for to speak for themselves. Whitman inspires in Robinson a faith in the lyric self: despite ideals about the self's enclosure, consensus and connection are possible

While Crane and Robinson expressed a concern for community, the union they depict was not as easily achievable for minorities at the turn of the century. Edna St. Vincent Millay and Paul Laurence Dunbar addressed the selfhood of women and African Americans who still did not quite fit into a union of American selves. Their poetry registered the recent historical past as they traced a genealogy from antebellum non-personhood to their struggles in the Gilded Age to secure this personhood.

Millay complicated the privacy associated with women in order to deflate the expectation that a private interior underpins the self's composition. To do so, Millay conserved the expectation that the poetess offered public access to her supposed private self. This expectation continued to burden poets such as Millay; antebellum understandings of the poetess and her transparent soul supplied the preconditions for the twentieth-century female poet. Millay directly addressed this tradition by mobilizing the model of the poetess presented by Osgood in order to confront the impossible and self-diminishing practice of professing privacy. By complicating Osgood's examples of female privacy and sincerity, Millay demonstrated that that privacy is a fantasy promised by the lyric. She deployed the poetess's conservative form and ostensible open spirit to illustrate the emptiness of privacy in a genre that staked itself on the public presentation of the private. Millay picks up on Osgood's coy and flirtatious poetess figure, but revised it so that the poetess only appears to offer her interior to her readers. While Osgood's poetry argued that a private female self could exist and struggled to assert that space for selfhood in her poetry, she could not locate that privacy due to the poetess's complete transparency and consumablility. By the early twentieth century, Millay demonstrated that the perfect privacy that constituted selfhood is a fantasy. She thus revised notions of selfhood for the modern era, demonstrating that the self is a permeable entity in which the distinctions between public and private, interior and exterior, blur. For example, in the sonnet "Not in this chamber only at my birth," the lines "never shall one room contain me quite / Who in so many rooms first saw the light" uses the metaphor of a room to expose the ideal of interiority in constituting selfhood (*Poems* 6-7). The poem explains that the constitution of a self that does not rely on the privacy of one interior space, but multiple

public places and people. Beginning the poem with her own birth, the speaker declares that the "chamber" into which she was born did not constitute her interior. Thus, the interior space is not in fact the creative space of female selfhood. The speaker explains, "I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth / I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth" indicating that perfect privacy does not constitute expressive selfhood (*Poems* 4-5). Instead, experiences outside the self are necessary to "birth." The female poet transverses other people and other places in order to create a permeable selfhood instead of a pure, private, and singular interior.

Like Millay, Dunbar complicated the inherited ideals of liberal selfhood. Whereas Millay illustrates the emptiness of the privacy associated with the female self, Dunbar demonstrated that the sincerity necessary in constituting the African American self was a fantasy. Dunbar's poetry revised the practice of earlier slave and black poets such as Horton who had to convince readers of their personhood by being perceived as sincere and authentic. Horton struggled to associate the page's dislocating textual mediation with his personal voice. For Dunbar, the voice was a fiction and a limitation; he wrote lyrics with disappearing speakers or polyvocal fictional characters who did not correspond to an actual self. Dunbar did this in order to avoid the restriction of his identity to page, demonstrating that the self is not singular, but polyvocal and permeable. The real self is not apparent even to one's own self, and Dunbar used this ambiguity to avoid the rigid essentialization of "authentic" race.

Dunbar's poetry exposed hypocritical evaluations of turn-of-the-century racial identity by writing poetry about the oppressive masks, cages, and rigid fictions of race. In this era, both legal and social identifications of racial "essence" relied on a performance

of racial signifiers; "in the 1880s . . . the belief that language can be *representational* allowed for the construction of a language supposedly *representative* of race. The 'negro dialect' came to signify a self-evident and homogenous speech community" (Birnbaum 37). Dunbar wrote poems in this vernacular dialect, "minors," to trouble the speech that supposedly signifies race, depicting a double "voice" in his own poetry with larger implications for the double voice of lyric. The printed "voice" of the poem doubles because "the absence of clearly indicated sound from the silence of the written word creates a double nature in printed poetry, making it both itself and something other" (Griffiths 60). Through this doubling, Dunbar dislocated selfhood from the poem's printed single voice in order to prove that the authentic African American self could not be reduced to a linguistic signifier.

<u>Lyrical Strains</u>

Each chapter in this project documents efforts to refigure the poetic self by identifying a lyric convention that struggles against itself. Thus "strain" takes on a dual significance—a struggle with selfhood, as well as a struggle against poetic convention. Chapter One pairs Crane and Longfellow to discuss the ability of lyric to ground ethical norms that contributed to the constitution of the self. I introduce nineteenth-century heroic selfhood as modeled by Longfellow, whose "Paul Revere's Ride" and "Psalm of Life" employed chivalric values to exemplify moral, inspirational selves. By the end of the century, Crane picked up on Longfellow's nostalgic chivalry to assert that, despite individual aspirations to goodness, such heroism was a fantasy because all selves contain cowardly, malicious sides. While recognizing that Longfellow's nostalgia created fictions, Crane's poetry implied that its figments served a crucial communicative

purpose: the constitution of human fraternity despite the failures of ideal selfhood. Chapter Two pairs Whitman and Robinson to discuss the inheritance of the lyric "I" as it extends beyond Romantic understandings of the solitary, self-enclosed speaker. By rejecting lyric's eavesdropping in order to directly address, and thereby encompass, his readers, Whitman erased difference to include all within the union of his expansive "I." The chapter then turns to Robinson, who recognizes that the self can never be circumscribed because it is defined by the actions of others, thereby disassembling Whitman's all-consuming "I" into limited characters who are always in the process of being formed.

By trying to create order from a problematic model of the self, Longfellow and Whitman employed lyric as a productive technology to inspire a nation of self-reliant individuals. Their turn-of-the-century counterparts recognized that their efforts were not blind, idealistic attempts by articulating both the impossibility and the social utility of such beliefs. In the next two chapters, I move from the production of the national liberal self to the poetics of the excluded, discussing women and slave poets who were socially denied the status of selfhood. Because slaves and women poets were considered overly private figures in the antebellum period (indeed, private possessions in the case of slaves), they were deemed incapable of rational and autonomous participation in the public sphere, and were thus denied the full status of liberal subjectivity. Because these expectations adhered to women and African Americans in the years following the Civil War, these groups engaged lyric's technologies across the nineteenth century in order to create a space for selfhood that renegotiated the division between private and public. Chapter Three explores how Osgood's poetry navigates the paradox of publically

performing the social imperative of feminine privacy. I then discuss how Edna St. Vincent Millay later revamps this model in order to prove that the essential gendered self never existed in the first place; the public performance of female privacy was only ever a consumable fiction. While Chapter Three examines how gender revealed the false promise of the ideal self's privacy, Chapter Four examines how race exposed the fantasy of the self's authenticity through the perception of a racialized "voice." Chapter Four focuses on the perception of a "voice" in poetry to question the lyric ideal of communicative sincerity. Horton's slave poetry deployed the illusion of his own voice speaking through the printed page in order to convince readers that he was not a possession but self-possessed. At the end of the century, Dunbar likewise engaged the poetics of voice in order to create a national subjectivity that embraced a new generation of African Americans. Dunbar, however, strove to divorce "voice" from sincerity in order to prove that the seemingly sincere self proven by the printed lyric was a fiction. African American selfhood was not subject to the enclosing and enslaving power of print.

My conclusion addresses these fictions of selfhood to examine instances of lyric "failure" in which poetry fell short of and struggled with unattainable self-enclosure. Despite its impossibility, these poets contend with a shared ideal of selfhood in order to encourage a communicative union. The juxtapositions examined here create a variant of American exceptionalism in which failure constitutes the grounds of a meaningful human fraternity.

CHAPTER 1

STEPHEN CRANE AND THE POETICS OF NOSTALGIA

Although repeatedly singled out for its anticipation of the modernist movement, Stephen Crane's poetry participates, I argue, in a nineteenth-century tradition of longing for heroic selfhood. In fact, the subjects of Crane's poetry bear a distinct resemblance to those in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's works. While this might seem an unlikely pairing, Longfellow's late-nineteenth-century ubiquity provides the grounds for the comparison.[1] Although he died in 1882, Longfellow, one of the most widely recognized and revered nineteenth-century poets, remained highly popular well into the twentieth century. Longfellow's works were in Crane's Sussex house library (Hoffman 32). Among Crane's uncollected lines, moreover, is a brief parody of Longfellow's platitude-heavy "A Psalm of Life," in which the speaker insists that "we can make our lives sublime" in spite of contemporary cynicism and disillusionment. Crane riffs on Longfellow's opening, "Tell me not in mournful numbers / Life is but an empty dream" before directly quoting his most exhortatory line:

> Tell me not in joyous numbers
> We can make our lives sublime
> By—well, at least, not by
> Dabbling much in rhyme. (*Poems* 81)

A number of critics have understood this parody as a wholesale rejection of Longfellow's poetic project, arguing that Crane condenses the message of Longfellow's metered, optimistic poem in order to refute it. Judith Saunders, for example, argues that this piece

reveals that Crane's poetry "strives for genuine rather than contrived sublimity," and that "a preoccupation with the melodious effects of meter and rhyme tends to undermine—indeed, impede—the expression of harsh truths or tragic insights" (186). I want to argue, in contrast, that while Crane may reject Longfellow's formal practices, he actually embraces his nostalgia for the "sublime" self. By not "dabbling much in rhyme," Crane develops new formal strategies in order to resurrect the strong individualism that Longfellow's "Psalm" hoped to inspire. Here I take issue with the critical tendency to equate Crane's formal innovation—and, indeed, formal innovation more generally—with a depersonalized, proto-modern sensibility. In Crane's case, the opposite is true: his formal innovation continues commitments to sentimental longing for sublime selfhood that we associate with Longfellow's poetry.

Because he breaks with formal traditions of nineteenth-century poetry that seemed outmoded by the 1890s, Crane has been too easily understood as a harbinger of modernist depersonalization. The 1890s, the decade in which Crane published his two poetry collections, were considered a problematic period in American poetry by late-nineteenth and twentieth-century critics alike. Noting "a period of decline," in 1885 Edmund Clarence Stedman dubbed the era the "twilight of the poets" in his essay of the same name. The term "twilight" "spread rapidly through literary culture and became an almost instant catchphrase, a sensationalist coin that writers enjoyed trading amidst their broader discussions about the degraded literary status, or status in general, of the modern era" (Renker 135). Stedman thus coined a characterization with important ramifications for how critics have since thought about late-nineteenth-century American poetry: if poems weren't evidence of decline then they were, like Crane's works, proto-modernist,

breaking with nineteenth-century practices to herald the modernists' salvation of the American poetic tradition.

As Sarah Ehlers has recently pointed out, however, "twentieth-century critics tended to read the narrative of US poetry's turn-of-the-century decline too literally" (38). By examining the era's poetry and literary criticism, recent scholars have dispelled the myth of a poetic breakdown between the nineteenth and twentieth century.[2] Rather than charting a genteel decline or identifying protomodernist exceptions to the trend, they have demonstrated that the poetry and criticism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries illustrate an important "dialectical relationship between the old and the new" (Ehlers 39). US poetry did not die in the 1890s, nor did Modernism revive and rescue American poetry: works within the "twilight" period reveal that the American poetic tradition was both more complicated and continuous. By adapting nineteenth-century conventions to a modern poetic landscape, the era's poetry generated a newness that did not necessarily presage modernism's innovations.[3]

So far, this trend in recent criticism to explore and chart the continuities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry has bypassed Crane. Because of his formal innovations, scholars continue to consider him an exception to his turn-of-the-century poetic milieu.[4] Saunders characterizes Crane as "an important precursor to the generation of the modernists," and Keith Gandal even claims that Crane's "raucous wanderings and his visionary poetry are a sort of prophecy" of "something new and disturbing in American life" (Saunders 185, Gandal "Autopsy" 506). Understanding Crane's avant-garde forms to communicate emotional objectivity, critics perpetuate the assumption that formal and emotional innovation go hand-in-hand. Max Cavitch suggests as much when

he notes "how remarkable then to recognize in the irregular form of Crane's 'In the desert' what may already be—in what was one of the first volumes of free verse ever published in the U.S.—a kind of immanent critique of free verse as a manifestation of identity and personal freedom" (38). Yet by asserting the proto-modern exceptionality of Crane's works, such scholarship implicitly upholds the notion of a death or "twilight" in late-nineteenth-century poetry. When we read Crane not as a prophet introducing modernist salvation but as a poet bridging the supposed gap between nineteenth-century poetic traditions and modernist practices, we can see that his formal innovation does not necessarily entail a break with the emotional imperatives of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, Crane's formal innovation signifies an effort to conserve Longfellow's insights about nostalgia. Precisely by puncturing the "numbers," Crane commits to a nostalgia for the strong individual. In the case of Crane, in other words, I contend that the reflexive relationship between formal innovation and modernist depersonalization should be severed.

Crane is writing at the moment when the definition of "nostalgia" shifts from a medical condition to an aesthetic term. Previously an ailment common in young soldiers who suffered from a homesickness so severe it was believed to cause death, nostalgia takes on its more "poetic meaning" around 1900, when it begins to allude to "the useless yearning for a world or for a way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed" (Clarke 253, 270-1; Starobinski 101). While his parodic fragment may express nostalgia for the strong individualism invoked by Longfellow's poetry, Crane rejects Longfellow's poetic forms in order to acknowledge that this sublime "way of life" never existed in the first place. For Crane, Longfellow's yearning for individualism signified a nostalgic

"romance with one's own fantasy" in which the loss that initiates nostalgia has no basis in experience (Boym xiii). The loss is "real" because people feel it, but nostalgia can only exist for that which cannot and did not exist. Put simply, absence is the necessary precondition for nostalgia. As Susan Stewart argues, "nostalgia is sadness without an object" that seeks a past with "only ideological reality" (23). At the end of the century, Crane renovates a nostalgic poetics that not just Longfellow, but all so-called Fireside Poets— William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell—practiced. Of course, the Fireside Poets did not use the word "nostalgia," since the etymological shift occurred at the turn of the century, but its constitutive elements were present, if inchoate, in their ethos of yearning. Still popular at the end of the nineteenth century, Fireside poetry created an idealized American past that provided readers with emotional and national stability in a quickly modernizing and expanding country; it summoned an imaginary past to mobilize the present.[5] Crane's poems radically condense what were by his time identified as nostalgic practices in order to lay bare and confront nostalgia's reliance on fantasy. Indeed, Crane's reinterpretation of Longfellow's most famous poem recognizes nostalgia's false promise, the comforting yet unreal selfhood that nostalgia offered. At the same time, however, Crane was nostalgic for nostalgia, for a time when its illusion could still inspire readers to aspire to the heroic individualism summoned by Longfellow's poetry. While Longfellow's poetry trusted in the power of the illusory past to institute the dauntless selfhood of a bygone era, Crane admitted that heroic individualism would fail: his nostalgic poetics foreground the absolute absence that initiates the desire for a heroic ideal of selfhood. But Crane

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nevertheless promoted the fantasy, because despite its emptiness, the nostalgic self generated a fraternity whose usefulness outweighed its impossible origins.

While recognizing that nostalgia created fictions, Crane's poetry implies that its figments served a crucial communicative purpose: the creation of human fraternity despite the failures of selfhood. While recent criticism reads a pessimistic determinism into his proto-modernism, older studies have recognized what Crane himself described as a commitment to "Human Kindness."[6] Calling pessimism "ridiculously cheap" and "the cynical mind" an "uneducated thing," Crane declares: "I strive to be as kind and as just as may be to those about me and in my meager success at it, I find the solitary pleasure of life" (qtd. in Wertheim 180).[7] David Halliburton explains that "Crane has . . . a passion for earthly fraternity, and something even beyond that," while Daniel Hoffman claims that "despite his passivity, his crippling introspection, Crane's ultimate commitment is to an heroic ideal" (Halliburton 321, Hoffman 10). Crane only displays this belief in human tenderness, however, in the midst of catastrophic conditions, barren landscapes, and the seeming absence of all hope.

In what follows, I return to "A Psalm of Life" in order to trace a genealogy of Crane's nostalgic poetics. Longfellow's poem inspires heroic selfhood by encouraging readers to take or have "heart." By recalling illusions of heroic individualism from an idealized past, "A Psalm of Life" models the discovery of an inner courage. In turn, I discuss the strategies by which Crane translates Longfellow's hearts into his own poetry. While Crane condenses and exploits Longfellow's use of "heart" in order to reveal nostalgia's historical emptiness, he employs this emptiness for a socially useful purpose analogous to Longfellow's original goal: the constitution of a meaningful human

fraternity via a shared ideal of selfhood. Despite what Crane regarded as its excesses,

nostalgia generated the fantasy of a shared past capable of combating modernity's

dislocations. Thus, Crane's poetry produces the unexpected; his nostalgia for nostalgia

renovated Longfellow's attempts to establish bonds between people in the face of

isolation and helplessness. In Crane's case, a fantasy of the self becomes a comforting, if

not therapeutic, solution to modern life's absurd indifference to the human condition.

<u>Nostalgic Hearts</u>

Crane participates in a tradition of poetry that appeals to heroic individualism as a

salve for doubts about stable selfhood in a modernizing, industrializing world. He

employs a nostalgic poetics in order to represent an imaginary "self" in his poems, and I

will trace how these works expand nineteenth-century poetic considerations of socially

useful selfhood. The projection of a poetic self in nineteenth-century poetry has been the

subject of recent work on lyric poetry. Literary critics and editors since the second half of

the nineteenth century have defined lyric as a "short, nonnarrative poem depicting the

subjective experience of a speaker" (Jackson 183). Indeed, according to Virginia Jackson,

this has become the "normative definition" of all postromantic poetry, resulting in what

she has recently termed "lyricization" (183). In this mode of reading, "the stipulative

functions of particular genres are collapsed into one big idea of poems as lyrics" (Jackson

183). Lyricization constitutes a culturally removed, idealized subjectivity at the expense

of poetry's historical specificity. While my investigation of Crane's projection of a poetic

self may appear to participate in such idealizing of a transhistorical subjectivity, I do not

read Crane's poems as a means of establishing the "subjective experience of a speaker";

rather I discuss how their engagements with nostalgia revise the formation and

communication of nineteenth-century conceptions of the "self." While poetry is not always the lyrical expression of a self, it can be used to discuss or question what the self is.

While Crane eventually produces poetic selves distinct from those imagined by Longfellow, both poets use nostalgia to assuage the tensions produced by a political economy that threatened the self's constitution and expression. The antebellum period was marked by changes such as massive banking reform, the establishment of an industrial economy, an economic crash in 1837, and the consolidation of Presidential power. Some American thinkers and authors reacted by reflecting on a past ideal of the civic-minded, self-reliant man free from the entanglements of money and politics. Longfellow and Emerson's "Jacksonian contemporaries" "considered themselves heirs to the Jeffersonian tradition"; in order to combat "fears of a world out of control," these men "appealed to the yeoman ideals of the Old Republic" (Gilmore 21).[8] By regarding an idealized strength-in-simplicity as historical reality, these thinkers employed a nostalgic logic in order to cope with those forces they could not regulate. They identified "moral agency with the 'inner self' rather than with political and economic sovereignty" (Sklansky 37). Indeed, Longfellow's poetry does no less when it draws upon "yeoman ideals" to inspire a heroic self-reliance capable of embracing messy markets and economic factors beyond the individual's control.

This reaction would be repeated at the turn of the century when "the crisis of capitalism manifested . . . a deeper crisis of autonomous selfhood" (Sklansky 138). While a corporate economy had established itself by the Jacksonian era, corporate capitalism appeared even more pervasive and problematic at the century's end (Sklansky 3). Hope

for a "spirit of free agency," for a sovereign self that could exist beyond the market's reach, affected literature and psychology alike (Sklansky 143). When William James tried to account for the self's constitution in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), he attributed the "central part of the Self" to an abstraction of the stream of consciousness, one distinct from the social or material self (285-286). Other thinkers, contrary to James—who maintained belief in a unified self that was impervious to social and material conditions—returned to the power of nostalgic fantasy that Longfellow and his peers had explored decades earlier, in a parallel situation. Popular authors applied nostalgic strategies in order to figure autonomous self-reliance; by privileging the "diligent application of virtues such as honesty, frugality, industry, reliability, and loyalty," success manuals—book-length, non-fiction, didactic works, popular between 1870 and 1910—"articulated a moralistic view of the world that projected the values and virtues of an earlier preindustrial era as the means to success in the new age of industrial capitalism" (Hilkey 5). Here Crane's nostalgic poetics generates its critical salience. Without believing that the self could be restored, he nevertheless used nostalgia to evoke a traditional poetic emphasis on heroic self-creation and self-reliance, even as he acknowledged that such ideals do not exist. Crane saw that the nostalgia supporting Longfellow's heroic selves emerged from an empty and imaginary past. Regardless, for Crane, sustainable notions of the self can be staked on fantasy.

While Crane's deployment of nostalgia differs from Longfellow's, a nostalgic tradition works through both. Indeed, the popular reception of Longfellow registers a genealogy of nostalgia from the antebellum era to well within the twentieth century. Longfellow was popular across two centuries because his poetic nostalgia encouraged

readers to take "heart" in an economic environment that seemed persistently indifferent to the individual's actions and desires. By relying upon an ideal of past unity and autonomy, Longfellow's poetic hearts allowed readers to fortify their sense of self by projecting that figured past into the present. But precisely because Longfellow encouraged such a fantastical vision of the self, his poetry unravels the very fortification it would build. While Longfellow's nostalgia inadvertently revealed its own imaginary past to readers, the force of its solacing construct obscured the emptiness underpinning nostalgia's promise—that is, until Crane's reinterpretation exploited that same imaginary past.

Let us again place Crane's work in relation to Longfellow—in particular, "A Psalm of Life," the poem Crane parodies—in order to better understand how Crane rearticulates Longfellow's inspirational fantasy. With its subtitle "What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist," "A Psalm of Life" is framed as an imaginary but earnest outburst from the very depths of the self. The poem's inspirational message contributed to its persistent popularity across the nineteenth century; it attempts to dispel existential doubts and fears with a call to action. It was successful in doing so: the *New York Times* special section commemorating the Longfellow Centenary in 1907 commented that the poem's "moral lesson, conveyed in simple but musical verse, was accepted by its readers as the teaching of their own experience which they had failed to formulate for themselves. It was a help and an encouragement to depressed souls and a stimulus to the ambitious and the hopeful" ("Longfellow Centenary" PS2). In the absence of convincing moral interpretations of life's purpose, the poem's inspirational message secularizes religious rhetoric about otherworldliness in order to inculcate heroic

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individualism. Rather than the promise of a reward beyond, the poem proves this world's

worth by encouraging action, progress, and self-reliance in the present moment:

> TELL me not, in mournful numbers,
> Life is but an empty dream!—
> For the soul is dead that slumbers,
> And things are not what they seem.
>
> Life is real! Life is earnest!
> And the grave is not its goal;
> Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
> Was not spoken of the soul.
>
> Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
> Is our destined end or way;
> But to act, that each to-morrow
> Find us farther than to-day. (*Selected Poems* 1-12)

The speaker—the speaking heart—refuses the claim that "life is but an empty dream," or

that the "real" life is to be lived beyond this one. He instead insists that "the grave is not

its goal" or the "destined end"; rather, life is authentic and "earnest" in the moment it is

being lived. By focusing on the present moment, the opening suggests that a nostalgic

emphasis on the past can have no place in subsequent stanzas. However, these stanzas

actually propose a "real" life that hinges on a nostalgic ideal of autonomous

individualism. Although he denies nostalgia, Longfellow invokes longing for a time

when the promise of the afterlife motivated us "to act" with integrity in the present. He

de-emphasizes Christianity's immortal reward while maintaining that right action in this

life will imbue the present's "empty dream" with noble possibilities.

The repulsion of a figured past becomes more pronounced as the poem

progresses; yet "Psalm" employs nostalgia to motivate its insistence on "to-day."

Through their appeals to the past and present, stanzas six and seven clarify the strategies

of Longfellow's nostalgic poetics. Stanza six, the exclamatory climax of the poem, re-emphasizes the present moment:

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
 Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
 Heart within, and God o'erhead! (*Selected Poems* 21-24)

By rallying readers to embrace the moment and "act," the speaking heart appears explicitly to reject poetic nostalgia. The past is "dead," or vacant and meaningless, so we must take "heart" within the "living Present." While the speaker tells us to ignore the past in order to "be a hero" in the "bivouac of Life," this heroic self draws upon a past religious righteousness in the service of the present (*Selected Poems* 19, 18). Longfellow resurrects the right action that the afterlife used to inspire and reattributes it to God's watchfulness in the present. Longfellow thus conflates God's powers with the power of the heart in order to summon an individualistic ideal. No longer a judge determining immortal reward, God's role has been retooled to a guardian assuring the rewards of this life. Indeed, the past is resurrected when stanza seven urges readers to recall the example of "great men" in order to "make our lives sublime." Because these monumental figures "depart[]" or die, they leave an emptiness that serves to enliven the present:

Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
 Footprints on the sands of time; (*Selected Poems* 25-28)

The heroic self that Longfellow hopes to inspire in the present depends on a dead and empty past—on "footprints on the sands of time." "Lives of great men" create a memory of heroic individualism that inspires us to make this life, not the afterlife, sublime. Faith in their example resurrects the certainty of belief that was formerly located in religion and

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harnesses it to an emphasis on acting in the moment. Our sublimity may imprint history, thereby enabling a life after death based on human fraternity instead of the bygone reliance on religious reward. Longfellow tells us to bury the past just one stanza earlier because doing so permits its re-projection as a self-generated and self-generating fantasy. Nostalgia must first empty the past before it can instill or fortify "heart" in readers. Hence loss—the loss of religious reward, the loss of great men, the loss of that footprint's creator—is the very condition of the return of heroic individualism.

Much of the poem's language consists of platitudes and clichés—hearts, footprints, and, in the next stanza, shipwrecks—that have figurative significance across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These phrases signify nostalgia because their intuitive meaning is based on absence. Stanza eight invokes the Crusoe-like image of a shipwrecked man:

> Footprints, that perhaps another,
> Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
> A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
> Seeing, shall take heart again. (*Selected Poems* 29-32)

Romantic shipwreck imagery, from Coleridge's Mariner to Longfellow's Hesperus, hearkens back to nostalgia's homesickness and homecoming. The word combines the Greek *nostos*, homecoming, and *algos*, pain (Boym xiii). Existentially shipwrecked brothers and readers alike, longing for a time when lives were "sublime," heed the footprints and understand that they too can rediscover an inner will power. Footprints on sand are a commonly understood symbol for erasure or instability, and yet Longfellow uses them to trigger the heart's fortitude. To regain the heart through loss demonstrates the permanent absence that generates nostalgia's power. By looking to transient

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impressions for inspiration, Longfellow predicates possession on dispossession, grounds strength in instability—like building on sand.

We can detect the decades-long popularity of Longfellow's "Psalm," and the culture-wide longing for a strong self that it both responds to and cultivates, as an influence on Crane's poetry. By appealing to nostalgic strategies elaborated by Longfellow, Crane's poems address how the fantasy of the heroic self can survive in a modern "universe" that appears to have no "sense of obligation" to acts of greatness (Crane *War Is Kind* 36).[9] A number of Crane's poems take up the heart, exaggerating Longfellow's meaning in order to clarify the ideal of courageous selfhood the heart represents. By the turn of the century, life seemed to Crane and others less "sublime" and more indifferent to the human condition than ever before. Crane's poetry empties the heart of its inherent goodness in order to adapt the self to this modern era; however this is not a pessimistic maneuver to reflect a pessimistic outlook. Instead, Crane upholds heroic selfhood at the end of the nineteenth century by demonstrating that it does not necessarily emerge from the virtuous heart, in turn extending the possibilities of the self's composition. While Longfellow stressed the purely good self that nostalgia could constitute, Crane believed that the existence of such righteous individualism was impossible. He thus revises the modern heroic self as one who possesses the courage for honest self-scrutiny and understanding; recognition of one's own devilishness becomes the paradoxical source of the courageous heart. The strong, admirable self is the one who can recognize the inherent rottenness of people and the world and still seek positive community in the wake of that admission. Crane upholds Longfellow's nostalgic selfhood by using its fantasy to reveal what is absent in us, that is, a perfect goodness. By

employing nostalgia to acknowledge the dark side that exists in all selves, Crane adapts

nostalgic fantasy to a modern era. In foregrounding the virtuous heart's impossibility,

Crane preserves the usefulness that Longfellow identified: the heart still supplies a shared

fantasy that fosters comfort and community in the face of the world's indifference.

In XLVI from *Black Riders*, "Many red devils ran from my heart," Crane retains

the convention that the heart is the font of self-expression, but complicates the conviction

that locates courageousness therein. He extends Longfellow's ethics of the heart in order

to make possible a courageous self conceived without Longfellow's didacticism:

> MANY RED DEVILS RAN FROM MY HEART
> AND OUT UPON THE PAGE,
> THEY WERE SO TINY
> THE PEN COULD MASH THEM.
> AND MANY STRUGGLED IN THE INK.
> IT WAS STRANGE
> TO WRITE IN THIS RED MUCK
> OF THINGS FROM MY HEART. (*Black Riders* 55)

By housing devils there, Crane dislodges the virtue associated with the heart. In contrast

to Longfellow's "Psalm," what emerges from the heart is not good but demonic, not

sublime but "tiny." Crane renders this expression of the demonic "strange" or

disorienting in order to question the assumed transparency of the heart to its owner: this

speaker is separate from and baffled by his devilish interior. Despite the addition of two

surprises not typically associated with the heart—ignorance of its contents, and the

housing of devils in the font of goodness—Crane maintains the ability of Longfellow's

hearts to inspire courage, just not by drawing on the supposed virtue therein. In fact, the

author performs a heroic act by recognizing the devils that dwell in his heart. Mashing

devils with a pen does not constitute bravery; rather acknowledging and inscribing one's

devilishness onto the page indicates a courageous heart.

Crane's hearts do not work to communicate a fantasy of the heroics abiding in every self. As opposed to a heart that symbolizes a nostalgic integrity, his are bitter, devilish, and selfish *because* they are nostalgic. Poem III of *Black Riders*, "In the desert," strains the normative meaning of the heart that Longfellow drew upon in order to prove that nostalgia secures the self through strange and destructive acts:

> IN THE DESERT
> I SAW A CREATURE, NAKED, BESTIAL,
> WHO, SQUATTING UPON THE GROUND,
> HELD HIS HEART IN HIS HANDS,
> AND ATE OF IT.
> I SAID, "IS IT GOOD, FRIEND?"
> "IT IS BITTER—BITTER," HE ANSWERED;
> "BUT I LIKE IT
> BECAUSE IT IS BITTER,
> AND BECAUSE IT IS MY HEART." (*Black Riders* 9)

Crane condenses the multiple clichéd interpretations of "heart" depicted by Longfellow's poem—having heart, taking heart, and assumptions about the heart's inherent goodness and humanness—into a scenario that distorts their common meaning. By making a disgusting creature a "friend" who not only "has heart" but also is also capable of "taking heart," literally, in his hands, the poem overturns the traditional association of heart with human integrity. In order to refute the assumption that the heart contains heroic goodness, Crane then renders the "good" ambiguous: the creature's heart could be "good" because it is virtuous or merely because it is tasty. Emphasizing the breakdown of cliché's intuitive meaning, the creature's repetition of the word "bitter" supports the same two interpretations: a comment on magnanimity (or lack thereof) or a comment on flavor. Yet where Crane sees cliché, he also sees an opportunity to rearticulate Longfellow's poetic meaning by extending nostalgic selfhood not only to distressed humans but grotesque creations. Nostalgia for the heart's lost goodness simultaneously points out our common

beastliness, thereby creating fellowship through shared nostalgic belief and shared

depravity.

Crane collapses nostalgic logic—the creation of the self through negation—into a

single action, the eating of one's heart. In the conventional sense, to eat one's heart out

means to suffer silently.[10] Jean Starobinski comments that "for the Romantic, nostalgia

was a disease which could neither be cured nor assuaged . . . the nostalgic did not stop

eating his heart out; the wound did not heal" (94). The nostalgic consumes his heart

because such suffering endlessly eats away at a person. In the context of the poem, the

creature's self-consumption thus indicates nostalgic self-constitution. But in the act of re-

internalizing his core, the creature destroys the heart he attempts to re-gain, replaying the

loss that is nostalgia's "generating mechanism" (Stewart 23). By rearticulating

Longfellow's hearts, Crane reveals that nostalgic self-making destroys the very selfhood

one seeks to regain. Yet this paradox allows Crane to revise the ethics of Longfellow's

heroic selves. Crane extends the making of the heroic self to embrace the ugly, the

violent, and the masochistic. The creature physically eats his heart, but he does not seem

miserable—in fact he enjoys it. He "like[s]" to consume it, he "like[s]" to destroy this

core. By exploiting nostalgia's illogic, Crane renders these acts of self-destruction

"good"; nostalgia's self-consumptive self-constitution is absurd, but its pain creates

pleasure, its sacrifice creates satisfaction.

Crane situates this poem at the very frontiers of nineteenth-century selfhood,

echoed in the poem's desert wasteland. But can we even claim that this creature is or

becomes a "self"? Does this creature struggle to reconceive its selfhood or exhibit faith in

a nostalgic past? On the one hand, granting this creature a heart and hailing him as a

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"friend" suggests his humanity; on the other, his strange actions strain prevailing definitions of human selfhood. In other words, the creature may make it possible to read this poem as estranging, not reclaiming, the concept of selfhood. Cavitch suggests as much, arguing that the "autocardiophagic creature" points out "the curse of the illusion—the mirage—of individual consciousness" (37, 38).[11] Discussing epizeuxis (the repetition of "bitter—bitter"), he explains "the creature is there to remind us that we are incapable of the authentic production of the same, of re-production, or simple repetition, but that we are nonetheless constantly falling back on what seem to be the best rhetorical resources—the figures of repetition—enabled by our fictive lives of stable individuation" (Cavitch 41). For Crane, indeed, "stable individuation" had always been a nostalgic fiction, as demonstrated by Longfellow's "Psalm" which performed the same shoring up over fifty years earlier. Yet even if the various forms of repetition in "In the desert" underscore the self's unreality, Crane implies that the "illusion" of selfhood for man and creature alike is worth retaining due to the comforts of the construct. The poem relies on a nostalgic "falling back" or faith in order to communicate its fiction of strong individualism. Destroying his heart in homage to his very self, the creature's autocardiophagia constitutes a strange act of sacrifice. Susan Mizruchi, discussing ritual in everyday life, explains that "sacrifice is the quintessential ritual form, and its mark or signature is its articulation of nostalgia" (467-8). Sacrifice signals "a token of authentic belief: where there is sacrifice, there is faith" (Mizruchi 468). In other words, autocardiophagia is an act of sacrifice symbolizing a nostalgic belief in the self. Like "Psalm," this poem concerns a belief that is not explicitly religious, but implies the fellowship that faith entails. The creature's sacrifice implicates a community of, if not believers, then at least

witnesses.[12] Hence, Crane creates an "I" who bears witness to this act of sacrifice. While the creature's self-consumption nearly obscures all the other conditions and considerations of the text, we should not lose sight of how Crane situates this bizarre tale through an "I" who hails the creature and relates his conversation. By witnessing and then relating the event, the "I" recognizes the creature as a self, demonstrating that selfhood is not created in isolation. Thus the poem creates what Halliburton calls "a spontaneous sense of fraternity" in the first-person exchange with the creature (279). Like the footprints of shipwrecked sailors or the exemplary lives that "great men" leave behind, the nostalgic self relies on recognition by another. While Crane depicts the inadvertent self-destruction that results from the nostalgic pursuit of self-completion, nostalgia's fantastical self nevertheless fosters fraternity through the recognition of a shared ideal.

Nostalgic Knights

"In the desert" reinterpreted the courageous heart by constituting heroic selfhood through a grotesque act of self-cannibalization. The heart, however, was only one among many nineteenth-century tropes symbolizing strong individualism.[13] Of these, I will focus on one nostalgic device deployed by both Longfellow and Crane to define heroic selfhood: medieval chivalry. With its emblematic image of the knight and all his attendant heroics, chivalry evoked nostalgia in the same way as the "heart": by looking back to an ideal selfhood to inspire autonomy in the present. Both appeal to an imaginary past, but employ different images and themes.

By the turn of the century, bourgeois American culture had resurrected a fantasy of the Middle Ages that signified a time of authentic virtue and heroic self-reliance.[14]

People looked to medievalism's childlike simplicity in order to revise the perceived

complexities and artificiality of overcivilized modern life; according to T. J. Jackson

Lears, "wearied by struggles with religious doubt, impatient with the vagueness of liberal

optimism, Americans hailed the 'childlike faith' of the Middle Ages . . . Admiration for

the sincerity of the medieval peasant was tied to longings for 'real life'" (*No Place* 150).

Chivalry encouraged people, especially the young, to stay hopeful and look within for

power. In *Twentieth Century Knighthood: A Series of Addresses to Young Men* (1900),

Louis Albert Banks commented that while young readers might not possess the physical

attributes of knights, "the higher deeds of the loftier chivalry, of upright thinking, of pure

conduct, of self-denying devotion, are within each and every one of us" (qtd. in Lupack

197). Writers revised medieval aristocracy by locating chivalric righteousness within

every individual, rather than those with material wealth or noble bloodline (Lupack 197).

As Banks's revisions make clear, the chivalric craze did not draw upon the

historical realities of the middle-ages. Instead, the medieval period was subjected to

sanitized and generic cultural re-productions in forms "based on literary rather than

historical examples" (Lupack 197). Popular texts in the 1880s included Lord Alfred

Tennyson's *Idylls*, Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur*, and reprintings of Thomas

Malory's *Morte Darthur* in 1868, 1876, and 1889 (Bowden 198 note 5). The Tennyson

and Lanier texts presented moralizing and romantic depictions of the Arthurian tale, and

readers focused on the optimistic and noble messages of this literature instead of the dark

historical events they effaced. Yet, according to Betsy Bowden, *Morte Darthur* in its

entirety "stands solid witness against any Golden Age of childlike innocence . . . the

alleged glory days of British chivalry provide no admirable heroes, no moral or ethical

standards, no inspirational ideals"—hence the popularity of the Lanier version, which explicitly targeted young people, excluded the violent parts, and included illustrations (180).

In addition to these reprintings and reproductions of chivalric literature, chivalry influenced the era's fiction. For example, popular Civil War literature resurrected knights and distressed damsels in the conflict between north and south; David Blight explains that "an unheroic age could now escape to an alternative universe of gallant cavaliers and their trusted servants" (222). Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) explicitly addressed the themes and images of chivalry, while Henry Adams's "The Dynamo and the Virgin" (1907) staked the medieval Virgin against modern machinery. Moments in works such as W. D. Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) in which Lapham recalls Civil War heroics at the Bromfield Corey's dinner party, and the jousting scene in Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) suggested the ubiquity of chivalry even when war or the Middle Ages were not the explicit subject of the text.

Cultural nostalgia for medieval simplicity and chivalric virtue created a pedagogy paralleling the Fireside poets' message of hard work, patience, and progress. Longfellow's afterlife was thus inflected by chivalry's popularity. In addition to its inspirational nostalgia, "A Psalm of Life" was repurposed according to chivalric themes; the poem was reproduced as a book by E.P. Dutton and Co. in 1892, with illustrations by noted Boston artist H. Winthrop Peirce. Notably, all of the edition's illustrations couched Longfellow's words in idealized medieval settings. For example, stanza four, in which the speaker explains, "Art is long, and Time is fleeting," and our hearts "like muffled

drums, are beating / Funeral marches to the grave," is followed by an illustration of an

artist painting a mural in the foreground, while behind him a procession winds out of

view (see fig. 1).[15]

Fig. 1. H. Winthrop Peirce, A psalm of life *(New York: Dutton, 1893).*
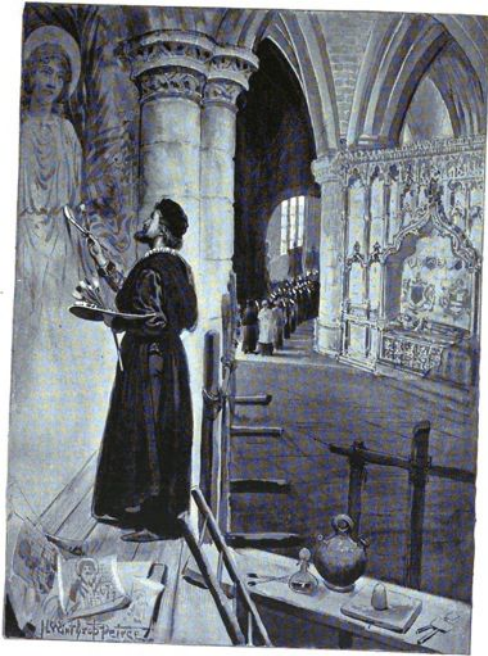
Art is literally long, represented by the size of the mural, and time flees, just as the

procession disappears into another room. Peirce or the publishers felt that Longfellow's

sentiment lent itself to a medieval context. The painter is dressed in what would be

understood as medieval garb.[16] In addition, Peirce depicts an alcove behind the artist that

contains the sarcophagus of a fallen knight, his family crests above him. As demonstrated

by this reproduction, Longfellow's poetry was well suited to chivalric reinterpretation

because it assisted in nineteenth-century endeavors to heroicize the self. Hence, poems

like "A Psalm of Life" and "Paul Revere's Ride" remained popular well after

Longfellow's death because they contained an embedded chivalry that inspired selfhood

whenever it was read. Indeed, poems such as "Paul Revere's Ride" made explicit the inherent chivalric values of poems such as "Psalm." "Paul Revere's Ride," first published in the *Boston Transcript* in 1860, was originally meant to rally the Union cause by relying on a historically inaccurate but inspirational reinterpretation of the American Revolution (Sorby 16). After the Civil War the poem became a schoolroom standard, repurposed to teach American identity by drawing on a shared, heroic past (Sorby 3).[17] The poem offered a chivalric, nationalist identity to all readers who struggled to conceive individual selfhood across the tumultuous second half of the nineteenth century.

Through the figured Paul Revere, Longfellow creates a knight with all the trappings. Revere is selfless and self-reliant, he is loyal to and in pursuit of an ideal; he even rides a horse. The poem opens by placing the reader in the position of the child-like subject, who shall be inspired by and loyal to the example of Paul Revere:

> Listen, my children, and you shall hear
> Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
> On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
> Hardly a man is now alive
> Who remembers that famous day and year. (*Selected Poems* 1-5)

This opening stanza depicts a tension typical of the rest of the poem between temporal specificity and nostalgic ambiguity. Us "children" will hear "*of* the midnight ride," setting this incident apart as a legend, one out of time but nevertheless handed down over time. This atemporality is parried by the specificity of a date in line three, yet Longfellow manages to erase the significance of the date in the next lines. We are reminded that "hardly a man" remains who remembers this specific date, hearkening to a "famous" past that is about to be lost. Revere's ride happened a long time ago, so long ago that it is about to pass from someone's lived past into the realm of collective legend. Longfellow

moves from the date to death to signal the move from history to nostalgia. In other words, the poem's chivalric reinterpretation of event makes the past not history but narrative, and thus ideological and imaginary.[18]

From Union supporters to turn-of-the-century readers, the poem's poetics of nostalgia conflated a chivalric and nationalist identity. Longfellow's nostalgic nationalism depends on the dead, figures whose absence generates a powerful political presence:

> Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
> In their night-encampment on the hill,
> Wrapped in silence so deep and still
> That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
> The watchful night-wind, as it went
> Creeping along from tent to tent,
> And seeming to whisper, "All is well!" (*Selected Poems* 42-48)

The bivouacking dead are envisioned as good, obedient soldiers—"All is well!" according to their sentinel, the night-wind. Their permanent encampment suggests commitment to an un-named cause, and they are faithful, retired fighters, eternal knightly figures. The repetition of "night" in this stanza could be heard as "knight," situating these dead in a "knight-encampment" watched over by a "knight-wind." Because nostalgia operates through absence, these dead "knights," like the great men and shipwrecked sailors of "Psalm," are unavailable, and their meaning reconceived in order to create an American chivalric lineage. By providing these dead with the attributes of chivalry, Longfellow extends American culture to a time before the Revolutionary War while simultaneously freeing this past of its British heritage. America's very earth is populated with dead knights, and Americans inherit chivalry simply by being American.

The end of the poem returns to Revere as he rides out of the past, and Longfellow extends his chivalric lineage into the present and beyond:

> So through the night rode Paul Revere;
> And so through the night went his cry of alarm
> To every Middlesex village and farm,—
> A cry of defiance and not of fear,
> A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
> And a word that shall echo forevermore!
> For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
> Through all our history, to the last,
> In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
> The people will waken and listen to hear
> The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
> And the midnight message of Paul Revere. (*Selected Poems* 119-130)

The "cry," "voice," and single "word" are generalized and generic encapsulations of Revere's chivalric message. Likewise, the (k)"night-wind" that whispered of wellness in the graveyard returns in this last stanza; now identified as emerging from "the Past," it conveys the "hurrying hoof-beats" and "midnight message" into the present. Through these sounds, Longfellow's nostalgia reveals its reliance on absence, because what carries into the present—a cry, a voice, a word—are reverberations without origin. The original is lost to the past and Revere's "echo" signals history turned into nostalgia. Yet these sourceless sounds offer a chivalric model of national identity. By blurring historical particularity, Longfellow's knightly Revere transcends time and is available whenever readers need him most; hence Revere's "word" echoes "forevermore." Indeed, Revere could come knocking on any given night. Chivalry exists, Longfellow tells us, we just have to listen for it in order to take heart.

While not as well known, chivalry inflected the era's poetry as well as Crane's works. *The Red Badge of Courage* grappled with explicitly chivalric ideals while *Black*

Riders and *War is Kind* intensified these themes and images. Crane's poetry emphasizes how chivalric nostalgia turns "history" into legend and experience into echo by effacing an event's attendant, unsavory aspects. While he reveals the violent, immoral, and illogical events that chivalry obscures, Crane both deconstructs and deploys the impossible heroics it inspired. For example, "Fast rode the knight" from *War Is Kind* illustrates the glory of chivalric selfhood but makes room for the gruesome circumstances accompanying heroic acts:

> Fast rode the knight
> With spurs, hot and reeking,
> Ever waving an eager sword,
> "To save my lady!"
> Fast rode the knight,
> And leaped from saddle to war.
> Men of steel flickered and gleamed
> Like riot of silver lights,
> And the gold of the knight's good banner
> Still waved on a castle wall.
> . . . . .
> A horse,
> Blowing, staggering, bloody thing,
> Forgotten at foot of castle wall.
> A horse
> Dead at foot of castle wall. (*War Is Kind* 30-31)

The horse "forgotten at foot of castle wall" serves as an apt metaphor for chivalry's evasive nostalgia. The first stanza assuages popular anxieties by modeling chivalric self-worth and success (the knight's "good banner / Still waved") to readers at a time when life would suggest ennui and defeat. However, the second stanza remembers what the first forgets. While the first stanza, in its hurry, neglected the indefinite article in "like riot," the second stanza emphasizes chivalry's redactions by ignoring definite and indefinite articles. The oversight occurs in two different lines to demonstrate chivalry's deliberate abstraction of event: "Forgotten at foot of castle wall . . . Dead at foot of castle

wall." The missing articles "a" and "the" overlook the scope or type of reference made by the noun, just as chivalry overlooks its original referent.

By calling attention to the darkness that chivalry ignores, Crane's poetry avoids a happy ending or didactic message. Unlike his Fireside predecessors, his works deliver no overt lesson. In a letter from 1896, Crane explains "preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give readers a slice out of life; and if there is any moral or lesson in it I do not point it out. I let the reader find it for himself" (qtd. in Wertheim 230). Indeed, Crane avoids Longfellow's exhortative poetics, but he embraces the shared ideal of heroic selfhood that Longfellow hoped to incite. By withholding an explicit moral, Crane expands the poetic possibilities constituting this self. Because the strong, admirable individual is the one who recognizes the rottenness in his self and the world, Crane includes chivalry's absurd violence in his endorsement of the heroic self. In poem XXVII from *Black Riders*, "A youth in apparel that glittered," Crane creates a perverse parable, rearticulating chivalry's ridiculous values to depict an equally ridiculous, yet surprisingly strong selfhood:

> A YOUTH IN APPAREL THAT GLITTERED
> WENT TO WALK IN A GRIM FOREST.
> THERE HE MET AN ASSASSIN
> ATTIRED ALL IN GARB OF OLD DAYS;
> HE, SCOWLING THROUGH THE THICKETS,
> AND DAGGER POISED QUIVERING,
> RUSHED UPON THE YOUTH.
> "SIR," SAID THIS LATTER,
> "I AM ENCHANTED, BELIEVE ME,
> "TO DIE, THUS,
> "IN THIS MEDIEVAL FASHION,
> "ACCORDING TO THE BEST LEGENDS;
> "AH, WHAT JOY!"
> THEN TOOK HE THE WOUND, SMILING,
> AND DIED, CONTENT. (*Black Riders* 34)

Crane describes the frenzy of a youth caught in the throes of chivalry's rallying cry. His glittering gear suggests a knight's suit of armor, and the poem further alludes to chivalry by engaging its ideals of bravery through the youth's death.[19] A scowling man in strange clothes with a knife has more than normal importance to the youth; he believes he is experiencing real "medieval fashion" and is consequently "content" to be murdered. However, the youth's seemingly authentic experience does not have any historical origin. He recalls a chivalric significance that never existed; his justification is an echo of what was fictional in the first place. Crane foregrounds the emptiness of chivalry's meaning in the poem's non-descriptive phrases. By creating a sort of rootless shorthand in expressions such as "apparel that glittered," "garb of old days," "medieval fashion," and "best legends," Crane condenses meaning, generating generic, conventional sayings that summon nostalgia but have no inherent content.[20] The larger narrative of the poem suggests such condensation; to the youth, even the event of being attacked signifies a larger, older story.[21] Like the missing referents in "Fast Rode the Knight," these condensations are meant cover up the emptiness underpinning their meaning. Hence, the last lines lack the word "stab"; by describing instead how the youth passively "took" the wound, the poem removes the real action of the poem. In this quest for chivalric self-completion, Crane recognizes that self-destruction is based on an ideological emptiness. Yet chivalry's emptiness permits its pervasiveness in a way that renews Longfellow's goal of inspirational selfhood. Echoing "In the desert," this poem depicts an act of self-sacrifice that symbolizes a nostalgic belief in the self.

Crane places this poem's heroic (non-)action in the present tense in order to exaggerate how chivalric poetics turn event into legend. Since chivalry rests on no

original source, the narrator may convert action into chivalry *as it happens*. Any instance—a walk in the woods, a murder—may claim a condensed, medieval meaning. By misconstruing murder as his own good fortune, the youth demonstrates how chivalry provides a meaningful identity in an otherwise cruel and meaningless world. Halliburton argues "the youth reminds us of the creature who eats his heart and likes it because it is bitter. The youth, too, finds a place within himself" (289). Because the youth took to "heart" nostalgia's teachings, he perceives murder by shabbily dressed criminals as tantamount to knightly self-sacrifice. While chivalry "handicap[s]" "the capacity to see life and oneself fully and clearly," Crane demonstrates that the limitation actually expands the constitution of heroic selfhood by including the immoral, violent, and foolish (Pizer 213).[22] Despite its criticism of the tradition and its delusions, the poem nevertheless asserts that chivalry preserves a self-satisfaction typically mourned as lost. Poetry cannot inoculate against the optimistic power of nostalgia: it is ridiculous and beneficial. This satisfaction even seduces the poetic speaker into adopting stilted, chivalric speech when he describes the youth's happy death—"Then took he the wound"—as if he could not help falling into the same stylized storytelling of the youth.

By stumbling into chivalric speech patterns, the speaker proves how chivalry resuscitates the external recognition and communication that constitutes the self. Like the "I" who speaks to the creature in "In the desert," the assassin and the poetic narrator are as necessary to the youth's heroics as the ideals of chivalry. As William Waters explains, "every coherent utterance aligns itself to, is coherent with respect to, some conception of its intelligibility, and intelligibility means uptake, receivability" (5). The youth assumes an "uptake" of his excited assertion by the assassin, meaning he expects "some

conception of its intelligibility," a resonance with the assassin that fosters fraternity

through the recognition of a shared ideal. Even if the assassin "is co-opted without being

consulted," the narrator exists to understand what the youth wants (Halliburton 291).

Really, it is the narrator who completes this connection by adopting the youth's tone and

expressing his contentment. Crane reveals the absurdity of chivalric ideals, but

nevertheless shows how nostalgic poetics constitute connection, even if that connection is

imperfect or misunderstood.

Nostalgic Crane

Despite revealing nostalgia's emptiness, Crane projected a longing for the perfect

communication that it once provided. In other words, Crane was nostalgic for nostalgia's

ability to transmit ideal selfhood. Because he believed in its communicative powers,

Longfellow employed nostalgia to convey his fictions of the heart to his readers. While

Crane's poetry revealed how Longfellow's heroic hearts were impossible fantasies, he

nevertheless missed the ways that nostalgia could broadcast a believable fiction. Crane

thus translates nineteenth-century nostalgia into the modern era in order to forge a poetic

fraternity, no longer based on a shared ideal of selfhood, but based on the recognition of

the fantasies that attempt to fill its place. By withholding an explicit moral teaching,

Crane's poetry underscored the relationships nostalgia made possible—between man and

creature, narrator and reader. Crane upholds the connections created by nostalgia in

"There was a man with tongue of wood" from *War Is Kind*:

> There was a man with tongue of wood
> Who essayed to sing,
> And in truth it was lamentable.
> But there was one who heard
> The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood
> And knew what the man

<blockquote>
Wished to sing,
And with that the singer was content. (*War Is Kind* 34)
</blockquote>

Crane turns away from poems about the heroic self in order to poetically discuss poetry, and how it no longer serves as a vehicle for nostalgic transmission. The man wants to be understood, and by finally designating him as the singer, Crane indicates that he has successfully performed his role. Like the singer, the poet performs nostalgia. But because nostalgia's communication of illusion is no longer believable, the song is awful and incomprehensible—to all but one. The "one who heard," like Crane, can still recognize what that nostalgia, despite its failures, hoped to translate. As a result, the singer is "content." His satisfaction stands; it is literally the final word. Like the creature of poem III, Crane's characters are gratified only when their selfhood is externally recognized— when the creature holds his heart outside his body, when another hears the singer. They do not appear to yearn for a lost sense of self because they construct themselves in relation to others. Crane demonstrates that no man is a self all by himself; contentment results from recognition. This little tale alludes to anxieties about intersubjective connection in an age of disorienting modernism, concerns over messages being received, about being able to reach people through the clutter and clamor of modernity. Crane thus looked backwards to nostalgia's communicative conventions in order to adapt selfhood to a modern environment; he fostered fraternity through an example of cacophony.

Perhaps Crane pays tribute to Longfellow in this poem. Longfellow was subject to criticism throughout his career for, according to Margaret Fuller in 1852, "ha[ving] no style of his own growing out of his own experiences" (154). In other words, Longfellow's poetry was problematic because it was nostalgic, because it translated or repeated the old. Longfellow's nostalgia thus recycled images and tropes in ways that were lamentable.

But perhaps Crane was the one who knew what Longfellow wished to sing. In fact, Crane might have even reappropriated Fuller's criticism of Longfellow's "Prelude" to *Voices of the Night* (1839), in which she called the "idea of the leaves clapping their little hands" "unpleasant" (155). Crane's poem thus provides an interesting commentary on Longfellow's supposedly repetitive poetry and his exemplary life. In 1825, Bowdoin College hired Longfellow to be a professor of modern languages and sent him to Europe to gain proficiency. In other words, Longfellow was a professor of "tongues," or a professor of translation and transmission. They show up in his poetry, for example "Kéramos," a poem from 1878 when Crane was approximately seven years old:

> Turn, turn, my wheel! The human race,
> Of every tongue, of every place,
> Caucasian, Coptic, or Malay,
> All that inhabit this great earth,
> Whatever be their rank or worth,
> Are kindred and allied by birth,
> And made of the same clay. (*Poems* 643)

"There was a man" seems to come to the same conclusion, although the way the poem gets there may not be the same. Longfellow translated nostalgia for his readers in order to encourage the recognition that all are "kindred" and "allied." Crane extended Longfellow's nostalgic performance in hopes of figuring a new "tongue" that would transmit a meaningful human fraternity via a shared nostalgia for nostalgia's perfect communication.

Nostalgia's ability to foster "Human Kindness" allows us to re-evaluate Crane's poetry (qtd. in Wertheim 180). As one who faced the nostalgic fantasies of his age, Crane found within them (and perhaps because of them) a human fellowship based on a shared belief in the heroic self, despite the impossibility of purely righteous personhood. As a

result, a surprising tenderness emerges in Crane's writing. While they depict the indifference of nature and the cruelties of existence, his poems do not make light of the human condition. For example, in poem V, the man who said "range me all men of the world in rows" creates "a loud quarrel, world-wide / It endured for ages"; the man then "went to death, weeping" for causing the "bloody scuffle" (*Black Riders* 11). In poem XXXVIII, the ocean tries to comfort a "woman, weeping" over her drowned lover by explaining that the "old, helpless" sea king "weeps too" as "the bustling fates / Heap his hands with corpses" (*Black Riders* 45) These figures suffer for inadvertently causing harm to others, and Crane extends this fraternity of suffering into a form of protective love forged by disaster. In poem X, the speaker asserts that the destruction of the world is insignificant as long as "thou and thy white arms were there, / And the fall to doom a long way" (*Black Riders* 17). Crane reverses conventional love lyrics in XXIII by explaining that the stars and sun should "shed no beams upon my weak heart" because "she is here / In a place of blackness" (*Black Riders* 30). In perhaps his most severe example of love in the face of destruction, poem LXVII explains "God lay dead in Heaven" while the earth, "groaning thing, / Turned black and sank." "But of all sadness this was sad," the poem explains, describing a woman who "tried to shield / The head of a sleeping man / From the jaws of the final beast" (*Black Riders* 80). The world may be falling apart, God may be dead, nature indifferent, but these lines suggest that, no matter how small, the bond between two people is valuable and worth protecting. Crane's poetry bears witness to the connections nostalgia makes possible, and suggests that such shared expression and reception of its fantasies may be all we have against life's disasters, deserts, and assassins.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the union that Longfellow and Crane's poetics of nostalgia strove to create. Since this unity relied on nostalgia's perfect communication, Chapter Two will focus on lyric address. I will explore how Walt Whitman and Edwin Arlington Robinson's poetry attempted to foster democratic union through the communicative exchange between the poetic "I" and "you." While Chapter One examined the formal shift from Longfellow's genteel lyric to Crane's innovative "pills," Chapter Two charts the reverse, from Whitman's free forms to Robinson's lapidary verse, in order to examine how Robinson revises Whitman's mode of address.

[1]See Dana Gioia "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism"; Christoph Irmscher *Longfellow Redux;* Newcomb 3-43; Sorby xi-xlv, 1-34.

[2]Elizabeth Renker argues that "the twilight of the poets was not the twilight of the genre, but the twilight of a particular elite definition of the genre" (136). Virginia Jackson and Shira Wolosky explore the development of the supposed break or decline. Wolosky attributes the interpretation of poetry as "transcendent" and "pure" to practices "peculiarly shaped in response to social and historical no less than aesthetic trends" at the end of the nineteenth century ("Claims" 14). According to Jackson, the tendency to collapse all nineteenth-century poetry into the "single abstraction of the post-Romantic lyric" contributes to the perception of modernist poetry as an enlivening break from the nineteenth century's personification and emotional availability (183). Michael Cohen, discussing the aftermath of Stedman's formulation, comments that "critiques grounded in an analysis of this bifurcation of culture into genteel ideals and pragmatic reality run through twentieth-century polemics against the nineteenth century" (181).

[3]Other works reverse this approach, by challenging modernism's stability as a historical and literary construct. For example, Edward Cutler demonstrates modernism's relation to the nineteenth century, arguing "the modernist pretense of innovation is itself historically derivative; the fetish of 'the new' common to later modernism was itself constitutive of the emergent mass print forms of the nineteenth century" (3). By collapsing the "rigid dichotomy between 'high' and 'low'" that has been employed to characterize modernism, Lawrence Rainey clarifies modernism's incorporation of influences that critics typically claim it rejects.

[4]Scholarship from the past ten years has remained invested in and devoted to his poetry's modernity, focusing exclusively on how its depersonalization models modernist innovation *avant la lettre*. Jerome McGann argues that the "immediate typographical unfolding" of the original 1895 poem "Black Riders" "simultaneously evacuates the texts of the subjectivity that poetry, particularly romantic poetry, commonly asks the reader to expect" (96). Shira Wolosky pushes Crane's poetry toward modernist depersonalization, explaining that in Crane's "radically experimental" verses "individualist claims are exposed as self-constricting, religious contexts as drained of meaning" (*Poetry* 204). Max Cavitch reads Crane's poetry as presaging not just the modern, but the post-human. He argues that "Crane doesn't deny the personal; he combusts it, like a fossil fuel, and lets the residue trail behind on the page, where it congeals into toxic, post-human shapes" (34). Cavitch's leap into the post-modern post-human exemplifies and extends this perception of Crane as a proto-modernist. Meanwhile, Crane's fiction currently receives copious and diverse critical consideration. See the Stephen Crane Society for an extensive bibliography of recent work, listed by year: <http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/crane/cranebib.htm>.

[5]Despite the fact that these men were already dead or dying by the 1890s, Fireside Poets saturated the turn-of-the-century literary marketplace. According to John Timberman Newcomb, they "were not foisted upon an unwilling public. Their ascent to canonicity, and their long hold on American literary institutions, suggests that they embodied a model of cultural value that resonated powerfully with readers of the era" (8).

[6]For example, Gandal argues "Crane's work contains no concept of will, conscience, moral character, eternal soul, or reason as a higher faculty of supreme arbitrator" (*Virtues* 9). According to Donald Pizer "there is no God, he appears to be saying, and isolation is therefore the quintessential human condition" (214). And Saunders points out that "Crane's apostasy moves in the direction of existential and nihilist philosophies influencing much early-twentieth-century literature" (196).

[7]Crane states this in a letter written to Nellie Crouse on January 12, 1896. He also explains "I don't like to make wise remarks on the aspect of life but I will say that it doesn't strike me as particularly worth the trouble. The final wall of the wise man's thought however is Human Kindness of course. If the road of disappointment, grief, pessimism, is followed far enough, it will arrive there" (Wertheim 180).

[8]See also Gilmore, 18-34, and West, 9-41.

[9]I quote from the poem, "A man said to the universe," from *War is Kind*:
> A man said to the universe:
> "Sir, I exist!"
> "However," replied the universe,
> "The fact has not created in me
> "A sense of obligation."

[10]The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces this understanding of "to eat one's heart" back as far as Spenser in 1590 and Tennyson in 1850.

[11]Jerome McGann makes a similar argument about Crane's poetics of impersonality by attending to the "arresting typographical design" of the original *Black Riders* (89). See p. 87-110.

[12]As a "social institution," the "ritual procedure" implies both "sacrificial actors" and "witnesses" (Mizruchi 468).

[13]See for example chapter 4 of Philip J. Deloria's *Playing Indian*, which explains how "archaic Indianness" was employed to "salvage" American identity amidst the "uncertainty and anxiety of modern urban industrialization" (100).

[14]Such a focus on the medieval was not mere evasion; its "antimodernism" hoped to inspire people to contend with modern life. See Matthews "Chaucer's American Accent" and Michelson "A Response to David Matthews."

[15] Available in full on Google books.

[16] These costumes, accessories, hairstyles, and facial hair are of the same style as those pictured in Alfred Kappes' illustrations for Sidney Lanier's edition of *The Boy's King Arthur*, which was published in 1881.

[17] Its attachments to the Civil War added to its post-bellum popularity because late nineteenth-century culture was also awash in reconstituted, "reconciliationist" Civil War stories (Blight 216).

[18] Stewart argues "nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack" (23).

[19] The glittering apparel cannot be armor, however; it merely resembles armor. As Halliburton points out, "a small, hand-held blade is not going to kill a person encased in protective metal" (290).

[20] Contemporary reviews of Crane's poetry address his condensation. In his review of *The Black Riders*, Thomas Wentworth Higginson explains that "while Whitman dilutes mercilessly, Crane condenses almost as formidably. He fulfils Joubert's wish, to condense a page into a sentence and a sentence into a word" (Monteiro 17). In 1899, Ashley A. Smith comments that "he does not describe so much as, by the use of a single word or phrase, he suggests the description" (Monteiro 197).

[21] Other Crane poems depict this condensed chivalry. "Fast rode the knight" signaled "war" through the phrase "Men of steel flickered and gleamed" (*War Is Kind* 30-31). In poem I, "Black riders came from the sea," instead of scenes of battle, Crane describes "clang and clang" and "clash and clash" (*Black Riders* 7). Knights on horseback are broken down into component parts such as "spear and shield" and "hoof and heel." Crane even suggests a damsel in distress with the feminine "wave of hair." However this phrase and the others are so condensed as to offer a multitude of generic readings.

[22] In a discussion of *Maggie*, Donald Pizer notes that Crane's characters are "locked in a prison of self-delusion" (212). *Maggie* depicts "the overpowering role of emotional self-interest in the handicapping of the capacity to see life and oneself fully and clearly" (213).

CHAPTER 2

WALT WHITMAN, EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, AND ROMANTIC

ADDRESS

Heeding the call for Ralph Waldo Emerson's Poet, Walt Whitman rearticulated

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's strong self in order to poetically professes himself the

"I" who would encompass all voices within a union of his self-making. Like Stephen

Crane, Edwin Arlington Robinson demonstrated that such perfect self-enclosure and self-

possession were fantasies, but recognized that this impossibility could foster a democratic

union. Robinson expands upon Crane's beastly and foolish figures by disassembling the

supposedly heroic self into limited, flawed people-in-progress.

Through his many years of poetic output and revision, Whitman's professed

desire for union revealed his perception of a primary and ongoing problem of dissolution

or fragmentation. Whitman's poetry attempted to provide solution and safeguard for a

nation facing divisive, destructive issues, by creating a democratic union through his

poetic voice and a poetic voice possessed by the union. David Reynolds explains that,

during the 1850s, "the healing of a divided nation, [Whitman] had come to believe, could

be best achieved through all-absorptive poetry" (67). Whitman hoped to achieve this

poetic nation through consensus, a joining together of people in a democracy that was,

importantly, uncoerced. Kerry Larson argues, "Whitman is quite single-minded in his

determination to erase all boundaries, to overcome all distance, to create, in effect, a

space in which reader and poem are one . . . the goal is not so much communication as

communion" (*Drama* 10). Whitman took it upon himself to be the agent of this consensus, fostering union through his own self; "into the vacuum created by the dissolution of the nation's political structure rushed Whitman's gargantuan 'I'" (Reynolds 67).

Despite Whitman's hopes for consensus and communion, most readers find his profession of democracy to be tinged with autocracy. Identifying Whitman's role as both "autocrat and democrat," Larson declares "there is no future in trying to factor out the democratic altruist from the democratic egotist" (*Drama* 53). Understanding the "egalitarian and the authoritarian" to be "mutually constituted," we can trace this "relation of adjacency" throughout Whitman's poetics, but it is especially evident in his discussion of the American presidency (Larson *Drama* 51). The office that Whitman despised before the Civil War and adored afterward highlights the "adjacency" of his autocrat and democrat because, for Whitman, the president must be the former in order to ensure the latter (Larson *Drama* 51). In other words, the president's authority was justified by the union he created. According to Whitman, however, presidential power has a price. Sean McCann explains:

> . . . presidential rule appeared legitimate so long as it served to bring forth a better, more democratic national community, and so long as the president demonstrated his commitment to that ambition in his willingness to sacrifice his own gratification, and in the limit case, his life, to the cause. xiii

Whitman envisioned union through a "Redeemer President," the leader he called for in his unpublished 1856 diatribe "The Eighteenth Presidency!" (1321). A few years later, Lincoln seemed to fulfill Whitman's hopes, and over the course of the Civil War, Whitman's "admiration and sympathy for the president grew" (McCann x). Whitman saw in Lincoln both leader and martyr:

> If, on the one hand, Whitman envisioned the president standing at the head of a massive army and exercising powers that dwarfed those of any king, on the other hand, he shielded the president from the charge of tyranny by emphasizing Lincoln's willingness, like that of his soldiers, to surrender his life to the cause he served. McCann xii

The union that Whitman wanted to create through poetry Lincoln appeared to create by dying.

In order to create union, then, Whitman needed a President—or a Poet. The qualities in Whitman's Redeemer President are the same as those in his definition of the Poet; indeed, for Whitman "the job of the new poet, like the job of the president, is not precisely to lead the people, but to *be* the people, to represent them full and entire" (Faries 164). For example, in his "Preface" to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman comments that American "Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man" (iv). Likewise, he argues in "The Eighteenth Presidency!" that "I would be much pleased to see some heroic, shrewd, fully-informed, healthy-bodied, middle-aged, beard-faced American blacksmith or boatman come down from the West across the Alleghanies, and walk into the Presidency" (1308). Both the President and the Poet feature the adjacency of the autocrat and the democrat: one who creates union by paradoxically holding himself apart and above, and one who redeems this authority through sacrifice. Lincoln appeared to sacrifice his life for the nation, and Whitman's Poet sacrifices his voice for unity with his readers. The Poet may "play[] the role of the benevolent dictator who enforces the democratic leveling in his poetry," but he further enacts his Presidential abilities by sacrificing his own voice for the creation of union (Faries 168).

Whitman's prose and poetry might envision a "democratic leveling" but the fact

of his "benevolent dictator" remains: the creation of poetic democracy may not always be

accomplished democratically and the Poet's sacrifice might not actually or adequately

atone for autocracy. While his poems advocate democracy, more attention needs to be

paid to how the autocratic action emerges from the democratic ideal. Patrick Redding

points out that the tendency to read Whitman as professing a democratic poetics institutes

a sort of false and anachronistic reading practice; "to describe a poem as 'democratic'

does not characterize an object so much as expose a particular way of reading that has

become deeply internalized and, thus, unexamined. Twentieth-century readers of

Whitman demonstrate that his program was never that coherent in the first place" (671).

While Redding will "point the way beyond *Leaves of Grass* as the normative standard for

what it means to be 'democratic' in poetry," I want to look backwards to discern where

the autocratic impulse resides within a democratic poetics (670). Indeed, Larson recently

argued:

> . . . the many features we take to be distinctively Whitman's—the privileging of
> the reader as a vital interlocutor, the muting of overt authorial judgment or
> invidious comparison, the use of rhetorical indeterminacy to blur differences
> between speaker and listener, the hostility to unduly idiosyncratic, non-
> generalizable experience—all had a long foreground somewhere. *Imagining* 98

What critics overlook in these formulations of Whitman's Poet-President is Whitman's

reliance on an inherited Romantic poetics that similarly posits the Poet as the

authoritative leader and insightful uniter. Shelley claims that poets are the

"unacknowledged legislators of the world," and Emerson echoes the British Romantics

when he argues that "the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the

complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth" (Shelley

309) (Emerson *Prose* 184). While Larson may not put Whitman in a Romantic lineage, I would argue that when we read him as a node in a Romantic tradition, we can see "the peculiar *extremism* of his literary egalitarianism" as an extension of Romantic address (*Imagining* 98). Whitman's obsession with equality stems from a Romantic preoccupation with poetic communication and communion that he adopts and extends. Examining Whitman in the tradition of Romantic poetics explains where this egalitarian impulse gave rise to its authoritarian counterpart.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address inspired Whitman so much that he pinned it to his wall, which is to say that just as presidential address holds in balance authority and democracy, the conventions of Romantic poetic address allow Whitman's Poets and Presidents to become both sovereign and subject (Erkkila 203). In the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the poem was understood to be the personification of the "voice" of the Poet, the idealized author of verses that expressed and exposed his inmost thoughts and feelings. The Poet was thus the speaker of the poem, represented by the pronoun "I," and "I" addressed himself to "you," another unavailable presence. As Emerson says in his essay "The Poet," "man is only half himself, the other half is his expression" (*Prose* 184). By addressing "you," the Poet constitutes his interiority and generates autonomy through self-enclosure. At the same time, Romantic address acted according to a logic in which the Poet was subject to powers not his own. The poem was the result of forces seizing and speaking through the Poet; hence the poetic voice was possessed, populated, and subject as opposed to singular, solitary, and autonomous. These contrasting understandings of Romantic address translate into the tension between authority and democracy in Whitman's works. His poems are authoritative, speaking to

command others and thereby constitute his own "voice," yet they are simultaneously subject, sacrificing power to the will and voices of others. Whitman's use of Romantic address conflates both understandings in order to make possible the adjacency that, in turn, reconstitutes national unity. Whitman addresses himself as "you" and addresses "you" as himself, combining and expanding the boundaries of Romantic address in an effort to constitute a democratic poetics. He renders the privileged address of the Poet fluid; his "I" stretches to directly address "you" and speak for all people. Whitman's poetry encompasses all voices, addressing and transmitting them to create a poetic union forged through his self.

If Whitman registers the legacy of Romantic poetics, it is helpful to look at a figure that in turn registers Whitman's legacy. Robinson rearticulates Romantic practices in their Whitmanian configuration. Robinson's Poet-President is Whitman, who is depicted in Robinson's poetry as having sacrificed his authoritarian voice for the unity of the nation. At the same time, Robinson redeploys Romantic address in a way that emphasizes the tension between unity and authority, demonstrating how reaching out to "you" to constitute union can instead constitute disunion by favoring the powerful, singular "I." In order to illustrate the authoritarian influences of Romantic address, Robinson composes poems which shift "I" to "we" and "you" to "he." "We" illustrates the position of Whitman's unified poetic speaker, but Robinson's poetry often warns against the tyranny of the "we," an extension of the ability of "I" to speak for others. Robinson employs "he" to exaggerate the position of "you," demonstrating the strange self-enclosure of the speaker who distances, instead of drawing closer, the addressee.

Nevertheless, Robinson imagines equality through Whitmanian address and tries to adapt this address in an effort to reconstitute union and community. He revises Whitman's capacious voice by condensing it, limiting the scope of "I" and "you": "I" is no longer capable of speaking for and channeling "you." But this compression constitutes an innovation, creating consensus by allowing the voices that Whitman speaks for to speak for themselves. Both poets have the same objective for their poetry, a goal Robinson inherits from Whitman. They are concerned with the possibility of union created from consensus, the common feeling and accord that will foster cohesion and equality. They index a struggle across the nineteenth century to create union through poetic communication, a practice that these figures allow us to chart from the Romantics through the beginning of the twentieth century. Whitman wanted to profess and possess a nation of readers during a time of disunion; later in the century, Robinson wanted to forge human connections at a time when his family was disintegrating. The two share a purpose but differ in terms of scale: Whitman hopes to reconstitute national unity while Robinson hopes to reconstitute communal connections. Whereas Whitman wants to remake a nation through the poem, Robinson hopes to remake a family.

Whitman and Romantic Address

The relation between Whitman's authoritative Poet and his possessed poetic subject instantiates the relation between Romantic theories of address. Whitman conflates and then extends these different theories in order to shift Romantic address from nature to people, creating a poetics of union and equality. In one schema, the Poet is associated with a nightingale; his poem is like the bird's song. According to Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," the poet "is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude

with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why" (293). In this situation, the reader thus "overhears" the poem, according to John Stuart Mill's famous formulation. The Poet's self-enclosure was psychologized as proof of sincerity; indirect speech constituted transparent expression.[1] The poem's access to private feeling was understood to represent a universal human understanding, or a "more weighty and important kind of truth," as opposed to the passive, objective truth of scientific data (Abrams *Mirror* 313). An additional natural metaphor attributed the Poet's voice to natural forces. Like the wind creating a tune by blowing over a harp, natural powers pass through the Poet who gives voice to a poem. Again, Shelley's "Defence" argues that man is "an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre" (288). The Poet is especially susceptible to this kind of possession and especially adept at speaking it out. Mark Maslan explains that "the poet is a passive medium upon which the poetic power acts and through which it makes itself—or, rather, a version of itself—heard" (71). "The Eolian fiction" foregrounds the diminished presence of the Poet; it offers "a fiction of *mediated* expression" that "relegates him or her to an ancillary role" (Maslan 71).

The metaphor of the Eolian harp suggests that the Poet is not isolated, but populated and possessed by nature's presence; a second power, not the Poet's own, speaks through him. Yet the nightingale metaphor suggests the Poet's self-enclosure, isolation, and autonomy; he expresses his self through his own power and pleasure. Whitman's poetry redeploys and holds in balance this tension in Romantic poetics. His Eolian Poet stands apart as the delicate instrument that registers the world's voices; he

sacrifices his own voice to become representative, giving up autonomy to become the mouthpiece of natural forces. At the same time, Whitman's Poet-as-nightingale constitutes the authoritarian figure whose self-enclosure offers representative truths to his overhearers. Characterized by the Romantic apostrophe—"O wild West Wind" for example—the reader overhears the solitary Poet addressing a natural object or phenomenon, enclosing his self through this apparent gesture outward. Shelley, who describes the Poet as both bird and harp in the same essay, illustrates this contradiction between self-enclosed solitude versus possessed population. Whitman's poetry acknowledges their paradoxical proximity and conflates the two to achieve poetic union and equality. He expands the self-enclosed act of address, incorporating the possessor's presence into the poetic voice and populating his poetry with people.

By joining together the Eolian and the isolated speaker, Whitman may speak to and for all peoples. He is both possessed and possessor, the solitary singer and the bard of a nation. Whitman's 1859 poem, "A Word Out of the Sea," later "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," conflates the metaphors of the harp and bird to recreate this speaker. Whitman understands poetic possession not as a sign of the self's attenuation but its strength, a way to host and harness external energies within himself. In this poem, he uses the Eolian fiction to break the self-enclosure of the solitary poetic singer by first acknowledging and then encouraging the voices that speak through his "I." Whitman addresses his possessors, drawing them into his singular self while giving them the chance to be sounded. Whitman's poetic voice becomes representative, bigger than his own self, speaking for all to forge union.

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Better known as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," this poem's first version, titled "A Child's Reminiscence," was published on Christmas Eve, 1859, in *The New York Saturday Press*. Whitman does not explicitly assert his ability to channel and proclaim multiple voices in this 1859 version, but it presents the beginnings of what turns into a more elaborate declaration of possession in later editions. Whitman makes significant changes to the poem for its next iteration in the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*. I will focus on this 1860 version, then titled "A Word Out of the Sea," because it most explicitly registers and reveals Whitman's development of the poetic "I." Whitman's "I" incorporates apostrophe into poetic possession, constituting a poetic speaker who can address people, not just nature. We will first examine Whitman's expansive "I" in order to understand how that "I" is then capable of addressing and encompassing "you."

"A Word Out of the Sea" articulates and intensifies the Eolian poetics of "A Child's Reminiscence," both of which may have been registering the earlier influence of Emerson's Eolian Poet. Prior to Emerson's famous essay "The Poet" in *Essays: Second Series*, Whitman attended a lyceum lecture by Emerson also titled "The Poet" in 1842.[2] This lesser-known address articulated the Eolian conventions that Whitman later reflects in "A Word Out of the Sea." Here Emerson explained that as "the universal knower and singer," the Poet "must have an universal experience . . . he wants every rude stroke that has been dealt on his irritable texture: he hangs out his life like an Aeolian harp in a tree" ("Poet" 357). "A Word Out of the Sea" illustrates how Whitman's poetic "I" was awakened, not by being hung out on a tree, but by resonating voices on the Long Island shore. The poem recalls the moment when, as a child, the speaker heard the call of a mockingbird to his lost mate, which awakens the speaker's own poetic powers. It is easy

to read this awakening as Whitman's own, due to the contextless "I" and evidence from Whitman's personal experiences.[3] I will read "I" as Whitman not to prove some biographical correlation but because conflating "I" with Whitman reveals how he specifically reconfigures the tropes of Romantic address to create poetic union with people. To illustrate the transformation of boy into Poet, Whitman repeats the tropes of the bird and the harp in the acts of eavesdropping and possession; the boy, overhearing the bird, realizes that he is possessed by voices that only he can hear, understand, and translate. But Whitman does not just tell the story of how his Poetic "I" was constituted via Romantic practices; he extends the Romantic "I" to address and encompass both natural and human voices. "I" is neither self-enclosed nor merely possessed; Whitman transforms Eolian possession into self-possession.

The poem's opening establishes its focus on the constitution and extension of "I." Favoring an expressive, self-constituting syntax, this opening notably avoids direct address, appearing to speak into the void. There is no use of "you" or the use of apostrophe, which is notable since apostrophe is a convention featured, even exaggerated, throughout the rest of the poem. For a poetic voice trying to establish his "I," apostrophe would seem the natural and rhetorically most forceful convention of address to employ. As Jonathan Culler explains in his seminal essay "Apostrophe," while Romantic apostrophe "seems to establish relations between the self and the other," it "can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism" (146). The apostrophized figure— indicated by "O" plus a noun, or an emphatic "you!"—is subsumed, even consumed, by the "I." The speaker appears to reach out to nature personified, but the apostrophe assists in constituting and communicating the selfhood of "I," thereby emphasizing its

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singularity and self-enclosure. Apostrophe, Culler argues, provides the means for "one who successfully invokes nature" to "mak[e] himself poet, visionary" ("Apostrophe" 142). Yet Whitman avoids apostrophe in the opening of this poem devoted to the development of "I." Instead he constitutes himself through syntax in order to establish equality and unity as the governing principles of his poetic address. In other words, Whitman begins the poem about his own poetic becoming not by subordinating other figures to his making, but by crediting the expansive, mysterious natural world with his creation:

> OUT of the rocked cradle,
> Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
> Out of the boy's mother's womb, and from the nipples
>   of her breasts,
> Out of the Ninth Month midnight,
> . . . .
> From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
> From your memories, sad brother—from the fitful
>   risings and fallings I heard,
> . . . .
> I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and here-
>   after,
> Taking all hints to use them—but swiftly leaping
>   beyond them,
> A reminiscence sing. ("Word" 269)[4]

"Out" of and "from" these situations, the "I" emerges to sing his own memory. These individual phrases accumulate to build the figure rather than reflecting him back to himself. Instead of a "you" whose presence is subordinated to justify the existence of "I," Whitman creates an "I" based on hypotaxis. Each of the subordinate clauses in this long periodic sentence rely on the resolution and structure provided by the pronoun "I." While dependent, these phrases have equal weight in relation to each other, demonstrating the

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adjacency of Whitman's authority and democracy: the equality of the syntax is made possible through a central authoritative "I."

This section, titled "Pre-Verse" in the *The New York Saturday Press* in 1859, is separated from the rest of the poem by a gap and a small dash. While this subtitle is dropped in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in both 1859 and 1860 this section remains typographically divided from the rest of the poem by a break. The next section, titled "Reminiscence" in 1859 and 1860, begins to number the stanzas, from one to thirty-four, but this opening section has no number until 1867. Whitman isolates this opening to introduce and establish the poetic "I" who retells this story. He uses a unique form of address in the "Pre-Verse" because, as the rest of the poem illustrates, he has overcome the diminishing self-constitution of the Eolian harp and the isolating self-constitution of the nightingale. The Poet of the "Pre-Verse" communicates his self through an equalizing syntactical union. The birth of this Poet, however, requires a return to Romantic conventions in the rest of the poem.

In the "Reminiscence," Whitman revises Romantic address, encompassing all natural voices instead of being possessed by or constituted through them. Whitman layers the tropes of the bird and the harp densely against each other until this innovative "I" breaks through in its clarity. The "Reminiscence" introduces these tropes in its first stanza, describing the "he-bird," "she-bird," and the young Poet "absorbing, translating" ("Word" 270). Shifting from Shelley's nightingale to the mockingbird, Whitman emphasizes the isolation associated with the trope. Overhearing his song, the speaker describes the "he-bird" as "the solitary guest from Alabama" and "the lone singer"

("Word" 271). However this bird, the image that typically represents the isolated poetic

speaker, comes to possess the poem's speaker:

> 8 He called on his mate,
> He poured forth the meanings which I, of all men,
>   know.
>
> 9 Yes, my brother, I know,
> The rest might not—but I have treasured every note,
> . . . .
> 10 Listened, to keep, to sing—now translating the
>   notes,
> Following you, my brother. ("Word" 271-272)

The speaker describes his possession, and in alternating, italicized stanzas, continuing

until stanza 28, the bird's song speaks through him. Yet these seventeen stanzas of

ventriloquized bird-song repeat Romantic apostrophes, calling on the sun, the land, the

stars, the night, among other natural objects. Thus Whitman confuses and conflates the

conventions of Romantic address: the speaker overhears an isolated bird, the speaker is

possessed by that bird and translates his song, and within that song the bird apostrophizes

nature. Who is created; who is diminished? The confusion allows Whitman's Poet to

emerge. His retelling conflates the bird and the harp, isolation and possession, in order to

position himself as a Poet who contains and resonates all modes of address. Whitman

describes nature becoming a Poet and the Poet possessing nature; yet this becoming

occurs through his singular voice. His innovative Poetic speaker collapses and expands

Romantic conventions to encompass all speakers, possessors, and apostrophes in a new,

unifying "I."

By stanza 28, the bird's song ends, "The aria sinking, / All else continuing"

("Word" 275). Following the bird's song it would appear that all poetic presences have

been equalized; the bird, the boy, and a third presence, the sea, characterized as "fierce

old mother," unite in "the colloquy there—the trio." What emerges from this apparent

union, however, is Whitman's own poetic voice. Having contained the bird's song and

the old mother's "incessant[]" moans and cries, the poetic voice emerges to name itself

the "outsetting bard of love" ("Word" 275). Whitman repurposes Romantic conventions

when he describes the moment of poetic awakening:

> 29. Bird! (then said the boy's Soul,)
> Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it
>   mostly to me?
> For I that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping,
> Now that I have heard you,
> Now in a moment I know what I am for—I awake,
> And already a thousand singers—a thousand songs,
>   clearer, louder, more sorrowful than yours,
> A thousand warbling echoes have started to life
>   within me,
> Never to die. ("Word" 275-276)

The he-bird possesses the boy, awakening his own poetic powers, and the boy thus

transmits its song among a thousand others. Instead of becoming a passive instrument for

natural voices, he apostrophizes this possessor—"Bird!"—and incorporates him into his

own subjectivity. In a reversal of the Eolian fiction, in which possession indicated

submission, the speaker's ability to attract these possessors asserts his self. He declares

himself populated with "a thousand songs," and this possession indicates his poetic

autonomy, strengthening the "I" rather than diminishing it. The moment of the Poet's

awakening relies on a conflation of possession and self-enclosure: the apostrophe to that

which possesses the boy results in self-possession, allowing him to expand "I" to channel

not just one voice but thousands.

Having established the poetic "I" and the birth of the Poet, Whitman begins the

next stanza with emphatic, repetitive apostrophes. Because the Romantic apostrophe

enforces the constitution of the singular poetic speaker, it would make sense for Whitman to assert the birth of his Poet and fortify him through the enclosure of apostrophe. These apostrophes, however, address the possessing force and the speaker himself, continuing to confuse the distinction between Eolian population and apostrophic isolation:

> 30. O throes!
> O you demon, singing by yourself—projecting me,
> O solitary me, listening—never more shall I cease
>   imitating, perpetuating you,
> Never more shall I escape,
> Never more shall the reverberations,
> Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent
>   from me,
> Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was
>   before what there, in the night,
> By the sea, under the yellow and sagging moon,
> The dusky demon aroused—the fire, the sweet hell
>   within,
> The unknown want, the destiny of me. ("Word" 276)

Later editions of *Leaves of Grass* remove the apostrophes in this section; by 1867 Whitman eliminates the line "O throes!" and replaces "demon" with "singer." "Demon" here may indicate an evil fiend, but the word also implies the sense in which a demon is a possessing, indwelling spirit. While Whitman might call this bird a demon, he again uses apostrophe to address that which possesses him, conflating apostrophe and possession in order to assert a self-possessed "I." The speaker is "projected," apostrophized by his possessor, and in turn the speaker apostrophizes his possessor, doubling the self-constitution of Romantic apostrophe. Indeed, his repetition of "never" becomes not a negation but an assertion of his self.[5] The next line takes these conventions to their breaking point by introducing an innovative "I." Whitman's remarkable apostrophe to himself, "O solitary me," identifies him as both speaker and overhearer, while "never more shall I cease imitating, perpetuating you," identifies him as the possessed and

possessing. Whitman has expanded address to act as both harp and bird, carving out a new "destiny" for "me," or the Poetic "I." While the harp's possession would appear to diminish the speaker, and the self-enclosure of the bird would appear to shut out any possibility of poetic union, Whitman conflates the two to create an "I" that is both self-possessed and capable of containing and connecting multiple voices.

In the next stanza Whitman continues to intensify apostrophe but shifts the focus from that which is "projecting me" to the voices that the boy discovers he is capable of projecting. The recognition of this capacity marks the shift of poetic address from nature to people, accomplished through apostrophes that push beyond mere self-constitution to self-expansion. Section 31 repeats Romantic apostrophe to the point that its "O" nearly loses meaning:

> 31. O give me some clew!
> O if I am to have so much, let me have more!
> O a word! O what is my destination?
> O I fear it is henceforth chaos!
> O how joys, dreads, convolutions, human shapes, and
>   all shapes, spring as from graves around me!
> O phantoms! you cover all the land, and all the sea!
> O I cannot see in the dimness whether you smile or
>   frown upon me;
> O vapor, a look, a word! O well-beloved!
> O you dear women's and men's phantoms! ("Word" 276)

By the 1881-82 edition, this section contains only two apostrophes: "O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,) / O if I am to have so much, let me have more!" Their proliferation in the 1860 version emphasizes the incorporation of human forms in Whitman's poetic address. Whitman begins with exclamations concerning disorientation, ending with his situation amidst women and men. The apostrophe no longer only constitutes the self in relation to a single natural object but constitutes the self in relation

to all things, "human shapes, and all shapes." Because these figures are visible and audible, they may be addressed, accomplished through the apostrophes in this stanza. Now that the world is available to be addressed, it is available to be encompassed by Whitman's voice, his "I" extended to unify all. As we saw in the stanza above, "never more shall the reverberations" cease through him; thus all will be sounded through his expanded and expansive "I."

"A Word Out of the Sea" charts the movement from Whitman's possession by other voices to his self-possession, from a singular voice speaking through him to his ability to register and speak for multiple voices. The newfound ability to give voice to all voices that is this poem's culmination indicates a new kind of Poet, one who is self-possessed when he is possessed and who opens up when he apostrophizes others. "I" does not become a solitary, solipsistic figure; rather "I" embodies other voices and registers the silent ones. Whitman creates this "I" for the benefit of those who hear or read his voice; Whitman's "I" intends to reach out to and join together all those "you's" who exist in a divided nation. While "A Word Out of the Sea" shifted address from nature to people, the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* explores the import of that shift by concentrating on "you," the addressee. I move backwards, from 1860 to 1855, because the instances exemplifying Whitman's innovative Romantic address are not necessarily chronological. These discrete moments in his early works best illustrate where he specifically conflates Romantic tropes and expands the positions of "I" and "you." Let us now examine how Whitman's innovate "I" directly addresses "you" in order to teach her to become a Poet-President, because as such, she can join Whitman as an equal in his poetic union.

The 1855 *Leaves of Grass* renovates and reaches out to "you" in order to make the addressee more than a speaker-constituting apostrophe or the natural force possessing the poet. The work's opening poem might suggest otherwise, however, with its focus on Whitman as the singular Poet. While it had no title in 1855, the poem becomes "Poem of Walt Whitman, An American" in 1856, then simply "Walt Whitman" in 1860 and "Song of Myself" in 1881. As these titles indicate, the focus on Whitman serves to position him as the representative man; in other words, a poem about Whitman is really a poem about us. Indeed, Whitman asserts this in his preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, adjusting the Romantic role of the Poet across time and place: "the American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people" (iv). While Whitman may emphasize his poetic prowess and exceptionality, he does so to assert and enforce the equality and fraternity that exists among all people. The poet "is the equalizer of his age and land," and it is through his position as a Poet that Whitman is able to address and join "you" in a new union (*Leaves* iv).

Through the focus on himself, the opening poem of *Leaves of Grass* exemplifies how Whitman revises Romantic understandings of "you" as an addressee and apostrophe. While "A Word Out of the Sea" offered an explanation of Whitman's poetic awakening, the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* instructs "you" on how to achieve poetic awakening. Whitman teaches "you" how to become his "I," making his addressees his poetic equals. Whitman wants all his readers to become Poets, bardic seers who can see, understand, and articulate anew in order to fulfill his democratic project. Whitman must reconceive "you" in the same way he reconceived the Romantic "I." Once he teaches all these voices to become Poets like himself, all may be joined in one poetic union. Whitman's "I" may

create a poetic union of all voices through his own voice, but as the great equalizer, Whitman must provide some guidance to "you" on how to "stand by my side and look in the mirror with me" (*Leaves* vii). No longer an address deflected through nature, nor an object that reflects the speaker, Whitman demonstrates that "you" can become his "I"; through Whitman's voice "you" may address and possess nature, "you" may register and sound other voices, and thus "you" may join Whitman's voice in poetic unison. His "I" will only be complete when "you" stands beside him as poetic equal; hence "you" is not to be subordinated but incorporated.

The 1855 *Leaves of Grass* opens by reveling in the self-constitution and directness of the renovated Romantic address; Whitman jubilantly encourages us to join him, celebrating the equality inherent in each self:

> I CELEBRATE myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (*Leaves* 13)

Whitman begins by breaking the self-enclosure of the poem and the fantasy of its indifference to the reader. Rather than giving the "you" "the privileged intimacy of a voyeur," Whitman changes the terms of this relationship by making it more equitable (Larson *Drama* 5). "You" is seized and appropriated into the making of one vast poetic union through the power of Whitman's poetic voice. Larson explains that "by placing his auditors at the center stage of his verse, Whitman hopes to bring forward and actualize the movement from isolated individuality ('the simple, separate person') to affirmed unanimity ('the word Democratic, the word En-Masse') captured within the 'common ground' of the poem itself'" (*Drama* 6). The use of "assume," whose Latin root *sumere* means to take into oneself or usurp, demonstrates the sense in which this poem adopts

"you" and incorporates its presence into Whitman's voice. Now that he has adopted

"you," Whitman needs to educate his interlocutor on how to become a Poet and a self-

sufficient part of his universe. A few stanzas into the poem, Whitman lists the actions that

"you shall" perform in order to "reckon the earth" and "get at the meaning of poems," in

other words, the abilities "you" needs in order to understand the vast connectedness of his

poetic union:

> Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
> You shall possess the good of the earth and sun . . . . there are millions of suns
>   left,
> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand . . . . nor look through the
>   eyes of the dead . . . . nor feed on the spectres in books,
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself. (*Leaves* 14)

The use of "shall" in the second person makes each clause a decree, a new rule for living

that overlooks the will of the subject. However, Whitman deflates his prescriptive tone

through a loose syntactical structure whose paratactical clauses model Whitman's vision

of equality. Romantic poetic possession returns here, but renovated so that Whitman

makes "you" the possessor rather than the possessed. Whereas nature's possession of the

Poet's voice generated the poem, now the Poet's possession of nature, "the earth and the

sun," is "the origin of all poems." Moving from personal poetic awakening to awakening

the personal poetry of others, Whitman teaches us in this poem how to be a "you" that is

neither apostrophized nor possessed. By becoming the Poet, "you" will create her own

address, and hence her own self.

After directly addressing "you" to teach her how to enter into his poetic union,

Whitman moves his focus to himself as an example to invoke and inform the reader.

Whitman later names himself in the poem, not to set himself apart or as a solipsistic

doubling, but to assert his equality and solidarity with the interlocutor:

> Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
> Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . . eating drinking and breeding,
> No sentimentalist . . . . no stander above men and women or apart from them . . . .
>   no more modest than immodest. (*Leaves* 29)

Whether this confession of fleshiness and sensuality is intriguing or revolting, Whitman

transforms exposure into equality. He plays on the form of "modest," demonstrating that

despite the "im-" prefix, these words are more synonyms than antonyms. Immodesty

makes one modest; all are joined in their common fleshiness. Because exposure

constitutes equality, he insists upon openness, indeed, getting rid of locks and doors. And

yet in this open world of the poem, all returns "at last to me":

> Unscrew the locks from the doors!
> Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!
>
> Whoever degrades another degrades me . . . . and whatever is done or said returns
>   at last to me,
> And whatever I do or say I also return.
>
> Through me the afflatus surging and surging . . . . through me the current and
>   index.
>
> I speak the password primeval . . . . I give the sign of democracy;
> By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the
>   same terms. (*Leaves* 29)

Proclaiming his solidarity with "another" and insisting that he shares the "counterpart" of

all personal and impersonal actions, Whitman appears to mimic Romantic address,

invoking his "you" by ignoring her. However, Larson explains that "in Mill's fictive

contract," "the supposed banishment of the reader from the poet's consciousness here

serves in fact to extend a tacit invitation to that reader . . . Access is predicated upon

exclusion" (*Drama* 4). "You" is incorporated whether she is acknowledged or not. These

lines set up "counterpart[s]"—cycle and terminus, afflatus and speech, and implicitly, "I"

and "you." Rather than existing as discrete concepts, Whitman hosts them in himself,

modeling their simultaneous individuality and connection. The sense of return and

circularity makes Whitman the medium that everything passes through and lives within;

he sacrifices his self to turn the "one" into his "kosmos," his "I" into the interlocutor's

"you."

  This poem moves from address to inclusion, that is, from the address of "you" as

a separate presence to "you"'s incorporation into Whitman's all-encompassing voice.

Whitman has sacrificed his individuality to encompass multitudes while encouraging and

equipping "you" to join his union by becoming her own Poet. He has equipped "you"

with the ability to speak through his poetic voice, but, rather than allowing these voices to

simply speak on their own, Whitman must speak *for* them. Whitman's interaction with

"you," speaking to her and for her, comes off, in the words of Adela Pinch, as

"impossibly, embarrassingly bossy" (91).[6] Despite Whitman's efforts to open himself to

"you" in order to create equality, his poetic practice creates inequality because speaking

for "you" is a form of oppression. Pinch points out that "once a poem stages an address to

an actually existing person, that empirical person becomes virtualized – a 'compost of

Nullity' if not of Dullity –, part of the fictive fabric of the poem" (93). "You" may not be

consumed by the constitution of "I," but "you" becomes part of the "I's" fictional world.

In other words, if Whitman addresses us, then we are conscripted into his vision of a

universe. This address attenuates our autonomy rather than upholding and encouraging it,

inasmuch as we speak through him and not for ourselves. Despite efforts to constitute a

"you" who exists as Whitman's equal, the autocratic act of addressing and speaking for

"you" incorporates it into a nation of Whitman's making. While Whitman teaches us in this poem how to be a "you" who is neither apostrophized nor possessed, "you"'s autonomy is dependent on Whitman's authority. Whitman's "bossiness" is the only way he can ensure union, however; he may guarantee communion when he controls its creation. While this uniform absorption would appear a form of union, it lacks consensus and institutes hierarchy: Whitman is placed above and apart as the singular voice, vision, and being.

Whitman may conflate and expand the parameters of Romantic address, and he may try to teach "you" how to be her own Poet, but in the effort to constitute a democratic union peopled with communicative Poets, he inevitably constitutes and privileges himself as the Poet President. We have reached the problem of Whitman's revised Romantic address: Whitman may create a poetic union, but it does not achieve equality. All voices may deserve to be heard, but their sounding occurs *through* Whitman, and as a result, they emerge transformed:

> Through me many long dumb voices,
> Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
> Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
> Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs,
> Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
> And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff,
> And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
> Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,
> Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung.
>
> Through me forbidden voices,
> Voices of sexes and lusts . . . . voices veiled, and I remove the veil,
> Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured. (*Leaves* 29)

Rather than the birds, winds, and natural objects of Romantic address, Whitman becomes the mediating force through which poetic selves are constituted. The loose structure of

this sentence emphasizes the autonomy of each phrase and each voice, outcasts that for "generations" have not had a social voice. But anaphora reduces individuality and turns the voices into repetitions, items in a list; the establishing phrase, "through me," syntactically carries them back to Whitman as originator. Herein lies the problem of Whitman's leveling or tallying; he achieves equality and individuality by constituting all people through himself. Whitman makes himself the ubiquitous material of his poetic universe. Although this list originates in Whitman, he tries to minimize the appearance of his authority by avoiding a main clause that also concludes in him, but the echo of "through me" maintains his authority throughout the list. While he highlights their existence, indicating that these are people and things worthy of speaking, he may only call attention to them by submitting them to his bardic voice. Whitman sounds these voices through himself and with some editorial power; he takes it upon himself to "clarif[y] and transfigur[e]" in order to reveal their equality. This unveiling returns us to the significance of this section, which combines Whitman's stated name and the nameless figures, his speech and the "dumb" voices: Whitman cannot assert equality without at the same time setting himself apart.

This poem concludes with Whitman returning to "you," his readers. Having tried to expand his "I" to encompass all people within it, "I" appears to have reached its expansive breaking point, disintegrating into disembodied components. Whitman has been divvied up into the world, available to us in equal parts. His breakdown leaves us disoriented, yet reorientation and reconstitution serves to circumscribe us firmly within the world of Whitman's making:

> I depart as air . . . . I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
> I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.

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> I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.
>
> You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fibre your blood.
>
> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another,
> I stop some where waiting for you (*Leaves* 56)

These ending stanzas provide further instructions or guidance from the Poet to his readers. "You" "fail[s]" and "misse[s]," implying that we need Whitman's guidance. Interestingly, Whitman increases his presence by describing its loss; we will not know what he is, what he means, or where to find him, but this is the best evidence of his being. "You" cannot seek out Whitman because he is ubiquitous; he is even in our blood. Indeed, the last line is missing a period; the poem never properly ends and Whitman never finishes talking. We are unified in a vast and democratic union, but Whitman places us in a nation of his making. He may sacrifice his body to host a nation, but we sacrifice our autonomy to his poetic authority. This experience comes to seem rather enclosed because it reveals its limitations—it is circumscribed by Whitman. The body of Whitman becomes a paradoxical figure: to embrace multitudes, it serves as a figure of enclosure.

Robinson and Whitmanian Address

Until now I have discussed address, and how Whitman receives and revises Romantic practices to create a Poet able to unify antebellum America with his authoritative and democratic powers. I would like to further extend the trajectory by tracing Romantic address through the end of the nineteenth century in the poetry of

Robinson. His poetry seems the precise opposite of Whitman's, but as Alan Trachtenberg explains:

> If Whitman is a poet of 'Myself,' Robinson just as surely is a poet of many selves and many stories, stories of selves, or 'others,' witnessed from without. It's of the witnessing and often the judging of lost souls and failed provincial lives that Robinson makes his best poems, foregrounding the act of storytelling within the story itself. Whitman sings; Robinson tells. 275

When read not as a negation or extension of Whitman's example, but a condensation of Whitman's practices, we will see that Whitman and Robinson both employ Romantic address for the same goal of consensus and unity. Robinson read and at some point revered Whitman, including the poem "Walt Whitman," in his first and second collections of poems. According to Trachtenberg, years after writing "Walt Whitman," Robinson explained "I was very young when I wrote it, but I knew all the time I was writing that I didn't really mean it" (qtd. in Trachtenberg 273). The fact that he does not choose "Walt Whitman" when he puts together his Pulitzer-Prize winning *Collected Poems* (1921) suggests that Whitman may have occupied a central place in his consciousness—a place he did not want to inhabit, a model he did not want to acknowledge. Despite this exclusion, Whitman's example makes its mark on Robinson's poetry, albeit in the reverse of Whitman's expansiveness. Trachtenberg notes an aversion in Robinson, but does not realize that antipathy may be based on a shared poetic promise. Robinson's poetry can be seen as attempting to solve a problem recognized in Whitman, one of democratic community and communication.

While Trachtenberg argues that "between Whitman's songs of the unfolding of selfhood and Robinson's finely tempered investigations of point of view and tonal irony there lies little common ground," I will demonstrate that there is quite a bit of common

ground between the two poets (275). Robinson posits a different solution to a shared problem. His poems may not appear to resemble Whitman's, but his poetic impulse is the same; his works are an inversion or negative image of Whitman's poetic practice but not his influence. Indeed, Robinson would disavow Whitman because Whitman's poetry fails to achieve the communion that they both strive for. They experience the same problem in different historical conditions. While Whitman experienced the dissolution of the union and conflicts of the Civil War, Robinson experienced dissolution of his family and the conflicts of modernity. Scott Donaldson explains "during the terrible decade from 1888 to 1898—as Win Robinson grew from an inexperienced youth to a mature man of nearly thirty—his family collapsed around him in a series of terrible misfortunes" (59). Within seven years, Robinson's father and mother died (his mother devastatingly of diphtheria—no one but her sons would bury her); his oldest brother, who Robinson adored, became a drug addict and then died of an overdose; his other brother married the woman Robinson loved, then squandered family fortune in the depression of 1893, died of alcoholism, and left the family destitute (Donaldson 59-72). As his family fell apart, Robinson's poetry attempted to represent and rebuild those lost bonds. The inequalities of financial crisis, illness, and love inflected his works. Robinson's life reveals these impressions in his famous self-depreciation and solitude.[7] Robinson recognized in Whitman a poet who exposed a similar loss and desire, expanded to the national scale.

Robinson was well known and critically lauded for his long Arthurian narratives in the early twentieth century, as well as his shorter poems, many of which are character studies, eponymous pieces about a person or the poetic expression of that person. As such, they do not figure a strong Poet. While Whitman makes his Poet representative of

"the commonwealth," Robinson moves in the opposite direction, creating poetic figures whose "I" does not presume to represent all people. Robinson's works constitute a sort of "bad" Poet who represents his own limited and idiosyncratic viewpoint. He presents the "partial men" Emerson warned against, characters with limitations who discuss the limitations of others. Reading Robinson's limited men as, indeed, limited charts another historical development of Romantic address at the turn of the century. Robinson takes on Whitman's expanded address by condensing and confining the power of "I." In doing so, Robinson confronts the problems of Whitmanian address. In a severe attempt to avoid imposing upon "you," Robinson all but banishes the personal pronoun from his poems so that the "I" may not speak for it. While Whitman created unity by expanding his "I" to incorporate the addressee into his poetic voice, Robinson understands that while the poem is directed toward a "you," it need not directly addresses "you" to constitute connection. Robinson does not resurrect Mill's strategy of ignoring the reader to draw her closer, however; instead Robinson uses the absence of "you" to create union. To name "you" is always to distance her by acknowledging that she is separate from the "I"; to name "you" is always to consume or lose her to the constitution of the "I." Robinson avoids "you" so that there are no distinctions or barriers between the participants in poetic address, an act that reflects back on Whitman's practice. But because Robinson recognized the limitations of Whitmanian address, he radically reverses the assurance associated with the Poet. Robinson acknowledges the possibility that the Poet may fail: we may not hear him or understand him. Through this possibility Robinson offers the prospect of poetic union. The potential for failure voids the autocratic assumption and

assertion of the Poet. Robinson will ultimately prove that "we" can fulfill Whitman's promise, but only in the face of his perceived failure.

Whereas Whitman conflated and contained the bird and the harp, Robinson represents the failure of both modes of address to create democratic union. Robinson reiterates Whitman's harp; his Poet registers multiple voices but stops them from speaking through him. Withholding these voices would appear to de-populate Whitman's expansive renovation of Romantic address and constitute the ultimate act of Poetic autocracy. Robinson limits the voice of Whitman's Eolian Poet, however, in order to ensure that the Poet never speaks for anyone else. While these voices exist mutely, they may exist autonomously, able to join with the Poet without being circumscribed by him. The possessed speaker sacrifices his self to host these other voices; Robinson recognizes that the Poet must become strange to himself, give up part of himself in order to ensure equality and unity. In addition, Robinson condenses Whitman's expanded bird to create more democratic possibilities for Romantic address. While the bird's song to itself rendered all address and apostrophe into the solitary and solipsistic "I," Whitman expanded "I" to include and incorporate "you" by directly addressing and speaking for it. While union was created, equality was barred as the Poet set himself apart. Robinson's poetry illustrates the dangers of speaking for "you." His speaker does not address its interlocutor, but draws her in by believing in, not ignoring, the person out there listening. His poetic speakers understand that they are talking to "you," another person, not to nature or themselves. Doing so allows us to draw closer of our own accord, instead of demanding or assuming it.

To illustrate Robinson's revision of Whitman's address, I will examine two poems that concern the tropes of the harp and the bird, beginning with the birth of the Poetic "I" and the trope of the harp in his poem "John Evereldown." In "A Word Out of the Sea," the boy's possession gave birth to his self-possession and connection to all people; in "John Evereldown," Robinson demonstrates that possession may create self-estrangement and disconnection from others. As the possessed speaker, John does not directly address his possessor or allow the possessor to speak through him. Robinson pushes possession to a different possibility in which the speaker talks *about* the possessor instead of speaking *to* the possessor. This shift condenses Whitman's expanded address because the speaker is de-populated and even made strange by naming and thus distancing the possessed part of himself. But this reduction serves to expand the democratic possibilities of the poem's address. As John becomes increasingly estranged from himself and others, his ability to become an autocratic Poet diminishes. While John may not be able to speak directly to others or create union through his poetic voice, he sacrifices his autonomy to allow other voices to exist. Like the Poet's sacrifice in Eolian poetics, John sacrifices communication and connection so that other voices may not be spoken for, so they may continue to exist in possibility. While "A Word Out of the Sea" depicted the "I's" perfect communication and self-expansion, "John Evereldown" depicts the speaker's miscommunication and self-delusion. Robinson illustrates how poetic failure, or the work of the bad Poet, may actually create uncoerced, democratic consensus and community; he risks failure in the spirit of Whitman's poetic unity.

Compared to "A Word Out of the Sea," "John Evereldown" depicts a bizarre poetic awakening that could also be understood as insanity. John registers other voices,

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but he does not address them back. Meanwhile this poem features a second speaker who addresses John, asking him questions that John does not adequately answer. The back-and-forth question and answer places the poem in a ballad tradition, and "John Evereldown" echoes the popular "Edward" ballad from the popular Child collection.[8] While the traditional ballad "Edward" repeats the names "Edward, Edward" and "mither, mither," and places the exchange between Edward and his mother within the same stanza, Robinson employs the longer name "John Evereldown" and separates the back-and-forth conversation into discrete stanzas. In the same way that "Edward" "linger[s]" through "repeated questions, repeated answers," and "redundancy in the mother's speech," Robinson's poem extends the action, repeating questions, answers, and names (Stewart "Possession" 42). Even the name "John Evereldown" possesses the residues of "Edward" in the soft "e" and hard "d" of "Evereldown." Robinson's engagement with this ballad demonstrates how he diminishes the autocratic power and presence of the Poet. The ballad tradition removes the Poet's authorial presence by permitting its speaker to reveal interiority without the attendant poetic self-making or self-extension. MacEdward Leach, in *The Ballad Book* (1955), argues "an impersonal kind of *I*" speaks in the ballad (8). Leach calls the form "objective; the action is allowed to unfold of itself, without comment or expressed emotion of the author" (7). The ballad effaces the authority of the Poet, allowing the "I" to channel other voices that do not contribute to the constitution of selfhood but the constitution of community. Michael Cohen explains that "the socio-political value of ballads derived from their association with the idealized oral cultures of imagined folk communities," and Susan Stewart argues that "of all the singers of Western lyric, the ballad singer is the one most radically haunted by others, for he or she presents

the gestures, the symptoms, of a range of social actors" (Cohen "Whittier" 4) (Stewart "Possession" 41). Hence Robinson engages the form because it was both haunted by a community and independent of the power of the Poet to create that community. Robinson's own "possession" by the ballad tradition strives to achieve the same consensus that Whitman desired.

"John Evereldown" is likewise possessed or haunted by Whitman's "A Word Out of the Sea." It begins with a pair of dactyls, and this triple meter recurs throughout the poem. Like Whitman's use of present participle verbs, Robinson begins this poem with the repetition of John's "going" and "pointing" in a strange direction.[9] Robinson replays Whitman's poetic birth through John, who is possessed by the voices of others:

> "WHERE are you going to-night, to-night,—
> Where are you going, John Evereldown?
> There's never the sign of a star in sight,
> Nor a lamp that's nearer than Tilbury Town.
> Why do you stare as a dead man might?
> Where are you pointing away from the light?
> And where are you going to-night, to-night,—
> Where are you going, John Evereldown?"
>
> "Right through the forest, where none can see,
> There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town.
> The men are asleep,—or awake, may be,—
> But the women are calling John Evereldown.
> Ever and ever they call for me,
> And while they call can a man be free?
> So right through the forest, where none can see,
> There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town." (*Collected* 1-16)

John does not speak back to the voices that speak to him, nor does he translate their song for the benefit of his interlocutor. John instead demonstrates where possession goes mute. Instead of possessing the possessor through direct address, John does not make them a part of his being. He lets other voices exist outside his self; John is incapable of

apostrophe. Robinson thus sets severe limits on the poetic speaker, but these limits should not be mistaken for Romantic self-enclosure. Whereas Whitman depicted the self-possession and expansion of "I" due to its ability to register and channel other voices, no voice actually speaks through Robinson's possessed speaker. Instead, he speaks *about* these other voices, removing the autocratic authorial function of the Poet. While "I" remains capable of being possessed, it is no longer capable of speaking for or being spoken through. This may diminish the communicative ability of Eolian address as demonstrated in this poem, but a more limited "I" maintains the potential union foreclosed by Whitman's autocratic poet.

Robinson pushes against the Poet who creates nations; instead "John Evereldown" creates neighborhoods. The figure of John is contingent on a human relationship that emerges from the first speaker. Because they address each other, they recognize and register each other; the address of the other constitutes their poetic being. Whereas Whitmanian address constitutes the "I" through direct address and incorporation of those possessors into the self, Robinson's poetic speakers emerge from recognition, not consumption—not a taking in or talking through, but a recognition of and talking to. William Waters explains:

> Every coherent utterance aligns itself to, is coherent with respect to, some conception of its intelligibility, and intelligibility means uptake, receivability. Even self-address is modeled, as the term itself shows, on address in the more general sense . . . [address] is the fiber of language's use and being, inseparable from every word in every sentence. 5

Robinson revises the self-making of Whitman's address; John and the unnamed speaker both rely on each other's presence to constitute their own. Rather than "you" possessing "I" or "I" possessing and upholding "you," Robinson demonstrates that all poetic

presences have a turn to be "I," and that "I" only exists with the participation of another. John's recognition of the women extends this example to include all the voices that do not get a chance to speak. He believes in them, and in registering their voices, he gives them a chance to speak back. In this way, Robinson's speakers imply their interlocutor. While it is explicit in this poem that the speakers address each other, other poems exist because they believe in "uptake, receivability" by another without having or name her or channel her voice.

Despite this connection between John, his neighbor, and the women, Robinson does not depict a perfect union in this poem. Unlike Whitman's nations, Robinson's neighborhoods appear to create relationships of disconnect and disbelief. This relationship between John and the other speaker is problematic; meanwhile John heeds a bond that could be a total fantasy. Yet, undeterred by its strained and strange relationships, "John Evereldown" rearticulates a Whitmanian longing for connection. This poem depicts the call to community, the desire to be desired. John wants to go to those who want him; he is called and he wants to respond:

> "But why are you going so late, so late,—
> Why are you going, John Evereldown?
> Though the road be smooth and the way be straight,
> There are two long leagues to Tilbury Town.
> Come in by the fire, old man, and wait!
> Why do you chatter out there by the gate?
> And why are you going so late, so late,—
> Why are you going, John Evereldown?"
>
> "I follow the women wherever they call,—
> That's why I'm going to Tilbury Town.
> God knows if I pray to be done with it all,
> But God is no friend to John Evereldown.
> So the clouds may come and the rain may fall,
> The shadows may creep and the dead men crawl,—
> But I follow the women wherever they call,

And that's why I'm going to Tilbury Town." (*Collected* 17-32)

The first speaker continues to pepper John with questions and John does not notice, or if he does notice, he ignores the tone of concern (and irritation). Instead, John heeds an urge that is most likely a total fantasy. Proximity does not create intimacy between John and his neighbor; John's loyalty to the distant women grows stronger over the course of the conversation as he describes his strange burden. The very human connections that poetry tries to revive are inadvertently overlooked due to an absorbing and obscuring "call." The possessed, poetic "I" is not the vehicle of perfect communication; in fact "I" holds the potential to be misunderstood, to miss its mark. But this failure creates a different kind of communicative and communal space for John. John is not representative, and because he fails to express or represent ideas or feelings that others can easily understand, he leaves open the space for other voices, other selves to exist. His failure to communicate ensures that he cannot speak for anyone. John may not be teaching others through his example; nevertheless he reflects the desire for community.

Despite this desire, Robinson recognizes that unity does not necessarily constitute democracy. While "John Evereldown" depicts fragmented people and the longing for community, the poem "Richard Cory" demonstrates that community may not entail the democracy and equality promised in Whitmanian poetics. This poem rearticulates the trope of the bird, as Robinson warns that a union may constitute and enclose itself at the expense of others. In this poem, a poetic speaker refers to itself as "we" and represents the voices of a community. "We" discusses the one, Richard Cory, for the benefit of an unnamed, rather than ignored, interlocutor. In other words, Robinson reimagines Whitman's expansion of the bird trope, exchanging Whitman's unified "me" for "we."

"We" promises the unified voice of many, but, like the solitary bird, this voice speaks to constitute itself. The many may join together because they address a single other, creating a circumscribed, exclusionary speaker. While Whitman speaks for "you" in *Leaves of Grass* in order to join it with his "I," Robinson shifts these pronouns in "Richard Cory" so that "we" speaks for "he," demonstrating that the subject of the poetic address—be it "you" or "he"—nevertheless exists to constitute the speaker. "We" and "he" show that the ideal unity of Whitman's "I" and "you" may still result in bird-like self-enclosure and exclusion.

"We" presumes to speak for others, but in the process demonstrates the destructive bossiness of assumption. In the poem's opening stanzas, Robinson blurs the line between Whitman's all-knowing, ideal Poet and the everyday, neighborhood gossip:

> Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
> We people on the pavement looked at him:
> He was a gentleman from soul to crown,
> Clean favored, and imperially slim. (*Collected* 1-4)

Paronomasia in this stanza—"crown" and "imperially," and the sonic similarity between "soul" and sole—intensifies Cory's nobility, in contrast to "Walt Whitman's" immodesty in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's coarseness and his professed impatience for hierarchy ("By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms") were meant to assert his equality in order to foster unity with readers (*Leaves* 29). "Richard Cory" fosters community in the same way: "we people" are equal, (im)modest, and join together in their common awe of Cory. "We people" echoes the inclusiveness of the U.S. Constitution's "we the people," but this equality only exists in relation to the excluded Cory. The creation of community occurs by setting Cory apart, and Robinson echoes Whitman's inadvertent creation of hierarchy when he sets himself apart as the

bardic seer. Robinson rearticulates Whitman's poetics in which the equality of those addressed results from the Poet's exceptional powers. "We people" may come together on equal terms only by declaring someone else unequal. The speaker may appear to praise and admire, but this stanza evinces the crowd's ability to make themselves exclusive by discussing Corey's exclusivity.

Cory's wealth and grace make him a figure of envy and admiration. By responding to the elegant Cory with awe, the community effectively objectifies him, like the bird apostrophizing to nature to constitute his self. While Whitman's "I" assumed and spoke for "you," "we" likewise assumes and speaks for "he" to further establish their identity:

> And he was always quietly arrayed,
> And he was always human when he talked;
> But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
> "Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.
>
> And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
> And admirably schooled in every grace:
> In fine, we thought that he was everything
> To make us wish that we were in his place. (*Collected* 5-12)

In their admiration of Cory, the community estranges this man rather than including him. They react but do not interact; very familiar with Cory's exterior, they know nothing of his interior. The poem's iambic pentameter and abab rhyme scheme sets up a nearly mechanical meter whose regularity and perfection parallels Cory's exhibited regularity and perfection. This mechanical indifference reflects the actions of the townspeople and their routinized conception and treatment of Cory. "We" presumes that Cory has a perfect life, that his riches and nobility are evidence of his enviable happiness. This collective

thinking demonstrates the tyranny of the mass, a reversal that speaks to Whitman's poetics. Robinson demonstrates that even the demos can act as the assumptive autocrat.

Cory is never afforded the opportunity to speak for himself; "we" speaks for Cory and this figuration possesses fatal limitations. While "we" may constitute a community by the example of Cory, Robinson's poetry teaches us that we cannot go so far as to assume to speak for another. Echoing Whitman's well-meaning act of assumption— "what I assume you shall assume"—Robinson demonstrates the dangers of assuming something about other voices or lives; assumption creates isolation, even destruction:

> So on we worked, and waited for the light,
> And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
> And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
> Went home and put a bullet through his head. (*Collected* 13-16)

Robinson tells a well-known story here; that we should not covet our neighbor's wealth because riches and social status do not bring happiness. However, poetry traditionally claims the privilege of intimacy, as demonstrated by Whitman's (im)modesty. But Robinson warns what happens when the speaker assumes intimacy, when the speaker speaks for, not to or with the figured other. This poem points out that Whitman's Poet has the potential to destroy others by speaking for them. Even with Whitman's advancements, there is something tyrannical in Romantic address. The ideal of a unified poetic speaker, represented by "we," becomes as solipsistic and autocratic as the bird who sings to herself and apostrophizes to others for her own self-creation. Through address, the speaker inevitably holds itself apart and above that which it names. Indeed, Maslan makes this point:

> . . . many individuals and groups thus achieve unity with one another not by themselves but only through Whitman's identification with all of them. And this, in turn, means that the poet is not just another of the people presented in the

passage; in his capacity to unite an otherwise heterogeneous collection of people into a tableau of the People, he is actually unique among those with whom he identifies. 113

Robinson's "we people" performs this in reverse: a "heterogeneous collection of people" become "a tableau" by singling out one other. As a result, community is created; inclusion is possible through exclusion. Hence "I" or "we" falls back into self-enclosure, repeating the circumscription of Whitman's address. "Richard Cory" deflates Whitman's extension of Romantic poetics, moving from an expansive, all-encompassing "I" who unifies itself with "you" to a self-enclosed "we" who excludes and avoids "he."

Addressing Whitman

By meditating on the problem of reception raised in "John Evereldown," Robinson reflects on problems of poetic address that Whitman never considers. What if no one hears the Poet's voice? What if we cannot comprehend what he says? How then will there be poetic unity? In "Richard Cory," Robinson approaches the problem from another position: those whom the Poet addresses and channels, those "you's" and "dumb voices" Whitman wants to incorporate into his poetic voice. Once unified, however, will they create the equality Whitman hoped to instill? While Robinson's poetry tries to uphold the promise of Whitman's example, allowing all people a chance to speak, he examines the potential for Whitman's instruction to fail. His speakers' limitations imply that Whitman's expansive "I" and "you" are not tenable at the turn of the century.

But Robinson does try to expand on the promise of Whitman's poetics instead of just revealing its problems. Whitman is Robinson's great Poet, and his poems recognize the need for a single bardic leader to create union. At the same time, Robinson attempts to revise Whitman's union in the effort to eliminate authority and make genuine

consensus possible. "Walt Whitman," the poem that Robinson rejects from his collected

works, perhaps best illustrates not just the meaning of Whitman to Robinson, but the

inheritance and reconfiguration of poetic authority and democracy through Romantic

address. The poem never directly articulates its purpose or acknowledges its subject;

instead it addresses the failed products of Whitman's poetics, those who cannot read,

hear, or understand. In other words, "Walt Whitman" begins by deflating Whitman's

heroic project:

> The master-songs are ended, and the man
> That sang them is a name. And so is God
> A name; and so is love, and life, and death,
> And everything. But we, who are too blind
> To read what we have written, or what faith
> Has written for us, do not understand:
> We only blink, and wonder. (*Torrent* 1-7)

The poem is composed of three stanzas in blank verse. The final line of each stanza

flattens the meter's association with heroism by featuring three iambs instead of five and

a leftover, weak beat. This poem, and in a sense, all of Robinson's character studies,

concern how "we" have bungled Whitman's promise. Because we did not hear or heed

his voice, we become "blind" or unperceptive.

Whitman's "I" and "you" are no longer feasible; they are too big, too open, too

generous, and too demanding. Thus, Whitman by the 1890s is "drained" (Trachtenberg

271). He is turned into a name, no different than other self-constituting forces that we

have similarly deflated: God, love, life, death. Whitman's unsustainable "afflatus" could

not keep these forces afloat and we no longer know how to read, hear, or understand

them. In other words, he no longer possesses us with his voice:

> Last night it was the song that was the man,
> But now it is the man that is the song.

> We do not hear him very much to-day:
> His piercing and eternal cadence rings
> Too pure for us --- too powerfully pure,
> Too lovingly triumphant, and too large;
> But there are some that hear him, and they know
> That he shall sing to-morrow for all men,
> And that all time shall listen. (*Torrent* 8-16)

"Last night" Whitman was a man made up of his songs; they possessed him and spoke through him. But now, in a reversal of the Eolian harp, Whitman speaks through the songs. He haunts them, possesses them: they are all that is left of him.

Whitman now speaks through his songs instead of attracting and articulating all songs, all voices through his self, yet this reversal creates a space for a more democratic address, one that does not rely on the singular, special Poet. There are "some" who are capable of hearing Whitman's voice; they are possessed with this special ability. These few register these songs, these remnants of Whitman's voice, and know what they mean for the future. Whitman will once again "sing" "for all men" because those few who hear him reconstitute his voice and his poetic possibility. "We," or at least some of us, make possible the Poet. In other words, the listener upholds the speaker; "you" must register "I" in order for "I" to exist. We must *hear* the speaker, not just be addressed by him, because otherwise he does not speak. "We" in this poem simultaneously occupies the roles of speaker and interlocutor, "I" and "you," and by making "we" listen and speak, Robinson collapses and revises the positions of poetic address.

Robinson revises address in a poem about Whitman in order to re-vision a democratic poetics. While Whitman no longer possesses us with his voice, we can act like his Eolian Poet, hearing voices and redeploying them. Many may be too blind or insensible to comprehend, but Robinson points out the important *possibility* of those who

are capable. By leaving open the possibility of those who can hear, by not apostrophizing or addressing them by type or name, Robinson gestures to the possibility of an uncoerced, unassumed consensus and resurrects Whitman as an unauthoritarian Poet. "We" does not mandate that we all hear Whitman's songs; "we" does not grasp the "some that hear him" in direct address. The poem fosters the possibility of artistic leadership where all have potential to speak and hear.

The end of the poem revises the assessment of the first stanza:

The master-songs are ended? Rather say
No songs are ended that are ever sung,
And that no names are dead names. When we write
Men's letters on proud marble or on sand,
We write them there forever. (*Torrent* 17-21)

Names are not dead and songs are not ended: nothing sung, named, or written ever really goes away. Whitman inspires in Robinson a sort of poetic faith, that despite the limitations of address, despite its great possibility for failure, consensus and connection are possible. We will still keep communicating, even when that communication seems barred or impossible. Remaining open to the residues of other voices, and acknowledging the possibility that they might go unheard and unread, Robinson revises Romantic address to eliminate its self-enclosure. For poetry at the turn of the century, address was possible only when its failure, its fading, remained a possibility.

In order to further explore this failure, the next chapter will examine how gender inflected the impossibility of the self-enclosed and self-possessed lyric subject. While Robinson revealed how lyric address could not constitute self-enclosure, Frances Sargent Osgood and Edna St. Vincent Millay revealed that this self-enclosure was always already denied to female poets across the nineteenth century. Their works in the poetess tradition

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exploited the paradox of self-enclosure in a medium that relied on address to constitute

the self.

[1]Adela Pinch explains that "overhearing, eavesdropping, and voyeurism become the conditions of confidence, and intimacy is the enemy of knowledge" (103).

[2]See Maslan, note 40, p. 194. Joan Shelley Rubin explains "In 1842, the 23-year-old Walt Whitman heard Emerson deliver the lyceum lecture on poetry that Emerson later adapted for publication as 'The Poet'" (20).

[3]See Richards "Poe's Lyrical Media," 25-26, for a brief discussion of Howard Nelson's recent essay that links this poem back to Whitman's adolescence.

[4]*Leaves of Grass* (1860). All quotations of Whitman's poetry come from the online *Walt Whitman Archive*, Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, editors. Since the archive reproduces the poems as they appeared in the print editions of Whitman's works, I will cite them as they were originally printed with page and/or stanza number, rather than line numbers.

[5]The echoes of Poe's raven should not be overlooked here. See Richards, who argues "just as the bereaved lover in 'The Raven' makes his story from the raven's nevermore, Whitman's speaker characterizes himself as a 'projection' of Poe's poem" ("Poe's Lyrical Media" 28).

[6]Pinch is not specifically referring to Whitman here, but Culler's essay "Apostrophe."

[7]In typical, self-depreciating tone, Robinson comments that "if [he] ha[s] a message":
> If it is likely to be of any great value to the race, I suppose that a part of it might be described as a faint hope of making a few of us understand our fellow creates a little better, and to realize what a small difference there is after all between ourselves as we are and ourselves not only as we might have been if our physical and temperamental make-up and out environment had been a little different.

From William Stanley Braithwaite, "America's Foremost Poet," in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 28, 1913, found in Cary 122.

[8]See Stewart, "Lyric Possession" 41-43.

[9]For more on Whitman's "-ing" endings, see Richards "Poe's Lyrical Media," 25, and Larson, *Drama*, 188.

CHAPTER 3

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY AND THE POETESS TRADITION

In the next two chapters, I move from productions of the liberal self to poets who were socially denied its status. Whereas Walt Whitman and Edwin Arlington Robinson explored lyric self-possession through the trope of Eolian poet, this chapter considers what happened when women poets took on that role. Women poets across the nineteenth century had to contend with the expectation that they were already harps that could not help but profess perfect privacy to the public. While figures such as Whitman and Robinson were socially deemed capable of self-possession and could thus employ lyric address to expand the boundaries of self-enclosure, women were not granted this same subjectivity. In fact, the very self-profession that constituted self-possession for male poets constituted dispossession and exposure for female poets, rendering their self-enclosure impossible. Just as Robinson conserved nineteenth-century poetic forms, Edna St. Vincent Millay conserved the practices of Frances Sargent Osgood's poetess poetry well into the twentieth century to reveal how the self-possession that private profession supposedly conferred was a fiction for both men and women.

It is taken for granted today that Millay's poetry detailed the sexual and social liberation of the modern woman. But why, critics ask, does she represent the emergence of modernity in such distinctly un-modern poetic forms? While the work of her female contemporaries, such as H. D. and Marianne Moore, distances itself from the nineteenth-century conventions of the genre, the majority of Millay's poetry evoked them; her work

was conservative in the sense that she conserved past traditions. A number of critics, among them Robert Johnson and Jane Stanbrough, have attempted to make sense of the apparently problematic opposition between her subversive ethos and her traditional forms. They have thus concluded that Millay exercises a healthy poetic restraint, containing modern emotional unruliness and vulnerability within self-imposed and protective formal limitations.[1] Millay's poetic self-discipline assuaged and explained the conflict between innovative content and conventional form.

I want to suggest that such an approach insists upon a conflict where none exists. Millay's conservative forms communicate rather than confine a modernist affect and intuition. She taps into a poetic tradition that has always expressed emotional insight through conservative poetic conventions. Her poetic restraint derives from her literary lineage as a practitioner of the poetess tradition, which emerged in eighteenth-century England, achieved immense popularity in the nineteenth-century United States, and persisted, as Millay demonstrates, within twentieth-century modernism. In this essay I situate Millay's early poetry collections, *Renascence and Other Poems* and *A Few Figs from Thistles*, within the tradition of antebellum American poetess poetry. In doing so, I engage many of the interpretive challenges this tradition has incurred, most notably the conflation of the woman poet with her poem.[2] The poetess was published and popular in the nineteenth century because she appeared to offer her own private thoughts to a reading public. This profession constituted both the poetess's allure and her greatest difficulty, however. Her poems had to convincingly communicate to readers the personal thoughts and feelings of a woman who was moral, sincere, and idealized. In other words, the poetess publicly performed her privacy, which ultimately rendered her consumable

and forgettable because she relinquished the interiority that would otherwise establish her as an abiding, autonomous literary figure.[3] This vexed poetess tradition inflects Millay's modernism; she redeploys the faulty expectation that women poets profess privacy in order to disrupt the ideal intimacy associated with women's poetry.

While scholars have recovered and analyzed poetess poetry from the nineteenth-century United States, the lasting influence of this poetic tradition on later works has not yet been established. It is time to start drawing lines from the nineteenth-century poetess onward. In "The Poet as Poetess," Virginia Jackson addresses the difficulty of studying this literary figure. As a "trope in a rather pure sense, as definite and slippery as a turn of phrase, the trope of the Poetess worked differently at different moments over the course of the nineteenth century" (57). In this essay I offer a historical solution to the problem that Jackson identifies: the practice of ahistorically idealizing the poetess "as a hologram of readerly desire" (Jackson "Poetess" 54). By investigating shifting notions of women's poetic privacy, I trace historical iterations of the poetess in order to draw her beyond the nineteenth-century and into the modernist period. By overtly writing within the poetess tradition, Millay, more than other comparable women modernists, made explicit the problems of private female expression in the early twentieth-century. She highlighted and reclaimed the woman poet's specific inheritance in her conservative approach to modernist quandaries. In a sense, American modernism was underpinned by the poetess's problematic privacy.[4] An awareness of people's alienation despite urban proximity and the question of personified versus objectified private emotion as a potential means of re-connection led modern poets to examine the authenticity and feasibility of interiority and to question the existence of actual privacy. By the twentieth century, the woman poet's

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problems with privacy were blended or dissolved amid the larger investigations of the movement. Where other modernists employed innovative practices to investigate the line between the inner self and external world, Millay depicted an alternative mode of modernist inquiry that engaged a tradition consumed and created by public figurations of interiority and the ideal of privacy. In a period noted for its artistic experimentation, she attested to the presence and relevance of this conservative practice. By mobilizing the poetess to confront the problem of modern selves and souls, Millay unveiled the problem that faced the woman poet: the impossible and self-diminishing practice of professing privacy.

Consider Millay's poem "The Penitent," which characterizes a freewheeling femme's failed attempt at self-revision according to traditional propriety. Here she depicts a girl seeking seclusion in order to trouble the relationship between privacy and ideal womanhood. The poem thus undercuts the ethical soul-baring associated with women's public poetry. The speaker "had a little Sorrow / Born of a little Sin," and she mandates that she, along with Sorrow and Sin, will atone for being "bad" (lines 1-2, 8). She therefore shuts herself up with them in "a room all damp with gloom" to work on "pious planning" (3, 9). But Sorrow will "not weep," Sin simply "go[es] to sleep," and the speaker cannot keep her "graceless mind" on the task of saving her "soul" (13, 14, 16, 15). In the final stanza, she surrenders to wickedness:

> So up I got in anger,
> And took a book I had,
> And put a ribbon on my hair
> To please a passing lad,
> And, "One thing there's no getting by—
> I've been a wicked girl," said I;
> "But if I can't be sorry, why,
> I might as well be glad!" (17-24)[5]

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The speaker performs the role of the poetess by professing personal conflict in terms of ideal feminine morality, which she resolves to restore in the privacy of her room. Rather than purge impropriety, this exercise renders the speaker a "wicked girl," a shifting, fickle female, as demonstrated by the tiny tantrum at the poem's end. The conflict between the speaker's inherited ideals about moral femininity—the expectation that privacy will rectify the components of her self—and the reality of her public, provocative persona cannot constitute any sustaining "soul." Such a problem of inner moral integrity emerges because the speaker, as a poetess, was always already public: She was available for and constructed according to adoring observers and readers. The speaker shows that a sincere, sustaining spirit is bound to fail when constituted by public expectations of feminine privacy and propriety.

The fantasy of women's privacy that Millay exploits in this poem has its roots in the nineteenth-century poetess. Thus, I begin this essay with a discussion of the work of Osgood, whose poetry modeled the conventions of the poetess tradition while simultaneously addressing that figure's paradoxical and problematic privacy. Her seemingly private poetry gave readers what they wanted: the pious, pure woman combined with the coy, sexy sprite. However, Osgood attested to the poetess's complete consumability; she could not establish herself as a literary presence because she had to sell or offer up her so-called spirit in order to be published. I then map Osgood's example onto twentieth-century women poets who inherited the expectation that they would profess intimacy and sincerity, examining Millay's early work in order to illuminate how ideal privacy was taken up and adapted to a modern environment. Echoing Osgood's flirty, fanciful, and clever female personae, Millay purposefully made murky the

emotional objectivity of modernism in order to trouble the sanctity of the woman poet's privacy. By performing the private self, Millay revealed that the public profession of privacy was a fantasy. She illustrated the emptiness of personal expression in a genre that staked itself on being a public presentation of the private.

Osgood, the Home, and the Spirit

Poetess poetry has been a highly popular genre because it has been understood to express women's private thoughts; it provided imaginary public access to a poet's idealized interior, and therefore to her presumably inviolable and pure soul or spirit. Critical concern with the term "poetess" has focused on this collapse between poet and poem. While I concur with Paula Bernat Bennett's suggestion that it might "be more accurate as well as less confusing to speak of Poetess poems or Poetess thematics, rather than of Poetesses per se," the association of public women's poetry with the fictional poetess figure means that a strict distinction between the empirical author and imagined poetess persona is difficult to maintain ("Was Sigourney a Poetess?" 270). In this section, I will explore how Osgood and Millay understood the equation of a female poet's interiority with the content of her poetry in order to add nuance to "poetess" as a term and as a tradition.

Scholars argue that the figure of the poetess validated an ideal of nineteenth-century womanhood that granted some women an inborn and insular piety, purity, and morality. According to Eliza Richards, "women were imagined to be receptacles of emotion untainted by worldly concerns"; antebellum women who wrote poetry therefore "were portrayed as fonts of unmediated emotion . . . Their poems were cast as identical offspring, incarnations of the poetess' intimate feelings" (16). However, what some

scholars have labeled as "true womanhood" was neither a reality for antebellum women nor a stable literary trope.[6] By collapsing the real and ideal, the poetess both performed the true woman and simultaneously called attention to the figure's impossibility and unreality. Because she supposedly allowed readers access to an emotional and physical interior, the poetess afforded a glimpse inside herself that was often perceived as erotic. But because the poetess was understood to profess purity, the erotic charge she allowed could be seen to derive from innocent, accidental exposure.

Ostensibly hiding nothing, the nineteenth-century poetess was an utterly open and consumable figure, the product of a literary marketplace. By serving as this public figure for privacy, the poetess ironically retained no privacy for herself. Antebellum culture expected a public person to have a private side: "[N]ineteenth-century self-definitions . . . locate the individual in his or her interiority, in his or her removal from the marketplace" (Brown 3). While female identity was equated with private and domestic development, male identity was established and nurtured in private but extended into the public sphere. Men's publicity hinted at their private side; even in revealing their souls, men were always able to give the impression of reserving some essential self. Meanwhile, any hint of concealment in the poetess indicated her personal deceit and corruption, so she created the impression of transparency in order to be published. Rather than possess an interior, the poetess had to perform it with sufficient sincerity to suggest that she was not solely acting. But since a concealed core was necessary in the construction of antebellum autonomy, these women poets never became memorable authorial presences like some of their male contemporaries. The poetess was popular and generic, transient and forgettable. This problem was not limited to the poetesses' heyday, however. Privacy was

a gendered poetic practice with different historical iterations that continued to burden later public women poets such as Millay. Antebellum understandings of the poetess and her transparent soul supplied the preconditions for the twentieth-century women poets who were expected to offer access to their private selves in order to have a public poetic presence.

The poetess's problem with privacy encompassed both her projected emotional interior and the physical interiors she inhabited; in other words, women's privacy was articulated through tropes of the private sphere, or the home.[7] The home was characterized as a private realm of protection and refuge, removed from public exposure and economic exchange. However, antebellum figurations of the domestic actually indicated a larger reciprocity between the public and private, despite the superficial separation of the two. Private life had very public effects. The domestic was defined by public, nationalist, and gendered ideologies that infiltrated and influenced an individual's concept of interiority. Despite the cultural values associated with and within the home, women lacked a perfectly private space even within the ostensible realm of the private. Milette Shamir argues, "What the records of domesticity often reveal . . . are the psychological pressures brewing within middle-class women, who did not have at their disposal such backstage areas, ironically, at the very moment when they were figured as icons of privacy" (41). This notion of a "backstage" is especially pertinent for the poetess, who performed a public persona of privacy. The antebellum woman may have had no backstage in her domestic life, but the poetess purposefully constructed a backstage for public exposure.

Poetic representations of the home attested to antebellum women's paradoxical lack of privacy while serving as an apt analogy for the poetess's dilemma. Women poets such as Osgood created a relationship between the domestic woman and the poetess, demonstrating how women's problems mapped onto poetic practices. Osgood depicts the problems with privacy in her 1850 poem "'Happy at Home,'" in which a female speaker proclaims the virtues of the home but registers the psychic burden of a life with no backstage. The poetic speaker creates a removed, satisfying, domestic space for everyone in her life but herself:

> At home! oh, how thrillingly sweet is that word!
> And by it what visions of beauty are stirr'd!
> . . . .
> One bright little room where the children may play,
> Unfearful of spoiling the costly array;
> Where he, too—our dearest of all on the earth,
> May find the sweet welcome he loves at his hearth[.] (*Poems* 11-12, 21-24)

There is a space in the home for not only children, but also the husband and father, who is referred to solely by the pronoun "he." The term "welcome" suggests that "he" has been outside the home and returns looking for relief. The husband has his "sweet" spot, the hearth with "[t]he fire blazing warmly—the sofa drawn nigh" (25), but the second meaning of "hearth" as a metonym for the home denotes the entire interior as the husband's domain. Thus the home is a space that nourishes everyone but the speaker, whose own body and own space are never mentioned. She proffers her backstage so her family members can create theirs, paralleling the poetess's practice. Osgood renders the inside of the home the same as the inside of the speaker; she is available to all who enter—or all who read—this paradoxical private sphere.

In order to criticize this practice of domestic self-sacrifice, Osgood undercuts the sanctity of the home through metrical and formal conventions. She employs anapests, typically associated with the limerick, and end-stopped tetrameter couplets, typically associated with comedy or satire, in an argument about the superiority of home, suggesting that the speaker's assertion is a big joke. Each stanza ends with an endorsement of the refrain "happy at home"; however, the phrase remains in quotation marks throughout the poem, as it does in the title (10, 20, 32, 42). Perhaps the speaker is picking up on a popular saying of the day or quoting someone else, but these scare quotes create a sense of insincerity. The phrase becomes disruptive and suggests the speaker's need to convince herself that she is truly "happy at home." The refrain's anapestic pattern stresses the first syllable of "happy" along with "home," yet its repetition raises questions about the purpose of this emphasis: Is it endorsement or parody? The poem could be a celebration, but by using the recurring, unrelenting meter, Osgood suggests that the meter's comforting chant may lull anxieties to convince the speaker that she is truly "happy at home."

While Osgood does not overtly overcome the image of the ideal woman and her pure interior, she posits a strategy for the retention of privacy through such formal subversions. Osgood ends all four stanzas with the rhyming of "roam" and "home"; their association creates the kernel of a doubt that punctures the hermetic ideology of the domestic. Since privacy could not exist in the domestic space, perhaps public places could provide the opportunity to procure a private, hidden self. Through this question of roaming, the poem highlights the female figure who actually does roam: the publicly

circulating "maiden" of the first stanza who puts on a façade of joy to cover up her own sorrowful interior (5). Osgood writes:

> Let the gay and the idle go forth where they will,
> In search of soft Pleasure, that siren of ill;
> Let them seek her in Fashion's illumined saloon,
> Where Melody mocks at the heart out of tune;
> Where the laugh gushes light from the lips of the maiden,
> While her spirit, perchance, is with sorrow o'erladen;
> And where, 'mid the garlands Joy only should braid,
> Is Slander, the snake, by its rattle betray'd,
> Ah! no! let the idle for happiness roam,
> For me—I but ask to be "happy at home!" (*Poems* 1-10)

Osgood offers antebellum women, who perhaps also hide a "spirit . . . o'erladen" with "sorrow," a model in this maiden. She poses public, social spaces as the setting for women's potential self-possession. While entirely exposed, one might hide a private side here, even if that hidden self is unhappy. Yet despite Osgood's poetic efforts, the speaker inadvertently demonstrates that concealing any core "spirit" was not a possibility. In declaring the maiden's private side, the speaker negates her opacity; instead, the maiden becomes transparent and available to others, such as the speaker who sees through her. Publicly disclosing a private self still makes this self consumable and transparent. The speaker offers up the maiden as an example of such a scheme, but demonstrates that a woman's interior is inevitably, radically public. The woman poet, like the maiden, might strive to have private feelings, but cannot overcome public exposure; women inevitably offer recognizable and possessable pieces of their spirit.

In "Won't you die & be a spirit," a manuscript poem from 1845, Osgood shifts her focus from the spirit associated with domestic women to the imaginary and disembodied spirit associated with the poetess figure.[8] Her attempts to locate female privacy are imported into the poetics of the poetess. Writing could verge on indecency,

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even prostitution, for the poetess who revealed too much. In order to impart a publicly appropriate female intimacy, Osgood presents disembodied, imaginary speakers, fairy-like spirits or capricious coquettes to articulate erotic love and desire while conforming to true womanhood's conventions.[9] However, "Won't you die & be a spirit" further proves that even the poetess's spirit was not her own possession.

One of the striking similarities between Millay's and Osgood's poetess poetry was how it created erotic intimacy with readers through innocent ignorance; their figures blurred the line between sexual and moral appeal. Osgood created purity-professing speakers who accidentally exposed their interiors; this appearance of propriety excused the inadvertent display of erotic desire. "Won't you die & be a spirit" plays with this fine line between desire and decorum:

> Won't you die & be a spirit
> > Darling, say
> What's the use of keeping on
> > That robe of clay
> If you only were a spirit
> > You could *stay*. (Dobson 1-6)

By reversing gender roles and making the male the disembodied figure, Osgood takes sexual propriety to its absurd extreme. The speaker wants to spend the night with her lover; if only he were a spirit then it would be safe for them to pass the night in the same bedroom. However, if he were a spirit, then they could not have sexual relations.

Formal qualities assist in alluding to the contradictory nature of this plea. The poem's affinities with ballad form—longer odd lines and shorter even lines, the single b rhyme in every stanza—suggest an oral tradition; its meter—alternating between four and two stresses per line—resembles popular song. These oral effects enhance the poem's wide-ranging, public availability. Thus, the content of the poem—at its core a plea for

physical, rather than emotional intimacy—is couched in a public, popular form. Osgood was able to write such a risqué poem due to the medium: It was not published in widely available newspapers or literary journals but instead circulated as a manuscript poem among friends or in literary salons.[10] Oddly, it is the purity of privacy that permits the eroticism of this poem. Because a woman's interior was ideally so spotless, confessions from this private space were presumably chaste. The glimpse of something suggestive may be excused under the pretense of guilelessness, an assumption Osgood exploits in this poem. As a result of the speaker's seemingly authentic appeal, the sexual and murderous potential of such an utterance is effaced.

According to Dobson, Osgood "plays off . . . a popular perception that death unites those lovers who have in life been kept apart" (634). While a traditional love poem features a male lover lamenting the absence or death of a woman, "Won't you die & be a spirit" presents a female speaker, not lamenting the death of a lover, but begging this male lover to drop dead. The request is repeated in different variations at the beginning of each stanza, from requesting—"Won't you die & be a spirit"—to demanding—"Oh! die & be a spirit"—to persuading—"If you'll die & be a spirit" (1,7, 13). How can he bear to leave "a being so delightful / And so true"? If he died, then he could touch "the cheek that lips of clay / Shall n'er caress" (11-12, 17-18). The fictional speaker declares her sincerity and chastity, but Osgood gestures to these ideals to parody them: When a woman speaks "so true," morbid impulses are instead understood as signs of superior morality. Thus a speaker could plead with her lover to die and appear innocent, not malicious or potentially threatening. Osgood strains the relationship between sincerity and feminine morality to depict its paradoxical outcome: Female desire is acceptable in a

disembodied fantasy that achieves intimacy through death. This poem suggests that the cultural conventions of feminine propriety were ultimately problematic if someone has to die just so lovers can enter the bedroom.

The final stanza of "Won't you die & be a spirit" concludes with the speaker imagining how lovely it would be if her lover could gaze upon her; she wishes for her own objectification:

> Just think how nice 'twould be
> > To come & beam
> Like a star about my pillow
> > Or to seem
> A vision—I should love
> > To love a dream! (Dobson 25-30)

Osgood's depiction of the feminine figure determining, instead of obeying, the terms for possession and consumption overturns social roles. While she may offer these reversals as criticism, the poem still collapses back into the circular logic of the poetess' privacy. The poem models the creation of the poetess, a figure whose "spirit" is actually constituted by public circulation. In this final stanza, the apostrophe drops out, as does the request, and the poem becomes a solipsistic musing, not on retaining authority, but on becoming the disembodied and objectified spirit the poetess was popularly believed to be. The speaker desires to be spiritualized by a spirit, to constitute herself through cultural circulation. She confesses that she wants to be generic, public, and ideal; she would love to love an ideal, and, in another layer of emphasis, she wants to be objectified, gazed upon by an ideal. In wishing for her lover's gaze and loving him for his disembodied, idealized qualities, this speaker—and, by extension, the poetess—is a figure crafted around generic and consumable signs of the female spirit.

Millay: Hiding in Plain Sight

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Osgood's model sheds new light on Millay's work when we read the two comparatively. Osgood's strategies for contending with the problems of poetic privacy illuminate Millay's attempts at poetic self-possession. While a direct comparison of these two poets has been overlooked, they shared similar practices. This might indicate influence, but at this time no relationship between the two has been documented.[11] Yet Millay could not help but be aware of the poetess tradition, if not of Osgood in particular, through her mother. Cora Buzzell Millay clipped poetess poetry from newspapers throughout her daughter's youth, pasted poetess poems into scrapbooks, and even published her own feminine, sentimental, didactic poetry in northeastern newspapers beginning in the 1890s.[12] Her bookcases contained collected works by poetess poets such as Felicia Hemans and Jean Ingelow (Milford 41).[13] I am arguing that the connection between Osgood and Millay was the result of the unavoidable inheritance of the poetess's popular tradition rather than a direct, author-to-author influence. The poetess was powerfully pervasive beyond the nineteenth century: Women poets continued to write as poetesses, and poetess poetry was taught and anthologized well into the twentieth century.[14] The examples of Osgood and Millay depict the reception of women's poetic privacy as it developed over time.

In her iteration of this tradition, Millay inherited a legacy under which to labor, one with an absolute lack of privacy for the poetess. In writing this figure, she practiced a conservative poetry in a time of innovation and experimentation. Modernist poetry was inflected by gender, and twentieth-century women poets were part of a lineage that had associated women's public expression with complete availability and exposure; they implicitly grappled with the problems of the nineteenth-century poetess as they grappled

with modernity.[15] Men poets did not work within the same lineage, although male modernists certainly concerned themselves with the figure and figuration of the feminine poet and the diminishment or fantasy of a private self. Millay's poetry redeployed the conventions of the poetess to intervene in strategies of modernist literary expression.

While other women engaged problems of privacy in modernism's innovative poetic forms, Millay staged a direct confrontation by writing in the very tradition that was founded on privacy's utter publicity. For example, Marianne Moore and H. D. addressed the poetess's privacy, but in a modernist context. While Moore's poem "The Fish" extends strict metrical rhythms into original poetic forms, she engages the poetess's self-abnegation in order to explore the objective surface of life. The last lines—"it can live / on what can not revive / its youth. The sea grows old in it"— represent the poem's unenlivened biological imagery, akin to the absent or deflated physicality of the poetess (38-40). A sense of stagnation, used to explore objective existence, replaces and revokes the living self. This poem echoes the poetess's subjective retreat in favor of generic conventions and public availability, as the poetic subject must withdraw or sacrifice herself in order to make sense of the world. H. D. similarly explores a poetic lack of autonomy in her poem "Helen," wherein the ideal woman is culturally acceptable in generic, objectified form. "All Greece hates" Helen when she "remember[s] past enchantments / and past ills" (1, 10-11). When the public female figure, be it Helen or the poetess, reserves some part of her self in order to create a backstage, she is "revile[d]" (6). But if she were dead, "laid / white ash amid funereal cypresses," Helen would be accessible, beautiful, and beloved (17-18). H. D. thus expresses concern that culture was "unmoved" by the autonomous public woman (12). If Helen were to be cremated,

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literally objectified and culturally possessable, Greece "could love [this woman] indeed" (16). Moore and H. D. grappled with gendered privacy in a modern context by departing from and experimenting with traditional verse. Conversely, Millay specifically engaged the poetess's conservative forms in order to target female publicity, privacy, and possession.

Millay used the poetess's conventions and their inherent problems to make the poetess's lack of privacy work for, not against, her. Through moments of pause in the profession of privacy, she indicated that the seemingly present, confessional figure had taken herself elsewhere, proffering a mere surface instead. While Osgood proved that her backstage had dissolved into the public sphere, making women poets available, generic, and consumable, Millay demonstrated how to hide in plain sight. This was not the blatant obscurity of modernist poetics—Millay could not write with modernism's complexity because she invoked the poetess's availability. But through moments of unarticulated reasoning, or of contradictory confession, or other such intimate, yet obscure, indicators, she professed privacy while both disallowing access to a consumable core and questioning its very existence. By emphasizing surface sincerity, she offered generic femininity while indicating that the real or the authentic female soul existed elsewhere, if at all. Millay may offer the poetess's reproductions of privacy, but through a coy obscurity she asserted that these reproductions were not wholly her. These shadowy spots did not exist in any backstage, but on the surface: They were on display, but they were not transparent.

Millay's poems that discuss travel (or lack thererof) and the boundaries of women's freedom are predicated on the poetesses' understanding of privacy's radical

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publicity. "To the Not Impossible Him," from *A Few Figs from Thistles*, depicts a female speaker confessing her inner turmoil. Millay intensifies Osgood's techniques to question the value of the domestic or local. As in "'Happy at Home,'" this speaker contemplates roaming, taking idealized insularity to its ridiculous extreme:

> How shall I know, unless I go
>   To Cairo and Cathay,
> Whether or not this blessèd spot
>   Is blest in every way?
>
> Now it may be, the flower for me
>   Is this beneath my nose;
> How shall I tell, unless I smell
>   The Carthaginian rose?
>
> The fabric of my faithful love
>   No power shall dim or ravel
> Whilst I stay here, — but oh, my dear,
>   If I should ever travel! (1-12)

The speaker considers travel and experience in order to determine the sincerity of her love: Unless she actually goes to "Cairo and Cathay," how will she know "Whether or not this blessèd spot / Is blest in every way?" The speaker's candor makes the question seem innocuous, not promiscuous. As does Osgood's speaker in "'Happy at Home,'" Millay's speaker questions her private, insular experience against the possibility of public travel and exposure. While the contrast with roaming might have bolstered the supposed superior sincerity found at home, Millay reverses the connection: Here it is publicity that will determine honesty, and this poem demonstrates just how "impossible" privacy and authenticity are. Thus, its final ironic apostrophe—"but oh, my dear, / If I should ever travel!"—points to the contingency of the speaker's feelings in the first place; if she should ever leave the blessed spot "beneath my nose," her "faithful love" could possibly be ruined. Since her lover is "not impossible" and the possibility of traveling remains just

that, a possibility, then her feelings will remain constant. However, this conditional reasoning and the assertion of doubt belies the ironic flimsiness of her love.

The poem's metric repetitions and rhymes call attention to the questionable sincerity of private feelings. In the first and third line of each stanza, the repeated rhyme in the second and fourth stresses lends the poem its bubbly, playful quality, while also suggesting an almost forced cheeriness, like that of Osgood's repetitive speaker. The trochaic first foot of lines one and three, echoed in the second stanza (lines five and seven), helps the speaker firmly to enter into her mock-serious tone, transforming earnest inquiries about love and experience into flippant hypotheticals. The final stanza shifts the pattern. Here, the first line is iambic tetrameter, with no trochaic first foot, and the second line is trimeter but with a dangling unstressed syllable. This variation from the pattern set by the first two stanzas, along with the drawn-out o vowels ("of," "love," "power"), lowers the prior energy and volume, suggesting a turn to solemnity. Millay's speaker appears to be playing, in the sense of both performance and amusement, until this moment of intimacy disrupts the poem. Without the trochaic stress on the first syllable and the uneven quality of the second line, these two lines become a quieter, more regular statement whose performative quality is de-emphasized. Flirty brightness is dimmed by the stress on "dim"; "ravel" unravels, split into two different feet with its extra half-foot at the line's end. The speaker seems to be confessing a sober moment of sincerity. The fact that the poem is upset, in both metrical pattern and content, by a new figuration of sincerity points to the problem of the poetess: The profession of privacy actually renders sincerity questionable, although the entire poetic utterance is ostensibly sincere. This brief moment of sobriety jars the rest of the poem's brightness, as if the speaker forgot

her character and let another, more authentic self break through. While Osgood emphasized the insincerity of the refrain "happy at home" in order to disrupt the speaker's supposedly sincere profession, Millay uses sincerity to disrupt the performance of sincerity.

This sober interlude, however, is swept away as quickly as it came along, leading into the comical apostrophe of the last two lines. This glimpse is as much a part of the performance as the rest of the poem. Millay uses this moment of confession to highlight the impossibility of privacy. Since even private moments are inadvertently offered to the public, sincerity is always questionable. Osgood could not overcome public belief in feminine sincerity, despite foregrounding its performance. But Millay employed the poetess's performance to question the place of sincerity in the twentieth century. She may declare that there was nothing to overcome, no struggle, because there was no point: Ideal, authentic female purity was a fantasy, an unreality. There was no privacy or sincerity to begin with.

While the resolution of this poem points to a lack of freedom, Millay calls upon the conservative position of the poetess in order to access a larger audience, free from the high modernist criteria that made a poem accessible to a learned few. Modernist aesthetics split poetic practice into two categories, according to Sandra Gilbert: "'Bad' verse was stereotypically 'feminine' (i.e., formally conservative, sentimental, lacking in aesthetic or intellectual ambition), while 'good' poetry was stereotypically masculine (i.e., formally innovative, 'hard,' abstract, ambitious)" (299). Millay wrote "bad" verse by invoking the poetess, but the poetess's poetry remained utterly accessible due to its sentimental theme, its traditional meter, and its privacy-rendered-public. Her poetry may

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have depicted generic and formal limitation, but her techniques and choices constituted

an open address.

Like "To the Not Impossible Him," "The Unexplorer," also from *A Few Figs*

from Thistles, engages these elements of restriction in order to open the poem; here the

emphasis on confinement alludes to all the unexplored implications beyond the scope of

the poem. Only six lines long, "The Unexplorer" describes a figure confined to the

domestic space, her innocence generated by a lack of world experience that keeps her

naive and ostensibly honest:

> There was a road ran past our house
> Too lovely to explore.
> I asked my mother once—she said
> That if you followed where it led
> It brought you to the milk-man's door.
> (Tha's why I have not travelled more.) (1-6)

The speaker's ignorance suggests that she is a child, if not in years, then in experience.

The mother, an idealized woman in her domestic-tutelary role, is the singular resource for

this speaker beyond her self. As we saw with "Won't you die & be a spirit," innocence

translates to interiority: The speaker's simplicity, her naïveté, and her passivity suggest

that there is no more to this figure, no public, performed persona. Millay presents an

open, unadulterated soul whose innocence collapses the line between interior and

exterior.

The poem closes with the speaker confiding to her audience, "(That's why I have

not travelled more.)," but she leaves open numerous interpretations for this vague

parenthetical explanation. Something is not fully revealed in the speaker's reasoning: The

road is too beautiful, the road leads to the milk-man, hence I have not traveled. Perhaps

this is a scandalous tale—the road once led the mother to the milk-man and the speaker is

his child, but she must never meet him. The sexually suggestive readings of this poem connect it to "Won't you die & be a spirit," in which innocence enabled innuendo. Readers glimpse the domestic, private self and its inadvertent eroticism through what appears to be naiveté. However, Millay extends this logic; while Osgood's speaker made herself tantalizingly available for public consumption through the innocent exposure of her interior, Millay manages to obscure the privacy her speaker offers. The speaker may similarly have no backstage, but by publicly offering an over-simplified, inconclusive, child-like logic, she puts forth a part of herself that cannot be penetrated or fully ascertained. Her innocence contains obscurity, and the speaker is not fully available for public consumption.

The poem's stripped-down rhetoric and unraveling meter do not provide enough information to judge the speaker's explanation for "unexplor[ing]." Like "Won't you die & be a spirit," "The Unexplorer" couches private profession in popular form; it establishes itself as ballad form in straightforward iambic tetrameter followed by iambic trimeter. But the poem just as quickly conceals its structure, much like the speaker conceals her logic: Line three rhymes with line four, instead of line two as it would in a traditional ballad, and while the first two lines alternate between four and three beats, the fourth and sixth lines are four syllables instead of three. While this recursiveness—back-to-back rhymes and proliferating four-syllable lines—suggests a lengthening of the poem, the extra material provides less information. This speaker does proffer two explanations, but within both of these ostensible accounts are holes in mental and metrical logic. The first comment, "Too lovely to explore," is the traditional three-syllable line of ballad form, but the rest of the poem's four-beat lines highlight the missing feet and potential

content of this line. The second explanation, the parenthetical closing line, appears as an aside that would presumably contain a more direct form of address from speaker to audience, hence a more substantial reason. However, the line is a mark of absence, the outline of a confession; the "I" here is no closer or more available than the "I" in line three. Millay suggests that something is present—ghost feet, ghost lines—but still unavailable and withheld.

Gesturing to missing pieces, the speaker proffers a public explanation that only emphasizes what is missing. It is this speaker's innocence that compels her to both reveal her interior and obscure it at the same time. She is too pure to hold her tongue yet too simple to explicate, and thus offer up, her own reasoning. In "The Unexplorer," Millay revises the conventions of the innocent, pure, and accidentally erotic poetess by offering an interior that simultaneously disallowed sexualization or possession of the figure's spirit. The speaker professes privacy, but what she does reveal is not very consumable. Millay suggests that what the reader gets is not really her, or is not really there.

Millay further develops these points in the sonnet "Bluebeard" from *Renascence*. Despite its ostensibly masculine title, "Bluebeard" may be read as poetess poetry. As such, the poem is particularly striking because it provides access to the backstage of a publicly performed persona. The fable, in which Bluebeard kills his wives and stores their bloody bodies in a hidden chamber, was widely referenced in turn-of-the-century U.S. poetry; poets such as Rose Terry Cooke, Emily Dickinson, Edgar Fawcett, Bret Harte, James Russell Lowell, and Edwin Arlington Robinson alluded to the tale to describe something wondrous, hidden, or deadly.[16] These poems approach the Bluebeard story as a parable, a moral tale about hidden, private conditions within us or within

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society. By placing her speaker inside Bluebeard's secret chamber, Millay empties the space of its horrible crimes, nevertheless using the chamber as a symbol of corrupted female identity.

When its speaker is read as female, "Bluebeard" connects the poetess's problematic privacy to modern women poets. The sonnet returns us to the false promise of privacy and the pressures of a non-existent backstage, reflected in the room discussed in the poem and the sonnet's own rooms or stanzas.[17] The speaker discusses performing a public persona while maintaining some private, unaccessed space for herself. But this "backstage" is penetrable by the public:

> This door you might not open, and you did;
> So enter now, and see for what slight thing
> You are betrayed. . . . Here is no treasure hid,
> No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
> The sought-for Truth, no heads of women slain
> For greed like yours, no writhings of distress;
> But only what you see. . . . Look yet again:
> An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
> Yet this alone out of my life I kept
> Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
> And you did so profane me when you crept
> Unto the threshold of this room tonight
> That I must never more behold your face.
> This now is yours. I seek another place. (1-14)

This speaker's public persona suggests some withheld treasure or scandal, enticing the "greed" of "you" to pry beyond her performance. Thus, the speaker's last vestige of privacy, and not the public's perception of the private, has been given up: "Yet this alone out of my life I kept / Unto myself, lest any know me quite." She laments that invasion has irreparably violated her privacy; the room was a touchstone for self-preservation, and she has been so "profane[d]" that the entire operation must be abandoned. The speaker professes sincerity by lamenting the invasion of privacy, and here Millay encourages the

association of privacy with sincerity, poet with poem. However, she uses the equation to foreground emptiness.

The speaker explains, "Here is no treasure hid, / No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring / The sought-for Truth, no heads of women slain." There is nothing shocking in this private life, but what is shocking is that the private is so "empty" and barren. By discussing not just a private but an empty room, the speaker concedes the shell of privacy to an expectant, prying public while concealing herself somewhere else. Like "The Unexplorer," empty privacy obscures the subject and allows her to "seek another place." Millay's performance of the poetess preserves authorial autonomy in order to make the room and the poem the site of a vanishing act. Whereas Osgood's "maiden" publicly declared a private side that proved transparent and consumable, Millay publicly declares a private space to entice the reader into its emptiness. No one was ever there, not Bluebeard or the woman poet; the room was occupied only by a fictional speaker who scolds her reader for invading a fictional place. The speaker thus leaves us with a form full of fiction, an empty stanza or "room" where we expected to see "Truth" or "heads of women slain."

When read from the position of a female speaker, "Bluebeard" demonstrates that the sonnet is a disappearing act. Millay avoids an invasion of the female interior by staging an invasion of the female interior, in turn revealing the emptiness of ideal privacy. Rather than invoke the domestic woman who cannot overcome public consumption, or the innocent girl who inadvertently reveals her private side, Millay moves beyond the poetess by making corruption part of the female figure. Invasion or penetration of the woman's idealized interior creates her identity; Millay demonstrates

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that the purity and privacy associated with the public woman is a contradiction and a fantasy. In order to move beyond the expectations that adhere to the figure, Millay offers her own fantasy: a fictional space for a fictional identity, an invited invasion where the intruder confronts himself rather than an inner sanctum of privacy and purity. Effacing the woman from the site of the poem while offering up her stanza or "room," Millay preserves the poetess, demonstrating that she is one step ahead, looking back at us and not the other way around. Even though the poetess's poetic space becomes "profane[d]," Millay nevertheless speaks to the "sought-for truth" pursued in "another place," the need for personal reconciliation between self and the world despite the failed fantasy of privacy—a project that aligns the poetess genre with modernist investigation.

The Modernist Poetess

By the early twentieth century, representations of poetic selfhood based on an isolated, ideal privacy could no longer hold, raising questions about the relationship between personhood and personal space. If as J. Hillis Miller suggests, the "twentieth-century poem" constituted an arena "in which things, the mind, and words coincide in closest intimacy," then poetry had to overcome a tension between the private expression associated with nineteenth-century verse and a sense of its disconnection from the external world and its people (8). The conflict outlined a crucial concern for the modernist poet: how to reconcile personal, private emotions with a depersonalized poetic utterance.

Millay redeployed the poetess's conventions and expectations in order to parry the problems of modernity. She grappled with the issues that surfaced in overtly modernist texts but did so by way of an alternate historical practice. By blurring the line

between poetic persona and the objective expression of private emotion, she created a radically public poetic self that acknowledged the division between self and world while exposing that very self to the world. Because Millay has been read through canons and criticism formed by modernist influence, the majority opinion on her work posits modernist models of interrogation and knowledge as problems that she does not or cannot address. Yet Millay in particular provides the means to recover a poetry overlooked by the American modernist continuum—the often-ignored, non-canonical poetry of the early modernist period, itself an area that is currently receiving greater critical attention.[18] She forges a link between the antebellum poetess and modernist modes of inquiry because both poetic practices were constituted and troubled by ideal privacy.

I place Millay in relation to nineteenth-century women's poetic conventions as a way to continue destabilizing the rigid dichotomies and oppositions that have long characterized high modernism. In other words, the poetess offers a strategy for expanding critical understandings of modernist poetry.[19] As a widely circulating figure constructed by and for the literary marketplace, the poetess embodies a paradoxical privacy. This contradictory formulation registers the horizons of a mid-nineteenth-century culture coping with industrial, technological, and urban expansions that reconstituted the meaning of the private. By the early twentieth century, the prominent stylistic innovations of the modernists register the continuation and consolidation of such economic, industrial, and social shifts, along with their attendant issues and anxieties. Consequently, the presence of the poetess tradition in the twentieth century illuminates modernist practice by charting a history of privacy, demonstrating how poetry grappled with its status and stability in a time of emerging modernities. While the abandonment of

tradition may be the qualifying characteristic of modernism, the nineteenth century persists in modernist poetics: Its specter hovers as a presence that Millay and other modernists choose to invoke or revoke, and in ways that need not imply retrograde aesthetic or political practices. Millay and the high modernists shared a common lineage, but differed in how they envisioned and reacted to their inheritance.

Millay is valuable in part because her poetry offers a range of considerations with which to widen conventional readings of modernism. By displaying and disputing nineteenth-century poetic practices, she foregrounded the circumstances unifying her traditionalism and American modernism's iconoclasm. Through a twentieth-century iteration of the poetess, she depicted another means of modernist investigation, an alternative method to its experimentation, innovation, and rejection of tradition. Millay took modernism's concern with surfaces and depth, the real and the artificial, and elaborated their conflicts and connections through poetess poetry, a practice that similarly questioned form and freedom, public and private availability, artificiality and authenticity.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the supposed authenticity of the lyric subject in the context of race. While Millay revealed that the poet's performance of sincerity was neither transparent nor real, the next chapter will discuss how African American poets exploited this realization. Their work harnessed the performance of the black "voice" to publicly prove African Americans' self-possession while problematizing the reduction of race to printed poetry.

[1]Johnson suggests that Millay's sonnets "reflect the artistic problems of her age . . . . [T]hey often balance the urgency of human emotional responses and the concomitant need to name what one feels against the limitations of attempting to describe the felt moment" (117). Stanbrough argues that Millay's public image hides internal anguish, "an overwhelming sense of personal vulnerability . . . to victimization by uncontrollable conditions in her environment" (214). Thus Millay avoids modernist "freedoms of form" and favors the sonnet, "a fit vehicle to convey her deepest feelings of woman's victimization" (227).

[2]To discuss the poetess is to enter into a web of tautologies, associations, and contradictions. Critics and readers understand "poetess" to mean a genre, a trope, a universal tradition, a figure, a subject, as well as an author. See works by scholars such as Bennett ("Was Sigourney a Poetess?"), Jackson ("The Poet as Poetess"), Loeffelholz, Prins, Richards, and Walker (*American Women Poets* and *Masks Outrageous and Austere*) have been instrumental in recovering the archives of poetesses and reconstituting the meaning of the poetess figure.

[3]See Rosenbaum 1-24, 93-126.

[4]Modernism's concern with the private and public, the subjective interior and objective exterior, echoes the poetess's problem of public privacy and a poetic self created for public consumption. Popular access or availability was a key modernist issue; in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, Riding and Graves comment that modernist poetry "seems to say: 'Keep out. This is a private performance'" (9). They explain that "what we have to do, then, is to discover whether or not the poets means to keep the public out" (10). T. S. Eliot contemplates the place of private feeling in public poetry, famously arguing that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." In the words of J. Hillis Miller, Eliot determines that "an act of self-surrender has expanded the private mind of the poet into the universal sphere" (172).

[5]All of Millay's work quoted in this chapter comes from *Collected Poems*.

[6]Responding to scholarship on the "cult of true womanhood," McCall has examined the popular and widely circulating nineteenth-century magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, destabilizing the supposed dominance of the "true woman" ideal in antebellum popular culture. She finds that "the categories historians have formulated to describe the ideal woman were not prevalent in either the fiction or the editorials of *Godey's*" (235).

[7]Kerber and Tonkovich, among others, have pointed out that the separate spheres concept was more of a rhetorical and ideological construct than a reality.

[8]This poem was discovered by Joanne Dobson among the Frances Osgood Papers at the Houghton Library at Harvard University (648n11). Here I quote from the poem as it is reprinted in her *American Literature* article. The poem is also reprinted in Bennett, *Nineteenth-Century* 62-63.

[9]See Richards 65-72.

[10]Dobson explains, "The forum of the salon, with its urbane constituency, allowed Osgood to go further than she would—or could—in her published work" (634).

[11]Milford's biography is the primary source documenting Millay's early influences, and it provides few details on what the poet may have read at school or at home. The Edna St. Vincent Millay Society (www.millay.org) recently opened Steepletop, Millay's upstate New York home, to visitors. The site contains her library, but the archive is not yet open to the public.

[12]See Cora Buzzell Millay's poetry clippings and published poetry clippings, along with her daughter's scrapbooks, in the Edna St. Vincent Millay Papers, Library of Congress.

[13]In her 1910 diary, Millay mentions reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, whose 1907 edition contained work by various poetesses.

[14]For example, *The Home Book of Verse*, published by Henry Holt in 1918 and "twelfth on a list of two hundred books selected by the National Council for Better Homes in America to comprise the 'Ideal Library,'" contained work by Sigourney and Osgood, along with many other women poets (Rubin 247).

[15]Cristanne Miller points out that "one of the most revolutionary aspects of modernism" was that "it was the first literary and artistic movement in which women played major roles both nationally and internationally, not just in writing modernist prose and poetry but in developing its foundational ideas and in shaping literary production" (69).

[16]In brief, the story follows these lines: No women want to marry the nobleman Bluebeard because he has an ugly blue beard. Despite the disappearance of his seven former wives, he convinces an eighth wife to marry him. The young woman joins him in his castle, but shortly thereafter he leaves for the country. Bluebeard gives his wife the keys to the castle, including a key to a small room she is forbidden to enter. Curiosity overcomes her, and she enters the room, discovering the bloody bodies of the former seven wives. Bluebeard returns, discovers the entry, and tries to kill her, but her brothers save her at the last moment. The website *SurLaLune Fairy Tales* provides an excellent, annotated version of Charles Perrault's tale.

[17]Millay's work with the sonnet form further links her to the poetess tradition. The sonnet became the culturally appropriate form for women's public expression in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries in both England and the United States. It "signified a generic role for sincere feeling, a gendered cultural script" (Rosenbaum 100). For further discussion on this point, see Curran and Robinson.

[18]See, to name a few, recent and forthcoming works on turn-of-the-century poetry and literary culture by Bentley, Cavitch, Jackson (*Before Modernism*), and Renker.

[19]For other works that expand the scope of modernist interpretation, see Cutler 1-21 and 168-79, Huyssen vii-xii and 44-62, and Rainey 1-10.

CHAPTER 4

LYRIC READING AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICE

Frances Sargent Osgood and Edna St. Vincent Millay exploited the female poet's

supposedly sincere profession of privacy in order to find a public space where their

"voices" could be heard. This chapter continues this examination of "voice," moving

from gender to race. George Moses Horton, a slave poet, used the convention of the lyric

voice's authenticity in order to publicly profess his status not as a slave but as an

autonomous self. By the end of the century, Paul Laurence Dunbar, a young African

American poet considered the representative "voice" of his race, divorces the seemingly

sincere self from "voice" for a greater—because less scripted—authenticity. In discussing

the poetics of lyric voice, this chapter will focus on the materiality of printed poetry as a

strategy to either possess or dislocate the socially acceptable lyric subject depicted in the

first two chapters.

Lyric has been understood to create a fictional subject who expresses private

thoughts and emotions, either to herself or to an unavailable other. In this theory, voice is

crucial to imagining lyric subjectivity because it is the vehicle that conveys the interiority

that constitutes and legitimates selfhood. While integral to discussions of poetry, voice

has constituted one of its biggest problems because, in the words of Eliza Richards, "to

define *voice* in written poetry immediately poses a problem, for there is no literal voice in

the poem: voice is an oral metaphor employed in the description and analysis of the

written word" ("Voice" 1525). "Voice" is a fiction; readers imagine the printed text on

the page to represent human speech. And yet lyric voice has been understood to express

the personhood, not just of a figured speaker, but of the poet. A poem's voice has thus

been read as the articulation of a poet's interiority, and hence of his or her sincere self.

But what happens when the poet who composes a lyric voice is not considered a

self? For example, did the "voice" in poetry written by slaves in antebellum America

signal personhood or possession? Did the "voice" in poems written by African Americans

during the Jim Crow era "sound" black and therefore communicate second-class

citizenship? Because they employed lyric's voice to access the selfhood that American

society denied them, poetry by African Americans in the nineteenth-century intensifies

the problem of voice and subjectivity. Under chattel slavery, slaves were not only

possessions, but they were denied the social relationships that would register them as

people. According to Orlando Patterson, slavery conferred on its sufferers the status of "a

socially dead person. Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, [the slave] ceased to

belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (5). Even after emancipation,

blacks were barred from full personhood; as Saidiya Hartman argues, emancipation

"appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of

servitude and racial subjection" (6). From slaves to the first generation of free blacks,

social subjectivity and the all rights that it entailed were contingent on political and social

recognition. Yet, just as the public sphere constructed selfhood, race was likewise

constructed and enforced by social and political circumstances. Public recognition thus

determined both race and the status of selfhood; the construction of the two was

irrevocably intertwined in the nineteenth century. Hartman explains that "blackness is

defined here in terms of social relationality rather than identity; thus blackness

incorporates subjects nominally defined as black, the relations among blacks, whites, and others, and the practices that produce racial difference. Blackness marks a social relationship of dominance and abjection and potentially one of redress and emancipation" (56-57). The historical denial of personhood was based on the enforcement of the political and social relations that constituted race in the U.S. Because race was determined by the same public consensus that determined who was a person and who was less than a person, black poets saw the lyric voice as a means to speak within the social space that decided selfhood. In other words, because the lyric voice was supposed to indicate selfhood, black poets used the imaginary construct of voice to try to alter the social relations that constructed race. By exploiting that voice's inherent doubleness, that is, the division between the lyric voice's imagined orality and its textual, material mediation in print, African American poets attempted to access the selfhood they had been denied.

African American poets navigated voice's simultaneous unreality and materiality in order to access normative subjectivity as it developed across the nineteenth century. Thus, the lyric voice was constructed and deployed in order to accommodate different historical iterations of subjectivity. By examining two African American poets, Horton and Dunbar, I will trace how the fiction of the lyric voice has been employed and exploited in historical understandings of the self. As a slave, Horton tried to gain access to selfhood by transmitting the fiction of his own voice in order to convince readers that he was not merely a slave but a person. Horton's poetic voice professed his possession of a sincere, emotional interior in order to convince readers of his humanity, and therefore,

his unjust enslavement. By the end of the century, Dunbar demonstrated that the socially recognized selfhood that Horton sought was an idealized, narrow, and impossible fantasy.

Horton and Dunbar present different ways of dealing with voice's simultaneous existence and non-existence in lyric. Horton wanted his poetic voice to exist in order to gain access to the personhood that the possession of a "voice" would prove. Yet his poetry reveals voice's imaginary construction. Conversely, Dunbar did not want voice to exist in his poetry because by the end of the century, the fiction of African American voice helped to naturalize stereotypes and was thus recognized as evidence of a narrowly defined black subjectivity. Dunbar thus exposed the fiction of the voice in order to strain against the fantasy of enclosed selfhood that the possession of a voice would prove. Whereas Horton encouraged the inscription of his self in the page's textual "voice" in order to prove his personhood, Dunbar deliberately detached himself from the voice on the page in order to preserve personhood. Dunbar thus reverses Horton's example: while Horton used poems that created fictional speakers and situations to directly recall and impact his person, Dunbar used poetry, even autobiographical poetry, to detach his person from the poetic speaker.

Double Voice and Race

The "voice" of printed poetry gestures to two operations that exist in tension: that which can be spoken and heard and that which is seen on the page. Paul Zumthor argues, "language without voice is unthinkable"; hence the written text of a poem gestures to an orality beyond itself (6). This association of language with speaking voice causes an imaginary speaking subject to be read into printed poetry. Modern readers have had no problem associating the printed page with the human voice due to the ubiquity of

"technologically mediated voices" (Prins "Inverse" 47). Historically, however, the written text of a poem was not always interpreted as a person talking. Investigations of nineteenth-century poetics reveal that contemporary readers and writers could imagine a disembodied, dehumanized "voice" in a poem, rather than the utterance of an imaginary speaker. According to Yopie Prins, "we listen without the sense of estrangement that fascinated Victorian readers and writers, for whom literary and technological inventions of 'voice' were a way to perform the dissociation and disembodiment of speech" ("Inverse" 47). Prins explains that Victorian readers and critics understood voice to be "a metaphor," and that the poem could "dislocate a speaking subject by emphasizing impersonal utterances, absent voices, empty echoes, displaced dialogue, and bits of heteroglossia" ("Inverse" 45). "The mechanism of meter" provided one means of creating this "disembodiment of voice" ("Inverse" 49, 44). Meter interrupts the reading of poems as a personified utterance because its "mechanical mediation of voice" evinced a dehumanized force beyond an imaginary speaking self ("Inverse" 49). Meter de-personalizes the poem and provides polyvocality in the additional presence of a voice without human origins. Prins argues that "nineteenth-century theories of meter also uncover a form of linguistic materialism that complicates the claim to vocal presence. Instead of hearing voice as breath or spirit, we see it materialize through the counting of metrical marks" ("Meters" 92). Meter's textual materialization coincided with "a general nineteenth-century tendency toward the codification of numerical modes of analysis and the production of abstract space" ("Meters"106).

While Prins insists on the recognition of a disembodied and mechanical voice in Victorian poetry, poets and readers still understand lyric to retain human speech acts

alongside mechanical depersonifications. In other words, the printed poem offers the poetic depersonification of an imaginary persona through the mediation of that voice on the page, but the simultaneous and persistent "voice" of this imaginary speaker is impossible to discount or erase. Eric Griffiths calls this "the double nature of the printed voice" (74). Because poetry is "a use of language that works with the sounds of words":

> . . . the absence of clearly indicated sound from the silence of the written word creates a double nature in printed poetry, making it both itself and something other—a text of hints at voicing, whose centre in utterance lies outside itself, and also an achieved pattern on the page, salvaged from the evanescence of the voice in air. 60

Like Prins, Griffiths discusses this "double nature" in British Victorian and Romantic poetry. Yet the doubleness of printed poetry has important ramifications in the reading of African American poetics. Indeed, the textual and metrical displacements of voice that Prins locates in Victorian poetry as well as the persistence of a personified voice resonate in examinations of African American poetics across the nineteenth century. When we are sensitive to the ways that lyric poems "signal their addressees," "touch actual readers," or "mark[] the presence of a hearer," we can experience the voice of a human figure communicating with another through the poem (Waters 6). Textuality may separate voice from person but it also maps out a space that can be exploited to create fictional people. Prins criticizes Griffiths for "an account of writing as the voice of an absent person" that overlooks the dislocated, dehumanized voice. According to Prins, Griffiths insists that "the written word 'retains' (in both senses) the spoken word and the intentionality of a speaker" (45). Yet some poems, like those in the African American literary tradition, beg to be read as absent people speaking. With their use of "I," dialect language, and

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conversational contexts, African American poetry encourages readers to imagine a speaker, even if the utterance possesses depersonifying meter and rhyme.

Because of African Americans' struggles to be recognized as subjects in American society, African American literature is sensitive to the use of lyric voice as a means of gaining access to and reclaiming selfhood, as well as its potential to dislocate person from text. This potential is captured in what Henry Louis Gates has termed "signifying." According to Gavin Jones, "signifying is a double-voiced process" and pertinent to the poetics of voice because its practice displays and exploits voice's modulations within a poem (190). For example, Griffiths articulates a view similar to theories of signification when he argues that "the 'unsubstantial existence' of poetic voice in print creates the chance of a polyphony, the chance for a divided soul to speak with something better than a forked tongue" (75). Griffiths argues that the double voice of printed text allows the poet "to fashion, and not merely suffer from, bafflements of voice, lacks and flusterings in speech, the burdens of address" (74). Because African American poets were historically denied access to the full personhood that the lyric "voice" represented, their poetry had to contend with "bafflements," "lacks," and "burdens of address" that resulted from being non-persons in print.

By exploiting the mediation of voice by printed page, African American poets could contend with the barriers to full personhood imposed by American society. According to Max Cavitch, "the phenomenological concept of rhythm" in poetry "of slave subjectivity" created "a history of subjectivation through rhythm. . . a continuing history of both the subject's formation (agency) and its subordination (deprivation of agency)" ("Slavery" 95-96). Rhythm's mediation of the printed voice invoked the

phenomenological experience of the slave, even if the reader did not have first-hand experience of its sensations. Cavitch explains that American chattel slavery "reinforced the connections between time, sound, and pain, with its bells, with its whips, and not least, with its songs. Sounds both lyrical and unlyrical facilitated new and prodigious rhythms of work" ("Slavery" 100). He argues that the rhythms created by slaves in work and song inflected poetry; "this singing and chanting, long before its verses started to be systematically transcribed and published, had a pervasive influence on American popular song, particularly through blackface performance and minstrelsy" ("Slavery" 100). The rhythms of slavery marked printed poetry, demonstrating that the rhythm retained by the printed voice of the text could dislocate a personified speaker while denoting slavery's phenomenological reality. In other words, the inhumanity of slavery did not need to be communicated by a figured human speaker, rather the depersonalized mechanizations of meter could communicate this state of presumed non-personhood. But unlike Prins who describes the mechanical mediation of voice as creating the possibility of a dehumanized, non-subjective poetry, Cavitch demonstrates that meter and rhythm do not merely disembody voice and bar the connection of poem to person. Rather, meter and rhythm communicated a human state to those who did not think slaves were human. By understanding rhythm to communicate physical experience, Cavitch creates a connection between the fictional voice of a personified speaker, the depersonalizing voice of the inscribed text, and the presence of the poet. While Prins argues that poetry's materialized meter exists independently of a figured speaker, the poem's meter does not always have to dislodge subjectivity from text. According to Cavitch, "one needn't condemn any poet to subjectlessness, or deny subjectivity to any and all enactments of voice in poetry, in

order to turn a less personalizing gaze—and ear—toward the figures of subjectivation in the poetry of slavery" ("Slavery" 95). Cavitch's discussion of rhythm allows us to extend Prins' useful polyvocality to nineteenth-century African American poets' struggle with subjectivity. By acknowledging the impact that slavery's rhythms had on the poem, we may access the poet without ascribing his or her personal voice to the page.

Horton and Voice's Inscription

Horton's poetry provides unique access to the phenomenology of slavery's metrics and the poetics of voice. He composed the poems of his 1829 collection, *The Hope of Liberty*, while a slave in North Carolina. Its publication was to have a direct impact of the life of the poet, thus linking the "voice" of the poem directly to Horton's person. As Leon Jackson explains, *The Hope of Liberty* was not for sale; it "was not a commercial venture that was sold by subscription." Instead, the collection "was a gratuitous publication, introduced into an economy of benevolence, in order to solicit contributions ('subscriptions') to a manumission fund" (75). In addition to funding his freedom, the money raised by the publication was also intended to pay for Horton's resettlement in Liberia through the American Colonization Society (Jackson 75). While these poems emerged from and were to irrevocably alter Horton's life, some of their subjects seem impossibly dislocated from Horton's experience. One might imagine that every poem in a collection meant to raise funds for manumission would concern slavery, if not explicitly, then symbolically. Many do not; it would be a stretch to draw abolitionist arguments and personal appeals from poems about jilted lovers, the seasons, and dead babies. The range and depth of feeling displayed in these poems, however,

proves Horton's exceptional emotional capacity and human spirit in order to solicit funds from potential donors.

This range of topics may also result from the fact that Horton did not know his poems would be collected. Jackson argues that Horton "had absolutely no hand in the publication of the volume, and there is some question as to whether he was even aware of its publication" (69). Indeed, Horton was not even aware that some of these works were altered. Jackson found that verses previously published in newspapers had been revised and reprinted in *The Hope of Liberty*. A comparison "reveals that someone" adjusted the works to "minimize their abolitionist sentiment and instead suggest a colonizationist aesthetic" (Jackson 73). Jackson thus argues that Horton's works were subject to "to a series of dis-locations" that "ultimately deprived him of control over his words and the contexts in which they were lodged" (66). However, these dislocations reveal the polyvocality of poetic voice. The mediating hands of editors and publishers cannot efface the double voice of the printed page; while the dislocated and dehumanized "voice" of the text—its rhythm, its visual form—may not link up to a personified speaker, the printed text nevertheless points to Horton's struggle to gain access to socially recognized personhood. As I will explain, the printed "voice" of these poems re-embodies Horton despite his apparent dislocation from the page in order to assert his status as a self.

The Hope of Liberty contains two elegies on subjects seemingly unrelated to the experience of slavery, on the death of a baby and on the death of a maiden. These poems prove Horton's poetic proficiency and his exceptional capacity for sympathy in order to impress readers and potential donors. While death was a common experience for the slave, these elegies do not explicitly address slavery's images or symbols to bolster

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Horton's case. Nevertheless, the elegy form retains the experience of slavery; Cavitch

explains that "as part of the mourning culture of black Americans, elegy was also part of

the racialized drama of sorrow and resistance that characterized American culture more

generally. . . elegy sometimes helped to restore a sense of the severed affiliations from

which blacks suffered disproportionately" (*Elegy* 180). Horton thus indirectly alluded to

the experience of chattel slavery in order to emphasize the empathy that proved his

humanity: not only could he express the emotional interiority of a person, but he could

sympathize with the experience of his white reader. For example, "On the Death of an

Infant" possesses images that are repeated in Horton's poems about slavery. Yet, this

imagery is used by a "sad parent" to rationalize loss:

> Blest Babe! it at length has withdrawn,
> The Seraphs have rock'd it to sleep;
> Away with an angelic smile it has gone,
> And left a sad parent to weep!
>
> It soars from the ocean of pain,
> On breezes of precious perfume;
> O be not discouraged when death is but gain--
> The triumph of life from the tomb.
>
> With pleasure I thought it my own,
> And smil'd on its infantile charms;
> But some mystic bird, like an eagle, came down,
> And snatch'd it away from my arms.
>
> Blest Babe, it ascends into Heaven,
> It mounts with delight at the call;
> And flies to the bosom from whence it was given,
> The Parent and Patron of all. (*Hope* 1-16)

As if life was a sort of slavery, the child has been freed into life after death: the child

"soars" over pain and it is his or her "triumph" to have made this escape. The speaker

"thought" the child "my own," but it was "snatch'd" away, implying the punishment that

attends the ownership of a person. This poem emphasizes that no one belongs to anyone but the "Parent and Patron of all," and may be interpreted as an indictment of slavery and its fantasy of ownership. Horton's strategic choice of a dead child empathizes with parents who have lost children, equating their pain with Horton's slavery. In this commentary on a child returning to its true parent or patron, Horton evokes not just the emotional rhetoric of emancipation, but the economy of patronage in which this work circulates. If readers become patrons of Horton, donating to his manumission fund, Horton might likewise perceive them as the false patrons or parents depicted in this poem. However, Horton invokes slavery's rhetoric of paternalism to revise it. He will not become anyone's "own" as a result of patronage; he remains a self-possessed, autonomous individual. If readers think they become patron or parent Horton, they cannot expect him to become their property, just like the child did not really belong to its earthly parent. Indeed, the poem exists to distance patron from Horton, contributing to his freedom and autonomy, not his indebtedness or enslavement.

In the context of a collection trying to garner manumission funds, this "masked" voice is foregrounded. Yet other "voices" emerge when taken out of this context. On its most basic level, the poem asks us to imagine the voice of a mourning parent. While we cannot say definitively that this fictional speaker is also the voice of Horton himself—perhaps he parented and lost a child—the fictional persona still suggests his authorial presence because it evinces the sympathy and emotional capacity necessary to write such a poem. Meanwhile, the poem's short meter suggests a disembodied, mechanical voice materialized on the page. This is especially apparent in rhymes that work visually but not aurally, like "own" and "down." Nevertheless, this textual materialization of voice still

retains a link to its author. By detaching the figured speaking subject from the text on the page, this mechanical, metrical voice refuses ownership by a personified speaker. Horton thus models the kind of liberty he desires for himself through the materialization of voice. By diverging from a speaking subject that would own and control it, the disembodied, material voice is free. Its liberation from a speaking subject attests to the poem's symbolic message advocating absolute freedom from patronage by just another parent or master. Thus the fictional voice of the speaker and the disembodied mechanism of meter join to link the text back to Horton's struggle for recognition as a self-possessed subject. Like the child who returns to its otherworldly parent, these voices return to Horton.

As fictions and dislocations, the voices of "On the Death of an Infant" asserted independence from the bondage created by parentage or patronage while simultaneously professing the emotional interiority that constituted subjectivity. Nevertheless, patronage was necessary to secure Horton's freedom. Unfortunately, *The Hope of Liberty* was "was a monumental failure," not raising enough money to free Horton, let alone send him to Liberia (Jackson 77). However, other modes of moneymaking were more successful. Horton wrote and sold acrostics to undergraduates at the University of North Carolina who hoped to woo young women. By participating in a direct, face-to-face mode of poetic exchange, these poems existed at the intersections of a "gift-exchange economy," and "an economy of patronage" (Jackson 57). These acrostics created an obvious connection back to Horton due to the exchange of money between poet and patron. Yet the acrostics simultaneously erased Horton's presence by attempting to create an exclusive and intimate relationship between the patron and the object of his affection who received the gift of the poem.

Jackson contends that these acrostics were a more successful form of autonomous authorship for Horton because they did not dislocate his person from the poem, unlike *The Hope of Liberty*. He argues that:

> . . . in selling his acrostics, Horton forged relationships with his customers; these relationships were often condescending, sometimes not, but they facilitated an ongoing source of income and goodwill. The publication of *The Hope of Liberty* was a wholly mediated, indeed impersonal, process through which third parties controlled his words, the contexts into which they were introduced, the nature of the economy of which they were a part, and the purposes to which any money associated with them would be applied. (77)

However, these acrostics were neither more nor less "impersonal" mediations of Horton's authorship. "Third parties" may have determined the "contexts" of publication and edited some of his works, but the acrostics similarly introduced a mediating party—the undergraduate patron—who erased Horton's authorship altogether. For example, the manuscript of "An Acrostic on the Pleasures of Beauty" is written in Horton's hand, but does not have his signature. The verso indicates that the poem was written for "Mr. Pettigrew," one of the two Pettigrew brothers enrolled at the University of North Carolina in the 1830s, but beyond Horton's handwriting, neither side of the page indicates Horton's authorship.[1] *The Hope of Liberty* at least had Horton's name attached to it, while these acrostics conceal Horton's presence because the poet's "voice" was supposed to be that of the suitor. Face-to-face exchange actually worked to obliterate Horton's authorial presence more than the "wholly mediated" collection of printed poems. But neither the collected poems nor the acrostics have a "voice" that is more authentically Horton's. The poems in *The Hope of Liberty* and the acrostics constitute alternate configurations of the complicated connection between poetic voice and empirical poet.

Horton's poetry splits into multiple embodied and disembodied voices whether the poems are part of a direct monetary exchange or mediated by publication.

 "An Acrostic on the Pleasures of Beauty" depicts the constellation of poet, poem, and patron when the poet seems to have been erased. It arranges the name "Julia Shepard" to profess Julia's beauty and the affection she creates in the poem's speaking persona. As such, the poem appears to have no connection back to Horton; the "voice" of the speaker would seem to be that of the suitor, leaving no room for the author. However, the double voice of printed text undercuts the constitution of the "I" and "you" personas in order to reinstate Horton's presence in the poem. The mediation of the page makes possible a disembodied and disembodying voice that upholds Horton's personhood.

Horton did not know Julia Shepard, nor did he love her, and the fictional speaking "I" of this poem thus exaggerates its unreality through seemingly sincere profession:

> Joy like the morning breaks from one divine
> Unveiling streams which can not fail to shine
> Long have I strove to magnify her name
> Imperial floating on the breeze of fame—
>
> Attracting beauty must delight afford
> Sought of the world and of the Bards adored
> Her grace of form and heart alluring pow'rs
> Express her more than fair, the queen of flow'rs
>
> Pleasure fond nature's stream from beauty sprang
> And was the softest strain the Muses sang
> Reverting sorrows into speachless joys
> Dispeling gloom which human peace destroys—Beauty. ("Acrostic" 1-12)

The acrostic's form complicates the supposedly authentic voice of "I" by emphasizing the deliberate position of text on the page. Rather than the sincerity associated with spontaneity, the arrangement of letters belies a craftedness that both punctures authenticity and undercuts the fantasy of a speaking persona. By fitting lines to the name

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of "Julia Shepard," the voice of the personified speaker is not autonomous but mediated by the page. Romance is created by the materialization of text instead of a personified voice.

As a document meant to create intimacy between two people, this poem appears to privilege those human presences—the fictional speaker and the object of his affection—over all other voices or presences in the poem. Yet, a disembodied textual voice that spells out Julia's name disrupts the constitution of a speaking "I," and likewise, the constitution of Julia. The opening stanza's reflexive discussion of "name" empties the fiction of the personified speaker and interlocutor to foreground the dehumanized determinations of words arranged on the page. The line "long have I strove to magnify her name" implies that the speaker has assailed to express his admiration for Julia, associating "name" with Julia's person. The technology of the acrostic has finally allowed him to do so, but in the process he dehumanizes Julia, turning her from a person back into a "name," or text on the page. "I" finally and successfully "magnifies" Julia, but the mention of "name" draws attention to the fact that this magnification is made possible by the acrostic form, rather than the expressive powers of the personified speaker.

The poem acknowledges the redistribution of power from a speaking voice to the arrangement of the text. Through self-conscious references to speech and speechlessness, the poem attenuates the communicative power of the personified voice. The second stanza references "Bards," yet revokes their powers of expression, perhaps alluding to the student who cannot compose but can only pose as the bardic creator of this poem. Instead of the bard's words, Julia's own "grace of form" and "heart alluring" actions "express her

more than fair." But the use of "form" here indicates the poem's self-conscious tension between personified voice and textual technology, as if Horton wanted to emphasize the power of the printed page over the suitor's performance in order to sabotage the wooing. Julia's bodily "form" may attest to her fairness, but the double meaning of this word suggests that instead, the "form" of the poem, here her name spread out to constitute the acrostic, expresses this fairness. In other words, the text of the page, not the imaginary speaking voice nor Julia's body, would express her "fair." Likewise, Julia becomes constituted by the visual materialization of the text. She is disembodied, dismembered even, and split up into the lines of the poem.

Once Julia's name has been spelled, the two remaining stanzas emphasize the fiction of a suitor's voice by turning away from the self-conscious textuality foregrounded by the acrostic proper:

> But Goddess thou the di'mond of the fair
> Willt from thy brow repel affection's prayer
> And smile to hear the unavailing sigh
> With tears disolving from thy suppliant's eye—
>
> But light upon the beau to thee assignd
> And leave all els with disregard behind
> Then softly bind affection's sacred chain
> Never thro life to be broke off again ("Acrostic" 13-20)

In his discussion of the poem, Jackson points out that "the gifting of poetry. . . was part of an embedded economy designed to create lasting affective bonds, and, in this case, to draw two people into the bonds of matrimony" (58). Here the suitor references these bonds, ultimately requesting that Julia "bind affection's sacred chain." In order to communicate the suitor's sincere feeling and achieve intimacy, these stanzas depict a forlorn speaking subject; yet this "I" has been revealed to be a dehumanized technology

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of the page in the preceding stanzas. The suitor hopes to create a "sacred chain" that would never "be broke off again," but forges these bonds through the insistent inauthenticity of a depersonalized and disembodied textual voice and the authorship of a stranger. Thus these last stanzas, rather than constructing the speaking subject through a profession of emotion, or creating Julia by describing the physical, pleasurable sensations she inspires, emphasize that the poetic creation of personhood is a performance of the personal. Horton alludes to what his printed "voice" must overcome: recognition that the intimate utterance of poetry is a fictional performance enabled by textual mediation.

In a sense, this poem was deeply personal for Horton—not because of what his fictional speaker says, but because of the conditions of its composition. Horton was likewise "assignd" a "beau" who commissioned the work, and the text's disembodiment of the fictional voice connects back to Horton's position as the poet dislocated from his text. Just as Horton has to create the fictional voice of another person, disconnecting the poem from his self, this poem's textual materialization of Julia's name dislocates "voice" from a human speaker. Thus the reference to chains may not even be a reference to Horton's enslavement. Jackson argues "the obligations engendered by the bestowal of gifts were precisely the 'chains' to which Horton's poem on Julia Shepard referred, and which the initial gifting of the poem was designed to forge. It was a common enough trope" (57).

Horton's presence in this poem's fictional voices and their mediation by the printed page suggests that all poems have a way of distancing and recalling their author. By performing the communicative exchange between others, Horton uses the poem to signal his own selfhood. Poems that concern Horton's personal experience with chattel

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slavery would appear to avoid distancing their author. However, even the

autobiographical voice is subject to the dislocations of the page, and Horton's poems

about slavery similarly perform his personhood through the fiction of voice. Horton

argues for his own freedom by evoking his magnanimous humanity in the poem "On

Liberty and Slavery," included in the 1829 collection. Like his poem "Slavery," which

also addressed his bondage, "these were not passive or defeatist poems that addressed

God in displacing salvation from the here and now to the hereafter" (Jackson 63-64).

Instead of expressing rage or hopeless self-pity, Horton discusses the burden of slavery, a

grief that would be relieved by freedom. Slavery degrades him because of its exhausting

torment, while freedom would bring a humanizing respite:

> Alas! and am I born for this,
> To wear this slavish chain?
> Deprived of all created bliss,
> Through hardship, toil and pain! (*Hope* 1-4)

Through the question that begins this poem, "I" expresses disbelief that he should be born

for slavery. The first stanza employs an implied rhetoric of equality to point out injustice:

the speaking "I" is deprived of what others enjoy, creating an absurd and arbitrary

inequality. The rest of the poem continues to impress the reader with slavery's injustice

by discussing the burden that has been randomly assigned to the speaker from birth:

> How long have I in bondage lain,
> And languished to be free!
> Alas! and must I still complain--
> Deprived of liberty.
>
> Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief
> This side the silent grave--
> To soothe the pain--to quell the grief
> And anguish of a slave? (*Hope* 5-12)

These two stanzas express the emotional experience of a slave in conditions that all

readers can relate to. In order to constitute a broad sympathy, Horton emphasizes

sensations of pain and relief without specifically describing their exact quality and

source. The phrase "languished to be free" expresses how he pines for freedom, and

"anguish" in the next stanza emphasizes the attendant pain of languishing by embedding

"anguish" within the word. In the visual representation of languishing's anguish, and in

the mechanized, depersonalized near-perfect rhymes—lain/complain, free/liberty,

relief/grief, grave/slave—the voice emphasizes its textual materialization in order to

make its plea more deliberate. While the rhyme scheme and meter foreground the printed

voice on the page rather than a subjective-expressive utterance, Horton harnesses these

dehumanizing repetitions in order to constitute his self as a slave *and* a person. The

mediation of the voice by the page makes communicable the conditions of slavery to his

readers. As Cavitch explained, slave poetry's meter captured the rhythms, restrictions,

and dehumanization of slavery. Horton inscribes this disembodying meter in his poetic

voice not to distance his self, but to make his self more transmittable and convincing.

The next stanza addresses the joys of freedom, implying the relief the reader

could make possible through subscriptions and donations:

> Come Liberty, thou cheerful sound,
> Roll through my ravished ears!
> Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
> And drive away my fears. (*Hope* 13-16)

Like anguish and relief, emotions understood to be felt but with no actual physical

attributes, liberty becomes a phenomenon, a sound to "roll through" the speaker. The

poem continues to be couched in sensations such as "ravished ears," but the textual

location and mediation of voice provides no body. This textual "voice" would appear to

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disrupt the persuasiveness of an embodied speaker's plea for freedom. The persistent abab rhyme scheme and ballad meter demonstrate the materialization of metrics on the page, evacuating the subjectivity of a fictional speaker. In order to avoid this dislocation, the poem emphasizes sensation. The fictional voice of the speaker discusses his physical and emotional feelings in order to insist upon the imaginary body of a suffering, speaking slave. This communication of physicality is enabled, not disabled, by the materialization of voice on the page. Printed words become associated with physical sensation; for example, freedom is a "cheerful" sound, a sensation that will "roll through" ears. In the previous stanza, the equation of grief with "pain" grants an emotional state a physical bearing. Likewise, this stanza associates emotional language with physical feeling through the textual mediation of voice to further communicate slavery's sensations. In order to parry the dislocations of the textual voice, Horton employs the text on the page to communicate physical sensations and complex emotional concepts. Feelings exist in both senses of the word—emotions and physical sensations—and this duality is made possible through the mediation of printed text. Conflating the two convinces readers of Horton's actual self even though voice becomes disembodied on the page.

The poem continues to discuss "liberty" as a sound that acts upon the body. Liberty may not constitute a physical change to the body's state, but like sound, it is a sensation of reception, something without physical substance that is nevertheless internalized:

> Say unto foul oppression, Cease:
> Ye tyrants rage no more,
> And let the joyful trump of peace,
> Now bid the vassal soar.
>
> Soar on the pinions of that dove

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> Which long has cooed for thee,
> And breathed her notes from Afric's grove,
> The sound of Liberty.
>
> Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,
> So often sought by blood--
> We crave thy sacred sun to rise,
> The gift of nature's God: (*Hope* 17-28)

Liberty is associated with sound, a physical sensation. Liberty's resultant peace likewise has a sound; peace may "trump" in the sense of excelling or triumphing, but "trump" also connotes a trumpet sounding peace, a fanfare encouraging the "vassal soar." Horton discusses "the sound of liberty" because freedom and sound share the same physical and textual paradox. Liberty, like sound, will not physically impact or change Horton's body; yet, like sound, it is characterized as a physical sensation. Liberty is made legible through the printed page in the same way that sound or "voice" is represented through the printed text. Liberty and sound are felt but not seen, invisible without the mediation of the text. Horton relies on sound in this poem to convey the meaning of liberty despite the printed text's erasure of the person liberty would create. In this way Horton exploits the printed page to make a plea for his disembodied self. Both Horton and liberty are abstract concepts for the reader, but they become realities through a textual representation of voice that discusses hearing although it cannot be heard. By linking the abstract concept of liberty to physical effects through the textual materialization of voice, Horton may communicate his embodied, enslaved existence. Hence the emphasis on voice and sound in these stanzas: speaking to oppression, cooing doves, breathing notes.

In addition to freedom's soothing sounds, the poem associates freedom with flight: the vassal soars, the dove flies, the sun rises. The next stanzas return to slavery and reverse this movement, moving from ascension and action to descent and rest. Despite

the change in movement, these last stanzas continue to emphasize embodiment through a

profusion and confusion of metaphors:

> Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,
> And barbarism fly:
> I scorn to see the sad disgrace
> In which enslaved I lie.
>
> Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,
> I languish to respire;
> And like the Swan unto her nest,
> I'd to thy smiles retire.
>
> Oh, blest asylum--heavenly balm!
> Unto thy boughs I flee--
> And in thy shades the storm shall calm,
> With songs of Liberty! (*Hope* 29-40)

Slavery has a face, as does liberty with its "smiles." In fact, liberty is now an entire body,

not just a sound, with a maternal "breast" on which to "respire." While liberty has

become a protective tree, the last line returns to its sounds. However, we cannot tell if it

is the "I" speaker or Liberty herself who sings the "songs of Liberty." Liberty has a voice

that merges with the speaker's. This closing emphasizes the poetic polyvocality of the

printed text: "I" has a voice, as does liberty, while a textual voice gestures to the rhythms

and restraints of slavery that exist beyond the page. Horton tries to create a self-enclosed

and self-possessed subject who deserves freedom because of his status as a person, but

the printed text makes his self-enclosure impossible: he is communicating interiority to

prove his selfhood to readers. By emphasizing embodiment through textual "sensations"

of sound and liberty, Horton seeks to overcome the exposure of his supposed interiority

in order to link his poetry back to his empirical, enclosed, and enslaved self. Horton

strives to inscribe his body on the page in order to combat the inability to possess his self.

Due to this impossibility, Horton in a sense enslaves the dislocated voice of the text to complete his self-possession.

Dunbar and Voice's Dislocations

Horton had to perform his interiority which prevented him from enclosing his self. To combat this incompletion he employed the dislocations of the printed page to revive his physical and phenomenological experience. The textual mediation of voice allowed him to construct his body without exposing or performing his interiority. Hence he used printed words to represent "feelings," or physical feelings, in place of emotional feelings to ensure his self-enclosure and prevent his self-exposure. Horton thus inscribed his self on the page, using the textual mediation of voice to construct his body and his seemingly enclosed selfhood.

While Horton employed both the fictional "I" and its depersonifying textual materialization to attempt to inscribe his self on the page, Dunbar reversed this practice. Dunbar recognized that the perfect self-enclosure and self-possession that Horton sought were impossible: the self was always permeable through a communicative exchange with others and always subject to influences beyond the individual's control. Thus, he would and could not use the poetic "voice" to inscribe his self on the page. His poetry subtly avoided the direct association between poet and poem that Horton hoped to inscribe.

Dunbar demonstrated that inscribing the self to the page was oppressive: it amounted to permanently wearing a mask or being caged, forms of subjugation to be avoided because they limited identity and expression. In order to avoid this confining and rigid essentialization of identity, Dunbar's poems foregrounded the fundamental double-sidedness of "voice" that offered both the illusion and the erasure of a self. Considered

the "poet of his people," Dunbar experienced his poetry being transformed into something that both exceeded his person yet formed a rigid identity beyond his reach (Daigle 634). Dunbar thus encountered the same problem of self-possession as Horton, even though he was legally free to possess himself. In order to avoid constituting an immovable mask that was read as his self at the turn of the century, Dunbar exaggerated the fiction of a speaking persona to make clear that the "I" speaker was a performance, a mask, but one that ultimately had no actor behind it. The results, however, are slippery poems that create personas whose messages and meanings are sometimes contradictory or confusing. But Dunbar creates the possibility of multiple meanings in order to avoid enslaving his own self to the page. By writing poems that appear to be expressions of racial identity, Dunbar demonstrates that race is a textual fiction that does not exist on the page, a possible explanation for his writing as both a progressive advocate for African American rights and as a retrograde entertainer performing the plantation myth.

Dunbar's emphasis on the fiction of a black voice in print does not mean that the injustices against African Americans that Dunbar called attention to were equally fictional. At the turn of the century, a new generation of African American citizens still had to prove their personhood by communicating their inner selves. But due to the pervasiveness and the history of minstrelsy in the post-bellum U.S. culture, African American public expression was connected to minstrelsy's denigrations.[2] Jonathan Daigle, in his discussion of Dunbar's librettos and theatrical collaborations, explains "with its minstrel roots, the emerging black theater could not easily convince racist white audiences of black humanity" (637). The ubiquity of minstrelsy had the potential to make public expression by African American artists appear performative and ridiculous. By

fragmenting the performance of identity, giving it a range of voices, speakers, and masks,

Dunbar was able to combat turn-of-the-century racist reductions. The fictional masks

created by his poetic voice echoed how African Americans had to mask their expression

in the public, white world.

In order to demonstrate that racial identity could not be confined to minstrelsy or

to the single voice on the page, Dunbar employed the fiction of a speaker in order to

access a phenomenological realm of sound. Divested of its oral component, text on the

page hints at the qualities that it has lost as a result of its inscription; Griffiths explains,

"my self is my voice, the uttered agent in a significant medium, but the medium exacts,

as the cost of utterance, a loss of immediate physical particularity" (64). The printed

poem's "mute polyphony" allowed Dunbar to fracture the fiction of textual inscription in

order to locate selfhood beyond the page (Griffiths 66). Indeed, poems that could be

understood to be Dunbar speaking avoid this inscription because "the poet's voice is not

the voice of the person who is the poet" (Griffiths 67). Dunbar's dialect poems emphasize

the performance of a persona by creating a textual voice based on the way words sound

when spoken out loud. Although they are not direct transcriptions, these poems create an

intersection between oral and printed poetry that duplicates the exchange between

speakers and listeners.[3] In his discussion of oral poetry, Zumthor argues that "the

discourse of the poem cannot be in itself its own end. . . Within the vibration of voice, the

thread that connects so many signals or experientially determined markers to the text is

stretched to the breaking point" (127). The spoken voice of oral poetry retains and

communicates physical and psychological features that the written text freezes or

effaces.[4] Zumthor explains that "from its initial outburst poetry aspires, like an ideal term,

to purify itself from semantic constraints, to get outside language, ahead of a fullness where everything that is not simple presence would be abolished. Writing occults or represses this aspiration. Oral poetry, in contrast, welcomes its phantasms and tries to give them form" (128). While written poetry may appear hopelessly incapable of capturing oral poetry's unique "phantasms," Dunbar's dialect poems contain residues of this oral voice. Dunbar tries to merge written and oral poetry through a textual inscription of dialect. By trying to get "outside language," Dunbar's representations of spoken dialect uphold these excesses in order to maintain the existence of poetically constructed personhood that exists off the page. The double voice of printed dialect insists on its reality beyond the page in order to demonstrate that selfhood cannot be inscribed.

Indeed, readers took Dunbar's dialect to be the authentic expression of African American experience, but not because they imagined a black person or Dunbar himself talking. By placing dialect in traditional poetic forms and meters, Dunbar was able to combine the oral voice implied by printed poetry via the textual materialization of voice. In doing so, Dunbar's poems did not create or dislocate speaking subjects; rather they were perceived as communicating the larger experience of his race. As Michael Cohen explains:

> 19th-century readers substituted abstractions of genre for persons and personal voices, so that certain kinds of poems came to *stand for* certain kinds of social experience. Therefore, when writers, readers, and critics of dialect poetry described dialect poems as though they were like ballads and spirituals, they did so to authenticate dialect poems as the expressions of racialized folk groups, no matter who actually wrote the poems. . . While Dunbar was no doubt read within the valence of minstrelsy, his popularity as a dialect poet derived more particularly from the ways that his poems were understood to supersede minstrelsy by providing a more authentic look at the real black folk. 248

Because his dialect poems were understood within broader generic categories, Dunbar's

emphasis on the fictional voice of the poem and the mediation of the page was read as

constituting his race's realities. Rather than inscribing the black subject on the page,

Dunbar engaged the poetics of voice to both communicate the impossibility of the poetic

self and the experience of "real black folk." For example, Dunbar's "An Ante-bellum

Sermon" demonstrates the polyvocality of the printed voice in order to give expression to

a "racialized folk group[]" beyond the page. In "An Ante-bellum Sermon," a figured

preacher gives a sermon on the Exodus story, an explicit and popular metaphor for

emancipation. Presumably a slave preacher who could be punished for fomenting

abolitionist sentiments, the speaker often reminds his listeners that he is not discussing

the present: "I'm still a-preachin' ancient, / I ain't talkin' 'bout to-day" (lines 39-40).

However, he uses the Bible story to represent dual meanings. Its miracles enhance belief

in "de Lawd," while its symbolic narrative promises emancipation for the enslaved. The

preacher's repeated insistence on the facts of the "ancient" tale and his denial of a

meaning applicable to "to-day" manages to highlight this second, more subversive lesson.

What appears to be authentic, earnest speech is used to express disingenuousness, and

this duality disrupts the coherence of this preacher's voice. The preacher's

communication of the dual meanings of the Exodus story represents the multiple vocal

possibilities of the printed poem. The last three stanzas of this poem depict this

proliferation both in the preacher's message and in the poetics of his printed voice:

> So you see de Lawd's intention,
> Evah sence de worl' began,
> Was dat His almighty freedom
> Should belong to evah man,
> But I think it would be bettah,
> Ef I'd pause agin to say,

Dat I'm talkin' 'bout ouah freedom
In a Bibleistic way.

But de Moses is a-comin',
An' he's comin' suah and fas'.
We kin hyeah his feet a-trompin',
We kin hyeah his trumpit blas'.
But I want to wa'n you people,
Don't you git too brigity;
An' don't you git to braggin'
'Bout dese things, you wait an' see. (65-80)

These two stanzas set up a rhetorical pattern of invocation and rejection that will be repeated in the next and final stanza. The preacher gestures to the "almighty freedom" implied by the Exodus story, but explicitly denies the story's interpretation beyond the literal "Bibleistic way." While Dunbar creates a speaker whose message is mixed, his trochaic meter is straightforward and consistent. Lines alternate between eight and seven syllables, but Dunbar subtly disrupts this pattern in the last two stanzas. The penultimate and the final stanzas reduce their seventh lines, which should be eight syllables, by one syllable. For example, "An' don't you git to braggin" is missing its last syllable, and this oversight repeats the meter from the previous line, "Don't you git too brigity." The preacher wants to warn his listeners not to brag or get "brigity" because of the inevitable freedom signified by his sermon, and the meter helps emphasize these warning by repeating the syllables and stresses in back-to-back lines. Thus the "spoken" voice contains a metrical, depersonalized meaning that reinforces the preacher's unspoken or symbolic message of emancipation. In other words, we can understand the double voice of the printed page as a symbolic representation of the double meaning in the preacher's "voice." Just as he does not "voice" this other meaning, the unspoken "voice" of the printed page assists in communicating the preacher's meaning. What goes unspoken is

then as important as what is explicitly transmitted, and Dunbar proves that self-expression does not have to printed or voiced in order to communicate with a public.

The last stanza emphasizes the printed representation of voice in order to acknowledge the spoken voice that exists beyond and free of the page. Dunbar does this to assert that selfhood likewise exists beyond and free of the page. The printed voice foregrounds its doubleness by gesturing to the spoken voice's ability to convey a meaning not couched in words:

> But when Moses wif his powah
> Comes an' sets us chillun free,
> We will praise de gracious Mastah
> Dat has gin us liberty;
> An' we'll shout ouah halleluyahs,
> On dat mighty reck'nin day,
> When we'se reco'nised ez citiz'--
> Huh uh! Chillun, let us pray! (81-88)

The end of this poem extends the pattern of the previous two, asserting that the arrival of a modern day Moses is imminent while simultaneously attempting to negate this message. The use of "Mastah" is ambiguous: it could be a praise to "de Lawd," it could refer to the great emancipator, Lincoln, or it could even thank a plantation master who frees his slaves. The inarticulate last two lines of the poem continue this confusion. The preacher cuts himself off as he begins to say "citizens," which could indicate a number of events in the fictional world of the poem: he could recognize that asserting a radical political equality as citizens of the United States is a dangerous practice, or perhaps someone has interrupted his sermon. Whatever the reason, the next phrase, "huh uh!" indicates negation and a stop.[5] "Huh uh!" could refer to the speaker's refusal to let this political voice through, or it could be a suppression of his hope for freedom. Regardless, in the way that "citiz'--" abruptly cuts off and in the ambiguous negation of "huh uh," the

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printed text gestures to speech and the conditions affecting the utterance of these last two lines. The poem culminates in events the page cannot possibly capture, signaled by a visual depiction of speech. Something occurs so that the preacher cannot put his meaning into words. Dunbar's invocation of the oral voice recalls those meanings outside language and beyond the printed voice.

"An Ante-bellum Sermon" creates polyvocality even when it seems to be the fictional utterance of a single imaginary character. The preacher symbolizes the possibilities of multiple voices in the double messages of his own preaching. Through the textual mediation of the poem's single, fictional speaker, multiple voices emerge such as the depersonalized "voice" of meter and a spoken voice that shadows the printed text. Dunbar's poems offer the illusion of a unified speaking voice on the page while simultaneously disrupting that singularity and cohesion. The printed poetic voice in Dunbar's poems is never stable. He uses that very instability to communicate that the impossibility of inscribing singular, self-enclosed subjectivity on the page. Selfhood is similarly unstable, not to be taken at face value, and suspect by others—much like the preacher's experience in "An Ante-bellum Sermon."

The double voice of the printed page is present in all of Dunbar's poems, but critics most often locate it in his dialect poetry. However Dunbar's poems in "standard" English may likewise be read as textual representations of a speaking persona. Both "majors" in standard English and "minors" in African American vernacular communicate the complications surrounding public recognition of African American selfhood regardless of whether the poem "sounds" like Dunbar. In fact, as Gavin Jones explains, "Dunbar tends to place poems in black dialect beside poems in orthodox English—a

technique he repeated in his public recitals—thus making us aware that there is no natural connection between the poet and any single language" (196). Dunbar's public readings demonstrate that no single "voice" constitutes his self; the performance of these poems exaggerates the public and textual performance of selfhood in Dunbar's poems. Dunbar addresses the tension between fictional voice and personal experience in the poem "We Wear the Mask" (*Lyric of Lowly Life*, 1896). This work extends the polyvocality made possible by the page to call attention to the way these voices were received. Just as the voice of a poem becomes multiple and detached from a speaker, Dunbar's poem demonstrates that the "listener" or reader is similarly multiple. Within this diverse audience, certain members are simultaneously invoked and even ignored. Readers of this poem are directed to recognize the presence of other audiences, disrupting the enclosure of the seemingly isolated interlocutor. Instead of the traditional and singular "I-You" relationship of poetry, Dunbar shows how the poetics of voice can multiply the possible interlocutors in these positions.

As the title indicates, this poem will discuss masking in African American public expression. The poem's first line, "We wear the mask that grins and lies," explains that "we" wear a cheery facade in order to cover up grief, alluding to the fictional selves that African Americans have to present to a white reading public. Some may understand what is presented to them by the mask, while others may understand what the mask conceals. But by admitting that "we" wears a mask, the entire poem opens itself to the possibility of duplicity: how do we know that this voice is sincere when it readily admits to masking? This skepticism keeps the straightforward assertions of the poem from ever becoming single and static. "We" wears a mask, and because, in addition, it lies, its

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claims may have multiple meanings or no meaning at all. Dunbar engages the mask's

levels of address to avoid limiting representation to one audience and one voice.

The first stanza addresses the pain that this masking covers up, and suggests that

"we" must bear the punishment for humanity's cunning:

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties. (1-5)

While "we" expresses the many, they are joined into a univocal speaking voice on the

page. Such a condensation of what seems to be the representative voice of African

American artistic expression could easily inscribe and essentialize racial representation

on the page. From the first line, however, this poem makes it difficult to pin down the

group this "we" voice represents because we know this voice is a "mask" and that it

"lies." Unlike Horton's poetic voice that emphasized its transparent and sincere

expression, Dunbar tells us that what the world perceives as transparency and sincerity

are performed. The poem's "voice" offers other unavailable and unarticulated meanings,

and the instability of the fictional "we" likewise renders the position of the addressee

unstable. The reader cannot be certain if the speaker addresses her or another audience

altogether. Through the performance of a supposed sincerity that simultaneously

undercuts both its transparency and the stable position of the interlocutor, Dunbar

disrupts poetic address to render the speaker-audience relationship un-enclosable.

"We Wear the Mask" reveals by what it purports to conceal, exposing the

speaker's torn heart as he attempts to mask it. By alluding to facial and body parts—

mouths, cheeks, eyes, hearts—it constructs a body that houses an emotional interior. The second stanza elaborates on the exposure of this hidden self:

> Why should the world be over-wise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
> Nay, let them only see us, while
> We wear the mask. (6-9)

As if holding back in self-protection, this stanza is the shortest of the poem. Indeed, the "tears and sighs" suggest vulnerability and the need for a mask that projects an exterior strength. This stanza does not specify the consequences of letting the world see beneath the mask, and the poem thus protects itself, withholding the damage of such a revelation even as it confesses that something lies beneath its exterior. The speaker presents the reader with what appears to be transparency, but he merely gestures to interiority without illuminating what resides within. In other words, "we" knows why the world should not be "over-wise," but the reader is not privy to this reason. Such concealment suggests that public access to this private interior would constitute a violation. Dunbar conceals the interiority that would constitute poetic personhood and confronts the paradox of African American poetic subjectivity: to perform interiority would prove subjectivity, but the very act of profession makes self-possession and enclosure impossible. By revealing what cannot be revealed, Dunbar troubles the poetic constitution of personhood. The reader cannot participate in this self-exposure or self-construction.

The second stanza cuts itself in half, suggesting that those lines that would make it equal to stanzas one and three are concealed or suppressed. At the same time, the second stanza introduces "we wear the mask" as a kind of refrain, a disembodied phrase whose emergence ruptures the cohesion of what would appear to be a speaking person.[6] As it becomes a refrain, "we" does not seem to have control over the placement of the

phrase. Hence the second stanza cuts itself off while the third stanza could end without the independent clause of its last line:

> We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
> To thee from tortured souls arise.
> We sing, but oh the clay is vile
> Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
> But let the world dream otherwise,
> We wear the mask! (10-15)

Christ is the listener to whom these voices reveal their true selves, but the speaker further discusses his act of concealment, obscuring what the mask covers. In a play on clay feet, the speaker suggests that the world does not perceive the hidden faults of these singers. Yet the continued constitution of a figured body—souls, feet—is disrupted by the textual voice of the poem. Its prosodic features inject a voice that does not relate back to the personified body/bodies of a speaking "we." Iambic tetrameter persists throughout the entire poem except for the lines "We wear the mask" at the ends of stanzas two and three. The poem also employs the same rhyme scheme, using words that rhyme only with "lies" and "guile," and leaving the refrain line's "mask" without any rhyming counterparts. The repetitive meter and repetitive rhymes lend the poem a hypnotic quality that is jarred by the assertion of the mask. In a poem that laments wearing a mask, the rhyme and meter regulate that lament, suggesting that expression is still not free. If this is the voice of a person or group trying to confide in a reader, then the confession tries to overcome its confinement by revealing restriction in brief, contrasting moments of metrical irregularity.

But just because the fictional voice creates a mask in the shape of a personified speaker does not mean that once exposed, its message is powerless and meaningless. Rather, the mask itself creates a powerful rhetoric and communicative tool for poets to

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reach out to readers. Dunbar extends this double voice in other poems. Whereas "An Ante-bellum Sermon" featured a single fictional speaker masking his speech, and "We Wear the Mask" depicted a unified "we" speaker creating a mask out of seemingly sincerity, Dunbar continues to exaggerate the personified speakers, double voices, and supposed authenticity of poetry. By taking what appears to be his own autobiographical voice personified on the page, Dunbar adds another layer to the ability of voice to mask and double itself, and continues to fragment interlocutors into multiple presences.

"To Kelly Miller, Jr.," an inscription Dunbar writes on the flyleaf of his first work *Oak and Ivy* (1893), demonstrates how the seemingly sincere autobiographical voice can elude inscription. The autograph ostensibly captures the biographical author on the page, and authenticates that the text connects back to him. Like the printed words on the page, the author prints his name to transform the fiction of voice into the reality of the author's existence. Dunbar's inscription, however, makes his person and experience unintelligible rather than legible and real. While we know Dunbar is a person and an author (his photo was even included in *Oak and Ivy*), this fragment exploits the double voice of the printed text in order to make his own autobiographical voice into a mask or a fiction. Dunbar makes himself into an other by addressing Kelly Miller Jr. as himself; as Walter J. Ong argues, "every human word implies not only the existence—at least in the imagination—of another to whom the word is uttered, but it also implies that the speaker has a kind of otherness within himself" (52). To write himself onto the page means that Dunbar has to gain some distance from his self and thereby dislocates his own being into a textual inscription. While an autograph is supposed to attest the person it represents as the

originating, creative force behind a work, this inscription instead attests to the shifting

nature of the voice on the page and how poet becomes detached from his poem:

> Dear Kelly, when I was a kid
> I wrote this book: that's what I did.
> When you grow up—I may be dead—
> You allus think o' what I said,
> Dat you gon' mek yo' ma'k fu' true,
> Cos, Kelly M—, I bets on you. (1-6)

The poem begins in a conversational tone rather than a poetic meter. A steady iambic

tetrameter picks up in the second line, signaling that the "voice" of the first line—

unmetered, and unaware of its place in a rhyming couplet—has been replaced with the

mechanics of meter. While the meter persists through the rest of the fragment, Dunbar's

voice shifts. In line 4, the poem slips into the black vernacular dialect. Notably, this slip

occurs when Dunbar tells Kelly to always remember what he said. The "I" tells Kelly that

he believes that Kelly will "mek yo' ma'k" or make an impression or difference, an

assertion that will give young Kelly confidence and guidance as he grows up. "I"

encourages Kelly to remember what he "said" and yet "I" both becomes an unstable

identity who does not actually "speak" in this moment. Such doubleness, echoed in the

poems above, denotes insincerity and slippery identity rather than authentic

autobiography. Dunbar uses the autograph not to authenticate and stabilize his

subjectivity but to destabilize the inscription of his identity onto the page. Because the

poem does not inscribe Dunbar onto the page, it makes possible a range of voices that

exist both due to and beyond the reach of his authorship. Dunbar recognizes that the

poetic voice is multiple but somehow that multiplicity points back to the authenticity of

an author. As we have seen, the instability of the voice on the page would indicate

Dunbar's autograph. Dunbar creates identity by displacing it.

[1]To view an image of this page, see UNC's *Documenting the American South*, http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/mss03-06/mss03-06.html

[2]See Eric Lott, 4-7. He explains that "the minstrel show has been ubiquitous, cultural common coin; it has been so central to the lives of North Americans that we are hardly aware of its extraordinary influence" (4).

[3]The failure to "dictate to his reader because he cannot always dictate his voice into print" actually constitutes "a discovery of the conditions of essential reciprocity in the exchanges which take place between writers and readers" (Griffiths 65).

[4]Even Francis Berry's misguided assertion that men make better poets because voice resounds in their larger chest cavity alludes to the intimate relationship between the physical and psychological that the oral voice creates (37-38).

[5]"Huh-uh" is listed in the OED as "an expression of negation." Its reverse, "uh-huh" indicates affirmation.

[6]See Cavitch, "Stephen Crane's Refrain" in *ESQ* 54: 1-4 (2008): 33-53.

CONCLUSION

LYRIC FAILURE

Lyric's expression must both fashion an ideal self and assume its preexistence. While expression is key to recognizing the lyric and liberal self, the self has to already exist in order to express it. Lyric thus faces the impossible task of creating selfhood by communicating it. Furthermore, because lyric creates liberal self-enclosure through the "overheard" performance of privacy, it contends with the constitution of interiority through communication. This communicative imperative appears to expose the self rather than possess the self. Hence, poets enter into a fundamentally flawed vocation. The ideal self was a project always doomed to failure. Thus lyric provides insight into a poetics of impossibility that is simultaneous with the effort to articulate the self across the nineteenth century.

In the Introduction I discussed the social, political, and economic influences that lead to the ideal of liberal subjectivity; these same influences also contribute to its failure as well as lyric's failure to achieve perfect selfhood. According to Scott Sandage, "nineteenth-century Americans had to learn to live in a new world where the sky was always falling" (22). I have discussed how this sense of instability led to a crisis of selfhood. The optimistic, ideal selfhood that was projected in the face of these ongoing crises tried to obscure the fact that often, the sky just fell on people. In fact, the nineteenth-century consolidation of ideal liberal subjectivity corresponded to the history of failure. The autonomous individualism that underpinned the myth of American

bootstrapping obscured the failures of many. "Panic," both personal and financial, was the norm in nineteenth-century America. Sandage explains that by the time of the economic panic of 1893, the nation "had endured the panic of 1819, 1837, 1857, and 1873; numerous minor dips; and a civil war," or nearly a century of constant crisis (17). Economic failure was equated with personal failure; failure was perceived "as 'a moral sieve' that trapped the loafer and passed the true man through. Such ideologies fixed blame squarely on individual faults, not extenuating circumstances" (Sandage 17). The presence of a "burgeoning genre of success stories and primers long before Horatio Alger" asserted that "a winner never quits" (Sandage 17). Sandage comments, "the American who fails is a prophet without honor in his own country. Our creed is that hard work earns prosperity and prestige. . . Quitters never win. Failure builds character" (18). Numerous examples of this philosophy exist in nineteenth-century prose, from biographies of famous men, such as *The Life of P.T. Barnum* (1855), to success manuals at the end of the century, such as *Portraits and Principles of the World's Great Men and Women With Practical Lessons on Successful Life By Over Fifty Leading Thinkers* from 1898. According to the included essay, "Footprints of Failure" by Reverend James W. Cole, "we say that success is the exception and failure the rule of life. Not so" (King 74). While the loser is far more common, popular literature privileges the winners. I would suggest that lyric offers a respite and a unique realm for the failure of the self.

Indeed, the expression of this failure is useful because poets and readers could constitute community though the mutual recognition of the self's collapse. The poetry examined here approaches the self with the knowledge of its impossibility and the hope this acknowledgment will nevertheless enable a productive union of deficient people.

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Antebellum poets such as Longfellow, Whitman, Osgood, and Horton are not naïve in their promotion of a self-enclosed subject; rather they believed that transmitting the possibility of selfhood could forge fraternity or even freedom. For Longfellow and Whitman, belief in this self could serve the project of national unity. For Osgood and Horton, access to liberal selfhood was barred, but belief in its ideal helped them locate a public space in which their "voices" could be heard.

Crane, Robinson, Millay, and Dunbar emptied the promise of ideal selfhood articulated by these predecessors, but by upholding the unity that belief in the self inspired, they were able to reconstitute selfhood for a modern era. Because they experienced "a Gilded Age that was also a great depression," they practiced a poetics of failure meant to revise the poetic self (Sandage 228). There is perhaps no better poet than Edwin Arlington Robinson when it comes to articulating failure. Robinson's first self-published work, *The Torrent and the Night Before*, coincided with the economic panic of 1893; he, Crane, Dunbar, and Millay watched "the century peter[] out amid farmer's revolts, the advent of Jim Crow, currency wars over the gold and silver standards, antitrust debates, bloody labor strikes, and 'Coxey's Army' of unemployed men marching on Washington" (Sandage 228). Robinson's sonnet, "On the Night of a Friend's Wedding," from this collection reflects this sense of failure:

> If ever I am old, and all alone,
> I shall have killed one grief, at any rate;
> For then, thank God, I shall not have to wait
> Much longer for the sheaves that I have sown.
> The devil only knows what I have done,
> But here I am, and here are six or eight
> Good friends, who most ingenuously prate
> About my songs to such and such a one.
>
> But everything is all askew to-night, —

As if the time were come, or almost come,
For their untenanted mirage of me
To lose itself and crumble out of sight,
Like a tall ship that floats above the foam
A little while, and then breaks utterly. (1-14)

This is a poem about the failure of lyric to craft and communicate the self. The sonnet begins with "I" looking forward to old age because then he will be closer to death, when he can finally reap what he has "sown." In a play on words, "sheaves" both indicates harvest and stacks of pages, presumably pages of lyric poetry given the use of "songs" at the end of the stanza. Robinson's double meaning denotes the dissemination of stacks of poems and the reaping of their public reception. But the next lines suggest that this will not be a rewarding harvest since "the devil only knows" what has been distributed. While the speaker is successful enough for his friends to know and prate about his "songs," this positive reception of his works will not return to him the kind of recognition or understanding he desires. Hence he cannot wait to reclaim these works from the hands of his supposed friends. The spondee "Good friends" causes a break in the iambic pentameter; the caesura enforced by the comma literally and metaphorically gives us pause and renders the goodness of these friends ironic. Their prating indicates that they have not interpreted these songs accordingly; instead they make the work of "I" into trivial chatter. Because his friends artlessly babble, we recognize that "I" will only truly be known by the devil. This octave does not communicate lyric's ability to construct selfhood through reflection and recognition. Instead, we experience Robinson's nightmare of lyric failure.

The sestet turns from the inadequacies of the speaker and his friends to the effects of these deficiencies. The friends' inattention to the celebration at hand and their inability

as readers and critics seems to bode a final failure. The "untenanted mirage" that these friends perceive will finally "crumble." Like the shipwreck imagery that has been employed by many of the poets in this project, the breaking apart of the symbolic ship signifies the collapse of this imaginary self. While the sonnet ends with the wreckage of his failure, it presents the possibility that false, fallen selfhood will disintegrate. Robinson does not indicate what will take the place of this improbable self, but the possibility exists for a revised selfhood recognizable by all, not just the devil, for what it is. At the very least, friends are brought together around the mirage of the self. The untenanted fantasy will finally "lose itself" but not before forging a social unity at the expense of the speaker. His failure offers a sad sacrifice in hope of the rejuvenantion of socially recognized and socially unifying selfhood.

Poems like this are not difficult to find in Robinson's works, the difficulty is choosing among them. Robinson's concern with failure stems from his historical circumstances, certainly, but this sense of failure inheres in the poetry of lyric selfhood. Robinson's poems about limited, flawed characters, Crane's poems about the universe's indifference to the human condition, Millay's poems about impossible and self-negating love, and Dunbar's poems about masks without actors all reveal the failures of ideal selfhood at the turn of the century. These poets inherit the paradoxes and inherent impossibility of lyric subjectivity from their predecessors' failures, but attempt to reassemble the self for a modern era by employing their fantasy of ideal selfhood. Robinson, like Crane, Millay, and Dunbar, explore, mourn, and re-vision the ideal selfhood Longfellow, Whitman, Osgood, and Horton communicated, hoping to forge the community they know this failed fantasy is capable of creating.

These poets contend with an impossible ideal of selfhood that nevertheless meant to encourage union through a shared vision of self-possession. The juxtapositions examined here create a variant of American exceptionalism in which failure to achieve the liberty, equality, and autonomy of liberal subjectivity constitutes the grounds of a national fraternity based on shared and unattainable beliefs. These poets articulate the defeat underpinning American exemplarity; yet the bravado of American liberal subjectivity constitutes a humble union of those courageous enough to admit failure. Lyric's aspirations to its own impossibility create a productive tension that serves this purpose across the nineteenth century.

The history of lyric in the nineteenth century has important ramifications for how we understand lyric in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Modern accounts of lyric, however, have largely been based on longstanding critical misinterpretations. Such scholarship situates nineteenth-century lyric in a position of overt idealism that permits its wholesale rejection by modernist poetics. This project revises such critical oversights by demonstrating that the turn-of-the-century lyric was continuous with the concerns of the modernist movement. Indeed, both modernists and turn-of-the-century poets look backward but differ in how they engage that inheritance; "even when modernist authors are making it new, they are inevitably grappling with the old: backwardness is a feature of even the most forward-looking modernist literature" (Love 6).

Recent scholars recovering the history of lyric argue that by the turn of the century, contemporary literary editors and critics determined lyric poetry to be ideal and transcendent, sheltered from historical influences. Shira Wolosky points out that:

> . . . the notion of poetry as a self-enclosed aesthetic realm; as a formal object to be approached through more or less exclusively specified categories of formal

analysis; as metahistorically transcendent; and as a text deploying a distinct and poetically 'pure' language: these notions seem only to begin to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century, in a process that is itself peculiarly shaped in response to social and historical no less than aesthetic trends. "Claims" 14

Citing Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* as an example, Jackson argues "at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the process of lyricization was just underway" ("Poetess" 57). Like Wolosky, Jackson agrees that "the nineteenth century was the period in which the shift from many verse cultures articulated through various social relations gave way to an idea of poetry devoted to the transcendence of those relations (via beauty, say, or truth, or Literature, or Culture, or Poetry)" ("Poetess" 57).

Wolosky and Jackson argue that lyric shifted into a "single abstraction" at the same time that American poetry is perceived as entering a period of twilight or death (Jackson "Poetess" 57). This turn-of-the-century temporal overlap suggests a causal connection between these two events in the history of lyric. Because lyric was perceived as aesthetically transcendent, and because all poetry was read as lyric, American poetry entered a period of twilight because it was thought to be so detached from reality as to be irrelevant. Indeed, this was the narrative of American poetry told by turn-of-the-century critics. Renker explains that "literary discourse in the period often simply assumed that the genre of poetry was inherently idealist. Since it presumably operated instead with reference to the better, higher, superior world of eternal and transcendent spirit rather than to material or actual fact, poetry was construed to be, by definition, antithetical to realism" (136). This assumption was bolstered by the popularity of Stedman's twilight formulation, which became so widespread that it obscured any counter-examples. As Renker explains "after Edmund Clarence Stedman published the term in 1885, it spread rapidly through literary culture and became an almost instant catchphrase, a sensationalist

coin that writers enjoyed trading amidst their broader discussions about the degraded literary status, or status in general, of the modern era" (135). But when we recall that Stedman was lamenting the twilight of lyric's idealized status, it becomes apparent that "Stedman was used against himself" (Renker 140).

For Stedman, lyric had entered its twilight because it had ceased being ideal and genteel. In other words, lyric was in decline because it began adopting the practices of realism. Stedman criticizes the "new leaders" in poetry precisely because they abandoned the tradition of genteel idealizing, complaining "we do not ask for masterpieces, but how few the recent poems which approach in breadth and interest those of the veteran school" (794). He analyzes the psyche of "new leaders in poetry" in order to discern the reason for their disregard, asking "do they not share in a measure the sentiment which regards ideality as an amiable weakness, the relic of a Quixotic period, and thus feel half-ashamed of their birthright?" (794). Despite these concerns, Stedman coined a characterization whose misinterpretation had important ramifications for how critics have since thought about nineteenth-century American poetry.

The notion of poetry's twilight, and later Santayana's description of nineteenth-century poetry as "genteel" and "grandmotherly" "has operated hegemonically to distort the history of the genre in the United States. . . the era itself had already generated a counter-poetics of realism. The twilight narrative has simply kept it in the shadows" (Santayana 73) (Renker 149). Indeed, Crane, Robinson, Millay, and Dunbar work to adapt lyric's conservative tradition to a modern environment. By tracing liberal selfhood through the technology of lyric, these figures engage with the experience of the turn of the century just as their predecessors employed lyric to explore antebellum life.

The reality of lyric realism has been obscured by the misinterpretation of Stedman's twilight and later, Santayana's discussion of genteel poetry. While "before the middle of the nineteenth century, *genteel* had been a term of praise," Stedman's lament indicated a devaluation of gentility after the Civil War (Tomisch 2). But with Santayana and critics that followed him, the complicated history of lyric's struggle with idealization was wiped out. As Tomisch argues "the twentieth-century critics who followed Santayana, however, were less interested in understanding the past than in creating a new and vital future. They were in no doubt about what had to be exorcised from American life to make that future possible, and they seized on Santayana's phrase, the Genteel tradition, to describe it" (3). Santayana helps justify and pave the way for modernist's self-conscious rejection of the nineteenth century. Modernism's innovations have been viewed as "an escape from the crumbling center of culture" (Love 54). While this has been the dominant narrative of the movement, modernism can be considered another approach to the decline of lyric gentility. The poets examined here chose to work with the genteel tradition and the ideal notion of lyric, modernists self-consciously rejected it outright: both groups share the practice of recognizing that lyric had to adapt to the decline of gentility.

While modernist innovation has been critically documented, the "counter-poetics" of the poets who retain nineteenth-century traditions has been overlooked due to the immediate aftermath following Stedman's formulation of the "twilight" (Renker 149). Extending the "sensationalist coin" are recent reassessments of nineteenth-century poetry's idealism that implicitly resurrect Stedman's already misconstrued formulation (Renker 135). The critical aftermath of Stedman's formulation provides the evidence for

conclusions about the history of lyric poetry reached by contemporary critics such as Wolosky and Jackson. But as we have discussed, this twilight indicated a decline in the genteel and conservative definition of poetry, precisely the same one that pursued a concept of poetry as idealized and detached. While Stedman lamented the rise of realist poetry, this realist strain has been overlooked by recent critics in their definitions of the transcendental lyric at the turn of the century. Rather, the idealized lyric contained its own strain of realist counter-poetics across the nineteenth century.

The idealized lyric was disputed as early as Mill's definition of poetry and continued to be disputed to the end of the century. In other words, contemporary critics and poets resisted what was already understood to be lyric poetry's idealization. Herbert Tucker explains that "to the most ambitious and original young poets of the day, Browning and Alfred Tennyson, the sort of lyricism Mill admired must have seemed 'overheard' in a sense quite other than Mill intended: heard overmuch, overdone, and thus in need of being done over in fresh forms" (227). Yopie Prins, building on Tucker's discovery, argues that "Victorian verse" does not warrant reading "as an intensely subjective, personal utterance that is heard or overheard (*pace* Mill) but as the public performance of 'voice inverse,' an inversion of the figure on which lyric reading is predicated" ("Historical" 230). Marion Thain, discussing Decadent poetry, explains that in the figure "Michael Field's" dual authorship, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper strove to avoid the single, solipsistic and gendered lyric speaker; their work "opposed post-Romantic lyric solitariness" "in favour of the regeneration of an older, and perhaps less solipsistic, form of Elizabethan lyric voice" (*'Michael Field'* 94, 93).

If nineteenth-century critics assumed that lyric was a kind of idealized and ahistorical genre, it is apparent that poets were busy resisting and disputing this definition. The existence of a kind of lyric fatigue across the nineteenth century demonstrates that, despite the perception of lyric as transcendent, poets and critics struggled with the lyric ideal by failing to achieve its perfection, rejecting it outright, or attempting to adapt its ideals to historical conditions of selfhood. This fatigue reveals that lyric was a troublesome ideal, one that was not coherent and one that often came up short. Thain argues "the Decadent lyric both acknowledged implicitly the impossibility of its unified vision in the modern world, even while it forged, at its best, a finely wrought artistic conceit that enabled reconciliations not quite possible in life. This gives lyric an undeniable energy as poetic form strains against impossible content" ("Poetry" 226). While Thain discusses the Decadent tradition in 1890s England, her comments articulate the notion of lyric that this project has illustrated. The perception of lyric as an idealized and transcendent form did not gradually grow over the century; its idealism was already implicit at the end of the century. But this ideal is important to lyric's historical development, as lyric is a study in failure, a definition that is not coherent, a concept in conflict across the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Stedman's poetic twilight exemplifies lyric's own poetics of failure: by the end of the century idealism was not sufficient to instruct people in higher pursuits. Instead lyric acknowledged the failure of ideals and turned to a pragmatic pursuit of liberal self formation. The turn-of-the-century poetry examined here shows lyrical strains in the sense of both failure to achieve and struggles against idealism. In fact, the poetry's simultaneous aspiration and agitation demonstrates not that lyric was already a tired and

over-heard reading practice, not that it was an exhausted and exhausting collapse of

discrete poetic genres, but that lyric contained these dynamic tensions within itself.

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