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Chinese Wines and Foreign Urns: Making Objects of Lyric

Ryan Matthew Hintzman

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Yale University

Chinese Wines and Foreign Urns:

Making Objects of Lyric

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Supervised by Professor Edward Kamens

Senior Essay for the Literature Major

13 April 2017

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Song is not compatible with aphasia and a stuttering
Amphion is an absurd figure indeed.
—Paul de Man, *Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric*

A poem is not a “thing.”
—Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*

[Lyric] is [an illusion]. And so is the value of a
dollar; so are punk rock, and the welfare state, and
love, and Harvard University.

—Stephen Burt, *What Is This Thing Called Lyric?*

Introduction: Professing the Lyric

What makes a lyric? The professors say: the alienation of the individual in the world of the commodity, apostrophe, the emergence of a tripartite genre system in the eighteenth century, the language of paradox, an affective-expressive conception of poetics, twentieth-century literary critics, the dramatic monologue, generic openness, generic specificity, incantation, Petrarch, the letter O, lyric discourse, a fictional speaking persona, unmediated subjectivity, the inner life of the poet, the Greek lyre, the use of the present tense, the eighteenth century, prosopopoeia, triangulated address, Shakespeare, genre hierarchy, epideixis, defense mechanisms against the meaningless of the material world, extraordinary speech acts, literary tradition, a strange relation to time, brevity, the lyric voice, craft, readers.

What does lyric make, and what does lyric make us believe? The professors say: a thing, a poem, a verbal artifact, an urn-substitute, leaves of words, a script for performance, a disembodied voice, the dead letter, nothing at all, a lyric, a corporeal residue. Lyric makes us believe in the existence of a speaker, in urns, that poems are more than letters upon a page, that lyric poems are precisely letters upon a page, in immortality, in creative powers of imagination, in the lyric itself.

What does lyric do? The theorists say: Harmonize the relations between men and women, provide for proper regulation of the state, initialize a discursive event, imitate a speech act, assert power over a universe of death, remove the speaker from time, pretend to do something in the world, create a recurrent lyric present, enchant and disenchant, deceive, foreclose possibilities of historically-sensitive reading, suppress subgenres such as the ode or the inscription poem, and ignore the changing experiences and poems designated by the term 'lyric' over time.

Who professes the lyric? The professors say: the lyric poets themselves, who, in consciously placing themselves within the lyric tradition, guarantee the existence and viability of the lyric as concept; members of English departments who fill the academic positions created during the development of the professional (and professorial) Anglo-American reading class; the New Critics; the historical genre-specialists; the historians of poetics; the ancient Greeks; the Japanese poets.

The student of the catechism asks: *How can lyric be any of these things, if it seems to be capable of being anything?*

I begin with the form of the catechism because the lyric demands an interrogation of what we believe in and why. Some critics, writing in the wake of Paul de Man's distrust toward the figure of the voice, read lyric as essentially operating on "bad faith," presenting voices, subjects, and persons where only inscriptions exist (Burt 437). Barbara Johnson, commenting on the proximity between lyric and law, asks if lyric makes us believe in persons or subjects, and if lyric, in its anthropomorphizing figures, has the possibility of shaping our understanding of personhood and our relationship to the world (Burt 437). Reading de Man, Virginia Jackson tells us that "the lyric is in itself an illusion, a creation of readers who want to believe in it" (*Lyric Theory Reader* 271).

Virginia Jackson may be right, but many of the most cherished *things* in our lives are meaningfully charged illusions. The value of the dollar and a great many other things exist because people believe in their value or want to believe in their value. One may realize that a dollar bill is simply a material configuration of ink, linen, and paper fibers, but this demystification hardly keeps us from using paper money in our daily lives. Knowing a family heirloom—a grandfather’s watch, perhaps—is an elaborate mechanism made of various gears working together does not explain away or numb one’s attachment to the watch, and, if anything, an understanding of the physical object and its material intricacies only heightens our enchantment with the object. Every book collector will recognize what Walter Benjamin describes as the intimate relationship between the collector and his objects:

What I am really concerned with is giving you some insight into the relationship of a book collector to his possessions, into *collecting* rather than a collection. If I do this by elaborating on the various ways of acquiring books, this is something entirely arbitrary. This or any other procedure is merely a dam against the *spring tide of memories* which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions. Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. . . . [I]f there is a counterpart to the confusion of a library, it is the order of its catalogue (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 59-60, emphases mine).

Benjamin locates the crucial and passionately charged interrelationship between collector (agent), collecting (the action), and collection (the result—the amassed physical books). Through

collecting, the material collection becomes soaked through with the “tide of memories.” For Keats, whose late work is obsessed *by* the relationship between the hand writing (“This Living Hand”) and handwriting, the poem as lyric object would be the affectively charged material interface of hand, ink, and paper. “Hand” may itself be a metonymy for the writing body, or it may be shorthand for one’s distinctive and idiosyncratic way of writing, i.e. one’s handwriting.

If books are not simply a collection of things but objects charged with significance through the process of collecting, and if the collector is at once aware of the material condition of their books but also of the affective charges they possess, if the collector feels that material things reach out to us and become more than things, so too is the case with poems and their readers. I argue that lyric poems trope on their physical forms, their materials, and the possibility of falling away from lyrical enchantment into a recognition of the prosaic material characteristics of verse: ink and paper, perhaps bound in a book, perhaps in manuscript form. In locating a key characteristic of the lyric in its material form and its simultaneous potential to be more than simply its material form, in the lyric’s ability to signal through various devices (apostrophe, prosopopoeia, and other figures) that one must read figuratively while also at the same time being aware that one is reading a sequence of letters on a material surface, I suggest throughout the present essay that lyric is enabled by a toggle-switch between literal and figurative reading, of illusion and de-mystification, of collection and collecting, and of charging objects with meaning while also recognizing the possibility of discharging this meaning. I ask why and how we read lyric objects and how meaning and meaningfulness get started. Why do we animate the world with non-prosaic, non-material visions of things, illusions which seem to be as unavoidable as they are clearly false? How does lyric navigate the double possibility of illusion and disillusion or de-mystification?

As a preliminary exploration of these questions I offer a reading of the last four lines of Hart Crane's "Praise for an Urn," in which Crane imagines the thoughts of the poet taking material form and being scattered over the face of the earth:

Scatter these well-meant idioms
Into the smoky spring that fills
The suburbs, where they will be lost.
They are no trophies of the sun. (69)

The Orphic strain of lyric, which Crane here gestures toward, takes as its primal scene the *sparagmos* of Orpheus, his being torn limb from limb by the Maenads, enraged by the beauty of his voice and lyre. As the magically potent song of Orpheus gathers together and collects animate and inanimate things alike, Crane's lyric reaches back into the mythical storehouse of lyric tropes toward a concept of a lyric poem that *does* something in the world of things. Crane's poem asks, in the optative, for a scattering of his "well-meant idioms," which functions as a metalepsis for Shelley's "leaves," which in turn is a catachresis for the pages on which the poem is printed. In asking for the idioms to "scatter," Crane also makes the leaves a metalepsis for ashes, which one might scatter into the world, and which in turn are a synecdoche for the meaningfully charged body of the elegist's deceased friend. Crane forces the reader to think literally and figuratively, materially and poetically at the same time. Idioms are not ashes, they are words on a page, but this page may be scattered, and in scattering the pages like ashes one will have hit upon a central figurative gesture of both Orphic poetry and of American funerary practice. Scattering, in the Orphic tradition, is compensated for by incorporation, in which the scattered limbs of leaves of the poet become fertile nutrients for a rebirth or reawakening of poetry. And yet no reader of *Dial*, the journal in which Crane's poem originally appeared, would

likely have torn the pages of Crane's poem out of the journal and littered them somewhere in an otherwise clean and proper suburban neighborhood. Nor is it likely that the autumn wind granted Shelley's request to scatter his "ashes and sparks" among mankind.¹ As I will suggest in various ways, poetic imperatives, requests, apostrophes, and interrogatives are not simply discursive events or addresses to potentially responsive subjects, but also ways in which the poet or poem constitutes and initiates objects as potential containers for meaning. I therefore read Crane's "scatter" as a transposition of and cipher for the optative "let there be meaning."

Lyric often borrows the minds of the living to animate and maintain memorial objects—urns, busts, necklaces, poems—and to transform them into full containers of meaning. The title of Crane's poem, "Praise for an Urn," places "for" where the habitual ode prepositions "on" or "to" usually belong. This troping of the usual trope of the ode might be "Praise *in the place of an urn*" (Irwin 260), which *in turn* suggests Crane's subtle reading of Keats's famous urn: that the urn, for all of its apparent solidity and timelessness, is a fiction, and that Keats's poem alone remains in its place. The poem, like any container or urn, can be full or empty, though in lyric poetry this fullness is a figurative one, for the surface of a poem holds no volume. Lyric fullness or meaningfulness, in the sense I use throughout the essay, refers to the poem's solicitation of the reader's belief in its ability to stand in for or guarantee the meaningful presence of something that is not or cannot be empirically and materially present. The poem always promises to be more than letters on a page and calls out to be read, to be understood, to be taken as a thing charged with meaning.

The poem's final "sun" would identify the fires of cremation with the sun's incendiary and self-consuming powers. The sun is always turning, always troping, always consuming itself and producing ash in its core. Yet the things of this world, the blossoms and the birds of the air,

are transubstantiations and trophies of the sun. The sun may rise and give rise to many things. The emptying out of the sun is recuperated into a fullness of meaning by lyric's troping of the sun's own turning. This metalepsis, or trope of the trope, which, as I will illustrate at times explicitly and often implicitly, recovers meaningfulness from meaninglessness in a lyrical feedback loop or oscillation between emptying out and filling with meaning. The disillusion or fall away from lyrical illusions is itself a trope that leads to the production of more lyric poetry. True non-comprehension and non-understanding, a truly non-illusory vision of the prosaic materiality of the world, would no longer lead to lyric, and would be incomprehensible within the tropological system of lyric poetry. Such seems to be de Man's point in his essay on Baudelaire that I read more fully in the first chapter: "there is no term available to tell us what 'Correspondences' might be. All we know is that it is, emphatically, *not* a lyric" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 261), adding that "Obsessions" can do nothing but produce a "hermeneutic, fallacious lyrical reading of the unintelligible" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 262). I will address de Man's arguments and his influence on critics of the lyric in the next section; for now, I note that lyric cannot provide a reading of the unintelligible or the material without turning it into some lyrical (i.e. falsified, deluded, hermeneutically-compatible) thing.

This dilemma of re-cycling meaninglessness into meaningfulness is one of the reasons why Paul de Man insists that, if one already has the "infratext" or material starting point for a lyric mystification of the world, one can trace the series of tropes, mystifications, and translations that de Man calls "lyric reading" and that I am calling a filling-with-meaning. But if one begins with only the lyric, it is impossible to perform the reverse gesture and to permanently de-mystify or fall out of the lyric. The materiality of the world—which, for de Man, is that which resists understanding or comprehension and is the opposite of phenomenalization—by definition

cannot be taken up into the lyric. The lyric is interested in its own material existence, I argue, only in so far as the material can be troped upon and made part of the figurative scheme of the poem. The material world and its concerns are not alien to the lyric, nor are the craft and artifice of verse-making betrayals of the lyric's apparent subjective turn. Instead, I will argue that the lyric is the site of particularly intensive reflection on the relationship between language and the material world, on the matter of language, and on the matter of making lyric.

My foregoing discussion has suggested that lyric may in fact be more than a willful illusion, that Virginia Jackson's placement of "readers" as the subject of "want" in the sentence "lyric is . . . a creation of readers who want to believe in [lyric]" perhaps formulates the problem the wrong way around. The etymological senses of *obsess*, which in an older though by no means outdated English idiom functions as a transitive verb, provide useful hints for reformulating the problem. To be obsessed *by* something is to be besieged by a spirit, to be haunted and watched closely. Obsession is the intrusion of thought from somewhere else, thought that originates in some other thing or being. Keats is haunted or obsessed by the idea of his posthumous corpus, the substitute body which may live on after his frail body has died. From obsession it is a short step to possession, when the spirit no longer sits opposite—as in the etymological sense of *object*—and has come to reside in the interior. Benjamin possesses his books, but in a stronger sense, he is possessed by them: his essay, as he willfully concedes, is a defensive gesture against the surge of memories the books threaten to release. We speak in English of possessing poems by memory or by heart, but we are also possessed and haunted by them, as when Keats's ghostly hand reaches towards us:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold

And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you. (384)

Possession holds legal connotations; here, Keats's hand, held out towards us in the present tense, adjures us again and again for a transfusion of blood, asserting a claim to ownership in a sinister reversal of Whitman: "every drop of blood belonging to you as good belongs to me." With each reading of the poem, Keats transforms repetition into a re-petitioning.

In attempting to locate a preliminary vocabulary for ascribing agency to poems, I return to the question of belief: what do lyrics want us to believe, or make us believe? More strongly phrased, it is a question of what lyric *charges* us with, in the legal and affective sense.

Generations of scholars have scoured the world's museums for Keats's urn. How many candidates have been put forward by scholars as the "real" love interests of the Shakespeare sonnets? When Yamanoue no Okura mourns the loss of his son Furuhi, he reaches into poetic tradition and ritual practice to mediate his grief, his lament echoing the chants of Hitomaro, his poetic predecessor:

What could I do? Not knowing where to reach for help, / I bound my sleeves, /
My white barken sleeves with cords, / And in my hands / grasping our round
cloudless mirror, / to the gods of heaven / I raised my voice in beseeching prayer,
/ and to the gods of earth / I bowed and pressed my brow into the dust. (Cranston
355)

世武須便乃 多杼伎乎之良爾 志路多倍乃 多須吉乎可氣 麻蘇鏡 弓爾登利
毛知弓 天神 阿布芸許比乃美 地祇 布之弓額拜 (MYS 5.904)²

*se-mu subye no tadwoki wo sira-ni sirwotape no tasuki wo kake ma-swokagami te
ni tori-motite ama tu kamwi apugi kopi-nomi kuni tu kamwi pusite nuka-duki*

If the ritually-charged words (in Japanese, *koto*, meaning “words”) and objects had done what they had promised to do (*koto*, meaning “things” or “affairs”), Furuhi would be alive, but there would be, it stands to reason, no poem. Lyric, as I will argue throughout, resists the de-mystification of the world by internalizing this trope of de-mystification and assimilating it into a larger regulating structure of illusion and disillusion in the lyric. Falling away from figurative vision is a pretext for making a poem.

What Makes a (Comparative) Lyric?

In maintaining and developing a concept of the lyric, I am implicitly arguing that there are poetic objects that can usefully be described as lyric, and I further maintain that lyric is a useful concept for comparative literary studies. In doing so, I acknowledge that strong arguments against the lyric have been put forward in recent years by Virginia Jackson and other skeptics of lyric: that “lyric” as a term has referred to vastly different objects or types of poems, that lyric can obfuscate and obscure a variety of historically-specific verse practices or subgenres of the lyric, and that lyric can and often is used as a critical tool to abstract the lyric away from its material existence, away from its socio-political frames, and away from historically-specific ideas about and practices of making verse. Historical poetics, a useful subfield of poetic study that has emerged in recent years largely as a reaction against New Critical assumptions about lyrical voice and lyric speakers (Jarvis, “What is Historical Poetics” 98), might be best described as a

critical practice of close reading that aspires to historicize both its own reading and the practices of verse-making it investigates.

My own conceptualization of lyric, which takes up a number of key terms and tropes associated with the debate on lyric—lyric reading, anthropomorphism, prosopopoeia—also shares Historical Poetics’ broader theoretical commitment to imagining alternatives to the New Critical paradigm of reading. I conceive an object-oriented reading of lyric as one that encourages attention to the ways in which lyric mediates our relationship to and with objects in the world, while also allowing for a pre-hermeneutical investigation of “how poems get made” at different points in history (Jarvis, “What is Historical Poetics” 100). Jarvis’s work, though focused on the English poetic tradition, provides a potentially comparative model for historically- and philologically-aware attention to the ways in which the material elements of the poem—including paralinguistic or non-semantic elements such as meter, melody, consonant handwriting, typographical choices, and the material on which a poem is written—ground the affects and effects of lyric. I accept Jonathan Culler’s characterization of lyric as a form of poetry strongly marked by its “foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions . . . in the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse” (“Why Lyric” 205), though I extend the idea of the “material dimensions” of language to include poetry’s material existence in the world. I argue that this dimension of lyric is central to the figurative scheme of the lyric, and I take lyric to be poetry that is marked by an unusual density of reflection upon and troping on its own material form, which is hardly “some kind of fixed container for a changing content” (Jarvis, “What is Historical Poetics,” 100) but a more vital and central problem in figuring out what lyric does and how. I also take up Simon Jarvis’s urging “to consider verse as a process of cutting, marking, and working over language” (“What is Historical Poetics” 108) and to be more attentive to what

Blake might call the “minute particulars” of verse, the materials that are taken up into verse—poetic forms, previous poems, objects in the real world. These materials are *col-lected*, etymologically a “gathering together” and also at least potentially a “reading together,” to create new lyric objects. At the highest level of abstraction, I claim that lyric poems are artfully and poetically crafted things that are always in some way aware of and playing upon their existence in the material world. In doing so, I conceive of a comparative lyric that can account for the various ways in which poems are made and come into being as *things* that, like the objects of our everyday lives, are capable of being charged with non-literal meanings. Poems are things, and somehow also potentially more than things.

The lyric, as I conceptualize and discuss it here, is therefore not a genre but a site, theoretical topic, poetic *topos*, and imaginative space that shapes the poetic subject’s relation to and toward the material world. This site of lyric exists in the space between the possibility of charging and transforming the world with figurative meaning and the threat of dis-figuration or imaginative dis-charge, a refusal to believe in the illusions that lyric sustains about the world. This doubled structure of affirming and denying the possibility of a sustained figurative or poetic vision of the world is most noticeable in the lyric’s tendency towards the apostrophic and vocative modes, frequently calling out to urns, roses, winds, and other inanimate objects as though they were capable of responding to the poet’s lyrical outbursts. Jonathan Culler, perhaps the most adamant contemporary supporter and theorist of the lyric, has long maintained that apostrophe and the special “lyric present” are markers of a special language of lyric, a language that would set the lyric apart from everyday experience, sick roses and “still unravished brid[al]” urns (Keats 282) not being objects one usually addresses or anthropomorphizes in public. This concept of lyric would retain something of that “*belief* that language can sometimes make *things*

happen” (“Why Lyric” 204-5, italics mine; see also *Pursuit of Signs* 155). For Culler, the lyric poem is its own discursive happening, an event that draws us out of the empirical world and empirical time into an iterable discursive event. Culler therefore describes Keats’s encounter with the Grecian Urn as “a fictional time in which nothing happens but which is the essence of happening” (*Pursuit of Signs* 168).

Earl Miner, the only scholar who, to my knowledge, has engaged substantially on the issues of comparative poetics and the question of lyric with regard to East Asian poetry, remarks that apostrophe “is not helpful for [describing and understanding] much of the world’s poetry” (568). Premodern Japanese poets, with significant exceptions, are less prone to addressing inanimate objects and absent auditors than their Greek counterparts but one feels that comparative literature should be more than a game of East-West ‘Go Fish,’ and one hardly feels intellectually satisfied by the prospect of tallying up the constitutive surface features or master tropes of various poetic traditions on a critical “master chart” of lyric. Miner’s idea of comparative poetics is really one of comparative literary systems, a question of the primacy and configurations of narrative, dramatic, and lyric poetry in different world poetics. Miner provides little reason why “systematic poetics” should aid us in reading poems, or why we should trust historical writers on poetics to provide genuine or accurate insight into the process of making poems or what kind of things poems are. Miner elicits though largely elides a second anxiety of the comparatist, that of scale. How can we come to know entire literary systems, and even if it were somehow possible to grasp the totality of a tradition, how could we, given our human capabilities and limited time, possibly come to know more than one system and to synthesize this knowledge into a useful theory of comparative literature? If comparative literature cannot be exhaustive, it must be methodologically cunning in other ways. Auerbach in *Mimesis* takes as his

epigraph Marvell's famous opening line from "To His Coy Mistress": "had we but world enough, and time." Auerbach knew that the comparatist has neither the world nor time, and so focused intensely on small excerpts from a wide range of works, small fragments that might stand in as synecdoches for what we cannot read and cannot know. What we know intimately are poems and the effects and designs they have upon us; if we may read these productively together, it may be enough.

I therefore dissent from Miner and extend Culler in reading apostrophe and prosopopoeia as two tropes in a broader poetic process of saturating the world with figurative meaning and of endowing objects with significance beyond their material worth or condition, what colloquial English would call the "sentimental value" of an object. As I trace in more detail below, Paul de Man in his late work considers prosopopoeia—literally "giving face" to an object—the constitutive trope of lyric. Prosopopoeia translates things of the material world into potential objects for the hermeneutical process and for understanding (Culler "Reading Lyric" 105). But de Man, having suggested that one Baudelaire poem is the lyrical reading of another—and so would allow us to see how lyric transforms its materials into something other than what it "really" is—emphatically denies the possibility of the reverse gesture, of reading one poem as the demystification of another (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 261). Culler pinpoints de Man's dilemma with precision:

Why does de Man emphatically deny this course, this possibility? In part to expose it as a recuperative strategy of understanding. To take the unintelligibility of "Correspondances" as demystification would be precisely to recuperate it: to make it no longer a materiality on which meaning is imposed by lyrical translation but a further instance of meaningfulness ("Reading Lyric" 105-106).

I argue that this falling away from and subsequent recuperation of meaning is one of the central features of the lyric. The recuperative gesture is equivalent to de Man's idea of the lyrical phenomenalization of the world, which would prepare the material world for intelligibility and interpretation, i.e. meaningfulness, by turning materiality into signs. The corresponding and opposite procedure, de-mystification, which falls away from this possibility for meaningfulness and sees the prosaic object *as it really is*—often takes place as the undoing of a synecdoche, discharging meaning from an object by rejecting the trope (or misprision, or mis-vision) that previously animated the thing and saturated it with meaning. This breaking of the trope—a turn away from trope, or the trope of a trope, and therefore a disturbing displacement—often takes a doubled visionary structure that suspends at once the material, de-mystified object and the object as it was once seen:

And yet she too is dissolved, she is destroyed.

She gives transparenence. But she has grown old.

The necklace is a carving not a kiss.

The soft hands are a motion not a touch.

The house will crumble and the books will burn. (Stevens 223)

In these lines taken from the third canto of the “Auroras of Autumn,” Stevens provides a useful illustration of the cycle of de-mystification and recuperation. Having previously read the necklace as a synecdoche that stands in for and guarantees the meaningful presence of the absent mother, Stevens rejects this poetic illusion in an emphatically negative un-naming and un-seeing: “the necklace is a carving not a kiss.” In a recuperative gesture, Stevens uses the energy released from this discharging of meaning to launch into the visionary mode: “The house will crumble

and the books will burn.” The trope of un-seeing, the breaking of the trope, becomes re-assimilated to meaningfulness when it is read as a visionary sign for future events not yet accessible to empirical experience. No longer a sign for the absent mother and past presences, the necklace-as-carving becomes a sign for the future and for the destruction of memory to come.

If death is a constant presence in the lyrics I discuss, it is because death, literal meaning, de-mystification and the “materiality of actual history” form one half of the lyric’s figurative possibilities:

True "mourning" is less deluded [than the name Baudelaire’s lyric gives it: a *chambre d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux rôle*]. The most it can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or, better, *historical* modes of language power (de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism* 262).

Historical modes of language might be content with the simple “it was” or “it happened,” but lyric, de Man seems to suggest, accepts no such finalities or simplicities. Death, which may seem initially to be universally human and thus eminently comparable, turns out to be highly culturally-specific and culturally-mediated precisely because it lies beyond empirical existence and therefore cannot be assimilated to historical or prosaic modes of language. Death, like the concept of materiality I develop through the paper with and against the late work of Paul de Man, is that which is incomprehensible and unimaginable except through the mystifications of the lyric, which seem to be as unavoidable as they are trivially false. The lyric, as I will argue throughout my readings, is a way of imagining *beyond* the possibilities of empirical experience, of imagining *the beyond*, of using objects and poems to imagine or feel one’s way out of the

empirical present, and of allowing the present to be charged by the figurative presence of things that are not truly there.

Chapter One: Materiality and Lyric (Theory)

Without contraries is no progression.

—William Blake

In recent years the debate on the usefulness and possibility of lyric as a poetic or analytic category has re-emerged in the sphere of academic literary criticism. On one side of the debate, critics have emphasized the apparent continuity of a Western lyric tradition reaching from Sappho through the present day. Jonathan Culler, perhaps the most prominent exponent of this school of lyric theory, takes in his *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) as axiomatic the fact that lyric exists and proceeds inductively to ascertain the distinguishing or at least prominent features of the lyric. For Culler, speaking of the lyric tradition is justified by the self-conscious practice of lyric poets imitating earlier lyric poets to form a tradition of lyric—one might trace a genealogy through Pindar, Sappho, Horace, Petrarch, Auden. Culler finds the uniqueness of lyric in its extravagance and strangeness of its forms of address and speaking, its balancing of ritual and resuscitation, its iterability, its use of a strange lyric present tense and, perhaps above all, the use of apostrophe. Culler's examples in his *Theory of the Lyric* are drawn exclusively from Indo-European traditions, and some of his most convincing arguments about features of language that set the lyric apart from everyday language—and from other forms of literary language—are not as commonly found in poetry in Japanese or Chinese, which have no marked lyric tense like the English simple present, and whose poets seem less given to apostrophic invocations of winds, urns, and roses, though the trope is not entirely absent from Japanese poetry.

To extend Culler's work to a comparative or non-Western corpus therefore requires more than a keen eye for the surface features Culler enumerates throughout his book. A *comparative*

theory of the lyric need not and cannot be a *comprehensive* theory of the lyric, which would survey all poeties that might conceivably be called lyrical and aim to find attributes common to all lyric. To search for a shared ancestor between lyric poetry in Old Japanese and the English Romantic Ode is transparently a fool's errand—the tree of life cannot serve as a useful model for comparative lyric, for the tree of lyric is not tenable even as a critical fiction. Influence and reception might, as Culler suggests, provide for certain continuities within the Western lyric tradition, but any comparative reading of Western and non-Western lyric must think through alternatives to inherited critical paradigms that rely on naturalistic or genealogical metaphors to describe the operations of literary history, and do so without falling into trivial comparison of shared surface features. The ability to fly has evolved independently at least four times on Earth, and a bat's wing has more in common with a dog's leg structure than with an insect's wing. The work of comparative lyric cannot be to conduct a poetic census, both for the practical reason that any comparatist's time and labor is limited and because of the more elusive theoretical problem—evaded by Culler in his *Theory of Lyric* by proceeding inductively and assuming that he can identify a lyric—that one would conduct a comprehensive survey to find out what the lyric is, but that one can hardly take a census unless the object to be surveyed is already known and defined. Nor should the work of comparative lyric be to produce a spreadsheet that would map out the relative frequency or absence in different lyric traditions of apostrophe, the present tense, rhythm, and any number of other surface features that might easily be compared and tallied. In articulating and practicing a comparative reading of lyric in the present essay, I maintain that lyric can be a useful concept for criticism, and I locate this site for comparison in the ways in which lyric takes up and thinks through its material existence in the world.

Virginia Jackson's 2005 *Dickinson's Misery* is representative of a second strain of recent work on the lyric, one that attempts to restore materiality and mediation to poems that have been read in the twentieth-century as lyric(al). Using the ideas of "lyric reading" and "lyricization," terms taken from and derived against the late work of Paul de Man, Jackson argues that lyric is less an innate quality of poems than an interpretive reading strategy that develops historically alongside the emergence of a new print culture in the nineteenth century and with the emergence of the professional literary critic in the twentieth century. The aesthetic ideology of the lyric—ideological in so far as it decides that a certain scrap of writing on the back of an envelope is in fact a poem, and should be read like one and re-cast in the pattern of a lyric poem—erases the material and historical existence of Dickinson's work, creating the illusion that her poems, if they are indeed poems, are unmediated subjective expressions unproblematically available and accessible to twenty-first century readers in professionally-edited hardcover reading editions. In an anti-ideological and purportedly restorative critical gesture, *Dickinson's Misery* attempts to expose what lyric had made invisible: manuscript scraps, unconventional poetic forms, the historical contingency of manuscripts and their materiality, and nineteenth century versification practice and print culture.

Both factions of New Lyric Studies derive some of their central propositions from readings of a brief but characteristically difficult essay of Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric." Both Culler and Jackson dedicate significant attention to reading and making sense of de Man's assertion that the "lyric is not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding, the possibility of future hermeneutics. From this point of view, there is no significant difference between one generic term and another: all have the same apparently intentional and temporal function" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 261).

Following directly on the heels of a passage that concerns itself with apostrophe's double function as prominent lyric trope and as artificer of lyrical subjects out of the non-human material of the external world—"O Wild West Wind," Shelley chants—de Man here suggests that lyric's central feature is the projection of naturalized human-like consciousness onto the material world. Lyric inaugurates the illusion that the surfaces of things in the external world might also have a corresponding interior constructed on the model of the inside/outside metaphor of the lyric subject and of the lyric voice. Prosopopoeia is a projection of legibility onto the world, asserting that material surfaces are not simply surfaces but things that at least potentially harbor both depth and meaning. For a Romantic poet, the wind is never simply the wind, and we might easily be embarrassed on Shelley's behalf for his apostrophic address to the apparently sentient wind, but without a similar assumption that letters on a page are more than simply meaningless arrangements of ink and paper, reading lyric is impossible. Lyric therefore prepares the ground for a hermeneutic reading (i.e. interpretation) that would transform meaningless materiality into some *thing* that is meaningful.³ Lyric is then a particular mode of producing intelligibility and of imposing significance on materiality through "lyric translation" (Culler "Reading Lyric" 104-105). Any reading of lyric poetry, as I suggest throughout the present essay, relies on the same structures of projecting meaning onto the material world (i.e. the letters and paper of the poem that come to stand in for the voice or hand of the poet) that have been frequently identified as central rhetorical features of the lyric.

From here, it is only a short step to the lyric's tropes of its own material form, particularly the Romantic and post-Romantic lyric, which often figure the poem as tomb, crypt, urn, and violin, all figures of spacious interiority approximating the structure of the subject and therefore an "identification on the level of substance" between subject and external world (de

Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism* 241). De Man, insisting that what the poem actually provides is not subjectivity but a series of tropes whose function is to approximate subjectivity, hears in these figures the echo of a long-sustained and resonant lyrical metaphor of the inside and the outside. Virginia Jackson puts the problem well: “Baudelaire’s “Chambres d’éternel deuil” are echo chambers not so unlike those “de longs échos” of “Correspondances,” and what they echo is a lyric convention (*De profundis*) rather than an unmediated personal cry of anguish” (*Dickinson’s Misery* 107-108). The lyric, in de Man’s judgment as well as in Jackson’s, practices bad faith: it pretends to present subjectivity but actually amplifies and transmits the lyric’s *ersatz* subjectivity, echoing the promise of spacious and subjective interiors that are nothing but the surface a poem. If we hear a subject, it is only because the lyric has fooled us into thinking it is the container for a soul or for a voice. The lyric, then, constantly runs the risk of being exposed as a surface produces the illusion of depth, a material signifier without a signified (i.e. an actual subject) that would ground and legitimize its appearance or guarantee its authenticity. This problem of lyric’s *ersatz* subjectivity is closely related to Stevens’ realization in the “Auroras of Autumn” that the necklace is only human artifice, not human presence, but in drawing the parallel between the internal figurative schemes that structure a significant work in the lyric tradition and the critic’s refusal to read lyric in a naïve manner, I tentatively open for consideration the possibility that the tropological structure of the lyrical anticipates and accommodates de Man and Jackson’s attempts to expose the lyric as the emperor who has no clothes. That poems are not literally subjects should surprise no one. The more interesting question, and the more difficult one, is why the lyric should compel this double-vision, why in reading the lyric one “beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is,” to invoke Stevens’ “The Snow Man” (7).

At the end of the same essay, de Man asserts that “generic terms such as ‘lyric’ (or its various sub-species, ‘ode,’ ‘idyll,’ or ‘elegy’) as well as pseudo-historical period terms such as ‘romanticism’ or ‘classicism’ are always terms of resistance and nostalgia, at the furthest remove from the materiality of actual history” (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 263). Here, “lyric” and “materiality” are in opposition in so far as “materiality” is that which resists the lyric’s ideological projection of meaning and coherence onto the objects of the world, any *thing* that resists the hermeneutic motions of understanding. Materiality is what cannot be read, and given that lyric is always a reading of things as other than what they literally are, materiality and lyric for de Man are incompatible. Culler here reads genre as a method to control and organize the world, a way of discarding and mastering otherwise resistant material (“Reading Lyric” 101). Jackson’s response is to historicize the term lyric itself, criticizing de Man for failing to realize that the term “lyric” has a material and historical trajectory of its own. Lyric reading, Jackson suggests, tends to de-materialize and de-historicize poems by presenting them as moments of subjective expression that happen outside of empirical time and space. Jackson’s work might be broadly described as an anti-ideological critical gesture, a turn or trope that would return materiality to lyric, to uncover what generic or lyric reading has (apparently) mastered and discarded. Can poetic material ever be freed from the fiction of genre—one ideological fiction among many—and is such a freedom truly desirable?

Hypogram, Materiality, and Meaning

Usually one hears the meaning and overhears the voice.

—Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*

The discussion to this point has opened the question of the relationship between materiality and lyrical reading, but the spatial or temporal relation between the two, as well as the processes by which the critic or reader may fall out of lyrical illusion and into the prosaic and lyrically unintelligible world of materiality, remain unresolved. To pursue these questions further, I turn to Paul de Man's 1981 essay "Hypogram and Inscription" on the work of Michael Riffaterre, an essay that belongs to the same matrix of theoretical concerns as the Baudelaire essay (that is, prosopopeia, the non-referentiality of poetry, materiality, and the phenomenality of reading) and provides a pair of new terms that anticipate Jackson's attempted restoration of materiality to the lyric. We will find that the question of materiality, or the tension between lyric reading and the poem's existence as a written thing in the world, is not a question of "frames" for reading such as circulation, reception, and literary culture that might be accessed by de-lyricizing Dickinson's work. I will instead argue that the relationship between legibility and illegibility, between the lyric as discourse marked by prosopopeia and the anti-ideological gesture of seeing (not reading!) the lyric as inscription, is already inscribed into the figural logic of the lyric. Materiality is not alien to the lyric, and the restoration of materiality is not the death of the lyric, as Jackson (and, in a way, de Man himself) seems to suggest.

Both critics are caught in the same double bind, though de Man seems to recognize it in his readings of Baudelaire discussed above: to read the illegibility of a poem as a de-mystification is to assimilate illegibility into a system of legible meanings, again converting

materiality into meaningfulness (Culler “Reading Lyric” 105). Far from de-mythologizing the lyric by exposing its ideological positions—that lyric reads the world as charged with meaning, and asks to be read itself as an anthropomorphized inscription, a voice or representation of a subject—I argue that this dialectic of charging and dis-charging of *things* is an operation that sustains a number of related figures in lyric poetry. The lyric, I am suggesting, exists in an uncomfortable tropological space that permits neither full immersion in illusion nor full disillusion. As in my reading of Hart Crane’s “Praise for an Urn” above, I maintain that lyric forces the reader at times to see literally, to recognize the material qualities of the lyric poem, to see it as an artfully and artificially shaped object, but then tropes upon these material qualities by incorporating them into the figurative scheme of the poem. In being read and being taken up by the lyric, these material features of the lyric are no longer materiality itself but are transformed into tropes of materiality.

Dolar relates an amusing and helpful anecdote for understanding the relationship between materiality and lyrical reading: Italian soldiers in the trenches, ever attuned to the aesthetic and affective qualities of language (so the joke goes), hear the cries of a squadron leader to attack, but do not respond. The leader cries out again, to no avail. On the third attempt (as in all jokes), the call to attack elicits a response, but not the expected one: a small voice, perhaps not unlike the child who points out that the emperor is in fact naked, cries out *Che bella voce!* What a beautiful voice! Dolar reads the joke as a humorous concentration on the medium instead of the message, suggesting that “usually one hears the meaning and overhears [i.e. fails to hear] the voice” precisely because the voice is, in a particularly suggestive turn of phrase, “covered by meaning” (1-3). Like the child who sees quite literally to the core of the matter with the emperor, the second voice in Dolar’s anecdote hits upon the material ground that conveys

and supports meaning but cannot itself be assimilated into the structure of meaning and interpretation. The voice, like the hand(writing) or the letter, is somehow paralinguistic and usually obscured.

Dolar uses the figure of being “covered in meaning,” which is the same figure that de Man uses to describe the relationship between “Obsessions” and “Correspondances”:

Stating this relationship [between infra-text and lyric reading], as we just did, in phenomenal, spatial terms, or in phenomenal, temporal terms—“Obsession,” a text of recollection and elegiac mourning, *adds* remembrance to the flat surface of time in “Correspondances”—produces at once a hermeneutic, fallacious lyrical reading of the unintelligible (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 262).

Dolar seems to have hit upon de Man’s main point: materiality is one-dimensional, lyric is necessarily two-dimensional. Materiality is that which, in Dolar’s idiom, is *overseen*: as one hardly hears the aesthetic qualities of the voice when listening for meaning, the material surface is *covered over* with meaning, submerged beneath the illusion of legibility. The lyric proper plays on this spatial figure in reverse. De Man calls our attention to the lyric’s figures of internality—the cave, the mausoleum, the violin—but a second figure of spatiality asserts itself when pursuing the question of lyric as synecdoche or of lyric as a sign whose legitimacy and meaningfulness is guaranteed by what it can stand in for—the lyric subject projected “behind” the surface of the text. The necklace is more than a carving when it can be seen to stand in for the mother, and Crane’s “Praise for an Urn” makes us believe that poems can be containers for value and can stand in for the dead or absent in the same way that funerary urns and ashes are charged with ritual and affective significance. But when the assumption of legibility is broken—in a language one does not know, for example, or when one’s readings systematically unravel the

fantastic and illusory elements of the lyric—the figures of surface and depth, interiority and exteriority seem to collapse onto the one-dimensional shape of materiality.

This is why, at the end of the “Hypogram and Inscription” essay, the single irrefutable fact of the lyric comes into focus for de Man: that the lyric was once written at a certain time and a certain place. “Description,” de Man writes, “was a device to *conceal* inscription” (*Resistance to Theory* 51, emphasis mine), in much the same way that the voice carries meaning and is covered over by the same process of signification that it permits. These realizations are articulated in a prosaic and historical mode of language—note the use of “was”—that seems to be an escape from the lyric. But de Man acknowledges that this very historicity, the fact that the lyric *was* written, is what allows for the iterability of the lyric *here* and *now*. The lyric recuperates this fall into materiality by transforming “a certain *there* and a certain *then*” into “a *here* and a *now* in the reading ‘now’ taking place” (*Resistance to Theory* 51). De Man ends the essay by suggesting that any theory of poetic reading must come to terms with the “materiality of . . . inscription” (*Resistance to Theory* 51), and in the readings I put forward in the present essay, I try to trace the contours of figurative reading and literal seeing, the ways in which lyric calls attention to and conceals inscription, the oscillation between a recognition of undeniable fact that the poem is a *written thing* and the figurative schemes that extend the one-dimensionality of the material surface of the poem into spatial and temporal depths.

As Dolar and de Man suggest in different ways, the material infrastructure that permits reading to take place is also the material that, when seen fully and clearly on its own terms, would be death to reading. The lyric then depends, as I argue here, on a simultaneous visibility and invisibility of the infrastructure that makes it possible, what I have described as the vertiginous interplay of the literal and the figurative, the lyrically charged and the prosaically

dis-charged. De Man focuses so often on the processes that disrupt hermeneutics, the structures in poetry that cannot be easily assimilated to meaning or legibility, precisely because these points of *non-meaning* in the text—which is to say the points at which bare materiality is hinted at or foregrounded—are what jolt the reader out of the sustained illusions that lyric projects onto the world. To return yet again to Stevens in the “Auroras of Autumn,” the foregrounding of the materiality of the necklace is the death of its synecdoche. The ability of the necklace to stand in for the mother is contingent on its ability to sustain a double life as thing and as something somehow more than a thing, a lyrically charged object.

The analogy between voice and poem should make clear that when de Man uses “materiality,” as he does only a few times in his late work, he does not mean a thing’s existence in the physical or material world. He seems instead to use the term to explore the space between “linguistic [and] natural reality,” between our linguistic mystifications of the world—which de Man in another essay calls “ideology” (*Resistance to Theory* 11)—and the world prior to phenomenalization. De Man writes:

It would be unfortunate, for example, to confuse the materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies. This may seem obvious enough on the level of light and sound, but it is less so with regard to the more general phenomenality of space, time or especially of the self; no one in his right mind will try to grow grapes by the luminosity of the word "day," but it is very difficult not to conceive the pattern of one's past and future existence as in accordance with temporal and spatial schemes that belong to fictional narratives and not to the world. This does not mean that fictional narratives are not part of the world

and of reality; their impact upon the world may well be all too strong for comfort.

(*Resistance to Theory* 11)

An unfortunate confusion for a wine-grower, but a productive one for the lyric poet. Wine cannot be grown with the word “day,” but the work of mourning might well be carried out by words upon a page, or so Crane’s poem would have us believe. As with Keats’s fictional and composite urn, which has no material existence “out there” in the world but is somehow brought into the world *through* the ode’s text, a textual surface that would make us and has made numerous critics believe in the urn’s empirical existence, the lyric poems I read here are made possible by the simultaneous distance between and potential conflation of “the materiality of the signifier [and] the materiality of what it signifies.”

In the essay on Riffaterre, de Man pinpoints the uncertainty between cause and effect or signifier and signified (or perhaps more properly, referent) in the figure of prosopopoeia:

This means, in linguistic terms, that it is impossible to say whether prosopopoeia is plausible because of the empirical existence of dreams and hallucinations of whether one believes that such a thing as dreams and hallucinations exist because language permits the figure of prosopopoeia (*Resistance to Theory* 49-50).

Does poetry exist because the world exists, or do we see the world the way we do because poetry allows us this vision? Does Keats’s famous ode exist because there are empirical urns out there in the world, or do we believe in Keats’s urn because his ode would have us do so? To de Man I can only add John Hollander’s observations that all pictures, like poems, “look more like other pictures than what they are pictures of” (*Vision and Resonance* 246) and that “the look of poems, square and framelike as they may invariably remain, open and *unendingly page-like* as their

iambic blocks may be, will serve as *lenses for the look of things*" (*Vision and Resonance* 285, italics mine). Poems are ways of looking and ways of seeing, modes of relating to the world.

The term hypogram, which de Man renders as "infratext" and which still is in need of clarification, originates in Saussure's late work on anagrams, where Saussure becomes suspicious that Latin poetry might actually be "about" the dismemberment and distribution of fragments of a proper name throughout the poem. The anxiety generated by the anagram or hypogram is that the reader be rendered unable to distinguish between meaningful and meaningless articulations (Culler "Reading Lyric" 104). The hypogram therefore attracts de Man's interest as another mechanism that disrupts hermeneutical reading of the text. Is the text really doing that, *or am I just hearing things*, Saussure seems to ask himself. The very status of the sign as signifier is therefore put into question:

Since the key word is the proper name in all its ordinary integrity, its subdivision into discrete parts and groups resembles, on the level of meaning, the worst phantasms of dismemberment to be found in D.P. Schreber's *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*. We would then have witnessed, in effect, the undoing of the phenomenality of language which always entails . . . the undoing of cognition and its replacement by the uncontrollable power of the letter as inscription.

(*Resistance to Theory* 37)

The hypogram threatens "the undoing of the assumption that linguistic structures are given as perceivable and intelligible" (Culler, "Reading Lyric" 106). The phenomenality of language, which de Man describes as preparatory gesture for a "*future hermeneutics*" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 261, italics mine), is the necessary precondition for reading and interpreting lyric. Lyric reading, which gives a *voice* to written letters upon a page in the same way that catachresis

gives chairs legs and hurricanes eyes, depends for its existence and intelligibility on the prosopopoeia that allows things to stand in for and represent, by way of synecdoche, a subjective experience or human presence that is not really there. The bad faith of the lyric, as read by de Man, is to be found in this dissimulation of the human.

The hypogram points toward a different model of the lyric, one that suspends the assumption or projection of intelligibility by positing that, potentially but never conclusively, the real occasion and real material for the lyric is the stuff of language itself, chopped into sub-semantic or semantically dis-charged units of sound and letter. Rather than representing a lyric voice or pointing toward a voluminous interior soul of the lyric subject, the hypogram represents the threat to understanding of a lyric surface playing at being a lyric surface, pointing only to itself and to the play of paralinguistic elements of language upon the page. Hypogrammatic reading seems to promise a “nonlyrical infratext” (Culler “Reading Lyric” 105) that would demystify the anthropomorphisms of lyric and that would return us to “actual materiality” and inscription. The difficulty with this possibility of de-mystifying the lyric, of finally doing away with its referential and ideological illusions, is that one can never quite be certain if the anagrams are actually there, if they are actually non-referential, and, as I will demonstrate in readings of a Japanese poem that dismembers the name “Yoshino” and of Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and its incessant repetitions of “or,” one can perhaps never be free of the suspicion that the anagram or dismemberment of the pieces of language might not be part of a larger meaning-making scheme within the poem, i.e. something that *makes sense*. Again, we are stuck somewhere in the indeterminate space between text and infratext, between materiality and the ways in which lyric might trope its own material form and therefore assimilate it to meaning.

De Man has difficulty pinning down the exact sense of “inscription,” defining it only negatively (*Resistance to Theory* 51), but the term seems to indicate that part of lyric poetry which cannot but be true (i.e. that it is written), the part that disrupts and resists any hermeneutic reading that would confer meaning or intelligibility on the text. The fact of the lyric’s writtenness, which is what allows a historical *there* and *then* to become a *here* and *now* of reading (*Resistance to Theory* 52) provides for the iterability of lyric. It is because the lyric is a written thing—and a written thing that *came into being* historically—that we can continuously re-read and repeat Keats’s ‘This Living Hand’ and its request for blood, which is always already a requesting or a re-petition, searching again for a ghostly transfusion from the reader. At the same time, de Man suggests inscription and hypogram destabilize anthropomorphic lyric reading by threatening to expose the fact that the poem is only writing, not a voice. If the sign cannot be taken to be a meaningful stand-in for something outside of itself, it cannot guarantee the existence of whatever is taken to be the referent, whether time made perceivable by the carillon chimes (as in de Man’s reading of Hugo in the essay on Riffaterre) or the subject intimated—and with whom we are apparently made intimate—in the reading of the lyric. In providing for both the possibility for any lyric to be re-activated here and now and for the possibility of the lyric’s reduction to indisputably true but prosaic reality—that it is a written thing, and nothing more—inscription can be seen to generate the two poles of the lyric I have been describing as figurative and literal reading.

The effect of the hypogram is not unlike that produced by the elementary student of a foreign language, who, noticing that the predicates from the second chapter of the textbook may be combined with the subjects from the first produces the abhorrent but not grammatically aberrant sentence “*Deutsche Kinder sind lecker*” (German children are delicious). The student

engages with language as a system of signs to be manipulated and transformed according to certain rules—i.e. morphology and syntax; de Man comments that the “virtue of the hypogram is certainly not its semantic ‘depth’ but rather its grammatical resourcefulness” (*Resistance to Theory* 38). The student, who stays within his or her grammatical rights, dismembers a number of perfectly regular example sentences to create a sentence shocking to the native speaker, who, working with the assumption that the language in question is meaningful, has no recourse but to step outside the rules of the language game to ask, “do you really mean that?”

Here we have arrived from a different direction at de Man’s distinction between grammar and rhetoric, in which multiple possible readings remain suspended in a single grammatically-acceptable utterance. The more radical reading of the sentence, which more precisely is not a reading at all in as far as it rejects the referentiality of language and refuses to phenomenize the utterance as the meaningful voice of a subject, sees the sentence for what it *is*: the grammatically lawful but hermeneutically unintelligible and undecidable play of the stuff of language. The infratext of the language game might be reformulated—somewhere between the Matthew Gospel, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the editorial (non-)voice of a newspaper opinion page—as “it is not I who speak, but language which *speaks through me*. The views expressed—or what you *read as being expressed*—do not reflect my own views, and I cannot guarantee them.” In working through de Man’s essay on hypogram and inscription, we have returned by another route to the perennial problem of the lyric’s questioning of legibility, interpretation, and what authority, if any, might stand behind the text to guarantee that the lyric is more than just a play of signs upon the page.

Chapter Two: The Poetry of the Man'yōshū

Ōtomo no Tabito 大伴旅人, as he is known to us, was a poet of old age. In 728AD, at the age of sixty-three, Tabito was appointed Governor-General of Dazaifu, a military and diplomatic outpost in Northern Kyushu that served to politically and culturally connect the Yamato Court in Nara with the Sinitic and Sinified cultures on the Asian continent. Book Five of the Man'yōshū, the earliest extant anthology of vernacular Japanese verse, presents a picture of a brief but flourishing literary culture centered around Tabito and his fellow major poet Yamanoue no Okura. Tabito's poetic activity belongs—and largely defines—a period of Japanese literary history marked by the importation and internalization of Chinese precedents into Japanese verse, often by way of direct calques from classical Chinese that would be read out loud in Japanese and fit into Japanese metrical patterns (Tatsumi, “Tenpyō no utamanabi” 18). The topic of Tabito's solo poem sequence, the praise of wine, is taken directly from Chinese precedent. But if Tabito's poetry bears the marks of a broader “Sinification” 漢風化 of Japanese verse (Tatsumi, “Tenpyō no utamanabi” 8), he seems uninterested in slavishly and mindlessly translating Chinese poetry and importing Chinese fashions into Japan, as is the charge sometimes leveled against “Sinified” poets by literary critics who, reading in the ideological wake of Tsurayuki's outwardly affective-expressive tenth-century preface (“Japanese poems take as their seed the human heart”), set “lyric” and “learning” in opposition to one another. Tabito is rather more interested in constantly questioning his relation to his own Chinese learning and in questioning how the various philosophical and poetic traditions he has internalized—Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist thinking, as well as Six Dynasties, early Tang, and early Japanese verse—mediate his

relation to the world. Living in the military and diplomatic frontier outpost in Dazaifu, Tabito and a small circle of poets around him form the *avant-garde* of eighth-century Japanese literary practice, a discursive space in which poets theorized and practiced a nascent comparative literature in which comparison is not simply a hermeneutic procedure for comparing disparate texts but is a “hands-on” method of making poems out of material from a number of literary traditions. Tabito’s is a world literature in so far as it imagines the world of literature, both past and present, and works through the questions of how poetry and literary tradition mediate one’s relationship to that world.

In Praise of Wine: Tabito’s Solo Revelry

I read here a sequence of thirteen poems by Tabito on the topic “In Praise of Wine.” The sequence is an extended flight of poetic imagination, among the longest single-poet sequences in the entire *Man’yōshū*. Tabito, completely immersed in wine and in the Chinese tradition, is nevertheless in masterful control of the microscopic details of Japanese verse-making. A series of poems composed in Japanese by a poet playing at being a Chinese poet from ages past, Tabito’s sequence affords me the opportunity to put into practice the theoretical aims I have articulated in the first chapter, and also provides for the possibility of imagining a different sort of comparative literary practice, one that in Tabito’s hands is learned and sophisticated, and one that in its temporal distance and in its orientation toward making poems provides a useful foil for the reading-oriented theoretical contours I have been tracing. Tabito is a poet-practitioner of comparative literature.

Tabito begins his sequence by dismissing the value of all things apart from wine:

驗無 物乎不念者 一坏乃 濁酒乎 可飲有良師 (MYS 3.338)

*sirusi na-ki mono wo omopa-zu pa pito-tuki no nigor-eru sake wo nomu be-ku aru
rasi*

Rather than waste my energy longing for empty things and be left with nothing to show for it, I'll take a cup of cloudy wine and drink it to the lees—yes, that's what I hear is best!

I have over-translated *sirusi naki mono* 驗無物, which here means “things without value” or “things without efficacy.” *Sirusi* can also be an omen, a signature, a sign, a seal—any *mark* that can be trusted to guarantee a meaningful presence behind or outside the material thing itself. A *sirusi* is an object that is charged with meaning and potential; a *sirusi naki mono*, by contrast, would be a thing that is nothing more than a thing, something that cannot be read to stand in for or guarantee anything outside of itself. The initial contrast Tabito sets up is simple: there are things in the world that would make us believe that they have meaning, and there are things that have actual efficacy. The first category of “things without value” remains productively open here and throughout the sequence, and will be used to un-name and de-mystify various objects of Chinese learning. The second category, “things with value” is occupied by rice wine, whose various virtues will be used as reference points to assess the virtues of other things in the world, all of which fall predictably short of wine's virtues.

Tabito turns away from the fairly simple equation of sobriety and clear-sightedness by troping on rice wine as the great de-mystifying force of lyric. Tabito sees most clearly into the “life of things”—to play on Wordsworth's famous passage in “Tintern Abbey”—when he is most inebriated. Even at the outset, Tabito marks a double ambivalence that will haunt the entire set of poems: the last five syllables of the first poem, *beku aru rasi*, are all speculative markers, indicating a “certain amount of uncertainty” 若干不確實 in his assertions of the value of rice

wine (Kojima et al., I:207). The suffix *rasi*, a speculative suffix denoting a lack of total certainty and, more generally, conjecture about a state of things that one cannot empirically verify, occurs throughout the sequence, along with its palindrome *-si-ra* “giving the appearance [of a certain adjective],” constantly calling into question (*citare*) the reality of things and the sources of Tabito’s value judgements about them.

In the second poem, Tabito deploys “drinker’s argot” (Cranston 334) from the prohibition of the Wei Dynasty, in which refined rice wine was given the anthropomorphizing name of “Sage” 聖 (MC: *sheng*). In classical Chinese *sheng* 聖 refers to things that are without peer or beyond comparison, often the emperor, and extends to men of great moral virtue and wisdom. Tabito implicitly acknowledges that his judgements of rice wine are mediated by his reading in the Sinitic literary tradition:

酒名乎 聖跡負師 古昔 大聖之 言乃宜左 (MYS 3.339)

sake no na wo piziri to opose-si inisipye no opo-ki piziri no koto no yorosi-sa

How wise the Great Sage of old times was in giving the name “Peerless Sage” to refined wine— what a fine word, what a fine deed!

I have translated *koto no yorosi* 言乃宜 as “fine word” and “fine deed” precisely because Tabito and other poets in the Man’yōshū play on the correspondence or lack thereof between the name (*koto*) and the effect it promises to have (*koto*) in the world. The phrase *koto ni si arikyeri* “and now I see it was nothing but [deceptive] words,” the rhetorical mirror image of Tabito’s last line *koto no yorosi-sa*, is a common line in the Man’yōshū; it appears in a poem by Tabito’s son, Ōtomo no Yakamochi, who berates the *wasuregusa* “grasses of forgetfulness” for being nothing but *siko no sikokusa* “stupid, stupid grass”:

萱草吾下紐尔著有跡鬼乃志許草事二思安利家理 (MYS 4.727)

wasuregusa wa ga sitapimo ni take-taredo siko no sikokusa koto ni si ari-kyeri

In my undersash / Grasses of forgetfulness / I tucked away—/ Oh, that scurvy

scurvy-grass / I see it was so much talk. (Cranston 439)

Yakamochi's "grasses of forgetfulness" are written with the characters 萱草 (MC: xuancao), a Chinese day lily rumored, according to folk belief, to have the power to make one forget one's longings and desires. Translated and transplanted into Japanese poetry, Yakamochi denounces and de-mystifies the *wasuregusa*; the poem acts out Yakamochi's textually-mediated investment of the grass with agency and his falling away from the lyrical illusion that names and objects might be powerfully related to one another. Knowing that disenchantment or falling away from prosopopoeia can, for the poet, never be final or irreversible, Yakamochi reads the meaningfulness materiality of the day lily's name 萱草—or, more properly, the lack of correspondence between what the day lily's Japanese name promises and what the prosaic grass does not do—as the opportunity to create a poem. If the grasses of forgetfulness had worked as promised, Yakamochi would have no poem. Instead, Yakamochi's lyric comes into being in the space between *koto* (words) and *koto* (things). The poem tropes on the falling away from figurative meaning and therefore restores figurative meaning (i.e. meaningfulness is taken up into the world of poetry as a new trope), demonstrating the impossibility of the poet's remaining in the prosaic, un-poetic, de-mystified world that de Man suggests lies outside the lyric.

In Tabito's poem, many of the same tropological mechanisms are at play, in the strong sense that Tabito seems to be delighting in playing names, tropes, and literary sources against one another and in playing the role of solitary Chinese poet. The repetition of *piziri* 聖 "sage" allows the word to function as a proper name for both the Great Sage and the rice wine and allows for the figurative transfer of qualities from the human sage to the personified rice wine.

We may be surprised to learn that the individual “Great Sage” is a fiction of the poem, invented by the demands of the figure, a synecdoche which would allow the name “Sage” to stand in for and allow Tabito—through his re-named sagely wine cup—access to an imaginative Chinese past of Daoist counter-government poets, artists, and musicians from the Western Jin Dynasty. In the next poem, Tabito brings to the surface the actual reference, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove:

古之 七賢 人等毛 欲為物者 酒西有良師 (MYS 3.340)

inisipye no nana no sakasi-ki pito-domo mo pori se-si mono pa sake ni si aru rasi

Even the Seven Worthies of Old desired nothing more than a cup of wine, I’ll bet!

“Sage” 聖 has been metonymically replaced by “Worthy” 賢 (MC: xian”), a close synonym and, in Wei dynasty prohibition argot, the cipher for cloudy rice wine (Cranston 334). The transition to the Seven Sages *topos* is made through a fully realized metaleptic gesture in which, contrary to Quintilian’s theorizing about the trope, the evaded middle term or terms are not meaningless (Bloom, *Map of Misreading* 102). The sequence of re-troped names runs from *sake* 酒 “rice wine” to *piziri* 聖 “Sage,” where Tabito’s rice wine gains the name’s associations with peerless value and moral perspicuity, associations that will later allow Tabito to compare the value of his Daoist sage wine to the priceless treasures expounded in Buddhist scriptures and Chinese literary texts. “Worthy” 賢 then substitutes for “Sage” 聖 by way of proximity—each belongs to a set of ciphers used by intellectuals who flaunted prohibition and turned their back on the Chinese government. “Worthy” 賢 is then taken as a synecdoche to represent the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢 (MC: Zhulin Qi Xian) with whom Tabito imaginatively identifies in the act of composing his poems. The topic of Tabito’s poem sequence, praising the virtues of wine while turning one’s back on the world of government and politics, is taken from

the works of Liu Ling 劉伶, a member of the Seven Sages and a notorious drunk (Tatsumi *Man'yōshū no hisutori* 394).

What is lost in all of this troping upon tropes is the empirical present of Tabito's writing, which is emptied out in his complete immersion in the textual past in what Tatsumi Masaaki calls Tabito's recurrent "self-effacement" 韜晦 through the exercise of poetic imagination (Tatsumi, *Man'yōshū no hisutori* 392). Of the main two imaginative possibilities engendered by the metaleptic allusion, either introjection of the past and displacement of the future or a distancing of the past and an identification of the future (Bloom, *Map of Misreading* 103), Tabito clearly chooses the first; in drinking wine, Tabito introjects and incorporates matter that has been figuratively charged through an elaborate series of lyrical displacements and re-namings.

The series of tropes continues to grow and transform itself in the next poem as Tabito's ire finds a new target, those who speak as though they possess some degree of discernment:

賢跡 物言從者 酒飲而 醉哭為師 益有良之(MYS 3.341)

sakasimito mono-ipu ywori pa sake nomite wepi-naki suru si masari-taru rasi

Better than speaking of things with a knowing air

is drinking wine and crying tears, drunken tears!

賢 "Wise" has been recycled to write *sakasimi* "with wisdom," but Tabito marks it off with the particle *-to*, which turns the phrase into an adverbial phrase "to talk about things [as if] knowingly" but rhetorically distances Tabito from the content of the assertion. Throughout the sequence Tabito precisely deploys the particle *-to* in order to mark names or quotations as being merely that, words without referents to substantiate their meaning. To use Tabito's own poetic figure from the opening poem, the *sirusi* "signs" are revealed to be *sirusi naki mono*, merely "worthless things." Having endowed the wine with the characteristics of moral discernment

through the re-naming and re-imagining of his wine cup as a “Sage” full of wine and moral discernment, Tabito begins to deploy the wine cup as the great demystifier of things, revealing the emptiness or potential emptiness of all names that would ascribe value to things in the world. Tabito’s verb of choice for this process of valuation and evaluation is *mono-ipu* 物言, a fairly ordinary locution for speaking in Old Japanese, but the orthographic and rhetorical suggestion is to read the word in its etymological sense, “speaking of things.” The figure exposes the difference between 物 “things” and 言 “speech,” the gap between the value ascribed to things by those who show wisdom outwardly but lack inward discretion.

Tabito then posits, half-jokingly, that the value of wine is beyond all words and cannot be figured in language:

将言為便 将為便不知 極 貴物者 酒西有良之 (MYS 3.342)

ipa-mu subye se-mu subye sira-zu kipamarite taputwo-ki mono pa sake ni si aru rasi

I know neither the words nor the deeds that might communicate
the goodness of that priceless thing, my rice wine.

The self-referential joke is fairly simple: wine, which should speak for itself, as the contemporary English idiom would have it, is actually dependent for its value on poetic and literary discourses. If wine were only about wine, only the prosaic thing in itself, Tabito would have no pretext for creating poetry. His poetry sequence is born out of the discrepancy between the thing (*mono*) and the various discourses (*koto*) that charge it. Haunting around the edges of the entire sequence is Tabito’s realization that people can and do see the same object differently, though neither Tabito nor his ideological opponents truly sees the object “as it really is.” The Confucian scholar or government official distrusts wine because such a view befits his social and

governmental standing; Tabito's affective attachment to wine is rooted in the object's potential to be charged with and allow access to Chinese textual pasts, to alternative ways of seeing the world of things.

Tabito proceeds to imagine himself transformed into his own object of lyric:

中々尔 人跡不有者 酒壺二 成而師鴨 酒二染嘗 (MYS 3.343)

nakanaka-ni pito to ara-zupa sakatubo ni nari-ni-te-si ka mo sake ni simi-na-mu

Rather than be a man, trapped in the middle of a mediocre world—that I could be a wine jar, and spend my days soaking in wine, lapping up the wine!

Tabito has already used the discursive site of the lyric to imagine different ways of seeing the world; here the lyric becomes a question of a different way of being in the world.

Following the series of transformations and exchanges between subject and object, Tabito chiasmatically reverses the external appearance of the drunk with that of the sober government official, turning the latter into a red-face monkey:

痛醜 賢良乎為跡 酒不飲 人乎熟見者 猿二鴨似 (MYS 3.344)

ana miniku sakasi-ra wo su to sake noma-nu pito wo yo-ku mireba saru ni ka mo ni-mu

My god, how hideous! The man who abstains from drink and feigns virtue—take a good look at him: doesn't he have the face of a monkey?

The characters used to write the Japanese *sakasira* 賢良 “behaving as if wise and virtuous” can also be read in classical Chinese as a compound word meaning “wise and virtuous” or “a person of exceptional learning who has passed the Civil Service examinations” (Tatsumi, *Man'yōshū no hisutori* 392). The character 良, ordinarily meaning “good,” is deployed throughout the

Man'yōshū as a phonetic character read *-ra*, here indicating an adjectival suffix meaning “giving the appearance of.”

Tabito then moves into a parodic un-doing of Buddhist teachings:

價無 寶跡言十方 一坏乃 濁酒尔 豈益目八方 (MYS 3.345)

atapi na-ki takara to ipu tomo pito-tuki no nigor-eru sake ni ani masa-me ya mo

Talk all you want about “treasures beyond all value”—for my part, I’ll take a cup of cloudy wine, a treasure without peer.

“Treasures beyond all value” or “priceless jewel” *atapi naki takara* 價無寶 is a calque into Japanese of a phrase from a parable in the eighth chapter of the Chinese-language Lotus Sutra, in which a man is, perhaps predictably, rather inebriated.⁴

Tabito again signals his distance from sources of learning with the particle *to*, here used in the phrase *to ipu* “so called”:

夜光 玉跡言十方 酒飲而 情乎遣尔 豈若目八方 (MYS 3.346)

yworu pikaru tama to ipu tomo sake nomite kokoro wo yaru ni ani sika-me ya mo

Talk all you want of “gems that radiate in the night”—surely nothing can compare to drinking one’s fill of wine and setting one’s heart free!

“Gems that radiate in the night” 夜光玉 is found in two foundational texts for Chinese literacy in the East Asian cultural sphere of the eighth century: the *Thousand Character Classic* 千字文 (MC: Qian Zi Wen) and the *Selections of Refined Literature* 文選 (MC: Wen Xuan) (Kojima et al., I:209). In the *Thousand Character Classic*, the phrase appears in a couplet in the first chapter 劍號巨闕 珠稱夜光 “The sword is named ‘Great Tower Gate,’ the pearl is called ‘Radiance of the Night.’” The *Thousand Character Classic* was a foundational pedagogical text for Chinese literacy, and its rhyming four-character couplets, written for ease of memorization, would have

been internalized by every member of the educated class in East Asia from the sixth century onwards.

Tabito's is a double skepticism toward the value of Chinese verse and Chinese learning and toward the value of the objects it would make its readers prize and believe in. Again marking off the object with the phrase *to ipu* "so called," Tabito both cites the Chinese precedent and summons—in the etymological sense of "cite"—the absent object of literary fabrication to stand trial against the apparently present and efficacious saké; that Tabito rules in favor of the rice wine should hardly surprise us. Tabito de-mystifies the objects of the Chinese literary tradition un-naming the gem of the *Thousand Character Classic*, exposing 夜光 "Radiance of the Night" as an empty sign that guarantees no meaningful presence or thing in the material world. The *Thousand Character Classic* is an ontologically strange text: internalized by any literate person, it strangely resists reference to the world beyond the text itself, having been composed for the pedagogical purpose of teaching one thousand Chinese characters. The possession by memory of the characters or signs is the material end of the text; the primer is a collection of signs that exist to allow for the production of more signs. "What good are the rotted names," as Stevens might call them, "and the literary primers from my schoolboy days," Tabito asks, "when I can have wine?"

That Tabito's own rhapsodies about the virtues of wine are in fact enabled and generated by Chinese literacy—that his imaginative act of *kokoro wo yaru* 情乎遣 "sending his heart to far-flung places" or "setting the heart free" is only possible through an elaborate series of literary conceits and imaginative maneuvers—is underwritten by the constant presence of the particles –*rasi* and –*ya*, grammatical and rhetorical units which do not so much color Tabito's value judgements with shades of doubt and self-questioning as much as they reveal Tabito's

recognition that the negotiations of value between objects can only take place because rice wine is so thoroughly charged with significance from the Chinese corpus, and that the process of demystification Tabito’s poetry performs on objects of non-lyrical and philosophical discourses might well be performed on the rice wine itself. Tabito’s bodily intoxication is supplemented and mediated by an intoxication or possession by the objects of lyric and, as with all intoxication, the possibility of physical and poetic sobriety is deferred into the future. But the phrase *kokoro wo yaru* 情乎遣 “setting the heart free” indicates a different sort of sobriety, an emotional catharsis that is made possible through a radical empathy with and immersion in the (textual) past, and another trace of the strange paradox by which lyric, by operating through illusions about the world, manages to actually do something in the world of people and things. The reading and making of poems, like the consumption of wine, can be an imaginative escape route for Tabito, a way of leaving behind the prosaic present of “it is.” This possibility of falling out of enchantment—of falling out of the animated world of the lyric and into the prosaic world of demystified things and Tabito’s bureaucratic responsibilities as a governor in a far-flung province—sustains, intensifies, and haunts the edges of Tabito’s imaginative erasures of the present.

The Buddhist parodies continue in the next poem with the first line “in this world” *yo no naka*, written here with the Buddhist term 世間 (MC: shijian), itself a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit *loka* “world.” Other poems in the Man’yōshū with the same initial phrase proceed to expound on the poet’s realizations about the ephemerality or emptiness of the world. Tabito breaks the trope and substitutes a rather hedonistic message:

世間之 遊道尔 怜者 醉泣為尔 可有良師 (MYS 3.347)

yo no naka no aswobi no miti ni suzusi-kupa wepi-naki suru ni aru be-karu rasi

In this world, along the Way of Amusements, I hear there's only one thing that's sure to freshen you up: crying drunken tears into one's cup.

The trope of a trope, Tabito's metalepsis again "sacrific[es] the present" so as to re-imagine another way (or Way) of existence (Bloom, *Map of Misreading* 103). The Buddhist-flavored meditation one expects in place of the hedonistic message is something like another poem attributed to Tabito, a poem that follows after a long essay in classical Chinese on the ephemeral nature of things in the world:

余能奈可波 牟奈之伎母乃等 志流等伎子 伊与余麻須万須 加奈之可利家理
(MYS 5.793?)

yo no naka pa munasi-ki mono to siru toki si iyoyo masumasu kanasi-kari-kyeri

I have realized that this world is an empty thing—

and since that time I have grown more terribly despondent.

In a tropological structure that should now be familiar, Tabito's poem marks out the moment in time that the world as thing (*mono*) was emptied of meaning but then recuperates this emptiness and his affective response to this revelation as the pretext for making a poem on an established *topos*. More precisely, the moment of poem-making is imagined to coincide with a second realization, the moment at which the poet registers his own affective response, indicated by the suffix *-kyeri* that concludes the poem.

Tabito's phrase *yo no naka no aswobi no miti* "the Way of Amusements of this World" appears nowhere else in the early Japanese corpus, and takes a revisionary stance toward the deeply serious and resigned Buddhist outlook of Tabito's close companion and fellow poet, Yamanoue no Okura:

手爾持流 安我古登婆之都 世間之道 (MYS 5.904)

te ni mot-eru a ga kwo tobasi-tu yo no naka no miti

The child I held in my hands I have let take flight—this is the way of life in the world, this too is what life brings.

Okura's elegy for Furuhi, quoted in the introduction, comes to rest on an acceptance that the loss of a child belongs also to the way of this world, *yo no naka no michi* 世間之道, using the same Buddhist orthography for *yo no naka* that Tabito deploys. Okura uses the same line to conclude an extended monologue presented in the voice of a destitute man:

可久婆可里 須部奈伎物能可 世間乃道 (MYS 5.893)

kaku bakari subye naki mono ka yo no naka no miti

Is this all it is? Is it such a helpless thing? – the way of things, and of man, in this world.

Okura's despondent man approaches the condition of de Man's non-lyric and disillusioned view of the world. He speaks of the world as a *subye naki mono*, a “thing about which nothing can be done,” which, translated into the lyrical tropes I have been discussing here, might be rendered “a thing about which no figuration can be made.” In an attempt to evade figurative language, Okura's speaker gestures toward the world in emphatically deictic language, asking *kaku bakari . . . ka* “is *this* all there is?” The language of *things* and their emptiness pervades the register of poetry in the Man'yōshū that Tabito draws on and turns from in the wine praise poems; it is precisely in this register that a non-figurative and non-lyrical poetry falls back into figuration by reading the meaningless things of the world as meaningful synecdoches for a totality that cannot be approached or comprehended but through figuration—the *way of things in this world*, an abstraction that re-names and allows poverty and death to be assimilated into a meaningful senselessness instead of an unmeaning one.

Okura's long poems are therefore a symmetrical reversal of the usual figurative scheme of *yo no naka* poems, which announce the topic ("life in this world") for which a figure or illustration must be found. Manzei's famous poem, placed immediately after the last of Tabito's poems presently under discussion in the third book of the *Man'yōshū*, provides an instructive example of the *topos*:

世間乎 何物尔将譬 且開 榜去師船之 跡無如 (MYS 3.351)

yo no naka wo nani ni tatope-mu asabiraki kogi-ini-si pune no atwo na-ki goto-si

To what / shall I compare the world? / It is like the wake / vanishing behind a boat
/ that has rowed out at dawn (Cranston 340-341).

The movement of the boat transforms the water into a writing surface that registers but does not retain the trace (*atwo naki*) of the boat's movement. The ephemerality of the trace—more the entire process of movement, inscription, and dissipation—is then taken up as an illustrative figure for the topic *yo no naka* "life in this world" in an act of poem-making that Manzei performs explicitly within the poem ("to what shall I compare life in this world?") but which, I am suggesting, is the underlying rhetorical structure for almost all poems on the *topos*. The illegibility of the trace or the emptiness of the world of things, seemingly initially to be a falling away from the illusions about the value or permanence of things—Tabito's poem (MYS 5.793) is born out of a realization that the world is only a *munasiki mono* "empty thing"—and an unseeing or refusal to see the external surfaces of things as guarantors or signs of value, is revealed to be another trope that allows the poet to *make sense* (out) of the world.

This making or production of sense from the materials of the world produces a legible illegibility whose trace is Manzei's poem itself. In Tabito's own idiom, the poem upon the page is a *sirusi* 驗 or meaningful mark lyrically derived from a *sirusi naki mono*, a thing without after-

effect. The boat leaves no trace unless it is recuperated in Manzei's poem as a figure for the world. In and through the act of making the poem, a figurative linkage is established between two phenomena that are individually unintelligible but together serve to guarantee the other's meaningfulness. In Manzei's poem the "way of things in the world," inaccessible but through figuration and signification—thus Manzei's rhetorically striking gesture of acting out the act of metaphor making—takes as its material sign the boat's movement across the water and the dissipation of the boat's trace in much the same way that chimes and bells are taken as the material signs of time and, having been enlisted as signifiers with "phenomenal and sensory properties" then "serve as guarantors for the certain existence of the signified and, ultimately, of the referent" (de Man *Resistance to Theory* 48).

But the reverse is also equally true: that the textually- and doctrinally-mediated belief in something like "the way of things is this world" guarantees that the vanishing trace of the boat *can be read* as the sign or synecdoche for something outside of itself. If time does not exist, the sounds of the bells are illegible materiality, not in the sense that they are literally material things but in the sense that they resist being made objects for understanding and interpretation; if the bells do not toll, time cannot be perceived with certainty. This circle of mutual reinforcement—and a consequent inability to assign ontological or tropological priority to either the part (boat) or whole (world) of the synecdoche—comes into being through Manzei's reading of the world, which calls attention to its own figures of reading and sense-making in the phrases *tatoemu* "to make a comparison" and *gotosi* "is exactly like."

This reading or making sense of the world is in turn the making of a poem. Okura's long poems, which end with the chiastically inverted pattern *things—world* instead of Manzei's *world—things*, can close with the line *yo no naka no miti* "the way of this world" because this

gesture is a metalepsis or transumption that tropes the trope of de-mystification. Things that have been dis-charged of their previous figurative values by the insight that the world is empty and meaningless are then re-assimilated as figurative objects for illustrating something. The entire cycle of the trope, which runs figuratively-charged and illusory object → dis-charged and empty thing → emptied thing taken back into legibility by being made a sign for something else, is not the emptying of all values, which would return the world to deadness, literal meaning, and the non-poetic, but a *transvaluation* of values. We have therefore pinpointed the dilemma that de Man seems to run into in his essay on prosopopoeia and the lyric: lyric might be an illusion, a reading of things other than what they really are, but one cannot escape or de-mystify the lyric because de-mystification and the falling away from or emptying out of figurative meaning—the unseeing of a previous vision of things—is not a preparation for a permanent disillusionment but for a metalepsis that sacrifices previous tropes for new ones (Bloom, *Map of Misreading* 102). Without the final step of a metalepsis that restores and renews the negated value of things, there can be no poem.

After completing a detour through the poems of Okura and Manzei, the metaleptic processes that motivate and make possible Tabito's entire sequence should be much clearer. Tabito transforms *yo no naka no michi* "the way of things in the world" into *yo no naka no aswobi no miti* "the Way of Amusements of this World." This re-writing hints at a deeper or more systematic re-troping or re-vision: that Tabito, in adopting rice wine as a means through which to un-name and expose the hollowness of things—the "treasures beyond all value," the "gems that radiate in the night," and the chiasitic reversal of attributing a monkey face, ordinarily that of the inebriated man, to the government scholars who renounce wine—has in fact appropriated and transumed the Buddhist-colored trope of exposing the transient and

phenomenal nature of all things in the world. Tabito's metalepsis is deeply comical, as it takes inebriation and the intoxicating things of the material world, the very transient objects that the Buddhist *yo no naka* trope empties out and attempts to expose as distractions or defensive gestures against a realization of *how things really are*, as the means by which to achieve a clear vision into the life and value of things. The entire sequence of poems is made possible by a transumption of the mechanisms of valuation and re-valuation. Tongue firmly planted in cheek, Tabito re-asserts the value of wine over and against Buddhist clear-headedness.

Tabito's parodies of Buddhism continue with a poem that lampoons the doctrine of reincarnation and the sacrifice of present enjoyment for future rewards:

今代尔之 樂有者 来生者 蟲尔鳥尔毛 吾羽成奈武 (MYS 3.348)

ko no yo ni si tanwosi-ku araba ko-mu yo ni pa musu ni tori ni mo ware pa nari-na-mu

If I can have a bit of fun in this life, I'll gladly be reborn as a bug, or a bird in the life to come—who gives a damn!

Tabito tropes the Buddhist metalepsis that would empty out the value of the present to identify strongly with the “life to come” 来生. Instead, Tabito reconfigures his present situation as governor of Dazaifu by imaginatively joining the company of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and in so doing reclaims and imaginatively re-charges his wine cup. Life in the present would then be made meaningful and bearable by a series of poem-making gestures that refuse to be paralyzed by the Freudian reality principle or the principle of non-contradiction:

生者 遂毛死 物尔有者 今生在間者 樂乎有名 (MYS 3.349)

ik-yeru mono tupi-ni mo sinuru mono ni areba ko no yo ni aru ma pa tanwosi-ku wo arana

Because all people are things that must in the end die, in the span I am allotted in this life, I'd like to have a bit of fun!

Drinking, making poems, and playing the role of Chinese recluse poet, and troping on Buddhist tropes are for Tabito imaginative acts that provide “a bit of fun” in this life. Hedonistic, perhaps, but for the poet there is no reason to accept the unlyrical trinity of death, literal meaning, and demystification. Tabito knows that Dazaifu is not the Daoist paradise he often imagines it to be (Tatsumi, *Man'yōshū no hisutori* 394), but the making of lyric poetry is necessary for the poet in so far as it allows the poet to read the things for what they really are and at the same time as more than they are—wine that is more than just wine, plums that stand in for and recall the elegance of life in the Nara capital, a frontier government outpost that is not exile from the capital but an escape from the monotony and seriousness of life as a bureaucrat.

The sequence ends with a poem that takes as its target the imaginative dullness of the Confucian bureaucratic class:

默然居而 賢良為者 飲酒而 醉泣為尔 尚不如來 (MYS 3.350)

moda worite sakasi-ra suru pa sake nomite wepi-naki suru ni napo sika-zu-kyeri

Airs of wise disdain and silent scorn—how can they ever match the pleasures of drinking wine and crying drunken tears?

The refrain of drunken tears concludes the sequence, putting into focus the bodily pleasure and imaginative escape provided by the wine cup and the corpus of poetry in Chinese that informs and transforms the wine cup into something other than simply wine. In Tabito's sequence on the virtues of wine, the bodily interface between drinker and drink becomes a site of negotiation between bodily pleasure, sobriety, the materiality or immateriality of language, the imaginatively re-collected past and the lyrically charged present, the relationship between signs and the

meaningful presences they guarantee or generate, the possibility of charging and dis-charging things with lyrical meaning, certainty and doubt in valuation, and the resistance of lyrical poetry to death, both imaginative and physical. I have traced the contours of these negotiations by close philological attention to the “process of cutting, marking, and working over language” (Jarvis “What is Historical Poetics” 108) and to the relationships between different ways of knowing and ascribing value to signs and objects. Comparative lyric, as I am arguing and demonstrating, requires attention to the ways in which lyric poetry figures and *configures* our relationship to the world and the objects in the world, but this attention is possible only through a detailed knowledge of the materials—physical and textual—that poems consume, incorporate, transume and transform into new poems, new tropes, and new ways of imagining the world.

Yoshino Disfigured

In 689AD, the Emperor Tenmu went on an imperial pilgrimage to the detached palace at Yoshino, a ritually- and symbolically-charged *topos* for an early Japanese emperor. Torquil Duthie, whose scholarship is invested in the idea of a lyrical imperial “I” that may be universalized to stand in for and represent larger groups and polities in the process of early Japanese state formation, reads the poem as being “in Tenmu’s voice” (Duthie 126). Extending the idea of the hypogram developed in the first part of the essay, and in keeping with a general theoretical and practical goal of imagining alternative models of reading the lyric with an attention to its material conditions and their disruption of hermeneutic reading, I read Tenmu’s Yoshino poem as a site of material interference or radical incommensurability between different material strains—oral song and continental writing—that underlie and underwrite Tenmu’s own poetic practice. I argue that Tenmu’s poem discloses—at a deep level of reading enabled and

enriched by the theoretical parameters I have established here—a way of making poems and of practicing a comparative literature that is always already comparative in the materials that it incorporates but cannot ever fully digest and homogenize.

In describing the encounter between Japanese song [*uta*] and the written word, Inomata Tokiwa writes:

Uta, in their encounter with the strange power of *kanji*, at once show the sound of words and encounter the dense 'world of meaning' of the Chinese classics Rather than [written *uta*] being a device to express something in particular, *uta* take pleasure in the new phenomena generated in the moment a given *uta* is written in *kanji*, in which the voice or oral language encounters a linguistic world of an entirely different nature. We cannot overlook this playful side [to Man'yōshū poetry] (Inomata 234-235).

The task here will be to characterize this "scene of writing," the moment in which two material strains of early Japanese poetry, the world of continental learning and letters and the indigenous ritual folk song tradition. What we will find are two worlds that are always already implicated in one another and cannot be disentangled from one another in a purely temporal or logical way. My reading takes Inomata's suggestive formulation of the process of poem making as a starting point, but dissents from Inomata's implicit binary model that would put orality on the Japanese side of the comparative equation and writing on the continental side. Instead, my reading reveals a remarkable heterogeneity within the Japanese vernacular materials, a repressed orality that threatens to resurface and interrupt the signifying processes of Tenmu's imperial "I."⁵

Here is Tenmu's poem:

淑人乃 良跡吉見而 好常言師 芳野吉見与 良人四来三 (MYS 1.27)

yo-ki pito *no* yo-si to yo-ku mite yo-si to ipi-si *yosinwo* yo-ku miyo yo-ki pito yo-
ku mi

Goodly men of old / Took a good look at its goodness / And pronounced it good: /
You too, good fellows, be good enough / To see Goodfield's goodliness!

(Cranston)

A variation on the same poem is attested in Fujiwara no Hamanari's 藤原浜成 *Code of Poetry*
歌経標式 (772AD), the "oldest extant piece of poetic criticism in the Japanese canon"

(Rabinovitch 471), where the poem is chosen as an example of the "Clustering Butterflies" style
of verse composition because each *ku* [verse segment] begins with the same word. The
compositional style seems to provoke an ambivalence in Hamanari's text: though he advocates
the poem as an example of admirable poetic practice, the style "not only violates some of
Hamanari's own taboos but was also considered undesirable by some Six Dynasties- and T'ang
period critics" (Rabinovitch 509). Hamanari's treatise, which concerns itself largely with the
aural aspects of waka in comparison with Chinese rhymed verse, inscribes the song in purely
phonographic spelling, making the sonic qualities of the song more readily detectable:

美与旨能呼 与旨止与俱美弓 与旨等伊比旨 与岐比等与旨能 与岐比等与俱
美

mi-yosino wo yo-si to yo-ku mite yo-si to ipi-si yo-ki pito yoshino yo-ki pito yo-ku
mi

The good people / Who had a good look at Yoshino / Found it to be good / And
said good of it / Have a good look, my good folk, at Yoshino! (Rabinovitch 546-
547, transcription modified)

In Hamanari's version, the last syllable of Yoshino, which in Old Japanese should be *-nwo*, has been spelled as *-no*,⁶ resulting in vowel harmony in which 28 of 31 vowels are either *-i* or *-o*. A reduction of each version to its vowels will make the sonic patterning clear. I have put in bold the syllables that derive from the name “Yoshino”:

yo-ki pito *no* / **yo-si** to **yo**-ku mite / **yo-si** to ipi-**si** / **yosinwo** **yo**-ku mi**yo** / **yo**-ki pito **yo**-ku mi

O i i o o / o i o o u i e / o i o i i i / o i w o o u i o / o i i o o u i (MYS 1.27)

mi-yosino wo / **yo-si** to **yo**-ku mite / **yo-si** to ipi-**si** / **yo**-ki pito **yosino** / **yo**-ki pito **yo**-ku mi

i o i o o / o i o o u i e / o i o i i i / o i i o o i o / o i i o o u i (Hamanari version)

The exact rules governing *waka* prosody in Old Japanese are not known, but it can be surmised from the present examples and Hamanari's commentary that certain sound patterns were valued and pursued by poets. The syllable *yo* is repeated at regular intervals and at the beginning of each line in Tenmu's poem, and the second vowel of each *ku* is always *i*. Tenmu's *uta* as a whole appears to be very close to a palindrome, and certainly exists on the vertiginous boundaries between sound and sense, legibility and the free play of the material of language that we traced in de Man's work.

Yet the two versions of the poem present very different written surfaces, and, despite their phonic resemblance, are two different poetic objects. An initial glance at the text of the *uta* attributed to Tenmu gives little indication of the aural qualities of the song. Chanted aloud in a style we might (anachronistically?) project backward from the Heian period *Kinkafu* 琴歌譜 manuscript, which seems to indicate that songs would be sung with vowel sounds extended over multiple beats, the entire duration of the song would consist almost entirely of two vowels,

awash in repetitions of *-i* and *-oi* (Inomata 232). These two vowels would seem to derive from the first two syllables of either *Mi-Yoshino* or *Yoshino*, the place name's sonic material having been expanded to fill the entire poem. On an aural level the song repeats the place name at three levels: the word *yoshi*, placed at the head of each *ku* and in the middle of each longer *ku*, varying in its inflections between attributive (*-ki*), adverbial (*-ku*), and final forms (*-si*); the syllable *yo*, which appears also as the imperative in *miyo*; and the *-i* and *-o* vowels, which account for ninety percent of the vowel sounds of the poem, abating only for *yo-ku mi-te* "had a good look," the *nwo* "field" of *Yoshino*,⁷ and again *yo-ku mi(yo)*, "take a good look!" Japanese commentary suggests that this repetition of sounds gives the song a ritualistic atmosphere, sacrificing semantic sense for auratic soundscape. The name 'Yoshino' has been stripped down for parts, dismembered to the point where the sounds of verse are used in a way that might no longer be properly described as signifying language. Tenmu's written *uta* performs the opposite gesture, sacrificing, as far as the eye is concerned, soundscape for the appearance of sophisticated Chinese learning.

The reading of the poem turns on the question of what *yosi* really means, or might be made to mean. As I have suggested, poems in the *Man'yōshū*, and lyrical poems more generally, often trope upon their material components, probing the possible origins and etymologies of words. The example of *kwopwi* "longing" spelled both phonographically and logographically as 孤悲 is often cited in such discussions of poetic etymologies and plays of inscription:

玉葛 花耳開而 不成有者 誰戀尔有目 吾孤悲念乎 (MYS 2.102)

tamakadura pana nomwi sakite nara-zaru pa ta ga kwopwi ni ara-me a pa

kwopwi-mopu wo

On the tangling vine, the flowers alone bloom and come not to fruition:

Whose love might that be? I, you can be sure, am alone, longing.

The re-writing of *kwopwi*, a fairly standard usage in the Man'yōshū, must derive from a double question: what sense does *kwopwi* possess, and where do the sounds of the word come from? Once broken down into its constituent parts of *kwo* and *pwi*, each syllable is re-written with characters whose adapted Chinese pronunciations are *kwo* and *pwi* and which, taken together, mean "alone and sad." Neither character is used frequently as a phonograph outside of the standardized *kwopwi* usage. The re-writing is made possible by an aural memory of reading Chinese and a willingness to break down Japanese words to sub-linguistic levels and then to match their sounds with similar sounding Chinese words. The hand and the voice implicate one another in the games of inscription.

Tenmu's text is made possible by similar processes of thinking about the material of language. This trope might be termed "defamiliarization," a rhetorical gesture in which the familiar or conventional is made to appear strange and unnatural. The *yosi* of Yoshino seems very strange, given that one would expect the attributive form *yoki nwo* for "good fields." The difference between the attributive form and final form of adjectives sometimes appears in flux in the Man'yōshū, though mostly for *-shiku* adjectives and only rarely for *-shi* adjectives (Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language* 83f), and in any case the forms are not confused outside of the proper name "Yoshino" in either the Man'yōshū or Hamanari's version of the *uta*. The "goodly gentlemen of old" who took a good look at Yoshino and said *yosi*—what did they mean?

In early Japanese folk song and in the Man'yōshū, five-syllable *makurakotoba* [poetic epithets or "pillow-words" whose relationship to semantic value is often ambiguous] are often composed of a three-syllable semantic component and a two-syllable generic verbal or interjectory unit that fills out the meter. A set of *makurakotoba* or *makurakotoba*-like figures are

built around *pasikye* or *pasiki*, "beloved": *pasikyeyasi* (KJK 32), *pasikiyosi* (NS 21), *pasikiyasi* (2.138), and *pasiki kamo* (Hitachi Fudoki).⁸ In these figures the *-si* appears superficially as an adjective in final form acting attributively, but as the parallel with *pasiki kamo* quite strongly suggests, these two-syllable units are exclamatory or interjectory phrases. They likely derive from interjectory *ya* or *yo* plus the emphatic particle *si*. A number of further examples might easily be appended, including a small number of forms ending in *-wosi*, such as *atikawosi* (sense unclear, MYS 5.894). In the Man'yōshū, the *yosi* examples often become interpreted and lexicalized as meaning "good," but it is clear that they do not derive from the same source as the adjective *yosi* (Kondō 97-107). The men of old who exclaimed 'yosi!' may have looked upon Yoshino and exclaimed something closer to "wow, that's quite something!" Here, in the Man'yōshū, the exclamatory voice from folk song seems to have survived in the form of various *-yosi* and *-yasi* phrases. It remains possible, and Tenmu's poem seems to suggest obliquely, that the "Yoshino" song tradition is built upon *hayashi kotoba*, semantically empty shouts that bear the traces of the exclamatory voice and bodily movement, and the dismemberment of the name of an imperially-sanctified palace.

The problem of Tenmu's written song-poem (or *uta* 歌, the Japanese term since at least the seventh century for the broad and diverse vernacular verse-making practice) still remains. In all early Japanese prose, Yoshino is written as 吉野. In the Man'yōshū version of Tenmu's song-poem, the word *yosi* is written with five different characters: 淑 良 吉 好 良. Each suggests allusions to the classical Chinese corpus, the *kanji* text opening up a new realm of allusive possibility and meaning that is made to exist on top of or alongside a ritualistic Japanese *uta* (Inomata 233). The inflected forms of the adjectives are not written out, and the reader of the poem is left to supply the proper inflections to render the text in grammatically correct Japanese.

The procedure derives from *kundoku* reading, in which the semantic range of each character overlaps with part of the sense of *yosi* and is thus read out as such. The set of five characters form a set not by virtue of their Chinese usages or pronunciations, but by the aural memory of reading or glossing each of the characters aloud as a form of *yosi*. More than playing on the lack of correspondence between sound, sense, and character, the serial re-writing of *yosi* in Tenmu's poem repeatedly destabilizes the sense of the word. Each character tries to pin down the meaning of *yosi*, to explain and re-write 'Yoshino,' only to be unsettled by the next character in the chain—the movement of *différance*. The writing of the poem in *kanji* is not a secondary or supplemental process that destabilizes the word *yosi* "after that fact." Such play is possible only because of the uncertainty already available in Yoshino's name—a proper name without a proper meaning—and in the varied and sometimes contradictory uses of *yosi*.

The last three characters of the poem, which have attracted attention for their usage of numerals but have generated little in the way of commentary on their poetic function, further compound the etymologizing play but in a different register. What if the *yo* of Yoshino came from *yotu*, "four"? The *mi* of Mi-Yoshino, which in later periods stabilizes as the honorific or royal *mi* 御, is written in the poem immediately prior as 三芳野, "Three Fragrant Fields" (MYS 1.26).⁹ This *mi* might have at least five meanings in the Man'yōshū: "look" 見, "deep" (as in *mi-yama*, deep mountains), "three" 三, "beautiful" 美, and the honorific *mi*.

What, then, might Yoshino mean? The poem seems to explode all the possibilities for Yoshino tropes in a 31-syllable, 22-character *uta*. Even if we assume that Tenmu's *uta* was composed orally or derives from ritual traditions, for a poet or bard of the early Man'yōshū, it would have already been impossible to see Yoshino without reading it, without phenomenalizing the material of the world and seeing it as a ritually- and poetically-charged landscape. For

Yoshino's physical landscape had long since been written over by a rich symbolic discourse, covered over with names and meanings. The exclamatory voices of the "men of old" are inscribed within Tenmu's song, modifying the place name "Yoshino" with the attributive *yosi to ipi-si* "Yoshino, which they declared to be *yosi*." No poetic Eden, Yoshino is always already marked with the discourse of the past. It is left to the poets of the Man'yōshū to read, re-write, and make sense of the richness of their material inheritance, to craft a comparative literature that would assimilate but never fully reconcile their various well-springs of poetic and lyrical material.



Figure 1: Keats's gravestone in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. Note the iconography of the broken lyre, marking Keats as a poet in the tradition of the Greek lyric. Note also the elision of Keats's name. Public domain image.

Chapter Three: Late Keats

Keats's Conjurations

Keats's fixation with his own mortality hardly needs explanation; trained in medicine and witness to his mother's death by consumption, Keats' late poetry—the work of a young man who seems to know that he will not survive his third decade—is filled with rumination on death and the afterlife of the poet. While the imagination of one's own death can hardly be said to be a necessary or sufficient condition for lyric poetry, the poetic figures through which Keats's thinking about his own death merit attention and may be instructive for how lyric poetry thinks about its own material and material afterlife.

Keats's gravestone, in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, bears the famous lines, ostensibly the poet's last words: "Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water" (Figure 1). The stone bears the wrong date, adding a single day to Keats's brief twenty-six year life. Above the inscription is the lyre, an emblem to mark Keats as a lyric poet, without Greek learning but somehow still heir to the ancient Greek tradition of sung poetry. The lyre, perhaps as a displacement or transformation of Keats's disfigured and tuberculosis-ridden body, is broken. The lines easily support a reading of Keats's own anxiety about his posthumous reputation as a poet, as though dry ink on parchment were but a temporary respite before being lost to the torrents of literary history. But in a subtly evasive gesture, the inscription turns away from any attribution to any single historical individual and opens a place in language analogous to what Culler has described as the shifting and ritually iterable "I" of lyric—"whose name among you," the inscription seems to charge us, "is not written in water?" "One" is only a short step away from "any." In refusing to name the concrete subject of experience, the inscription reaches out

toward the living and foregrounds the medium of inscription, the water upon which signification may be written but will not endure. “Writ in water” as trope finds itself halfway between “written in ink” and “written in stone,” the first denoting the matter *with which* something is written, the second the matter *into which* something is written. The gravestone epitaph, having been transferred from Keats’s dictation into the real world of material things, inaugurates a play of surfaces, the wrought stone masquerading as the surface of the water and as watery ink.

The figure of writing in water recalls, across time and across traditions, a set of poems



Figure 2: Seventeenth century depiction of the *yuki mizi ni...* poem from Section 50 of *Ise Monogatari*. Attributed to Tawaraya Sotatsu. Ink on Paper. Image and artwork owned by Miho Museum, Japan.

from Section 50 of the *Tales of Ise*, deployed in a very different context but playing on many of the same tropes that I have been discussing. The poem exchange takes place between two quarreling lovers, and on the surface the poems are framed by the narrator as relatively straightforward mutual accusations of infidelity, but the underlying poetic logic is much more interesting:

行く水に数かくよりもはかなきは思はぬ人を思ふなりけり (Fukui 157)

yuku midzu ni kazu kaku yori mo hakanaki ha omohanu hito wo omofu narikeri

More fleeting than inscribing figures on the surface of the flowing water

is longing for one who does not long for you.

To again borrow Tabito's idiom of *sirusi* "signs" and *sirusi naki mono* "things done in vain," the fleetingness (*hakanaki*) of inscribing figures in water is, like Manzei's boat that leaves no trace, transformed by the lyric's tropological structure into a *sirusi* or legible mark. Nothing will come of writing on water, except for a poem. According to one commentator, to "inscribe figures on the surface of the water" 行く水に数かく is to make a tally, to count "one, two three" (Fukui 156). In Japanese, as in Chinese, each of these numerals takes the visual shape of a tally: 一 二 三.

To make a tally requires a solid surface, a medium for writing that can successfully hold liquid ink permanently in place. The woman's every stroke dissipates the moment it is inscribed. The iconographic tradition of this scene, represented here by an Edo period depiction attributed to Tawaraya Sotatsu (Figure 2), shows the woman, brush in hand, leaning over the water and inscribing figures on the surface of the stream. The poem is inscribed in the upper left corner of the image. Sotatsu has stained the half of the stream nearest to the woman with black ink, as though she had, through repeated effort to inscribe the figures on the surface of the water, turned the stream into an inkwell. *Kazu* are numerical figures, and in Old Japanese the verb for counting

and the verb for composing poetry is the same: *yomu*, whose original meaning seems to have been to count the motion of the celestial bodies and other ordered phenomena, perhaps using one's fingers (Tada 399-403).¹⁰ *Yomu* can also designate marking time, hitting drums, composing poems, recitation, and reading texts aloud. To *yomu* is to divide time into meaningful and metrically sensible units, but any attempt to hold onto time, to mark it out or provide it with a sign that would render it intelligible, is always already doomed to fail, to be *hakanasi*, "fleeting and in vain."

The man's response poem cites the previous poem and two preceding poems, at once positing anthropomorphic objects of lyric and denying the possibility of their responsiveness:

ゆく水と過ぐる齡と散る花といづれ待ててふ言を聞くらむ (Fukui 157)

yuku midzu to suguru yohahi to chiru hana to idzure mate tefu koto wo kikuran

The moving water, the passing years, the scattering blossoms:

which of these, if one calls out to them "halt!", would heed those words?

Again, the poet plays on the lack of correspondence between *koto* (words) and *koto* (actions), the asymmetry between the tropological and poetic significance ascribed to objects and objects of discourse through poetry and the objects as they exist in the world. The comparison between Keats and the poems from the *Tales of Ise* is justified not because of the coincidental appearance of similar figures in two disparate poetic traditions, but because it is further evidence to conclude that lyric poems across literary traditions might be productively read with and against one another by paying close attention to how the lyric tropes its own form and plays on its own material existence in the world.

Poems and/as Visual Things: Keats's Grecian Urn

Keats's play of surfaces is most elaborately worked out in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the hypercanonical ode which seems to have become, like the figures of suspended animation apparently inscribed on the surface of the urn, forever condemned to play the same melodies and repeat the same things. That the ode should take on the characteristics of the urn is hardly surprising, I will argue, because the ode works out a number of elaborate or "overwrought" conceits that seem to describe the surface of the urn while self-referentially commenting upon the ode as a material surface and inscription existing in the world. The ode, like the urn, is a surface that asks to be read, that solicits participation and immersion from its readers, all the while foregrounding the material elements that cannot be easily assimilated into a reading of the poem. I read Keats's ode as an allegory of reading lyric and the possibility of a failure to read, the possibility of an object losing meaning through a dislocation in time and place (Rovee 996) and of the corresponding possibility not of recovering "latent information" (Wolfson *Questioning Presence* 319) underneath or behind the surface but rather of *covering the surface* of an object with meaning.

Keats first turns toward the mysterious urn and addresses it as an anthropomorphized composite bride-child-historian:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme. (282, ll. 1-4)

The foster-child urn has been adopted by the same force that has orphaned it—slow time, which has laid waste to the Greeks and the sculptor who made the urn but has spared the urn. The urn

remains an intact survivor or remainder not solely by virtue of being an ancient artifact—in his sonnet “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” Keats describes a “pain / That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude / Wasting of old time,” a fragmentation or dismemberment that mirrors Keats’s own anxieties about having to “die / like a sick eagle looking at the sky” (58)—but by the Grecian Urn’s status as an urn of the archive or of the museum, having been afforded “art’s preservation from history, physical decay, and commerce entail its removal from meaningful social circulation” (Rovee 998). The Elgin Marbles, properly a collection of marbles taken and transported from Athens to Britain in the early 19th century and acquired by the British Museum in 1816, are artifacts that bear the marks of ruin, of exposure to the elements and to the public life.

That Keats’s Grecian Urn is improbably “unravish’d” might clue us in to its unreality, its existence as an “archival” urn or collection in the sense that Keats has pieced together an urn of the mind from a number of fragments, scraps, and the heavy detritus of the artistic and artificial past. Not a truly self-contained *thing* in the world (Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* 4), the urn is composed like a poem: a readable object that exists on the crucial edge between autonomous art object—an apparent self-integrity that explains why the New Critics took the ode, *like its urn*, to be a model for a “well wrought” totality—and seeing the urn as internally fragmented, an object that upon closer inspection and closer reading resists totalizing understanding (Wolfson *Formal Charges* 9). To read the ode and its urn, then, is to listen and look closely at the surface of the urn-text, for I will argue—following Susan Wolfson’s reading of the ode’s text as playing on “[hie]roglyphics,” a pun Wolfson takes from Keats’s letters, in which Keats the poet “makes words themselves visible images” on the surface of the ode (*Reading John Keats* 98)—that the ode’s text plays at simulating the urn’s surface effects and at dissimulating its own origins. The

crucial figure in my reading is that of the composite urn-text as *ur*-text that precedes, generates, and provides a model for the ode ostensibly *on* it, but which *turns* out to be an imaginary or imagined object that is the creation of the ode in a metonymic reversal of cause and effect.

Let us be clear: there is no urn in the real world, no single model that would allow us to de-mystify and ground Keats's ode and allow us to map the imaginative transformations or lyrical translations that occur between the material infratext and the lyrically-enchanted text of the ode. At most we can say that the ode furnishes and creates its own *pretext*, the urn—the inaccessible *ur*-text that would reveal what the urn “really is,” pretext in the etymological sense of an outward display, and a pretext in the sense that the fiction of the urn provides the excuse or spark for the making of a poem—in a remarkable gesture of self-creation. There is only the surface of the poem, a potent poetic surface that entices us to fill it with meaning, to read it aloud, to interpret it, to believe in the fictions it sustains about the presence of the urn. In John Hollander's terms, the Elgin Marbles are “real ekphrasis,” while the Grecian urn is an example of “notional ekphrasis” that makes us believe in the object it purports to represent (“The Poetics of *ekphrasis*,” 209-210).

If my reading has gotten ahead of itself, so has Keats's reading: in naming the urn the “still unravish'd bride of quietness,” Keats's apparently descriptive mode projects itself into a future in which the urn will *no longer* be quiet and unravished, having been forced to relinquish its secrets to the interrogative approaches of the lyric reader. As de Man suggests, prosopopoeia is not a trope that bestows meaning on an object, which would make it a trope of reading, but, as we have seen, is at once a preliminary defensive gesture of the understanding and a groundwork for *future* interpretation. John Hollander, who has written persuasively on poetic namings and instantiations, suggests that all poetry is implicitly optative, hinging as it does on the promise of

“in time com[ing] to [mean] something” (*Melodious Guile* 82), positing not meaning in the moment of utterance but in a temporally deferred moment in which meaning will come into being. “Let there be meaning!” the poet declares, not asking for the urn to provide him with meaning, instead opening a discursive poetic space in which meaning may come into being through interpretation and lyrical reading (Hollander *Melodious Guile*, 80-82).

Keats’s opening invocation opens the possibility for future reading of the urn, which he takes up in the subsequent lines of the opening stanza, and also is strongly invested in recovering and reading the urn’s past. If Keats’s poetic invocation allows for a significance to come, it follows that reading and meaning are always belated, but that reading may take revenge on the past and recoup its belatedness by re-writing or writing over the past in what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit* or “retrospective meaningfulness,” a recuperative gesture that would reverse the priority between reader and object of reading (Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* 4). To put the matter simply: things always come to us from the past but they can be re-read and re-interpreted in the present, which would not be a recovery of meaning but a covering of the surface with meaning. The life of the urn is always already an after-life, it is already displaced and dislocated in time and space, marked by an anteriority in which the urn would not have been a foster-child but simply a child of a sculptor and of a culture. So too is Keats’s poem itself always *before* us. The urn bears on its surface the apparently legible but as-yet-uninterpreted markings of this origin, and any reading of Keats’s poem, like any reading of the urn itself, begins with the belief that the object can—and must—be read in the present. An “historian” is one who can interpret and read the past for the benefit of the present, but also one who proceeds by and tells the result of their inquiry, from the Greek *historein* (Wolfson, *Reading John Keats* 99-100). Thus the

inquiring mind roving over the surface finds its uncanny double in the silent but inquiring urn that seems to inquire of the would-be reader, “can you read me, *here and now?*”

If the urn seems to solicit readerly engagement, how does it do so? Jonathan Culler has recently described apostrophe as “presuming the potential responsiveness of the universe, in what is the acme of poetic presumption” (*Theory of the Lyric* 190) and has suggested that a “primary force of apostrophe is to constitute the addressee *as another subject*, with which the visionary poet can hope to develop a relationship, harmonious or antagonistic” (*Theory of the Lyric* 224, emphasis mine). Yet Keats seems to have little interest in constituting the urn as a potentially responsive subject, instead configuring the urn as a *potentially legible object for lyric*; the relation between poet and urn, I contend, is not between a lyric subject and a potentially responsive lyrically-constituted subject, but is instead between a reading subject and a lyrically-charged object that, in providing a site of resistance to reading, disrupts and illuminates the mechanisms that lyric uses to negotiate its relationships to and with objects in the external world.

Every parent, it will be agreed, has their own preferred method of embarrassing their children in public. My grandfather’s usual if peculiar habit was to engage mannequins in conversation, asking for directions or making small talk in a loud voice so as to attract the attention of as many bystanders as possible. My mother and uncle, forced to observe my grandfather’s ritual non-communication with an anthropomorphic but unresponsive object, naturally tended toward a figurative understanding of the situation that acknowledges both the literal situation (“my father is talking to a mannequin”) and the figurative purpose: “no, he’s not *really* talking to the mannequins, he is talking to the mannequin *so as to embarrass us.*”

If apostrophe is embarrassing—who goes around talking to urns outside of poetry?—it is because apostrophe always already forecloses the possibility of literal reading, which is a

preemptive foreclosure of the non-lyrical, non-poetic, prosaic world of materiality. We cannot read apostrophe to a mannequin or to an urn as being *only* that. Etymologically, embarrassment is a difficulty or an impediment, an etymology which hints at what apostrophe is really doing: it prevents the onlooker from reading the situation as *only* literal. *You can't really be doing that*, the onlooker thinks, *you must be doing that in order to do something else*. The force of apostrophe lies in its indirect directness: having begun to read the ode, we are caused to think figuratively. Hearing an apostrophe, we recognize it as a “lyric articulation” (Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* 226), to “apostrophe as sign of a fiction which knows its own fictive nature” (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs* 161), or, put more plainly: a poetic gesture that announces that a poem is beginning.

Why are we pulled into this lyrical force field? Perhaps Keats's ode has called out to us as a series of signs in need of interpretation in the same way that the urn itself seems to have called out to Keats's lyrical reader:

Any text, as text, *compels reading as its understanding*. What we call the lyric, the instance of represented voice, conveniently spells out the rhetorical and thematic characteristics that make it the paradigm of a complementary relationship between grammar, trope, and theme. (de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism* 260-261).

Keats's apostrophic address to the urn embarrasses *us*, the readers who need to make sense of the apostrophe. It is we who are *conscripted* by Keats, written into the very fabric of the Ode, implicated and drawn into the text in a conspiratorial (from *con-* “together” + *spirare* “to breathe”) play between poem and reader to give voice to Keats's text in the same way that Keats's lyrical reader tries to make sense of the “legend” that haunts the urn:

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (282, ll. 5-10)

Keats can interrogate the urn because, in addressing and anthropomorphizing it, he has already decided, consciously or not, that the urn is *legible*. Helen Vendler suggests that “the constitutive trope of the Urn is interrogation, that trope of the perplexed mind” (*The Odes of John Keats* 118), but the mind’s perplexion is logically secondary to the mind’s positing that whatever is being interrogated is worth interrogating, and that there potentially exists recoverable information or material that can be used to *make sense*. In reading the poet’s encounter with the urn as an allegory for lyric reading, I follow Susan Wolfson’s suggestion that “Keats turns the activity of his verse into a dilemma for the reader fully analogous to the speaker’s dilemma of interpretation before the urn” (*Questioning Presence* 319-320), though her concerns lie primarily in the ways that the urn resists interpretation and asserts its “freedom . . . from any finite significance” (*Questioning Presence* 320). There is no “answer key” or legend behind the urn, nothing that would guarantee and stabilize “if only [one] knew the lost legend that the dead sculptor presumably had in mind, and here illustrated” (Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* 119). But neither is there an answer key behind Keats’s ode, nor an urn. The series of dilemmas and mirror situations between the reader of the urn and the reader of the ode extend further than the hermeneutical difficulties of being unable to pin down definite meaning onto the urn. More fundamentally, the ode questions why we take things to be legible, and what we do when faced

with a crisis or failure of reading, as seems to happen when Keats's reader of the urn interrogates the urn for an entire stanza to seemingly little purpose.

Hazlitt suggests that imagination deals with unknown, not known quantities (Wolfson *Questioning Presence* 319), but Keats's imaginative engagement with the urn can be pinpointed more precisely: having already prepared for a reading of the urn through the gesture of address, Keats attempts to read the urn as though it were *harboring potentially recoverable information* about the past and the cultural world from which it was orphaned. The phrase "leaf-fring'd legend" is key in understanding the would-be urn reader's approach to the surface of the urn:

Traditionally, we have seen, ekphrasis is prosopopeial like the sepulchral epigrams from which it partly derives, it aspires to give the work of art a voice. But unlike Dante, who readily identifies the sculpted figures on the wall of purgatory and who knows exactly what they are saying to each other, Keats knows nothing of the figures on the urn He must therefore interrogate the urn, and the very word *legend* underscores his desire to speak and know its story (Heffernan 111).

Etymologically, a "legend" is a thing to read aloud, and gains the meaning of "written inscription" in the early 17th century. "Legend," from Latin *legere*, imagines of reading as a gathering or plucking of leaves; though the sense is lost in modern English, whose closest living relative is "lecture" or the Anglicized "reader" at British universities. Modern German's word for the grape harvest is *Traubenlese*, preserving the relationship to *lesen*, "to read." In German universities, the *pro venia legendi* or permission to read publicly, i.e. lecture is bestowed on a candidate whose *Habilitationsschrift* has been accepted by the academy, and some of the shock of the last lines of Keats's ode may derive from the urn's sudden lecture to the hapless and dismayed reader

on the interrelationships between truth, beauty, and the finitude of human existence—the shock that the urn might be capable of delivering a lecture to the urn’s (and the poem’s) reader on Greek aesthetics, and a particularly inscrutable lecture at that.

The interrogative speaker supposedly begins to read or give voice to the urn in the second stanza, which is precisely the point at which one realizes that the qualities attributed to the urn are in fact descriptions of what the surface of Keats’s text is doing, accomplishing a “pictorial mode of existence” (Hofmann 254) of its own over and against the visual object:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone (282, ll. 11-15)

Here the Ode plays to the inner ear, “more endear’d,” the reading eye as it scans the text (Wolfson *Reading John Keats* 99). “Ear” is seen but not heard in “heard” and “unheard,” as Keats punningly asks us to read for the shape of the word, not the sound. A second motivic structure is the two-letter combination “or,” the central interrogative tool in the first stanza and thereafter an “ana- or hypogram that threatens to fragment and dismember (rather than *remember*) words and their meanings into word particles, pieces of words, and ultimately inscribed letters” (Warminski 56). The letter combination appears almost thirty times on the surface of the text. In the second stanza, “or” finds its way into “therefore” and “more,” and once one begins to hear it—or better, see it—“or” appears everywhere. The poem is populated by “for,” “nor,” and “more,” each a motivic repetition and development of the “or” from the first stanza. The urn is called a “silent form,” a “Cold Pastoral,” and even appears in its anagrammatically reversed form in the line “with forest branches and the trodden weed.” If reading is a gathering up of

leaves, reading the ode seems to consist in recognizing and bringing together the clusters of letters and silent forms that constitute the “leaf-fring’d legend”—whose leaves may actually be a decorative pattern that is visible but not legible, not reducible to meaning—haunting about and around the surface of the ode’s text.

These “[hie]roglyphics” make “words themselves visible images” throughout the ode (*Reading John Keats* 98) and are roguish in their blurring the distinction between aural and visual reading, and in weaving a non-referential or self-referential textual surface consisting of the interplay of letters and word fragments that cannot be easily assimilated into a reading of text. Having initiated the ode with a self-confident assertion that the urn has a (hi)story to be read from the figures on its surface, Keats turns his ode into a self-consciously visual and non-narrative surface. “Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought” (line 44)—might the description be equally apt for the surface of the ode text, where “thou” makes its way into “*thought*” alongside the “or” motif in “silent *form*?” The ode teases us out of thought by making its reader question whether the compulsively repeating patterns of the text are meaningful or not—are they *our* compulsions of *our* reading *or* are they really there? What kind of a *thing* are we reading?

Heffernan informs us that the ekphrastic tradition has long called attention to the material difference between the thing depicted and the thing depicting:

When we understand that ekphrasis uses one medium of representation to represent another, we can begin to see what makes ekphrasis a distinguishable mode and what binds together all ekphrastic literature from the age of Homer to our own By explicitly noting the difference between the medium of visual representation (gold) and its referent (earth), Homer implicitly draws our attention

to the *friction* between the fixed forms of visual art and the narrative thrust of his words (4).

Heffernan's reading is limited to the difference in the represented visual image between the matter that represents (gold) and the thing represented (earth), but Keats's ode extends Homer by calling attention to the unbridgeable gap between linguistic text and visual art while at the same time asserting their interdependence, and the text's conscription of the reader into a reflection on the phenomenological and epistemological processes that underlie reading and the attempt to read something from a distant cultural configuration. In creating an ode text that is undecidably suspended or oscillating between *legend* (what can and must be read aloud) and the "ditties of no tone," the materials of the language taken not for the phonetic value but for their spatialized melody, their deployment in a two-dimensional silent melodic patterning on the surface of the text, Keats forces the careful reader to reflect on what kind of material the ode text really is, and to constantly second-guess one's own reading of the ode and to compulsively re-read. *Did I miss something*, the attentive reader of ode asks. As with real music, it is almost impossible to keep track of two melodies at the same time—one always comes into the foreground. Likewise, Keats's ode forces us to realize that two melodies are being played at once, one aural and one visual, and that the two cannot so easily be brought together. To read "thou" in "thought" as a visual melody is to hold, almost impossibly, two vowel sounds in the ear for the same word. The suspended double structure of lyric that I have been arguing for throughout the paper is transformed, in Keats's ode, not only into the question of whether one should read literally or figuratively, but into the unresolvable question of whether one should read with the eyes or with the ears.

In a powerful *trompe l'œil*, Keats has cobbled together a composite urn from real artifacts, paintings, and literary tradition. The mysterious utterance at the end of the poem, which has confounded many critics is actually a transformation of the Romantic didactic inscription, derived from the Greek epitaph, “a genre essential to the rise of the modern lyric” but long ignored under the auspices of New Criticism’s reading of lyric (Hartman 46). Keats’s urn is a literary fabrication, a spell whose conjuring blurs the line between the material world and the effects of the poem, or the object described and the object created.

Troping the structure of the urn itself, a two-dimensional surface whose “legend” haunts about a hollow interior, and the larger Romantic lyric’s self-fiction as spacious interior, Keats’s confident pseudo-ekphrastic ode asserts, against the poem’s lamentations on the fugitive nature of human life, the power of lyric language to *make* and *do things*. If the urn exists and persists in our imagination, it is because Keats’s ode has made it so. It is lyric language that would have us believe in its outlandish fictions. Keats’s ode is a textual surface that generates its own object and own interior but is always at risk of divulging the secrets of its own magic trick, of calling conspicuous attention to the specific mechanisms of poem-making. Reading, in Keats’s allegory of it, gestures toward the oral side of “legend” while turning toward the eye-rhymes, an interplay between material surface and reading voice, the voice of the poet reading, naming, and interrogating the urn, and that of Keats’s reader, who must read Keats’s poem as visual thing or text.

Chapter Four: Late Yeats

Death matters because it can be *material poetica*.

—Harold Bloom

William Butler Yeats died abroad on the twenty-eighth of January, 1939, a Saturday afternoon.

On his gravestone (Figure 3) are inscribed the lines:

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death.
Horseman, pass by!

The lines are drawn from the sixth section of "Under Ben Bulben," Yeats's self-elegy and auto-epitaph:

Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago, a church stands near,
By the road an ancient cross.
No marble, no conventional phrase;
On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye

On life, on death.

Horseman, pass by! (327-328)

Earlier drafts of the final inscription contain the line "Draw rein; draw breath," or, alternatively, "Draw rain; draw breath," a ghostly command issuing from the cold limestone, an imperative that would override the reader's central nervous system and take hold of the breath of the living (Wolfson, "Yeats's Latent Keats" 615). Read alongside Keats's odes, it is difficult not to hear in "cold eye" the echo of "Cold Pastoral," the cold eye that the urn turns to the passing generations, each wasted by time. The lyrical object has, by uncanny sleight, of hand turned the living to stone. The urn, indifferent to the passing generations and time's ruinous hand, disdains "all that man is" ("Sailing to Byzantium"). Here, in a substantial extension of zeugma—etymologically a yoking-together—the "cold eye" purveys life and death grammatically and in trope, erasing difference between the two while somehow insisting that to cast a cold eye on death and to cast a cold eye on life cannot be the same, if only because the first would be a mortal defiance of the reality principle—the perspective and gesture of Yeats in much of his late poetry (Bloom, "Death and the Native Strain in American Poetry" 452)—while the latter would be to adopt a similar perspective to the Keatsian nightingale or urn, the auditor unmoved by or disdainful of what Yeats in "Byzantium" calls "All that man is, / All mere complexities, The fury and the mire of human veins" (248).

The reader of the inscription is locked in a double bind, a "rhetoric of contradiction" (Wolfson, "Yeats's Latent Keats" 615): to read is to stop, to draw breath, perhaps so as to give voice to the cold and dead material world, but the same stone commands the reader to pass by. Voiced only in the imperative, the poem is never past, always inducing something in the present and making claims on the future. The death of the author has become the eternal return of un-dead author, "invoking, constituting readers on the way, at his material tomb, and ultimately on his material page" (Wolfson, "Yeats's Latent Keats" 615). In returning at the end of his life to the

epitaph form and the *Siste Viator* trope ("Stay, Traveler"), Yeats returns to a poetic subgenre that was absorbed into the lyric tradition in the 18th century and which may be responsible for many of the peculiar effects of the Romantic English Lyric as we recognize it (Hartman 31-46).¹¹

Yeats's autoepitaph, in its double binds and animated imperatives, may have as its rhetorical ancestor the gravestone inscription of Shakespeare's Timon ("*Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait*"), as Wolfson suggests ("Yeats's Latent Keats" 616), but in its scheme the relevant genealogy is the Romantic locodescriptive poem that fuses meditation on death and the elegiac function of language with a keen awareness of the poem's location in and relationship to the material world. Yeats's title "Under Ben Bulben," marking out the poem's place in the world, is a compressed form of familiar High Romantic titles, among them "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" or "Lines left upon a seat in a yew-tree."

Yeats's gravestone now stands under Ben Bulben in Drumcliff churchyard, the words of his poem transferred from paper to stone under the posthumous force of the poet's voice, the poem finally coming to rest in the place it had designated and opened for itself. Perhaps Yeats was aware that limestone is a sedimentary rock formed from the skeletal remains of marine organisms; the poem as it now stands is cut into a slate slab, more durable and practical but a less fitting figure for literary history and influence, the story of "how poetry and poets may survive" (Wolfson "Yeats's Latent Keats" 617). The gravestone in Ireland postdates Yeats's own death by some ten years, and the story of the stone's making gives Wolfson's methodology of "generic unearthing" and material juxtaposition an unfortunately literal turn. Financial and logistic complications prevented Yeats' body from being returned to Ireland upon his death in 1939. The outbreak of the Second World War further hindered the repatriation of his remains, and when



Figure 3: Yeats's gravestone in Ireland. Note that Yeats's bones do not lie under the tombstone. Who, then, "signs" for and justifies the halting effects that the tombstone has on us? Public domain image.

Yeats's widow returned to France following the war, she found that the poet's remains had been scattered in an ossuary, perhaps the result of negligence on the part of the local clergymen, though a lack of detailed records makes the exact sequence of events is difficult to reconstruct. The poet's widow George was insistent that Yeats's remains be returned to Ireland, though it is unlikely that any of the bones currently in Ireland are the poet's. The inscription, the pressure point for the Romantic poets between the "externality of the sensuous" and the internality of the spiritual (Warminski 40), becomes, in Yeats's gravestone, pure surface and externality, marking nothing, pointing to no hallowed bones. The gravestone has become the surface without an interior, a misprision or laying-bare of the lyric tradition's fictions of tombs, crypts, and resonant chambers for the dead. And yet the stone maintains its hold on its readers, in the strong sense of Keats's living and earnestly grasping hand, *manu tenere*, taking our breath so it may speak.

Late Terza Rima: The Posthumous Imagination

The last year of Yeats's life saw the composition of a number of poems that project the lyric poet beyond the threshold of death and imagine the afterlife of the lyric voice and the lyric poet. The most poetically interesting and relevant of these is "Cuchulain Comforted," an eerily purgatorial lyric in the mode and meter of Dante:

A man that had six mortal wounds, a man
Violent and famous, strode among the dead;
Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

Then certain Shrouds that muttered head to head
Came and were gone. He leant upon a tree

As though to meditate on wounds and blood.

A Shroud that seemed to have authority

Among those bird-like things came, and let fall

A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three

Came creeping up because the man was still.

And thereupon that linen-carrier said:

'Your life can grow much sweeter if you will

'Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud;

Mainly because of what we only know

The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.

'We thread the needles' eyes, and all we do

All must together do.' That done, the man

Took up the nearest and began to sew.

'Now must we sing and sing the best we can,

But first you must be told our character:

Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain

'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'

They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before;

They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds (332).

Is it a lyric or something else? The first verse draft of the poem is dated January 13, 1939, two weeks before the poet's death (Figures 4 and 5). Yeats dictated a prose version to his wife from his sickbed, as was his routine, before undertaking the work of putting the poem into *terza rima*. In putting his prose sketch into *terza rima*, Yeats selects a meaningfully-charged form from the poetic tradition, but the transformation is not as simple as pouring content into a new form. The meter of Dante, but also that of Shelley's "Triumph of Life" and, in modified form, Browning's "Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower Came," the two most proximate precursors to Yeats's own poem (Bloom *Anatomy of Influence* 173, 193), and in a sense Yeats performs a metalepsis over and against Shelley and Browning's use of the form for the apocalyptic quest poem. Here Yeats has no trace of Shelley's "Triumph of Life"—which is much closer to the "Triumph of Death"—nor the tortured interiority of Childe Roland. Cuchulain remains silent throughout the poem, peacefully preparing to be united with his antithetical self. Bloom, following Vendler, hears an echo of the close of *Inferno* Canto XV, where the pilgrim watches his former teacher Brunetto Latini retreat from him. The comparison is to a race run outside of Verona; here, in Dante's figure, the winners and the losers are transformed into one another:

After he turned back he seemed like one
who races for the green cloth on the plain
beyond Verona. And he looked more the winner

than the one who trails the field. (trans. Hollander)

*Poi si rivolse e parve di coloro / che corrono a Verona il drappo verde / per la
campagna; e parve di costoro / quelli che vince, non colui che perde* (Dante 284-
285).

The transvaluation of the victors and the defeated, a trope seen repeatedly in the transubstantiating effects accomplished by the lyrics under examination, prepares the way for Yeats's (or his hero's) antithetical transformations and union with his opposites, the cowards. "Cuchulain Comforted" is therefore a double imagining beyond empirical possibilities, imagining both the after-life of the hero and his other-life.

Cuchulain, Yeats's dramatic Irish hero, is transformed into an unspeaking member of the community of cowards. He, like the singing Shrouds, seems to lack human words. In taking up the needle, Cuchulain partakes in the weaving of the communal text(ile), a rhetorical move strengthened by Yeats's substitution of the powerfully metonymic "Shrouds" for the prose draft's "Shades." For to make a shroud is to become one, to apprentice to the production of textiles in the same way that the apprentice poet consents to have his voice shaped by poetic forms and traditions in order to speak in the language of the poets. John Durham Peters writes "the tongue and vocal tract of an infant are like potter's clay before the phonemes of the mother tongue, and after a few years of habituation the mouth's musculature is so set that some sounds can no longer be produced" (262), and the poet's clay tongue is no different. No such figure of apprenticeship, making, and personal transformation is possible with the conventional "shade." And yet this apprenticeship, a strangely transformed *Bildungsprozess*, is the forgetting of the self, not the acquisition of distinguishing marks of individuality.

A

Jan 15

Cuchulain Deal

A man that had six mortal wounds, a man
~~Violent & strong~~ man, stroke down, the deed;
eyes stare out of the branches or were gone.

Then certain strands ~~some something~~ ^{the strands} head to head

Came a hue gone & He leant upon a tree
As though to meditate on wounds & blood

A strand that seemed to have authority
~~through~~ ~~down~~ ^{now} ~~had~~ ^{like} ~~the~~ ^{thing} ^{is} ~~fall~~
A bundle of linen at his feet. Some tin or this

Came creeping up ~~too~~ because the man had still
~~the~~ ~~gold~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~a~~ ~~man~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~seen~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~land~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~west~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~seas~~
So ~~but~~ ~~may~~ ~~you~~ ~~have~~ ~~much~~ ~~sweets~~ ~~of~~ ~~your~~ ~~hill~~

they on ancient rule & make a strand
Many because of what we only know
The results of those arms makes us afraid

~~But we should know the matter all we do~~
We think the matter eyes & all we do
All must to make do" That done the man
Took up the needles & began to sew

Figure 4: First verse draft of "Cuchulain Comforted." As was Yeats's practice, this poem is a substantial revision of an earlier prose dictation. Reproduced from the excellent Cornell Yeats series of manuscript facsimiles. See Yeats, William Butler. *Last Poems: Manuscript Materials*. Ed. James Pethica. Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1997.

13

1/2 13

"~~What shall we do now,~~ ~~and shall we do~~
" now we shall see, & you as best we can
but first you must be like our chariot
at ^{concord} ~~concord~~ ~~how~~ ~~as~~ ~~concord~~ ~~all~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~hand~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~
~~of~~
Or drive you home & leave to die in fear
Thy son, who had no Yule ~~the~~ ~~his~~ ~~words~~,
though all was done in common as before
Thy had changed their minds & had to their, & had

Figure 5: First verse draft of "Cuchulain Comforted," second page. Reproduced from Yeats, William Butler. *Last Poems: Manuscript Materials*. Ed. James Pethica. Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1997.

The last line of the poem figures the passage of the Shrouds from the state of "Shiftings" into that of "Beatitude," but once Yeats's idiosyncratic system is understood, the transformation of the Shrouds into the throats of birds, a transformation that both moves away from verbal language and substitutes a bodily metonymy (throat for voice) for a textile one (shrouds for shades). In Yeats's poetic corpus, "birds" is rhymed with "words" at least eight times, as it is at the end of "Cuchulain Comforted" (Greene 109) and here the structural demands of the *terza rima* generate a transformation by which "words"—and by extension, poetic language—are alchemically transformed into their rhyme word and opposite, the "throats of birds." In a double metonymy, the shrouds' throats are transformed, the throat being the bodily substratum for the voice, which is in turn the material ground for the signifying phonemes of spoken language. Keats's nightingale, whose unchanging voice beyond language is the unattainable object of desire for the lyric poet and the ground for an imagined unbroken line of human community, provides something of the undersong for Yeats's chant:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown. (281)

But in Yeats's poem "throats" is in the plural, neither signifying the specificity of a single bodily subject's interior nor the distinctive lyrical voice of an individual poet. Cuchulain is merged into a collective song without words, a return to one of lyric's (constructed and inherited) primal scenes of pure musical event, the condition to which the Romantic lyric frequently gestures to and backs away from when it overhears and cannot escape the semantic weight of its own

singing: "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / to toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (Keats 281).

"Under Ben Bulben" and "Cuchulain Comforted," Yeats's death poems take up lyric's imaginative projects of its own afterlife and relation to the material world. In the first, lyric becomes material monument, generically and genetically descended from the convergence in England of the epitaph, elegiac mode, locodescriptive poems, and the meditative lyric in the 18th and 19th centuries. An attentiveness to the historical dimensions of the lyric genre and of the fictions lyric seems to tell about itself enable a reading of "Under Ben Bulben" as exploiting the figure of prosopopoeia, the figure by which lyric uncannily *make things happen* and shape the world of matter and reading subjects long after the death of the poet. In "Cuchulain Comforted," the lyric imagines itself as pure vocalic music, the pure voice unconstrained by the discipline imposed by the morphology and syntax of human language. In doing so, both "Under Ben Bulben" and "Cuchulain Comforted" play at the foregrounding of the material substratum of the lyric, the material signifier which is exposed as pure surface.

Postscript: The Afterlife of the Poem

In writing this essay, I have tried to find a vocabulary for why and how lyric reaches out to us, the way it compels us to compulsively read and re-read lyric, and I have tried to work out the complex system of tropes that link death, literal meaning, materiality, figuration, life, and meaning. In doing so, I have been haunted by the specter of Keats's hand, a poem which I wish to return to one final time in closing:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you. (384)

Keats, seized by inspiration, turns his manuscript upside down and dashes off an eight-line blank verse poem. The poem is written quickly, in a fairly clean hand, with only one or two corrections (Figure 6). Here Keats imagines his own death, the afterlife of his own hand, and proceeds to imagine the re-animation of this dead hand through a vampiric exchange of fluids between the living and the dead. We are haunted by the hand because, as inscription without context, we cannot defend against the hand's re-petition compulsion. The hand is held towards us from the past, yet somehow manages to seize the future, to be always ahead of us. The hand refuses to be assimilated to and defended against with the historical "it was." It petitions us again and again

for blood, again and again asks to be taken as a full spectral presence. Ghosts are interstitial phantoms, neither fully material nor fully beyond. So too, I suggest, is the lyric.

This living hand, now warm and capable
 Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
 and in the icy silence of the tomb,
 So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
 That thou wouldst wish thine ^{own} dry of blood.
 So in my veins red life might stream again,
 and thou be conscious-calm - see here it is
 I hold it - to wounds you

The monarch haunted her and over her
 These days of her bereavement with a sigh:
 The ~~former~~ ^{former} monarch in her heart but heard in the
 I'll this occasion couplet met his eye
 As he said "Alas, I do thee pity"
 It was too much, he ~~spoke~~ ^{spoke} both in the ~~city~~ ^{city}
 Eye, pale as death and haunted very
 Oho, movement of clanking nose dark des hair
 She does not mean it really - cheer up - there!

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Figure 6: Manuscript of 'This Living Hand.' Houghton Library, Harvard, Ms Keats 2.29.

¹ The boundary between funerary practice and poetic conception is sometimes made porous by unthinking and overly literal readers, most recently Roger Kaiser, the opera lover whose ash-scattering pilgrimage led to the cancellation of a Metropolitan Opera performance. Kaiser had told a cancer-stricken friend, evidently only half-jokingly, that he would scatter the friend's posthumous remains in opera houses around the world, where "they would never be able to vacuum all of him up. He would be there forever enjoying all the beautiful music" (New York Times, November 30, 2016). Prosopopoeia in the real world is not just another lyric embarrassment; the lyrically re-animated dead can cause a real fright. Sometimes, lyric poetry is best left on paper.

² Throughout the paper, poems from the *Man'yōshū* will be referred to with the abbreviation MYS and then a number designating their book and poem number. The Romanization for Old Japanese is taken from the Oxford Corpus of Old Japanese (see Frellesvig et al.), as are the Japanese-language texts.

³ In Lacanian terms, lyric exists at the interface of the Symbolic and the Real. The Real consists of material cannot be assimilated to the structures of language that generate meaning. In reading the lyric as a mode of poetry that constantly risks falling out of lyrical illusion and into a recognition of the absolute material qualities of the poem, I am suggesting that the Real always threatens to reappear traumatically in the middle of the Symbolic and to disrupt its signifying habits. Of course, in lyric the reappearance of the Real is only ever a threat and an animating force of the poem, because this falling away from the tropes of lyric is always itself a trope that is re-assimilated into the making of the poem. The lyric Real is therefore something of an *ersatz* Real, and can only ever appear as trauma that has already been assimilated to Symbolic and linguistic realm of poetry.

⁴ “It was like the case of a man who went to the house of a close friend and, having become drunk on wine, lay down to sleep. At that time the friend had to go out on official business. He took a priceless jewel, sewed it in the lining of the man's robe, and left it with him when he went out. The man was asleep drunk and knew nothing about it. In order to provide himself with food and clothing he had to search with all his energy and diligence, encountering very great hardship and making do with what little he could come by.” (Watson 150-151). The man, having endured a number of years in poverty, meets the old friend by chance, whereupon the friend informs the man of the existence of the priceless gem sewn into his robe. The priceless gem, the text explains, is like the teaching of the Buddha, which has been implanted in us, but “having gained a small portion of nirvana, we are satisfied and seek nothing more” (Watson 152-153). The Buddha, like the old friend in the parable who reveals the value of the hitherto-unseen gem, is to awaken us from our stupor and complacency and reawaken a desire for full attainment of wisdom.

⁵ A more detailed reading would also show the poem's recognition of and reference to a remarkable heterogeneity within the Chinese tradition. The poem seems to evoke the Book of Odes 詩經 *Shi Jing* and the “Selections of Refined Literature” 文選 *Wen Xuan*, and also various official histories from the continent and the Japanese court.

⁶ Perhaps by late eighth century, Old Japanese had lost the distinction between *nwo* and *no*, just as it had already lost the distinction between those vowels after *m*, another nasal consonant. *mwo* and *mo* are not distinguished after the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* songs and in parts of Book Five. *no* and *-nwo* may have sounded identical when chanted even in Tenmu's time. I thank James Scanlon-Canegata for suggesting this possibility to me.

⁷ As noted above, with reference to Hamanari's version of the song, it is possible that *nwo* and *no* would've sounded similar or indistinguishable when sung.

⁸ KJK is an abbreviation for “Kojiki.” NS is an abbreviation for “Nihon Shoki.” All of these songs can be found in Cranston’s *A Waka Anthology: Volume One*. Examples given here in parentheses are for reference and are not exhaustive. The last of these, *pasiki kamo*, appears in a Fudoki song translated by Cranston (132).

⁹ Other usages in the Man’yōshū include 美与之努, 見吉野, 三芳野, and 三吉野.

¹⁰See, for example, the poem:

春花能 宇都路布麻泥爾 相見祢婆 月日餘美都追 伊母麻都良牟曾 (MYS
17.3982)

parupana no uturwopu madeni api-mi-neba tukwipi yomitutu imo matu ramu so

We will not reunite until the spring blossoms have all lost their bloom:

And so my darling must be waiting for me, counting the suns and the moons.

¹¹ Much of the following is indebted to Hartman’s work on Romantic inscription.

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