ANTAGONISTIC COOPERATION: PROSE IN AMERICAN POETRY

by

ELIZABETH J. LERUD

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2017

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Elizabeth J. LeRud

Title: Antagonistic Cooperation: Prose in American Poetry

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the English Department by:

Karen J. Ford	Chair
Forest Pyle	Core Member
William Rossi	Core Member
Geri Doran	Institutional Representative

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2017.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Elizabeth J. LeRud

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

June 2017

Title: Antagonistic Cooperation: Prose in American Poetry

Poets and critics have long agreed that any perceived differences between poetry and prose are not essential to those modes: both are comprised of words, both may be arranged typographically in various ways—in lines, in paragraphs of sentences, or otherwise—and both draw freely from the complete range of literary styles and tools, like rhythm, sound patterning, focalization, figures, imagery, narration, or address. Yet still, in modern American literature, poetry and prose remain entrenched as a binary, one just as likely to be invoked as fact by writers and scholars as by casual readers. I argue that this binary is not only prevalent but also productive for modern notions of poetry, the root of many formal innovations of the past two centuries, like the prose poem and free verse. Further, for the poets considered in this study, the poetry/prose binary is generative precisely because it is flawed, offering an opportunity for an aesthetic critique.

"Antagonistic Cooperation: Prose in American Poetry" uncovers a history of innovative writing that traverses the divide between poetry and prose, writing that critiques the poetry/prose binary by combining conventions of each. These texts reveal how poetry and prose are similar, but they also explore why they seem different and even have different effects. When these writers' texts examine this binary, they do so not only for aesthetic reasons but also to question the social and political binaries of modern

American life—like rich/poor, white/black, male/female, gay/straight, natural/artificial, even living/dead—and these convergences of prose and poetry are a textual "space" each writer creates for representing those explorations. Ultimately, these texts neither choose between poetry and prose nor do they homogenize the two, affirming instead the complex effects that even faulty distinctions may have had historically, and still have, on literature—as on life. By confronting differences without reducing or erasing them, these texts imagine ways to negotiate and overcome modes of ignorance, invisibility, and oppression that may result from these flawed yet powerful dichotomies.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Elizabeth J. LeRud

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Westmont College, Santa Barbara

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2017, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2007, Westmont College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Poetry and Poetics
Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century American Literature
Comparative Multi-Ethnic US Literature

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, Department of English, University of Oregon, 2011-2017

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Sherwood Research Award, English Department, University of Oregon, 2016, 2017
University of Oregon Three Minute Thesis Competition, 2nd Place Winner, 2016

PUBLICATIONS:

LeRud, Lizzy. "Living Poems in Thoreau's Prose." *Nineteenth Century Prose*, vol. 44, Fall 2017, pp. 155-176.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go first to my mentor, Professor Karen J. Ford, whose generous and untiring support sustained me through difficulty and success alike and whose scrupulous attention to my writing is, to me, a cherished gift. I also thank the rest of my dissertation committee, Professor William Rossi, Professor Forest Pyle, and Professor Geri Doran, for their encouragement and insights at each stage of my project and especially for reading my manuscript and offering helpful suggestions toward future revisions. In addition, I am grateful to Professor Courtney Thorsson, Professor Rochelle Johnson, and Professor Elizabeth Witherell, who each provided incisive feedback on earlier versions of certain chapters. Throughout the course of this project, I benefitted greatly from the insights, observations, and camaraderie of the fellow graduate students with whom I shared offices, ideas, drafts, and favorite poems, old and new, and I am happy to thank them here. Finally, my particular gratitude goes to my beloved Ben Wenzel, who would as gamely engage my thinking and aid my work as refresh me with his most welcome and necessary diversions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

POETRY AND PROSE: TRAVERSING THE DIVIDE

Of course, there are no rules: when it comes to poetry and prose, recent discussions—debating the genres, forms, or any versions of either type of signifying practice—support what we already know to be true, that texts of all kinds resist such classifications. "The wisest definition of poetry the poet will instantly prove false by setting aside its requisitions," Thoreau averred nearly two centuries ago, and we could say the same of prose (*A Week* 91). Even the most conventional elements of texts change with the times—"The conventions readers bring to texts . . . are always historically conditioned," Marjorie Perloff reminds us (189). Separating poetry from prose—saying what one is or what it is not and definitively stating its features and attributes—is, at best, a fraught task. So when Jonathan Culler defines that major subset of poetry, "lyric," in 2015, he acknowledges Frederic Jameson's claim that genre criticism is "thoroughly discredited by modern literary theory and practice" (105). But he goes on: "what has been discredited is, first, the notion of a genre as a set of rules that a literary work ought to follow and, second, the idea that the purpose of generic categories is to classify works: to tell us whether this piece of literature is in fact a novel or an anti-novel, for example" (42). Put broadly, what has been discredited is the idea that literary classifications like "poetry" and "prose" are—or have ever been—a litmus test for a text.

Dispelling that notion lets us see such classifications for what they are, for indeed, rules and requisitions about poetry or prose, even if falsely ultimate, are generative. Thus, what Caroline Levine asserts about literary and social forms applies also to these two broad organizational groupings in literature: they are "equally real in their capacity to

organize materials, and equally *un*real in being artificial, contingent constraints" (14). We can easily focus on proving how artificial definitions of poetry are, for example. But I want to consider how these definitions work in the first place, what work particular ideas about "poetry" and "prose" have done over time, and what work they are doing right now. Again, Levine's words on forms apply more broadly: "too strong an emphasis on forms' dissolution has prevented us from attending to the complex ways that power operates in a world dense with functioning forms" (9). Too strong an emphasis on dissolving these two literary categories, we might say, prevents us from attending to their complex history and their persistent currency. Thus, distinguishing types from among bodies of literature is useful not to prescribe what literature should be but to understand what it has been; Culler reminds us to ask "which categories are most useful, most likely to provide insight into the history of the literary tradition and the functioning of literature" (44).

In the case of poetry and prose, we must admit, the two in tandem have become their own categorical convention, used together to define what each is—especially what poetry is. We know the two are not complete opposites, but all too frequently, we employ them as such. Common usage bears this out: "Prose," the Oxford English Dictionary declares, is "in contrast with *verse* or *poetry.*" Specialists and practitioners take the pair for granted, too: many university creative writing programs offer students a course of study in either poetry or prose. In publishing, poetry and prose distinctions are customary when collecting the works of those writers best known as poets: titles in the Library of America editions of Walt Whitman, Stephen Crane, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop all bear this out, and examples from other imprints are too easy to

enumerate. If they are illogical and imprecise, why do these categories persist? Indeed, common usage runs in the face of equally visible examples that defy the prose/poetry dichotomy. Consider the prominence of the prose poem, which has been in the US since at least the mid-1800s; even Emerson wrote one (366). The literary establishment recognized such hybrid works once and for all when Charles Simic's volume of prose poems, *The World Doesn't End*, won the Pulitzer for poetry in 1991. But even by 1957, writing poetry in prose styles was ubiquitous enough for Frank O'Hara to quip about his poem "Oranges," "It is even in / prose, I am a real poet" (262).

If this widespread disagreement about prose vis-à-vis poetry attests to any one thing, it is that the dichotomy captures our attention. The aim of this project is to explore how this came to be and why it continues to be so: how this binary, flawed though it may be, is productive for US poets. As the examples above suggest, this dualism is especially pertinent within a particular era—1800s to present-day—when, as I will explore below, the free verse revolution in poetry coincided and collided with the rise of prose in popularity, and both terms—prose and poetry—took on new meanings. To many, these two events sparked a new debate for literary culture. As poetry forms adopted conventions from prose, some used this stylistic evolution to argue that poetry and prose are essentially the same, while others rushed to mark off the territory of the poem by drawing firm boundary lines around even the prosiest poetry. For the poets in this study, the development of the debate itself became an opportunity: these writers began to employ the divide as something to be traversed. Reaching across the borderlines of poetry to include prose became an aesthetic strategy, one Williams describes as "antagonistic cooperation" or a synergy of seemingly opposed forms.

All this was happening simultaneously with a turn toward self-consciously national poetry, and for many, questioning calcified categories of prose and poetry became a tool for exploring the shifting social and political boundaries of modern America. When these writers combine prose and poetry strategies, they expand the boundaries of literary categories on the written page, and they in turn expose and evaluate cultural boundaries—like those of race, gender, class, and belief—that shape American lives. The texts that result attest to a tradition of formal openness in periods of aesthetic and social upheaval. This is a tradition that runs counter to the dominant narrative of experimentation in American poetry, where innovation is often understood in terms of the either/or choices poets make—excluding traditional forms or free verse, for example. But when the poets considered here approach political questions with aesthetic invention, they embrace rather than reject literary forms and strategies. This American poetics operates as a poetics of inclusion.

Modern American writers were not the first to use perceived differences between poetry and prose for argumentative purposes. Exposing this pair as a false dichotomy has long been a way to call out the "true" nature of poetry; English literature's most famous defenses of poetry stood firm on the idea that the category of poetry should encompass prose. So Sir Philip Sidney in his "Defence" argues for the inclusion of "mingled prose and verse" among the many types of "poesies," explaining that "if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful" (97). Similarly, when standing against the idea that poetic language is perforce metrical, Percy Bysshe Shelley declares that "the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy" and "the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error" ("Defense of Poetry" 514). Both

writers draw similar key points: that the poetic impulse is the impulse to create language, thus poetry is elemental and encompasses any vital creation with language, including prose.

Scholars who study the origins of literary cultures take Sidney's and Shelley's defenses one step further when they establish that, in fact, verse forms are the original forms in most, if not all, linguistic traditions. Historians can point to the moment when prose emerges—after verse—in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Old Icelandic, English, Spanish, German, Wolof, Pulaar, and other languages; Jeffrey Kittay and Wlad Godzich explore this phenomenon, and particularly the evolution of prose in medieval French literature, in their study of the origins of prose.[1] To chart prose's appearance and explore how its conventions took shape in French, Kittay and Godzich compare original thirteenth-century poetry with its revisions by *dérimeurs* ("de-rhymers"), the apt job title for those employed to purge verse of its ornamentation and transpose it into nonverse. When Kittay and Godzich reveal the pains dérimeurs took to eliminate poetic elements and reinvent written texts without them, they explode the modern notion that prose is merely recorded speech, the most natural and therefore primal written form. In fact, they argue, prose conventions are just as contrived as any poetic ones.

In some cultures, the emergence of prose led to the appearance of self-consciously hybrid poetry-prose creations, sometimes called "prosimetra" or "versiprosa," similar to those I explore in US literature. Like the cultures they emerge from, these texts vary greatly—from the tenth-century Chinese *fu* rhyming prose texts to Sanskrit epics like the Mahabharata. Sixth-century Roman poet Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* and Dante's thirteenth-century *La Vita Nuova* are well-known examples of Latin

prosimetrum; the medieval French *chante-fable* ("song-story") *Aucassin et Nicolette* is another famous example from the Western literary tradition, one that may have influenced American writers like William Carlos Williams.[2] Sidney's own *Arcadia* consists of prose interspersed with pastoral poems.

But Sidney's prosimetric text emerged amid a literary culture already accustomed to prose, a stark difference to some earlier texts. Modern American poets faced another difference still—readers were not only accustomed to prose but also inundated with it, and many poets began to feel protective of their readership and to worry about poetry's popularity. To chart the ascendency of prose, scholars often point to the rise of the novel, which they usually date from the early eighteenth century.[3] Granted, verse cultures flourished in this time, too: in the US, new printing technologies, cheap paper and bindings, and reduced postal rates began to take their effect in the mid-eighteenth century, leading to a burgeoning literary market for poetry as well as for novels. Increased publishing options made available by the growth of publishing houses and the proliferation of literary magazines benefited poets as well as prose writers. But regardless of whether prose actually threatened to usurp poetry's audiences, many felt then—as now—that it did. Consider Ezra Pound's gloss of prose's supposed rise to eminence:

> I mean to say that from the beginning of literature up to A.D. 1750 poetry was the superior art, and was so considered to be, and if we read books written before that date we find the number of interesting books in verse at least equal to the number of prose books still readable; and the poetry contains the quintessence. . . .
>
> And one morning Monsieur Stendhal, not thinking of Homer, or Villon, or Catullus, but having a very keen sense of actuality, noticed that 'poetry,' *la*

> *poésie*, as the term was then understood, the stuff written by his French contemporaries, or sonorously rolled at him from the French stage, was a damn nuisance. And he remarked that poetry, with its bagwigs and its bobwigs, and its padded calves and its periwigs, its 'fustian à la Louis XIV', was greatly inferior to prose for conveying a clear idea of the diverse states of our consciousness ('les mouvements du cœur').
>
> And at that moment the serious art of writing 'went over to prose', and for some time the important developments of language as means of expression were the developments of prose. And a man cannot clearly understand or justly judge the value of verse, modern verse, any verse, unless he has grasped this. (31)

Pound's glib take on a century of literary developments—not to mention the series of events that led to Stendhal's seeming revelation—has been so well-grasped that even some modern literary historians take this rendition at face value.[4] Timothy Steele argues that poets generally responded to this ostensible threat in one of two ways: some reacted against prose by developing a kind of "pure poetry," accentuating and capitalizing on the poetical qualities of traditional verse forms and conventions, while others sought to incorporate prose strategies into poetry forms (89). No doubt sentiments following the later response bred interest in poetic forms that throw off self-consciously poetic conventions like rhyme, meter, or lineation, contributing to increased interest in strategies like free verse, colloquial diction, Imagism, and forms like the prose poem.

Arguments exploring distinctions between poetry and prose gained especial purchase in this historical moment. On the one hand, in the wake of this shift, the view that poetry and prose are similar, or at least not opposites, was immediately more tenable:

writers like Whitman and Baudelaire, followed by Stein and so many others, demonstrably narrowed the gap between prose and poetry, as many critics have shown. Marjorie Perloff sums up the significance of these writers' works in this vein: "the breaking of the pentameter was only one step in a much more radical development of the *avant guerre*, namely, the breaking down of the binary opposition between verse and prose, as those two terms were understood at the turn of the century" (164-65). But on the other hand, just as some things called poems grew to look more and more like many things called prose, some writers became increasingly interested in telling the two apart. This happened for prose as well as for poetry: with the rise of prose, its conventions gained visibility, leading to critical debate about its distinguishing features. To cite just one striking example, Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky's major study, *Theory of Prose* (1925), defined prose as "ordinary speech" compared to poetry's more "impeded, distorted, . . . structured speech," before going on to explore examples of prose fiction by Cervantes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dickens, Laurence Sterne, Andrei Bely, and Vasily Rozanov.

For those focusing on poetry, the opening of aesthetic boundaries paired with the perceived encroachments of prose led to definitions cordoning off one from the other even when they had never seemed more alike. Arguments about free verse offer a telling glimpse into such debates. Regardless of whether writers aimed to discredit free verse or recognize its value, they frequently turned to prose as a comparator. As Henry B. Fuller explained in the pages of *The Dial*, "A favorite objection to free verse—or to free rhythm—is that it is merely prose cut up, arbitrarily, into short lengths" (65). Conversations in other modernist magazines bear this out. *The Chapbook* devoted its

entire April 1921 issue to "Poetry in Prose," with essays by T. S. Eliot, Frederic Manning, and Richard Aldington. The titles of *Poetry* commentary are similarly telling: "Poetic Prose and Vers Libre" by Alice Corbin Henderson in May 1913 and "Vers Libre and Metrical Prose" by Amy Lowell in March 1914. In *The Little Review*, where conversations about *vers libre* carried on over subsequent issues, defenders of freer forms found themselves claiming these as poetry by ruling out that they could be prose: Maxwell Bodenheim claims that poets who eschew traditional forms are "not miraculously changed from a poet to a writer of prose" (23). Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" famously promoted free verse by enjoining all poets to recognize a fundamental (though "unspeakable") difference between *good* prose and verse: "Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths" (201-2). Accordingly, not long after, *The Crisis* defined all poetry as *not* simply "prose cut into lengths" (236).

As these debates about free verse attest, poets were increasingly defining poetry by defining prose. It should come as no surprise that someone like Pound found himself reworking Sidney's and Shelley's primary arguments about poetry so as to include prose more prominently. Charged with the very task of writing a new "defense" in *The Egoist* in 1913, Pound begins by feigning disinterest in the very question of poetry versus prose, referring to its ubiquity: "I do not know that there is much use in composing an answer to the often asked question: What is the difference between poetry and prose?" ("The Serious Artist" 49). He goes on to explain, as many more after him will do, that "these

things are relative." But later on in the essay, when he turns to discussing the origins of all language, he now describes differences between poetry and prose as absolute and even primal. Instead of deeming the force of all inventive language "poetry," Pound says that poetry and prose are twin energies latent in language, growing separately as culture grows. Poetry grows one way—"You begin with the yeowl and the bark, and you develop into the dance and into music, and into music with words, and finally into words with music"—while prose takes another direction: "Gradually you wish to communicate something less bare and ambiguous than ideas. You wish to communicate an idea and its modifications, an idea and a crowd of its effects, atmospheres, and contradictions. You wish to question whether a certain formula works in every case, or in what per cent of cases, etc., etc., etc., you get the Henry James novel" (50-51). Pound's colorful explanation indicates how commonplace it had become to think of prose and poetry as two separate, essential, elemental ways of writing.

To look closely at the developments that led up to ideas like Pound's, as well as the aftermath and ongoing effects of these ideas, the chapters of this project span debates and developments in US poetry from the early nineteenth century to the present day. I begin before prose poems or *vers libre* had taken root in US soil, when writers like Thoreau explored a variety of ways of revitalizing modes of writing and publishing poetry. Thoreau did not think that verse forms themselves were to blame for anything lacking in poetry; instead, he objected to the ways poems were presented and displayed. He noticed that on the pages of anthologies, poems seemed like lifeless objects to be admired rather than vital words to guide and shape one's thoughts and actions. In his journal and early excursion essays, Thoreau began to experiment with ways of combining

prose narratives with verses, often explaining in prose the thoughts and ideas that led up to and resulted from encounters with verse. A long exploratory drafting process led to the structure of his first book-length work, the 1849 *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, where embedded poems join with the prose travel narrative of a two-week boat trip that Thoreau took with his brother, John, three years before John's untimely death. In Thoreau's combination of poetry and narrative prose, the poems take on an active role as they respond to the surrounding prose and influence the trajectory of Thoreau's thoughts. Thoreau uses prose to narrate the experience not just of travel but also of producing poetry as a result of travels on the Massachusetts and New Hampshire waterways. By embedding poems within the travel narrative prose, *A Week* shows how poetry "lives": how it emanates from a poet's thoughts and meditations, influences his thinking, and extends its influence endlessly, beyond the written page and into the lives of others.

As history shows, *A Week* sold few copies, its experimental form tended to confuse readers, and few of Thoreau's poems were admired (James Russell Lowell, for example, memorably dubbed much of the *Week* versification "worsification") (51). Yet the composition of the book is remarkably like what Williams designed seventy-four years later for *Spring and All* (1923) and then *Paterson* (1946-1961), the texts I focus on in my third chapter. Writing in the midst of modernist debates about poetry and prose, Williams detected an elitist strain emerging among some writers dedicated to the inviolability of poetry as a mode, elitism fueled by the view that poetry should be considered separate from prose. Williams noticed that such thinking often coincided with social conservatism grounded in hierarchies and stratification. He intuited that countering such supremacy required texts that were themselves egalitarian, so he determined he must

write about a wide array of American experiences but also depict this diversity in texts that treat poetry and prose forms as equals, too. When *Spring and All* and *Paterson* layer genres and forms in complex textual convergences of poetry and prose, they create a formal scaffolding on which to represent complex, intersectional lives.

Thus, there were prominent precedents available when Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell also grew distressed by the calcification of poetry as a literary category. Calculated, highly formal, and finely crafted poetry was "cooked" to Lowell, and Bishop described it as "that kind of clever thinking-out process that leaves me cold" (*Words in Air* 302). In my fourth chapter, I explore how Bishop, especially, used prose to release poetry from such constraints. She imagined a kind of writing that infused individual experience and immediacy into the poems themselves—to Lowell, this was "raw" poetry, not cooked, and many others came to call it "Confessionalism." A significant step in her development toward this ideal involved experimentation with prose narratives, like Bishop's short story about her childhood in Nova Scotia, "In the Village." Sensing something productive in the similarities yet perceived differences of prose and poetry, Bishop published "In the Village" in the very middle of her poetry collection, *Questions of Travel* (1965). Bishop's combination of prose with poetry maintains certain boundaries between the two, but a narrative of selfhood plays out across the collection, glimpsed unevenly through a wide range and diversity of personae as well as through prose and poetry forms. This multiplicity allows Bishop to test the limits of self-representation, to destabilize the singularity of the "I" and exceed the limitations of a narrowly autobiographical poetry. By exploring the borders of prose and poetry, Bishop explores both the fissures and coherences of self-perception in *Questions of Travel*.

In the final chapter, I explore how different versions of Kate Rushin's "The Bridge Poem" draw from the political stakes of Williams's formal intermixtures and the poetics of selfhood Bishop's prose and poetry enact. Rushin's poem and Williams' and Bishop's ideas are synthesized in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory. Anzaldúa explains that *mestiza* or borderland consciousness enables one to see that cultural expectations—from racial stereotypes to poetry and prose—are social constructs. She argues that literature can mimic this mindset to promote political change: that exposure to multiple cultures through multiple forms allows a kind of literary "code-switching," where readers grow in understanding not only by reading texts about different societies and peoples but also by switching literary "languages"—like from poetry to prose—as they read, practicing the empathy necessary for ethical engagement. So when co-editors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga put out a call for contributions to *This Bridge Called My Back*, they asked for a wide variety of experiences and voices as well as diverse forms and styles of writing. "Bridge Poem" became the volume's titular text, and it also encapsulates *This Bridge*'s emphasis on the complexly intersectional lives of women of color. As the many reprints of "Bridge Poem" show—from other anthologies, to a poetry book, a short story collection, and multiple works of theory—Anzaldúa's ideas had wide application in many works advocating for fuller recognition of women of color. For Anzaldúa, Moraga, Rushin and many others, convergences of prose and poetry become formal instantiations of intersectional theory, helping to portray how categories of identity and modes of oppression overlap and intersect.

Coming to terms with texts like these that combine poetry and prose requires scrupulous close readings of not just the poems and prose but also of the textual

environment created by their combination. Works like *A Week* and *Questions of Travel* are far more than mere collections of poems and prose in sequence, for poetry and prose conventions are imbricated typographically and semantically in such works. Conventions associated with poetry are often employed in prose and vice versa: a paragraph of prose may use rhyme and meter, and a poem may eschew line breaks and flush-left margins. Traditional prose or poetry forms may overlap, too, as when stanzas of verse are interrupted by a prose-style paragraph or a sentence overruns a line of poetry and continues into an unlineated body of text.

Reading these complex convergences of prose and poetry demands that we confront methods of reading and analysis—as well as publishing—that are also a product of the prose-poetry divide. Scholars of American literature often specialize in either poetry or prose forms, for example, and may be more likely to focus on one or the other than to read the two together. Many of the texts in this study have suffered neglect due to such inattention and inability to account for their hybridity. These habits and trends are exacerbated by publishing choices and practices. Consider the case of Bishop's *Questions of Travel*: while "In the Village" is prominently situated among poems in the 1965 edition, this edition has long been out of print. Today, *Questions of Travel* is printed within a volume of Bishop's collected works, and nearly every edition of the collected poetry omits "Village" from *Questions of Travel,* printing it instead in the separate *Prose* volume. As a result, many analyses of *Questions of Travel* simply overlook the prose piece altogether. The prose and poetry of *Spring and All* have an even more complex provenance and publishing history: less than three-hundred copies of the original volume were first printed by Contact Press, a small French publisher, and few copies were

distributed in the US because the text was deemed obscene and censored by customs. Meanwhile, Williams himself called the prose "nonsense" and seemed to disregard it, going on to publish many of the *Spring and All* poems without the prose in various chapbooks, then in various iterations of his collected poetry (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 37). Many readers still first encounter these poems as isolated works on the pages of poetry anthologies—especially the famous poems "Spring and All," "To Elsie," "The Red Wheelbarrow," and "This Is Just To Say." *Spring and All* was not reissued until 1970, and since then, it has been popular enough that in 2011, New Directions issued a facsimile edition of the 1923 Contact version. To read *Spring and All*, then, is to read a text that few modernists even read in 1923 but one that has become newly popular in part because its poems were removed from prose and became well known on their own.

In this study, I account for these complex histories and traditions by reading for what George Bornstein calls the "linguistic code," the words of the texts themselves, and the "bibliographic code," the material qualities of the given versions of the text. Doing so helps reveal how a text creates meaning by itself and in relation to its surroundings as different contexts may lead to disparate interpretations of a text. Thoreau, for example, first composed many of the *Week* poems as part of a daily journal, then revised and published them as short lyrics in the Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial* before editing them again for *A Week*. Of course, tracking one of Thoreau's poems from journal to magazine to *A Week* teaches us about Thoreau's editing process, which in turn helps us understand the design and intentions of a poetry-prose work like *A Week*.

Reading versions of a text across its publishing history with Bornstein's codes in mind also reveals a persistent, continuing tendency among publishers and critics to

separate hybrid texts out into either prose or poetry—even at the risk of erasing an entire section of a book, as in the case of Bishop's *Questions of Travel*. In the case of Thoreau, tracking the publication of his poetry into the twentieth century reveals that this tendency has recently become more common. When Henry Salt and Frank Sanborn published a volume of Thoreau's poetry in 1895, they did so with multiple caveats, agreeing with an early reviewer of *A Week*, Joel Benton, that it was "an injustice to treat them [the poems] separately at all" (xiii). At that time, they only printed a small selection of verse, admitting that, for the other poems, "it is in many cases impossible to detach them" from the prose. But by 1945, Carl Bode argued that "the great number of his [Thoreau's] poems can stand as entities and by themselves," although he still includes an appendix giving excerpts of prose contexts for several poems (x). Elizabeth Hall Witherell's 2001 edition of Thoreau's *Collected Essays and Poems* contains no such appendix, although its thorough "Notes on the Texts" catalogs all versions of each poem, carefully noting when poems were printed in contexts like the journals, *A Week*, or *Walden*. Witherell's volume is an accurate, invaluable tool for scholars, but it is also evidence of our ongoing tendency to cordon off poetry from prose.

The prose/poetry dichotomy continues to shape how American literature is conceived of and received. Thus, we must also consider how these categories continue to condition our own tastes and reading habits. What expectations do we bring to texts labeled "poems" or "prose"? What expectations do we hold that literature should be labeled in these ways? There are no rules, yet we must admit, we often operate as if they exist. Indeed, it is at least as illuminating to define them as it is to set them aside.

Notes

[1] The list of cultures and this overview of prose's emergence is Kittay and Godzich's, page xi.

[2] See Kittay and Godzich's analysis of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, in their chapter "Chantefable," pp. 78-106.

[3] *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* notes that novel forms can be traced back to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts, and scholars generally agree that the first U.S. novel is William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) (1-2). Leah Price's timeline for "serious discourse about novels" is from the first edition of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* in 1747 to the latest works of Victorian writer George Eliot in the 1880s (8).

[4] Timothy Steele, for example, quotes this passage without commentary, deeming it "cogently summarized" literary history (89).

CHAPTER II

THOREAU'S POEMS LIVING IN PROSE

In November 1841, a young Henry David Thoreau set out for the Harvard Library to gather materials for a poetry anthology that he hoped might become his first book. Many of the texts he consulted were not unlike our anthologies today—tools for study that compile poems under themes, perhaps for the sake of history, to document a certain genre, school, or movement.[1] But after spending time in the poetry section of the library, Thoreau grew frustrated with these volumes and the academic methods of collecting and studying poetry, and he began to question the design of his own project:

> When looking over the dry and dusty volumes of the English poets, I cannot believe that those fresh and fair creations I had imagined are contained in them. English poetry from Gower down collected into one alcove–and so from the library window compared with the commonest nature seems very mean.
>
> Poetry cannot breath in the scholar's atmosphere. . . . while I am running over the catalogue, and collating and selecting–I think if it would not be a shorter way to a complete volume–to step at once into the field or wood, with a very low reverence to students and librarians. (*Journal 1*: 337-38)

Thoreau draws from a trope of natural science to explain his thinking: what he finds in the library is the literary equivalent of taxidermy, where poems are captured and "collected" in "dry and dusty" containers, killed—they "cannot breathe"—and fixed to a page like specimens pinned beneath glass. His metaphor and his misgivings are echoed in

a later journal entry where he directly condemns such "embalming" as practiced in the natural history museums of his day (*Journal 2*: 79). He explains that the process of preservation disrupts and falsifies natural objects; it would be best to visit the artifacts where they originate: "Where is the proper Herbarium–the true cabinet of shells–and Museum of skeletons–but in the meadow where the flower bloomed–by the sea side where the tide cast up the fish–and on the hills and in the vallies where the beast laid down its life–and the skeleton of the traveller reposes on the grass" (78). Indeed, Thoreau's qualms about the museum and its artifacts are paralleled by his doubts about the library and its anthologies, and what he makes plain about plants and mollusks in the later journal entry—that to properly observe and appreciate them, one must visit them in their native habitats—he intuits about poetry in the earlier one. Thus, in both cases, Thoreau calls for the same thing: to understand the items under observation, one must return to the "meadow," "vallies," "field or wood," the places these objects belong. Certainly, in this example, the skeletons and shells are lifeless objects, whether in the museum or in nature, and poetry need not adhere to the same laws of life and death. Yet this very distinction—the fact that poems are lifelike yet escape biological aging—will only increase in importance to Thoreau as he develops the concept, still nascent here, that poems emerge from their surrounding world, existing and interrelating within an organic system as intricately as living organisms in a natural ecology.

What the library and scholarly anthologies could not represent was poetry's dynamic, lifelike force. This is the point Thoreau teases out of the journal entry when he revises it for *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, the book he undertook to

write after abandoning the anthology project, the narrative of a two-week boat trip Thoreau took with his brother, John, in fall 1839, three years before John's sudden death:

> When I stand in a library where is all the recorded wit of the world, but none of the recording, a mere accumulated, and not truly cumulative treasure, where immortal works stand side by side with anthologies which did not survive their month, and cobweb and mildew have already spread from these to the binding of those; and happily I am reminded of what poetry is, I perceive that Shakspeare and Milton did not foresee into what company they were to fall. Alas! that so soon the work of a true poet should be swept into such a dust-hole! (341)

Rephrased using the lexicon of literature and composition, Thoreau's library critique now anticipates an alternative type of poetry collection: instead of merely reprinting the poems, an anthology might reflect their "recording," the birth-like process of each poem's history of inspiration and invention. Then, too, this anthology would pay homage to the "cumulative" vitality and ongoing legacy of a poem and poetry in general: the power of a poem to unfold meaning beyond the conditions of its writing and a first reading or, more broadly, the collective conversations between poems through time and their legacies of influence and affect, like an ecosystem of English language poetry. Thus, poems by Shakespeare and Milton would not merely be "accumulated" alongside those of minor poets, as if only to complete the record of history, but would be recognized respective to their magnitude of influence on future generations. Of course, this new kind of anthology is hardly feasible on such a comprehensive scale. Thoreau would have

struggled to acquire the complex histories and far-reaching futures of the poems, even those by such well-known figures as Shakespeare and Milton.

It is easy to see why Thoreau abandoned such an ambitious project, as he did in early 1844.[2] But soon after he set his plans aside, Thoreau began to work seriously on *A Week*, where more than just the library experience would develop and mature, including Thoreau's ideas about poetry.[3] Like a palimpsest, *A Week* bears evidence of its predecessor even as it builds on it: Thoreau incorporates excerpts from his research—from work by Milton, Chaucer, Ossian, Homer, and more—into arguments about the poets, which themselves grow from literary criticism that he wrote in tandem with his studies: "Aulus Persius Flaccus" (1840), "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer." (1843), "Sir Walter Raleigh," (1843), and "Anacreon" (1843). Illustrating and exemplifying his ideas about poetry are over sixty of Thoreau's own poems. Many of these are extracted from journals or *Dial* publications that were contemporaneous with his work on the poetry anthology; many are revised for *A Week*, and all—as with the excerpts from other poets and literary essays—are meticulously interwoven into the meditations and reflections of the book. The result is that Thoreau's poems, along with his thoughts about poets and poetry, comprise an inextricable strand of what Linck Johnson calls *A Week*'s "complex weave" (xii). What Thoreau failed to do in the anthology, he was able to do—and more—in *A Week*, Thoreau's "poetic manifesto" according to Robert O. Evans, which supplies for John Carlos Rowe the "function and identity of the poet" that underpins *Walden* and, indeed, Thoreau's writings in general (43, 33).

A Week's debt to Thoreau's early work on poetry has been well documented by critics on all counts except with regard to the influence on that book of Thoreau's own

embedded poetry.[4] Although their sheer number should make them hard to overlook, Thoreau's poems have long been disregarded in the major studies of *A Week*, where they have been called digressions, explications, or mere ornaments to the prose.[5] That critics have largely neglected these poems—and Thoreau's poetry in general—reflects a critical consensus that the poems are, at best, inconsistent in quality and, at worst, bad writing. Emerson skirted the question of quality in his eulogy when he averred that Thoreau's "biography is in his verses," training ground for his mature ideas and prose style. This tepid commendation was the first of many to use Thoreau's poetry to understand his biography (408).[6] Focusing on Thoreau's development as a writer, many critics have illuminated the older writer's prose innovations by comparing them with the young Thoreau's experiments in poetry. But the attention to early poems has narrowed the focus to pre-*Week* poetry, and this perpetuates a tendency to overlook most of the poems in *A Week* or after *A Week*, especially those that underwent extensive revision when incorporated into prose. A few poetry critics, most notably Robert O. Evans and Elizabeth Hall Witherell, call attention to the interactions between Thoreau's poetry and prose in *A Week*, *Walden*, and throughout Thoreau's journals.[7] But even as they focus on poems, these critics primarily identify discrete themes and subjects or styles and formal strategies in the poems and relegate them to a supporting role in hybrid texts. Reading *A Week* for either poems or prose alone leaves unexamined the dialogue between the two, the subtle shifts in register from poetic speaker to prose narrator that connote his internal debates—thoughts Thoreau questions even as he presents them—as well as debates about genre within the structure of *A Week* as the timeless insights of these poems often stand out against the time-bound two-week boat trip. Further, ignoring the integration of the

poems into *A Week* leads us to overlook a major component of its complex compositional history. Tracking these poems from journal, to *Dial*, to *A Week* reveals that Thoreau often altered the meaning of poems during the editing process. Analyzing the same poem in multiple contexts exposes how it creates meaning by itself as well as in relation to its surroundings as different contexts encourage disparate interpretations of a poem.

Confronting the formal hybridity of Thoreau's poems within *A Week*'s prose demands strategies for reading the poetry and prose as well as for interpreting their interactions. I argue that reading the dialogue between Thoreau's poems and prose yields a depiction of poetry as something akin to a biological process, albeit one that exceeds the rules of nature and especially the inevitability of death. The book posits "life" stories of Thoreau's poems: as the poet himself, Thoreau is privy to the "recording" and reverberations of his own lyrics within his own life, and he is able to follow his own alternative anthology notion, tracing poems from inspiration and inception, to printed words, to reprinted and recalled words, forces that outlast their author. In a book about significant loss, a poem's immortality matters even more in concept than it does in fact. The narrative of the journey—with its beginning, middle, and end—employs plot structure to commemorate the course of a life, John's life, now ended, but the poems try to elude that temporality: like Thoreau's prose narrator, the poems voice ideas and concepts, but they do not participate in the action of the journey; they are displaced from the river context. Exterior to the narrative yet embedded within it, the lyrics and their insights are at once implicated in the story yet distinct from it. Even as these poems escape the *Week* narrative's portrayal of time's inevitable losses, they function as a consoling force in the face of that loss within the narrative. Narrating the lives of poems

may paradoxically fix them in the teleology of the excursion, but these lyrics nevertheless effect a more supple narration, a story that troubles notions of death and ending, life, and representation.

The strategies of *A Week*'s poems with prose were emerging in some of Thoreau's earliest writing; poems in "Natural History of Massachusetts," "A Walk to Wachusett," and "A Winter Walk," published in July 1842, January 1843, and October 1843 respectively, evidence his early experiments with interpolated poetry used to enrich the narrator's perspective. That the poems were used to represent aspects of a functioning mind was not lost on one of Thoreau's early readers: in a September 1842 journal entry, Nathaniel Hawthorne lauds Thoreau's work by way of the poems in "Natural History of Massachusetts," explaining that "his thoughts seem to measure and attune themselves into spontaneous verse, as they rightfully may, since there is real poetry in them" (319). The process Hawthorne imagines—that Thoreau's thoughts are "measured" and "attuned" into poems—suggests they are not, in fact, "spontaneous." Yet Hawthorne captures a key feature of these texts when he observes that the poems' meticulous structures appear natural and organic within the prose. Woven seamlessly into the text, they are as vital a component as any other aspect of their textual surroundings, not merely adornments but imbricated elements of the essays.

The poems in these early essays often represent multiple perspectives and sonic registers that complement the first-person narration of the prose, adding a layer of textual polyphony that correlates with the complexity of the natural landscapes that the narrator explores. In "Natural History of Massachusetts," for example, poems mimic the clamor of a natural setting as they explore the perspectives of subjects within the landscape: one

verse interjection, for example, describes birds' voices, loud like a "clarion" or "brazen trump."[8] Poetry lets the narrator acknowledge silent presences, too, such as in a pensive ode to the solitary crow that follows those lines on bird song (*Collected Essays and Poems* 28). Likewise, the prose narration in "A Walk to Wachusett" follows Thoreau's perspective until it pivots to verse portraying Wachusett Mountain's point of view: the narrator is considering Virgil and Wordsworth, then begins the quatrain, "Not unconcerned Wachusett rears *his* head" (50, emphasis mine). So, too, with smoke and a neighbor's cabin in "A Winter Walk"—"The sluggish smoke curls up from some deep dell, / The stiffened air exploring in the dawn"—where poetry escapes the narrator's generalized "we" to inhabit these particular, otherwise isolated others (93).

In these essays, poems not only allow the narrator to attend to the perspectives of natural subjects by inhabiting their point of view in verse, but they also let him synthesize what he learns from others by translating lessons into sonic sense through rhyme. In "Natural History of Massachusetts," the poem beginning "The river swelleth more and more" presents a brimming river's winter quiet in contrast to the bubble of rills and falls in summer, and the speaker observes that the quiet surface merely conceals the current that will carry summer's rushing water, much as someone deep in thought may appear placid even as she actively deliberates the thoughts she will soon disclose (*Collected Essays and Poems* 33-34). To Thoreau, the equations of empathy offered by metaphors such as this are the lessons nature teaches for those who listen: "Here Nature taught from year to year, / When only red men came to hear" (27-28). Granted, the reference to native populations jars us as offensive today; still, Thoreau enjoins us to "hear" both by considering the example of the river and by listening to the poem's sounds that conjoin

ideas, especially the rhyming end-words cascading down the right-hand margin. Later on in this essay, Thoreau expands on the relationship he sees between rhyming words and reoccurring forms and shapes in the natural world when he describes "natural rhymes": "when some animal form, color, or odor, has its counterpart in some vegetable" (38-39).[9] Icicles take shape on trees in patterns that mimic leaves' buds in later spring, Thoreau explains, and while contemporary readers may quibble with this over-simplified ecology, we can use Thoreau's logic to elucidate how his rhymes reinforce relational truths. In "The river swelleth," rhymes like *glide*/*tide* in the lines "And many a stream with smothered hum, / Doth swifter well and faster glide, / Though buried deep beneath the tide" connect the otherwise paradoxical idea that physical rest may still connote important preparatory activity (18-20).

When writing about patterns in meter, meanwhile, Thoreau begins to explore a different convention of sounds in poetry to narrate the experience of reading poetry and its role in contemplative practice. Thoreau describes several poetry-reading experiences in "A Walk to Wachusett," such as when he and his companion, Richard Fuller, discuss Virgil together while taking a break from their mountain ascent, or when they read Virgil and Wordsworth in their tent on the Wachusett summit (*Collected Essays and Poems* 46, 50). Thoreau's reflections on reading poetry turn to form, particularly meter, as he and Fuller descend Wachusett. To keep time to their walking pace, the travelers chant ballad quatrains aloud together; for this trip, the Robin Hood ballads (which will reappear later in *A Week*) serve as marching music. At first, their progress suggests that reciting metered lines does little to serve productive thinking:

> At length, as we plodded along the dusty roads, our thoughts became as dusty as they; all thought indeed stopped, thinking broke down, or proceeded only passively in a sort of rhythmical cadence of the confused material of thought, and we found ourselves mechanically repeating some familiar measure which timed with our tread; some verse of the Robin Hood ballads, for instance, which one can recommend to travel by. (55)

Yet as they continue, as the meter propels them down the mountain, the pulse of the quatrains begin to order their experience within a larger framework of understanding, one guided by the patterns of life which are themselves evocative of metrical repetitions. As if coming to the realization in this moment himself, Thoreau explains that the process of descent is as inevitable on a mountain journey as it is during high points of epiphany in one's life:

> There is, however, this consolation to the most way-worn traveler, upon the dustiest road, that the path his feet describe is so perfectly symbolical to human life—now climbing the hills, now descending into the vales. From the summits he beholds the heavens and horizon, from the vales he looks up to the heights again. He is treading his old lessons still, and though he may be very weary and travel-worn, it is yet sincere experience.

By equating a rough, dry passage along the path of "human life" with their downward travel and its poetry-induced metrical beat, the passage suggests that not all forward-moving progress or life learning must result in a revelation of something new, for lessons must also be rehearsed and repeated. Here, "treading their old lessons," Thoreau and

Fuller find that the measured text of poems affords repetition that allows for incremental, thorough thinking.

While these early excursion essays afforded Thoreau the opportunity to work out strategies of craft—that is, ways of writing poetry within prose—other early essays took poets and poetry as their subject matter, and it was here that Thoreau mapped his early theories about poetry versus prose. Some of these essays were the products of the anthology project, like his translations ("Homer. Ossian. Chaucer.," "Anacreon," and "Aulus Persius Flaccus"), a biography ("Sir Walter Raleigh"), and literary criticism (again, "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer.," "Anacreon," and "Aulus Persius Flaccus"). After abandoning the anthology project, Thoreau found various outlets for these labors, publishing some of his work as essays in *The Dial* and presenting some as lectures at the Concord Lyceum.[10] Eventually, many of these essays found their way into *A Week*, where they converge to present a poetics of reading and responding to poems. For the most part, these essays entered the draft *Week* before many of the poems, a foundation from which Thoreau built when he added poems to the draft later on. Because these essays form a groundwork for Thoreau's embedded poems, I will discuss them here before turning to the poems of *A Week*.

Reading poetry was an integral step to writing poetry for Thoreau. He viewed reading and writing as twin cognitive methods, a principle he shares with Emerson whose "American Scholar" essay coins the term "creative reading" as a correlative to creative writing (60). At Walden Pond, Thoreau finally found the proper setting for creative reading that he imagined long ago in the Harvard library, a setting he describes in *Walden*:

> My residence was more favorable, not only in thought, but to serious reading, than a university; and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time onto linen paper. (71)

Being at Walden offered Thoreau the space to focus on his reading, a process he records by embedding accounts of his reading—his literary criticism—in *A Week*. Thoreau recycles these works as reading moments in *A Week*, resituating the study of English and classic poets within the natural setting along the Concord and Merrimack. In so doing, Thoreau extracts his poets from the "dry and dusty volumes" of institutional libraries and returns them to the "field or wood," answering his earlier desire for an anthology that would bring the poems he was reading, as well as those he was writing, back into the world that inspired their creation.

When added to *A Week*, some of the literary essays received very little revision while others were more significantly reworked, and the extent to which they are incorporated into the text differentiates them as various steps in the reading process, starting with a first reading—the less revised embedded essay texts—and culminating in the act of remembering and reflecting on a previous reading experience—these include the more significantly altered essays. "Anacreon" illustrates the former, and it appear in *A Week* as if removed directly from the pages of the *Dial*, with their titles centered and capitalized just as they appeared originally in the periodical. Like many of the interpolated literary analysis essays, "Anacreon" is introduced anecdotally, with Thoreau

describing the scenery and occasion that inspired the brothers to take up the reading. "Anacreon" is in "Tuesday" right after an explanation of cooking—"There should always be some flowering and maturing of the fruits of nature in the cooking process," and Thoreau pivots to reading when he goes on to suggest that, ideally, reading improves upon literature through human application of thought just as heat improves upon raw food (225). It is as if in the midst of his narration, he has picked up his volume of the Greek lyricist and is turning to the right page as he continues expounding on metaphor and anecdote,

> On my warm hearth these cerealian blossoms expanded; here is the bank whereon they grew. […] Here was the 'pleasant harbor' which we had sighed for, where the weary voyageur could read the journal of some other sailor, whose bark had plowed, perchance, more famous and classic seas. At the tables of the gods, after feasting follow music and song; we will recline now under these island trees, and for our minstrel call on
>
> ANACREON.

What follows is Thoreau's essay copied over into *A Week* in its entirety, which originally began with a short explanation and analysis as introduction to Thoreau's poem translations. But framed by the boat narrative, it appears as if the reader-narrator Thoreau pauses here at the pronouncement of the title and returns to his prose explanation for several paragraphs before coming back at last to Anacreon's verse; in this context, he is a charmingly chatty reader who can't help but look up from his reading to explain it to his companions (John, perhaps, or us, his readers). Then, after Thoreau's analytical explanation of Anacreon, *A Week* presents the eleven translated poems without Thoreau's

commentary, just as they had appeared in *The Dial* (or, indeed, as they might appear were they printed in an anthology), as if readers were reading alongside Thoreau in this "pleasant harbor" along the way. For those who see the poems of *A Week* as digressions from the text, the Anacreon poems would seem a chief example—they literally make a pause in the forward movement of the journey with few proclaimed ties to other subjects in "Tuesday." Typographically, too, the poems are separated from the larger context of *A Week*, as if the text had become the "dry and dusty" library book Thoreau wished to avoid with his English poets project. Yet these anthology pages are not found on bookshelves but have been resituated within nature as, in the context of the narrative, the poems are read amid a natural scene. When the excerpted poems come to an end, the pivot from poetry to prose lends realism to the moment: it is as if Thoreau has become engrossed in his reading, when suddenly a prose paragraph begins, "Late in the afternoon, for we had lingered long on the island, we raised our sail for the first time," (231). Thus, with "Anacreon," the *Dial* essay changes little from its 1843 original publication, yet its purposes changes once it is part of the texture of *A Week*. Now, it is not only literary analysis but analysis in action, embedded in a life and reading practice just as it is embedded in the boating narrative prose.

By contrast, essays like "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer." change significantly, expanding to include ideas about poets and poems that fit the text more fully into the context of *A Week*, and through this synthesis, they represent later stages of the reading process in action. Before *A Week*, "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer.," like "Anacreon," was in *The Dial*, and in this version of the essay, Thoreau quotes passages from the *Iliad* that demonstrate the poet's use of natural imagery as metaphors for characterization (of

Hector and Juno), time (a day's passing during the battle between the Achaeans and Trojans), and place (the watchful fires of the Trojans under siege) (138-40). In the *Week* version, the "Homer" portion of the essay appears in "Sunday" ("Ossian" and "Chaucer" are located in different sections) and Thoreau adds to his analysis of the Greek epic poet with new content and quotations: further explanation of Homer's attention to scenery, for example, and excerpts from British poet Philip S. Bailey's *Festus* that underscore Thoreau's argument for *Iliad*'s timelessness: "His song outlives / Time, tower, and god,—all that then was save Heaven" (95). These two additions resonate with larger themes of travel and mortality within *A Week*. Moreover, these thematic additions are matched by a textual frame that presents Thoreau's thoughts on Homer as ideas recalled, inspired by the boat trip scenery. "What we would not give for some great poem to read now, which would be in harmony with the scenery," the narrator wistfully proclaims, and when pieces of the "Homer" essay appear spliced into the next paragraph, it is as if Thoreau is recalling that "great poem" since its text is not readily at hand in his boat. By depicting Thoreau remembering literature—and drawing insight from it as he remembers—the text shows a poem living beyond its written form. Thoreau argues that *The Iliad* is one of the few books "fit to be *remembered* in our wisest hours," a phrase from the original *Dial* version of the essay that takes on new meaning here, suggesting the extent to which this reading is done through memory (95, emphasis mine). As in "A Walk to Wachusett," where the repetition of ballad stanzas offered new insights, so the embedded "Homer" excerpt demonstrates the importance of recalling and reconsidering literature across time—an ongoing task, one that attests to the immortal lives of poems.

These many discussions about poetry in *A Week* notwithstanding, the text is never quite sure what is and isn't poetry, a debate that emerges both in these essays on poetics and in the text's poems (and prose) themselves. Thoreau is apt to question his own assertions about poetry as a genre as soon as he presents them, even his assertion that poetry is beyond definition, an assertion he makes in the embedded "Homer" essay:

> The wisest definition of poetry the poet will instantly prove false by setting aside its requisitions. We can, therefore, publish only our advertisement of it. There is no doubt that the loftiest written wisdom is either rhymed, or in some way musically measured,—is, in form as well as substance, poetry; and a volume which should contain the condensed wisdom of mankind, need not have one rhythmless line. (91)

Just as he denounces genre requisitions as foolhardy, Thoreau seems remarkably sure that poems should rhyme, or at least have meter, and that wisdom as a subject is the appropriate purview of poetry. He also distinguishes between poetic "form" and "substance" here, and, indeed, Thoreau stresses that the substantive qualities of poetry can exist in any kind of text. For example, the maps and local history of the Gazetteer give "the pleasure of poetry" on more than one occasion, Goethe's travel narrative prose exemplifies a "true account of the actual" that Thoreau calls "the rarest poetry," autumn is Nature's "poem," and mathematics, too, is "poetry" (90, 325, 377 362). Elsewhere are prose passages redolent of poetry's forms and conventions, as if while working to define "poetry," *A Week* also explores the boundaries of "prose." The repeated "Fs" of a paragraph in "Friday," for example, align this prose passage with alliterative verse, enacting the arrival of fall with a gradual accumulation of initial consonant sounds:

> We soon passed the mouth of the Souhegan and the village of Merrimack, and as the mist gradually rolled away, and we were relieved from the trouble of watching for rocks, we saw by the flitting clouds, by the first russet tinge on the hills, by the rushing river, the cottages on shore, and the shore itself, so coolly fresh and shining with dew, and later in the day, by the hue of the grape vine, the goldfinch on the willow, the flickers flying in flocks, and when we passed near enough to the shore, as we fancied, by the faces of men, that the Fall had commenced. (335)

Passages such as this one invite us to read prose lines with an attention to sound more often employed when reading poetry, so we, too, must "set aside the requisitions" of these two modes in such moments. In a text like *A Week* where more obvious verse and prose forms are liberally intermixed, these less obvious formal convergences ask for particular consideration, inviting curiosity about the difference between verse and prose.

But when it begins, *A Week* starts by making clear formal and typographical distinctions between poems and prose. Most visually distinct from the rest of the text are the opening epigraph poems, three of Thoreau's poems that introduce the book thematically (aside from these three, the rest of Thoreau's poems are embedded within the prose). That *A Week* starts with poetry—and Thoreau's own poetry at that—highlights the importance of the genre to the book and to Thoreau. Poetry gets to tell the story first: indeed, these two quatrains and one octave each sketch a piece of the *Week* journey and its compositional timeframe, from inspiration to manifestation, beginning with John's life and death and ending in Thoreau's reflection on the writing process.[11] These three poems present three distinct speakers, distinct because each inhabits a

sequential period. Thus, these three poems begin to explore how ideas and concepts emerge and take shape in a book—the "life" of *A Week* itself, a large-scale overview of what the text will later explore in individual poems.

The first poem introduces the elegiac mode of the text by dedicating the book to John and naming him as its inspiration:

> Where'er thou sail'st who sailed with me,
>
> Though now thou climbest loftier mounts,
>
> And fairer rivers dost ascend,
>
> Be thou my Muse, my Brother –. (3)

This invocation of a muse draws on a convention of elegy, situating the excursion narrative as a journey through mourning as well as through the New England landscape. Here, as in many elegies, the muse invoked is the departed, thus he is conspicuously absent—in the poem text as in book at large, where John's name never appears. This is where his name belongs: the pattern of iambic tetrameter in these lines suggests that the dash holds a place for the single-syllable name.[12] But even as John's name is missing from the poem, John is found in poetic imagery depicting him in an afterlife that parallels the river journey. This is one of the few places in *A Week* where John is distinguishable from his brother: elsewhere, the narrator insists on the anonymity of "one sailor," "one brother," or "one of us," never using proper names. The poem imaginatively recreates John even as the text mourns his absence.[13]

This simultaneous dedication and invocation is followed by two poems that introduce the water travel and the plot of the narrative to come. The second epigraph poem presents the narrative as a quest that Thoreau undertakes, one of mythological

proportions, and the references to myths and legends serves to align this adventure with its literary forebear, other significant excursion epics:

I am bound, I am bound, for a distant shore,

By a lonely isle, by a far Azore,

There it is, there it is, the treasure I seek,

On the barren sands of a desolate creek. (3)

The exotic, isolated location and valuable reward the speaker seeks, together with incantatory repetition and lilting meter, initiates the comparison between the brothers' travel and that of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, comparisons that Thoreau will flesh out in "Concord River," where his local waterway is matched with Xanthus and Scamander (11).[14] This brief poem presents the journey as a process undertaken and then completed, an arch that recalls a writing process, too.

Finally, the third epigraph foregrounds reflection on the finished journey (or book), turning inward to the interior quest in *A Week* and depicting the narrator's emotional response to his experience. It echoes the earlier two topically—river imagery and exploration abound—in order to establish an association and a sequence among all three. Too, the biographical context of the first poem returns as the poem describes more familiar rivers and townscapes like those that will appear in the book, and the poem first echoes the meter from "I am bound" before evolving into steady iambs like the first poem:

I sailed up a river with a pleasant wind,

New lands, new people, and new thoughts to find;

Many fair reaches and headlands appeared,

And many dangers were there to be feared;

But when I remember where I have been,

And the fair landscapes that I have seen,

THOU seemest the only permanent shore,

The cape never rounded, nor wandered o'er.

While the second poem concluded with journey's end and treasure found, skipping over any scenery along the way, this version offers a sketch of scenery and skips to journey's end, passing straight to reminiscence. Remembering the journey is the focus of this summary of *A Week*'s narrative, and what remains significant for this speaker to recall is the "THOU" whom he compares to an unending shoreline: someone always alongside with no beginning or end. In a more devout book, this address might look to God, as Carl Bode suggests it might, but here, it more clearly correlates with Thoreau's traveling companion, John, the "thou" of the first poem (344). This octave describes how the journey has become more than just an excursion narrative to Thoreau and is now a way to remember John, which the book is able to help him do.

As a sequence, these poems invite us to think of the epigraphs as an expression of Thoreau's writing process: how he conceived of, wrote, and responded emotionally to *A Week*, with each poem representing a discrete stage. Such a reading is supported by the textual histories of at least two of these three poems: "Where'er thou sail'st" appears first on the flyleaf of the Long Book, one of the earliest working sources for the first draft of *A Week*, and "I am bound" dates from a journal Thoreau kept when the drafting process for *A Week* was well underway (*Journal 2* 126).[15] Further, Thoreau's revisions of the second epitaph for *A Week* suggest that the poem evolved as *A Week* took shape: in the original,

line three merely predicts that the treasure will be found at the location described—"By a lonely isle a far azore / *Where* it is, *where* it is, the treasure I seek"—while the *Week* version becomes more assertive—"there it is"—once the endpoint of the text itself is in sight (emphasis added). For all three epigraph poems, the progression of time is indicated by the sequence of verb tenses that together track the evolution of the writer through the writing processes: the first speaker invites his muse using the future-looking imperative "to be," the second "I" is underway on his journey with the present-tense "am," and the third poem is written in past-tense as if to look back on the writing process.

While these three poems follow the experience of the historical Thoreau, they also introduce the complicated voice of the *Week* narrator, whose temporal and spatial distance from the original excursion is glimpsed in the shifts of perspective evident throughout the book and especially in the poems. This brief preview of the complexity of the narrator's perspective draws our attention to *A Week* as a text, a recreation of the original boat trip. The speaker of these poems prefigures the narrator who will anachronistically reconstitute his literary essays on the banks of the Merrimack, embed poems written after the original journey as if they were written along the way, and revise old journal entries to create new discoveries. This self-conscious literariness is signaled in the heightened poetic language of these three poems, too, which, along with the invocation of John as muse, elevates Thoreau's New England setting beyond biography to myth.

As if to emphasize the idea of *A Week* as a created world, Thoreau added a fourth poetic epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to a later edition of *A Week*, which eventually appeared when the book was republished in 1868, six years after Thoreau's

death.[16] The excerpt, which Thoreau translated himself, comes from the beginning of the poem, where Ovid describes how a creator god formed the earth. The quotation also places Thoreau's work in the company of another classical epic, one that, like *A Week*, fuses many genres through its digressive format of loosely linked vignettes. By aligning *A Week* with *Metamorphoses*, Thoreau underscores how the formal qualities of the *Week* world shape its narrative. In tune with *A Week*'s setting, the rivers, these four lines explain how the planet's waters were contained:

> He confined the rivers within their sloping banks,
> Which in different places are part absorbed by the earth,
> Part reach the sea, and being received within the plain
> Of its freer waters, beat the shore for banks. (5)

The mythic content of Ovid's verses contrasts with Thoreau's poems; as Carl Hovde notes, Thoreau's poems are more "personal" than the Ovid epigraph (527). Yet the "he" of this passage resonates with the "I" of the previous three poems as if this is another version of the Thoreauvian narrator; indeed, by the time he added this epigraph, Thoreau may have felt able to look back on the *Week* narrator objectively as "he" rather than "I." If the added epigraph emphasizes the distance between the historical Thoreau and the *Week* narrator, it still maintains its link to the original boat trip and the brother's death through the brief story it relates: just as Ovid's creator did not make the waters but merely organized them, giving shape and substance to otherwise intangible matter, so Thoreau fashions his own experience into the text of *A Week*, literally reshaping the scraps and pieces of his own written thoughts and ideas.

In the text of *A Week*, Ovid's creator correlates with Thoreau's poet, and living poems of *A Week* start with the poet, the conduit of new poems, yet the force of poetry is omnipresent and outside of human time. In *A Week*, the poet is described as a genius with abilities that average men lack: "What merely quickens or retards the blood in their veins and fills their afternoons with pleasure they know not whence, conveys a distinct assurance to the finer organization of the poet" (341). Yet the poet's "finer organization" is more the ability to channel poetic inspiration than to apply his own aesthetic talent and skill: "When the poet is most inspired, is stimulated by an *aura* which never even colors the afternoons of common men, then his talent is all gone, and he is no longer a poet" (342). Inspiration is a transient gift; it is not earned or even kept. Indeed, if poets can do little to obtain inspiration, they also can do nothing to control it. Thoreau's inspired poet has the creative capacity of a chicken hunting down grubs: "we run and scratch with our pen, intent only on worms . . . delighting in the dust we make, but do not detect where the jewel lies, which, perhaps, we have in the mean time cast to a distance, or quite covered up again." The jewel-like poems that result from inspiration are happy accidents in the poet's hands. But, paradoxically, because the poet had little to do with their production in the first place, the poems are capable of bearing meaning beyond the poet's life: "Poetry is so universally true and independent of experience, that it does not need any particular biography to illustrate it," Thoreau explains (95). Writing a poem releases it from the biographical circumstances of one person's life and gives it an existence that exceeds a human time frame, as Thoreau suggests with a quote from Philip James Bailey's *Festus*, "His song outlives / Time, tower, and god,--all that then was save Heaven."

A Week illustrates the inspiration that produces a poem and the early stages of its recording process by depicting poems emerging typographically from prose, much as the jewel becomes visible through dust. Take, for example, paragraph two of "Wednesday" which describes a bittern taking flight (235). As a poem just beginning to take shape, the poetic qualities of the bittern sentence are easily overlooked. Hidden in a paragraph of prose, its rhyme could be lost on many readers: "Now away he goes, with a limping flight, uncertain where he will alight, until a rod of clear sand amid the alders invites his feet; and now our steady approach compels him to seek a new retreat." The sentence could have been broken into lines to draw attention to the rhymes, perhaps like this:

Now away he goes,	*a*
with a limping flight,	*b*
uncertain where he will alight,	*b*
until a rod of clear sand amid the alders invites	*b*
his feet;	*c*
and now our steady approach compels him to seek a new retreat.	*c*

By remaining embedded in the prose, however, the sentence enacts a poem working to break free from prose but losing track of its rhyme and meter in the driving course of the narrative and struggling against the trajectory of the text. The poem's efforts are matched by the bittern's, who struggles to gain flight, then struggles to land, only to be scared away again as the travelers draw near—so the poet's unwitting approach scares away the elusive poem, the text seems to admonish. Even though Thoreau can only look sidelong at the bittern, the bittern's contemplative observations inspire his own; Thoreau imagines that simply looking into the bittern's eyes would teach him much—"One wonders if, by

its patient study by rocks and sandy capes, it has wrested the whole of her secret from Nature yet. . . . It would be worth the while to look closely into the eye which has been open and seeing at such hours, and in such solitudes, its dull yellowish, greenish eye" (246). Thus, he may not gain "the whole of her secret from Nature," but his glimpse of the bird prompts him to wonder after those secrets. So the poem, too, though only half-visible in prose, still has an effect on those who discern it, drawing our attention to the sounds and textures of Thoreau's language just as the bittern draws Thoreau's attention to the contours of its environment and the hue of its eye.

While poems like the submerged bittern poem are working to take shape from within a paragraph of prose, other poems appear in nascent stages, scattered in pieces across the book. "The Assabet" and "Inspiration," for example, two poems that Thoreau first drafted in 1839 and 1841 respectively, are excerpted across the pages of *A Week* to appear as if inspired by various moments along the boat trip—as, indeed, they may well have been. "Assabet," in fact, tells the story of a boat trip, narrating a morning's jaunt up a tributary of the Concord:

> Up this pleasant stream let's row
> For the livelong summer's day,
> Sprinkling foam where'er we go
> In wreaths as white as driven snow—
> Ply the oars, away! away! (*Collected Essays and Poems* 526)

In the 1839 poem, this boisterous opening quintain is followed by eleven stanzas that echo its metrical pattern and ABAAB rhyme scheme, each depicting a separate moment along the way—"Now we glide along the shore," (6) to "Now we stem the middle tide"

(11), for example—all ending with periods, containing their own respective snapshots of the journey. The final stanza echoes the opening, neatly framing the poem: "Since that first away! away! / Many a lengthy league we've rowed" (61-62). But in *A Week*, stanzas from the poem are redistributed to different days and different rivers. First, two stanzas from the middle of the poem appear in "Sunday," where they are used to describe the placid surface of the Concord (62). Later, in "Tuesday," the opening and closing stanzas appear, though now the oars ply the Merrimack (179, 190). Here, the framing stanzas of the poem surround the prose telling of another journey, Thoreau's June 1844 excursion up Saddleback Mountain. "Tuesday" morning opens to a misty river, and the beginning of the original poem, "Ply the oars, away! away!" is joined with lines that illustrate the "dewy" weather (5). But instead of going on to describe the river journey as the poem does, the prose narrative breaks away from the river scene: "As we cannot distinguish objects through this dense fog, let me tell this story more at length" (180). Thoreau spends eleven pages recounting his land travels, a digression which is the section's epiphany, as many have argued, with its structure of an ascent to discovery followed by a return to real life.[17] Returning to the present excursion, one sentence of prose and the final stanza of "Assabet" caps the sequence:

> But now we must make haste back before the fog disperses to the blithe Merrimack water.—
>
> Since that first 'away! away!'
>
> Many a lengthy reach we've rowed,
>
> Still the sparrow on the spray
>
> Hastes to usher in the day

With her simple stanza'd ode. (190)

It is as if telling the prose tale passes time until the fog disperses, with verse at either end to mark the passage of time. Separated literally by pages of text as well as the passage of time in the narrative itself, the stanzas in "Sunday" and "Tuesday" await the composition process which will unite them eventually into the complete poem.[18]

The stanzas of "Assabet" emerge fully formed in *A Week*, needing only minor editing and arrangement to make a poem, but the dispersed stanzas of "Inspiration" represent a more complicated compositional process underway. This is, indeed, the case with "Inspiration" itself, a poem Thoreau revisited and revised many times in his early career.[19] Witherell explains that "Inspiration" was part of a group of five poems that Thoreau worked on together during the fall of 1841 ("Thoreau's Watershed Season as Poet" 50). The five were then combined selectively into one longer poem, untitled, which narrates the poet's process from his experience of vocational calling to his artistic independence. "Inspiration" describes two methods of developing a poem: in one, the poet relies on his own powers—inevitably insufficient, "The verse is weak and shallow as its source"—and in another, he connects to a divine power, resulting in timeless, truthful verse (8). The latter is only sought indirectly, "with bended neck" "listening behind me," and its effects are out of the poet's control: "unsought, unseen," it undoes the poet, removing all sense of time, arousing him as if from sleep, and binding him to its truth with "an iron faith" (10-11, 21, 66). Although the divinely inspired verse is certainly preferable to the uninspired, producing it is "dangerous," likely to ostracize the poet from society by exposing him: "It doth expand my privacies / To all, and leave me single in the crowd" (78, 39-40).

Like “Assabet,” too, lines from “Inspiration” are scattered across the days of *A Week*, showing up in “Monday,” “Thursday,” and “Friday.” The largest selection of lines is at the end of “Monday,” where sections from the poem are interspersed with prose to create an epiphanic moment that echoes the revelation in the earlier complete poem. Just as the brothers are drifting off to sleep, they hear a would-be military drummer practicing a marching beat. Like the onset of inspiration in the poem, the rhythm’s presence is unsought yet welcome, assuring the narrator of the well-being of the natural world. Also like the poem, it reorients the narrator’s entire life: “I stop my habitual thinking,” he observes, asking, “How can I go on, who have just stepped over such a bottomless skylight in the bog of my life” (173). Excerpts from stanzas eight and eleven of “Inspiration,” interrupt the prose narration to describe how the epiphany causes the narrator to lose track of time:

> Then idle Time ran gadding by
>
> And left me with Eternity alone;
>
> I hear beyond the range of sound,
>
> I see beyond the verge of sight,—

In earlier drafts of the poem, the stanza continues, “New earths—new skies—new seas around, / And in my noon the sun doth pale his light” (15-16). But in *A Week*, the prose interjects, impatiently elaborating in paragraph-long sentence, as if the poet grows impatient with the measured pace of poetic inspiration and turns, instead, to hurried prose to express the ideas of the moment:

> I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves; the one

> historic truth, the most remarkable fact which can become the distinct and uninvited subject of our thought, the actual glory of the universe; the only fact which a human being cannot avoid recognizing, or in some way forget or dispense with.—

When the text expands from the controlled length of the four-beat lines to the unmetered prose, so, too, does the content of the lines, as two senses in the verse swell to a list of all five in the prose. But, the moment expressed, the narrator returns to verse: this section in "Monday" goes on to include two more excerpts from the "Inspiration" draft, each again followed by prose, as if the stanzas occur and appear to him amidst the discursive prose musings.

Since even partial, emergent poems send tremors through the text, how much more might finished poems affect it? Complete poems often guide and develop Thoreau's thought process, helping him work through the steps of an argument or emerging revelation. Oftentimes, poems present encapsulated ideas that the *Week* narrator then responds to in other poems or prose, a pattern of exchange that often carries through a series of several poems. For example, in a sequence of poetry and prose from "Saturday," Thoreau stages a debate with himself, now using the polyphony of a poems-prose exchange to invoke the kinds of conversations he may have had with Concord-circle friends. The text is a miniature Concord Who's-Who of the 1830s and 40s: Emerson, Hawthorne, Reverend Ezra Ripley, and the poet William Ellery Channing all make an appearance via allusions and references. Here, their textual presence replicates their real-life influence on Thoreau's thinking; these friends serve as a concert of muses accompanying Thoreau along his journey.

At this moment in the text, Thoreau and his brother are just leaving Concord, and as they pass by the sights of their hometown, each brings events and people to mind. For instance, sailing past the site of the Revolutionary War's first military engagement, the Old North Bridge, Thoreau is reminded of Emerson's "Concord Hymn," written to commemorate a monument that had been recently placed at the site. Thoreau quotes Emerson's first two stanzas, then offers his own verses in response, which begins a debate with Emerson on the page. Thoreau's poem argues that the monument is misplaced: it is not the site of the battle that we need to mark—not, as Emerson says, the place where "the embattled farmers stood"—but where they died, the site that Thoreau describes in stanza two of his poem: "There is one field beside this stream / Wherein no foot does fall / But yet it beareth in my dream / A richer crop than all" (17). In contending with Emerson, Thoreau is also critiquing Concord itself and misguided civic efforts to memorialize the heroes. He grumbles that the "ignoble" inhabitants of Concord are nothing like the "braver spirits" of the Revolutionary War heroes (18). But as the brothers proceed, they pass the Old Manse, where first Reverend Ezra Ripley and then Nathaniel Hawthorne recently lived, and Thoreau's thinking shifts as he factors these figures into his assessment of present-day Concord heroics. In another poem, he recalls that Reverend Ripley, Emerson's step-grandfather, shepherded the souls of Concord through major religious disputes that had divided the community before his arrival: "Here then an aged shepherd dwelt, / Who to his flock his substance dealt." After Ripley died in 1841, Hawthorne moved into the Old Manse, and also "fed" the people of Concord, not through pastoring but through writing. Hawthorne, then, is the subject of the next stanza: "Anon a youthful pastor came, Whose crook was not unknown to fame" (19). In this poem, Ripley

and Hawthorne are rendered comparable to the patriot described in stanza five of Thoreau's first poem: they, too, are "not bribed / By prospect of a peace." Then, in the final poem of this sequence, "On Ponkawtasset," Thoreau reflects on his own thought process from Old North Bridge poems to Manse poem. "On Ponkawtasset" is about Channing and his poetry—the Thoreau brothers would have passed Channing's house after the Old Manse—but it considers Ripley, Hawthorne, and even Emerson by association. Comparing Channing to a star whose constant light may be faint by day but bright by nightfall, Thoreau explains that we only fully appreciate some people's wisdom and influence over time, like lines of a poem that sink in after we set the text aside. Thoreau figuratively draws his community of Concord Circle interpolators around him in stanza three, where Channing's starlight is joined by "two or three" others. Thoreau's celestial imagery suggests the value of a friendship network that, like a constellation, locates individuals in relation to a group, for it is by identifying these friends through their relationship to the Concord community that Thoreau recognizes their importance. Just as Thoreau's revelations come when recalling his friends, the sequence of poems also illustrates how poems incubate insights that unfold over time, even after a direct encounter with the poem itself.

Thoreau postulates that, at its best, a poem can have an impact that far exceeds even its finished form, a force he identifies in "Friday" as the "true poem." Thoreau's theory of the true poem is rooted in that Platonic idea that a poem is a composite of "form"—its shape, size, and conventional features such as rhyme and meter—and "substance," which, to Thoreau, consists of its wisdom (91). It follows that if a lyric's substance is distinct from its form, then the idea of the poem may exist beyond its written

shape. Thus, "The true poem is not that which the public read" but something separate from the printed poem (343). This notion runs parallel to the idea that a human soul may exist beyond its lifeless body, and Thoreau's true poem is indeed a ghostly and nebulous literary spirit: evident "by the atmosphere which surrounds it," "true verses come toward us indistinctly, as the very breath of all friendliness, and envelope us in their spirit and fragrance" (374).[20]

The concept of an eternal poetic force is obviously attractive to someone grieving the loss of a brother's life, but Thoreau nevertheless struggles to make an absolute distinction between a physical poem and a true poem. Even as he insists that the true poem is separate from its written form, he ironically turns to the lexicon of the printing press—specifically, the stereotyping process—to describe it: "There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet's life. It is *what he has become through his work*. Not how is the idea expressed in stone, or on canvass or paper, is the question, but how far it has obtained form and expression in the life of the artist" (343). Here, the poem's effect on the poet is compared to the process of making a metal copy—the "stereotype"—of an original typeset "forme" of a text, the plate assembled for printing. The stereotype was cast as a substitute for the forme, to avoid wear to the individual metal "types" (the individual letters or symbols) in the forme and to facilitate future reprints of a text while freeing the pieces of type for other uses. To say that a text was "stereotyped" was to say that a cast had been made of the forme, a copy cast for reprinting the text. Yet "stereotyped" was also used to describe the printed product, to differentiate books made with the original forme from those made with the stereotype, an important distinction since stereotypes were susceptible to errors not

present in the original forme.[21] While the stereotype "life" seems to figure the true poem in a form less material than stone, canvas, or paper, it nevertheless offers an adamantly textual language for a true poem that is hardly disembodied, a poem, however ideal or abstract, that Thoreau cannot seem to picture apart from its written reproduction.

As if to explore this ambiguous relationship between poet, poem, and true poem, Thoreau animates the prose discussion of the true poem with two poems that respond to this passage and then to each other: first, the couplet beginning "My life has been the poem I would have writ," followed by "The Poet's Delay" (343). Together, these poems and prose create a textual sequence that replicates a sequence of thought in which the writer is literally affected by his poems appearing on the page. Each shift between texts introduces a new perspective as narrator and poetic speakers take part in a dialogue staged in poems and prose. Encapsulating positions in poems allows Thoreau to distinguish them from each other and from the prose and, thus, observe their effect. Still, each interjecting voice is circumscribed within the *Week* writer's thought process, part of an internal debate probing the question of how poems affect poets and what a poet may "become through his work."

Like much of *A Week*, these poems were, in fact, composed at an earlier date—both appear in Thoreau's journal, and "Poet's Delay" is also in the *Dial*.[22] By including them here, it is as if Thoreau, as poet-stereotype, is reprinting and experiencing them anew in conversation with each other. Playing the poems against each other results in revisions. For example, in the *Week* version of the couplet "My life has been the poem," the second line has been shortened from "But I could not both live and live to utter it" to "But I could not both live and utter it" (*Journal 1* 324, *Week* 343). For "Poet's Delay,"

the *Week* version is a replica of the *Dial* version, but both of these are different from the journal version. The journal "Poet's Delay" is untitled, it begins with a stanza corresponding to Thoreau's age at the original moment of composition—"Two years and twenty now have flown"—and includes a fourth stanza describing a sparrow building her nest (*Journal 1* 116). In the *Dial* and *A Week*, these first and fourth stanzas are removed, what was the third stanza becomes the first, and the title is given. Together on the pages of *A Week*, the sequence looks like this: "His true work will not stand in any prince's gallery," the prose asserts, then,

> My life has been the poem I would have writ,
> But I could not both live and utter it.
>
> THE POET'S DELAY.
> In vain I see the morning rise,
> In vain observe the western blaze,
> Who idly look to other skies,
> Expecting life by other ways.
>
> Amidst such boundless wealth without,
> I only still am poor within,
> The birds have sung their summer out,
> But still my spring does not begin.
>
> Shall I then wait the autumn wind,

Compelled to seek a milder day,

And leave no curious nest behind,

No woods still echoing to my lay? (343)

Proximity draws these poems and their compositional histories into a complicated conversation that I will discuss by considering what these poems mean both within and without the prose context. Without this context, the opening couplet could be taken as a justification for not writing poetry at all: it is difficult both to live well and write well, so one should focus on living well, it seems to argue. Certainly "My life has been the poem" implies that one's life can be constructed to convey meaning and exhibit beauty much as poems do, so living well is at least as good as writing well—or so the couplet logic goes. In this way, the couplet appears to clarify the prose description of the true poem by asserting that a meaningful life can be a poetic expression without a written poem of any kind. It is tempting to map the couplet onto Thoreau's biography and read it as his excuse for not writing more poems, an admission loosely paraphrased, *I could not live well and write poems well, so I chose to live well*. It is true that, elsewhere, *A Week* supports the idea that a great life may not allow one the time to write great poems. In "Concord River," for example, Thoreau admires the men of New England whose daily labor builds wisdom more profound than that of the great poets but whose dedication to work allows no time for poetry: "Look at their fields, and imagine what they might write, if ever they should put pen to paper" (8). If we read the couplet's speaker as one of these men, then the biographical interpretation seems to fit. But if we read the speaker as Thoreau rather than a laborer, as the sequence on the page invites us to do, we must admit that as much as Thoreau lauds the farmers, he does not see himself as one of them. He advocates for

physical work such as theirs as the proper training and experience for poets, but he never suggests that poets should abandon creative labor. Rather, he asserts that poetry should come from a life that balances mind and body.[23] Indeed, however vague Thoreau's concept of the true poem may be, it maintains that writing poems is a valuable part of living well: writing poems releases true poems that in turn promote personal growth. Although the couplet says that the speaker could not both "live and utter" a poem, *A Week* says otherwise, both in its prose discussions of the role of the poet and in its poems, which play a vital role in the *life* of the narrator. In this light, revisions between the *Week* version and journal version of the couplet are telling as they only deepen the couplet's ironies: removing "live to" makes these two lines identical in rhythm and length, formal agreement that matches the harmony between writing and living that *A Week* represents.

If instead of reading the couplet as an excuse, we read it as part of a debate with the prose—*do I need to write poems in order to live my life well?* —then "The Poet's Delay" stages its opposite: *do I need to live well in order to write?* Thus, the second poem enters the debate by taking a different tack, tacitly suggesting that the couplet is asking the wrong question. In "Delay," the poet struggles to write and wonders if his "delay" is due to his inability to connect with the natural world. He has been trying to live by the direction of "other skies"—the guidance of a transcendent faith—but he acknowledges that privileging the ideal over the material world has proven fruitless. Meanwhile, the natural world has nearly passed him by: it is almost fall, but the poet has not even begun his creative "spring." The poet worries that he's lost the opportunity to live or write. Looking to birds as an example, he imagines what he could be if he would take part in the natural world. By comparing himself to birds and poems to birdsong, the

speaker realizes that writing is a natural component of a life lived fully for poets just as singing is synonymous with living for birds. "The birds have sung their summer out," he observes, suggesting that singing has allowed the birds to fulfill their existence, yet "still my spring does not begin"—in other words, by not writing poems, the poet has been unable to begin living. Realizing that living well is, for him, defined by writing well, the speaker nearly despairs of his life by the poem's end and wonders if the spring and summer of a productive existence are lost, leaving him with "no curious nest" or "echoing lay" to leave behind—symbols for life and poetry. No answer is explicitly offered in the poem; it ends with its question. Yet the fact that this discussion is itself a poem—the product of its poet's response to the birdsong and sunset skies of the natural world—suggests that he has not given up on life but has chosen to live his life by writing. Further, reprinting the *Dial* version of the poem signals a specific moment when Thoreau himself made the choice to pursue writing and publishing poems. Indeed, "Poet's Delay" is a poem that grew and changed as its poet matured, a symbol of writing as a process of living, for to publish "Poet's Delay" in the 1842 *Dial*, Thoreau revisited the 1840 journal draft and refashioned it from a personal expression of his frustrations at age twenty-two to a general inquiry into the nature of art and productivity. Of course, Thoreau's definitive answer to the *Week* debate about living and writing is *A Week* itself, the product of a life lived well by writing, which Carl Hovde describes as Thoreau's ultimate "curious nest."[24]

As if satisfied with these implicit resolutions, the prose following these poems moves on from the conversation and returns to the narrative of the boat trip, shifting from the "other skies" of "Delay" to the skies of the book's present moment. The narrator must

be looking up and at the world around him to describe the stormy weather: "This raw and gusty day, and the creaking of the oaks and pines on shore, reminded us of more northern climes than Greece, and more wintry seas than the Ægean" (343). Leaving the abstract meditation on the true poem, the text will pivot to thoughts of Scotland and a consideration of Ossian's particular poetry, but the change of topic is bridged by a return to the landscape of the immediate journey. It is as if revisiting these poems has allowed the narrator to connect with the natural world and begin to live, which for him is to continue to read and write.

While the poems emerging from prose represents the early stages of lyric inspiration and formation and sequences of true poem exchanges illustrate the effect of lyrics on the speaker's life and mind, other poems in *A Week* show how verse evades chronological time and "lives" in a way that exceeds our limited bounding of mortality and immortality (383-84). These are oftentimes the poems that had already been published before *A Week*, often in *The Dial*; when these poems surface amid the *Week* prose, they take on new forms and meanings, signs that they continue to "live" within the world of *A Week*.[25] These poems' lives are often introduced with elaborate anecdotal introductions that anticipate the imagery or scenery of the poem. At first glance, it may appear that Thoreau is narrating the events that inspired the poem, and critics have pointed to these prose apparatuses as necessary scaffolding, a strategy for making inscrutable or obscure poetry meaningful when it otherwise is not. Yet far from being dependent on the prose, these poems elucidate it, often in ways that revitalize poem and prose together.

"To a Maiden in the East," for example, is introduced by prose that appears to set the scene of the poem, but the poem bears a different meaning within the larger context of the passage (46-48). This poem address to the maiden, who is now absent, compares her to the moon that watches over and influences the speaker, even from afar.[26] The prose immediately preceding the poem explains a memory of the maiden that presumably inspires the poet to recall her and, thus, to write the piece: "On this same stream a maiden once sailed in my boat, thus unattended but by invisible guardians, and as she sat in the prow there was nothing but herself between the steersman and the sky" (46). The narrator then quotes lines from William Ellery Channing—"Sweet falls the summer air / Over her frame who sails with me;" before transitioning into his own verses. The poem begins with the speaker describing the experience of not being able to see the moon, but knowing it is there when light is reflected in the surrounding sky, much as he feels the presence of his now-absent lover:

Low in the eastern sky
Is set thy glancing eye;
And though its gracious light
Ne'er riseth to my sight,
Yet every star that climbs
Above the gnarled limbs
    Of yonder hill,
Conveys thy gentle will. (1-8)

The poem describes the lovers' communication by means of kindly clouds and winds, as if the natural world approves and supports their relationship. Even though the lovers remain apart, the speaker is confident that the maiden's influence will benefit him:

> Still will I strive to be
> As if thou wert with me;
> Whatever path I take,
> It shall be for thy sake,
> Of gentle slope and wide,
> As thou wert by my side,
> Without a root
> To trip thy gentle foot.
>
> I'll walk with gentle pace,
> And choose the smoothest place,
> And careful dip the oar,
> And shun the winding shore,
> And gently steer my boat,
> Where water lilies float,
> And cardinal flowers
> Stand in their sylvan bowers. (33-48)

The travel imagery, especially that of the boat, seems readymade for *A Week*, but when the poem appeared in the October 1842 *Dial*, the imagery of travel was overshadowed by imagery of the sun, moon, and sky. Both the *Dial* and *Week* versions end with the boat,

but the *Dial* version includes three additional stanzas expanding the celestial premise (222-24). In these three stanzas, the speaker compares the moon-maiden favorably to the sun, calls himself "Mercury," and describes the maiden's moonlight as a source of inspiration: "Distinguished by thy face / The earth shall learn my place" (51-52). To compound the celestial associations, the poem is grouped with another poem called "The Moon" on the pages of the *Dial*, a poem that praises the unchanging moon in contrast to fleeting human life: "My wayward path declineth soon, / But she shines not the less" (7-8). In the pages of the *Dial*, the two poems are a pair, sharing a metaphor that each employs inversely to the other, one personifying the moon as a woman while the other compares a maiden to the moon.

But in "Sunday," these three stanzas of extra elaboration on moon imagery are deleted, and now the poem comes amid a discussion about vision and perception, where Thoreau compares the perception of metaphysical truth to physical sight. Particularly interested in how we can know human character in relation to natural surroundings, what he imagines is like the process of distinguishing foregrounded objects from their background in a landscape painting. In fact, he says, he wishes real life looked more like a painting in which figures are depicted in an environment that fits them in some way and helps the viewer understand them: "All our lives want a suitable background" (46). By way of example, Thoreau describes an anchorite in the desert set against crumbling rock and an unending horizon, objects that both symbolize the anchorite's pious struggle toward eternity and contrast his vitality with their crumbling dryness. In this context, "To a Maiden" becomes another such example that illustrates the process of perceiving character in relation to its background. Thus, when envisioning the woman in the

anecdote introducing the poem, it is as if her image is so memorably embedded in the scenery of the sky that Thoreau cannot look at it without recalling her, and even when she is absent, he still interprets the sky in relation to her character: "At evening still the very stars seem but this maiden's emissaries and reporters of her progress" (47). In this setting, the *Dial* poem that had personified nature to describe lovers' communications now portrays a self-conscious speaker interpreting the natural world to reflect his own perception of another person. Ironically, by removing the extra stanzas, Thoreau has adjusted the scenery of his own poem to fit the *Week* landscape in a poem that depicts someone controlling his perception of the world to reveal the meaning he wants to find there. The irony is not lost on Thoreau, who, immediately after the poem, praises the precision of the images reflected in the water—"so faithfully reflected, too faithfully indeed for art to imitate, for only nature may exaggerate herself"—as if to decry his own poetic reflection of the river landscape (48).

But Thoreau questions his own assertion, and thus opens up a second way to read the poem as an elegy for John. A few lines down the page, Thoreau suggests that human powers of mimesis may exceed nature's merely accurate reflection. He observes that the mechanics of the human eye allow us to see at once the surface of the river and the river bottom, too, which is a metaphor for our human ability to choose how we see something: "and so are there manifold visions in the direction of every object," he concludes. In the paragraph that follows, Thoreau suggests a below-the-surface reading of the poem by abstrusely describing the Thoreau brothers' own reflection on the river's surface as "Two men in a skiff, whom we passed hereabouts" rather than stating directly that his words paint a picture of themselves, even though it is in every detail the likeness of the brothers.

Couched amid this discussion of reflections and interpretations, "To the Maiden" takes on the elegiac cast of its textual environment, especially the final two stanzas which describe the speaker continuing on without his beloved. Just as the reflected image of the men in a skiff asks us to read through opaque language to "see" the brothers, so we can now interpret Thoreau's maiden as an echo for John, and the ominous "root / To trip thy gentle foot" as a reference to his tragic death.

That text and context combine to such "manifold visions" of meaning not hitherto available is the direct subject of "Sic Vita," another *Dial* poem, now in "Friday."[27] In the poem, a haphazard bouquet of flowers as a conceit for the speaker's otherworldly thoughts and aspirations that, like the flowers, are separated from "roots" that must have inspired and formed them. Like the anecdotal opening of "To a Maiden in the East," prose narrative introduces the poem with a brief story about a bouquet of violets. The poem follows, as if emerging organically from the imagery in the prose:

> It is but thin soil where we stand; I have felt my roots in a richer ere this. I have seen a bunch of violets in a glass vase, tied loosely with a straw, which reminded me of myself.—
>
> I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
> By a chance bond together,
> Dangling this way and that, their links
> Were made so loose and wide,
> Methinks,
> For milder weather.

A bunch of violets without their roots,

And sorrel intermixed,

Encircled by a wisp of straw

Once coiled about their shoots,

The law

By which I'm fixed.

A nosegay which Time clutched from out

Those fair Elysian fields,

With weeds and broken stems, in haste,

Doth make the rabble rout

That waste

The day he yields.

And here I bloom for a short hour unseen,

Drinking my juices up,

With no root in the land

To keep my branches green,

But stand

In a bare cup.

Some tender buds were left upon my stem

In mimicry of life,

But ah! the children will not know,

Till time has withered them,

The woe,

With which they're rife. (383-84)

Using the conceit of the bouquet, the speaker imagines the "richer" soil that formed him: he describes his origins as a paradisiacal Elysium from which "Time" "clutched" him, removing him from the source of his life, to "bloom for a short hour unseen" "in a bare cup," a metaphor for life on earth. While the poem offers some comfort for the speaker simply through its allegorical explanation of unfulfilled hopes and dreams, the picture it paints of life on earth is grim, and the poem's conclusion is a half-hearted attempt at consolation:

But now I see I was not plucked for naught,

And after in life's vase

Of glass set while I might survive,

But by a kind hand brought

Alive

To a strange place.

That stock thus thinned will soon redeem its hours,

And by another year,

Such as God knows, with freer air,

More fruit and fairer flowers

Will bear,

While I droop here.

Life's not "for naught," and the speaker's uprooting is even called "kind," but the poem does not spell out any benefit to the speaker; instead, the boon goes to the future of "another year," presumably in Elysium, while the speaker is left to "droop here." But if life is like a dying bouquet, then there is little hope for future generations, either, since they would presumably face the same fate. Richard Bridgman also notes the incongruity between stems first gathered "in haste" and later described as "thinned": only the latter connotes the comfort of design and intention, while the former is chillingly random (23). Bridgman concludes that the image of the thinned flowers is a "fable of productive sacrifice" inserted in an otherwise despondent poem that offers a "formal but distinctly unsatisfactory conclusion."

For the "Sic Vita" of the July 1841 *Dial*, Bridgman's reading rings true. But while the poem alone struggles to find solace in its resolution, its very struggle participates in a resolution encompassed in the poem and prose of this section in *A Week*. The poem is couched amid prose that discusses the possibility of something beyond the apparent world and its established answers to life's mysteries. The narration encourages us toward the challenging work of looking past the surface of the physical world: "It is easier to discover another such a new world as Columbus did, than to go within one fold of this which we appear to know so well" (383). The poem itself follows a string of exhortations from the narrator, directing us to avoid attaching ourselves to what little we understand of the present world but to strive toward what we cannot see. Coming next, the poem illustrates the complicated push-and-pull of resisting physical yearnings while pursuing

intangible ones. Beyond the poem, as the narrator probes possible ways to describe the inscrutable world he imagines, he hypothesizes a world within the present that is beyond our limited understanding of it, something more complex than an afterlife or an alternative universe but that may yet be realized: "I am not without hope that we may, even here and now, obtain some accurate information concerning that OTHER WORLD which the instinct of mankind has so long predicted" (385). The capitalization suggests the magnitude of the other world as well as the importance of this idea to the narrator. It is an extension of our world—"We live on the outskirts of that region,"—and thus, nearby, it is something that we can grow to understand: "We are still being born, and have as yet but a dim vision of sea and land, sun, moon, and stars" (383, 385). But though Thoreau's other world is more than just an afterlife, it still offers the consolation of life after the death of a physical body, as he illustrates at the end of this section with stanzas from Phineas Fletcher's *The Purple Island* and quotations from Hafiz and Dowlat Shah that describe individuals escaping mortal time by leaving physical bodies behind and continuing on as immortal souls (388).

This version of immortality offers another way to read "Sic Vita": the thinning of the flowers may not benefit future earthly generations but rather a future version of the speaker himself, as if the roots preserved the essence of the speaker. If this solution seems unorthodox and far-fetched, it nonetheless exemplifies the sort of imaginative and expansive thinking Thoreau calls for in the passage and carries out through the interweaving of poetry and prose. Indeed, the poem invites us to indulge our "vain strivings"—they are as lovely as violets, after all—even while it seeks to rationalize them. The poem's imagery suggests that any limits placed on these impulses in the

everyday world may be worth challenging, too: the "law" which binds the violets is no more than a "straw." Likewise, the carefully shaped stanzas—with a contracted or "tied" penultimate line—call attention to the construction of this particular poem, as if its stanzaic structure is the law of its figure.

By inviting us to look beyond the constrained form of "Sic Vita" for another explanation of its perplexing final stanza, this poem makes us look beyond one world toward that "other world" Thoreau envisions in "Friday." It is fitting that the prose discussion of the other world is what redeems the *Week* version of "Sic Vita" from the struggle of its *Dial* incarnation: set amid the narration of Thoreau's consciousness in response to the surrounding world, it is as if the poem has been reborn from the "thinned stock" of its own source of inspiration, as if the specimen poem has been returned to its natural habitat. Thus, it is not only a desire to exceed death that drives Thoreau to devise the poem as an eternal force but also a wish to show something eternal among the living.

Notes

[1] For the history of Thoreau's work on the poetry anthology, see Robert Sattelmeyer, "Thoreau's Projected Work on the English Poets." Sattelmeyer lists several anthologies Thoreau withdrew during his work on the poetry project, like the editions of traditional and broadside ballads from collectors Thomas Percy, J. Payne Collier, and Thomas Evans of the early eighteenth century, popular anthologies of their day that, as Thoreau later predicts, eventually fell out of fashion and out of print (251).

[2] Sattelmeyer explains that several other circumstances pulled Thoreau away from his work on the anthology: from the beginning, Thoreau found it challenging to gain access to the books he needed, as there was little material available to him in Concord. Of course, his brother's sudden death, followed by Thoreau's own sympathetic illness brought on by grief, also posed a tremendous obstacle to the project. A series of other opportunities continued to distract Thoreau after he recovered his health, such as his increasing editorial duties for *The Dial* and a tutoring appointment on Staten Island, although his proximity to New York libraries at that time inspired a brief resurgence of interest in the project. Finally,

Thoreau's growing talent as a prose writer played an important role in his choice to abandon the project: some of Thoreau's early excursion essays, were written and published during this period and they were well received.

[3] According to Linck Johnson, Thoreau considered writing about the 1839 river journey as early as 1840, but he did not envision a book-length work until 1842, and he did not work seriously on the project until 1844 ("*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*" 42-44). Both Johnson and Robert Sattelmeyer offer evidence that Thoreau was actively planning *A Week* during the fall of 1844, and Johnson dates the completion of the first draft of *A Week* to fall 1845 (*Thoreau's Complex Weave* 267-70, *Journal 1* 611-12).

[4] Linck Johnson's "Literary Tradition" from *Thoreau's Complex Weave* is the most comprehensive assessment of the interpolated poetry texts. Meredith McGill's study, "Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*," finds that the fragments of other writers' poems in *A Week* promote a "disjunctive" relationship with the past that is at odds with narrative progress (358). In both cases, the focus on other poets' works and Thoreau's literary analyses precludes extensive consideration of Thoreau's own poetry.

[5] Lawrence Buell in *Literary Transcendentalism*, for example, categorizes the poems as "digressions," although his analysis offers perceptive interpretations of some of the poems in *A Week* (210).

[6] Elizabeth Hall Witherell's essay, "Thoreau's Watershed Season as Poet," demonstrates the insights gained from using Thoreau's poetry to understand his biography. On the question of artistic skill in Thoreau's poetry, Witherell is less ambivalent than Emerson: "The assessment of Thoreau's poetic talent as a minor one is so widely shared and so obviously correct that critics and biographers generally treat his poetry in relation to some larger issue in his life or work" (49). When she analyzes a group of poems Thoreau wrote mid-1841, Witherell locates nascent versions of Thoreau's major themes, such as the significance of human presence within a natural world, as well as early evidence of his colloquial prose style to prove her point that these efforts at verse are "relics of the apprenticeship of a master of poetic prose" (62).

[7] Robert O. Evans' essay, "Thoreau's Poetry and Prose Works," is the first and most extensive treatment of the embedded poetry in Thoreau's prose. Though Evans argues that the combination of poetry and prose is an important framework for *A Week*, he rarely goes beyond cataloging each poem's discrete role in the prose and does not account for poetry's role as a primary *Week* genre. Elizabeth Hall Witherell's essay "Thoreau as Poet," an overview of Thoreau's poetry career, mentions "the pattern of interaction between prose and poetry" that starts in Thoreau's Spring 1841 journal and continues through his later career (62). She notes that the *Week* poems "resonate with and enhance" the prose, "while the prose extends and explicates the poetry" (66). This essay's analysis is indebted to Evans' and Witherell's provocative observations.

[8] Poems will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number when first introduced and then cited by line number thereafter. The poem quoted here is on page 27 and these lines are 1-2.

[9] For a complete analysis of Thoreau's conception of "natural rhymes," see Sattelmeyer *Thoreau's Reading*, page 27. Sattelmeyer traces Thoreau's ideas on rhyme in a natural setting to his interpretation of Goethe as recorded in *Journal 1*, pages 15-16.

[10] "Aulus Persius Flaccus" was published in the July 1840 *Dial*, "Anacreon" appeared in the April 1843 *Dial*, "Sir Walter Raleigh" began in Thoreau's journal in 1840 and was presented to the Lyceum as a lecture in 1843, and "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer." was presented in lecture form as "The Ancient Poets" in 1843 and appeared later with its present title in the January 1844 issue of the *Dial*.

[11] Many contemporary editions of *A Week* emulate the typography of the 1868 edition of *A Week*, which presented the three Thoreau poems on one page with four lines of white space between each, followed by the Ovid excerpt on the following page. This formatting especially encourages readers to consider Thoreau's poems as a sequence rather than as three separate poems, although the poems trace a narrative progression even with the additional space to differentiate them.

[12] In his 1882 biography of Thoreau, F. B. Sanborn misquotes this quatrain and adds the missing name: "Be thou my Muse, my brother John" (175). But even in Thoreau's earliest version of the poem, the name is left out (*Journal 2* 4). Sanborn's emendation manifests what the poem only suggests: that the dash is a placeholder for "John." Still, Thoreau was emphatic that the name would not appear in any version of the poem.

[13] While obscuring the name of the dead is a convention of elegy, the extent to which John's character is obscured in *A Week* goes beyond convention. Johnson interprets John's absence as a way to protect his memory while elevating him to a "pure idea" (45).

[14] Thoreau's engagement with the epic as a genre is comprehensively assessed in Ethel Seybold's *Thoreau: the Quest and the Classics*. Sattelmeyer also maps the influence of classical epics on Thoreau in *Thoreau's Reading*, page 38, and Raymond Adams explores Thoreau's use of "mock-epic" strategies in "Thoreau's Mock-Heroics and the American Natural History Writers." Notably, one of the few books Thoreau took with him to Walden Pond was Homer's *Iliad*; Adams explores the influence of the *Iliad* on *Walden*.

[15] While it is possible that Thoreau added "Where'er thou sail'st" to the Long Book flyleaf after he had already begun to fill its pages, even its retroactive placement at

the beginning of this important early source for *A Week* suggests that he conceived of it as a starting point for the rest of the project.

[16] Scholars debate the date and circumstances in which Thoreau made a series of post-publication changes to the *Week* text. But later in his life, Thoreau sought to republish the book, a request that may be associated with changes to the original text. Ticknor and Fields did not agree to republish *A Week* until the very end of Thoreau's life, and the second edition was finally available in 1868, six years after his death. Given these reasons, some argue that the 1868 edition should not be the authoritative one. For a complete analysis of the changes from the 1849 to the 1868 editions of *A Week*, see Carl Hovde's introduction to the Princeton edition of *A Week*, page 525.

[17] Buell argues that the episode is a "spiritual high point of the book" and "a model of Thoreau's quest for the sacred," and adds that as an anecdote, the significance of the episode is diminished since it "is not a 'real' event in *A Week*, but an analogue from the 'past,'" and therefore not necessarily an analogue for the spiritual realization of *A Week*, since "Transcendentalism recognizes, so to speak, no continuity between the past and present; and once the experience of ecstasy is past there is no knowing whether it can be recovered" (222).

[18] In their collection of Thoreau's poetry, Salt and Sanborn viewed these sections of "Assabet" as two poems, printing them on separate pages under different titles in 1895. The stanzas from "Sunday" are grouped together under the title "Some Tumultuous Little Rill," and those from "Tuesday" are a single poem called "River Song." Although Salt and Sanborn print these stanzas as two separate poems, they are placed sequentially in *Poems of Nature*, suggesting that even though the editors viewed the stanzas as two separate poems, they sought to maintain a semblance of the stanzas' earlier association.

[19] Bode called "Inspiration" Thoreau's "richest mine of self-quotation," a reference to its use in the untitled longer poem and in *A Week* (377). He also observes that "Inspiration" describes a composition method contrary to Thoreau's own experience writing the poem, since Thoreau frequently revised and reworked parts of the poem. Bode pairs "Inspiration" and "Assabet" in this way, identifying them as examples of "the eclecticism out of which much of the verse came into being" (378).

[20] Thoreau clarifies that not all poetic substances are immortal: "There are two classes of men called poets," and there are likewise two kinds of poems, "one that of genius, or the inspired, the other of intellect and taste, in the intervals of inspiration" (375). Poems of the latter kind may be well-written, but only the former contain eternal truth; both are "great and rare," but only an inspired poem "vibrates and pulsates with life forever," an enduring force that cannot be lost (375). Thoreau certainly aspired to write inspired, immortal verse.

[21] For a description and history of the stereotype process, see Thomas Hodgson, *An*

Essay on the Origin and Process of Stereotype Printing. Hodgson discusses the potential for errors in stereotype printing on pages 158-178.

[22] An earlier version of "My life has been the poem" is in *Journal 1*, August 28, 1841 (324). "The Poet's Delay" is also in *Journal 1*, between the entries of March 8, 1840 and March 16, 1840 (116-117). "The Poet's Delay" was also printed in the *Dial*, October 1842.

[23] *A Week*'s "Sunday" chapter, pages 105-108, offers a full discussion of how manual labor should undergird poetic and scholarly labor. Thoreau suggests that physical work can improve writing: "steady labor with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, is unquestionably the best method of removing palaver and sentimentality out of one's style, both of speaking and writing" (105). But even though Thoreau admires the working class, he does not believe that poets should work with their hands only. Rather, he advocates for a balanced life that keeps poets in touch with the world outside the mind: "Surely the writer is to address a world of laborers, and such therefore must be his own discipline. . . . Indeed, the mind never makes a great and successful effort without a corresponding energy of the body" (106).

[24] Thoreau ends *A Week* by comparing his book with another nest, the mud nest of the Chinese cliff swallow, corroboration for Carl Hovde's suggestion that *A Week* is itself another "curious nest" Thoreau left behind, one the writer humbly depicts as mere layers of mud, feathered "with the froth" (500, 393).

[25] The poems in *A Week* that had previously appeared in the *Dial* are "Sympathy," which originally appeared in the July 1840 issue, "Stanzas," from the January 1841 issue, "Sic Vita," from July 1841 issue, "Friendship," from the October 1841 issue, and "To the Maiden in the East," "Rumors from an Aeolian Harp," "Free Love," "Haze," "The Inward Morning," "Summer Rain," and "The Poet's Delay," all from the October 1842 issue.

[26] Why the maiden is absent is a subject of debate among Thoreau's biographers, who dispute which life events inspired the poem. They disagree over whether the poem was written for Mary Russell or Ellen Sewell, both women with whom Thoreau was in close contact in 1840 and 1841, the time this poem was likely written. Harding says the poem was written for Mary Russell who was staying with the Emersons and tutoring Waldo Emerson in the summers of 1840 and 1841. Canby says it was written for Ellen Sewell, who was also spending time with the Thoreaus in Concord while Mary Russell was in town. Canby points to Thoreau's journal of this time period for the event that may have inspired the poem: a boat outing recorded that matches the scene described in *A Week*. With no extant manuscript of the poem from this time frame, it's impossible to confirm Canby's history, which could merely be inferred from Thoreau's orchestration of the poem in *A Week*. Further, Thoreau's journal does not name the woman described, although it is feasible that either Mary Russell or Ellen Sewell went on such boating excursions with the Thoreau brothers.

[27] "Sic Vita"—loosely translated, "such is life"—dates to well before *A Week*. According to legend, a college-age Thoreau wrote "Sic Vita" for Emerson's sister-in-law, Lucy Jackson Brown, and delivered it to her by attaching it to a bouquet of violets and tossing the whole parcel through her window. Thoreau's biographers Henry Seidel Canby, Walter Harding, and F. B. Sanborn's all include a version of this story, though Canby and Harding largely repeat Sanborn's version (Canby 71-73, Harding 105, Sanborn 60). Even if the story is untrue, the poem can at least be traced to Thoreau's early career through the *Dial* and his journal. "Sic Vita" was published in the July 1841 *Dial*, and an earlier journal entry dated January 16, 1841 contains a reference to the poem: "'Sic Vita'–in The Dial" (221). Thoreau's editors believe such references saved the writer time when he copied over original manuscript journals; if there was an original "Sic Vita," this may be a reference to it (616-20). Only one other copy of the poem is extant: an undated manuscript in the Emerson Family collection at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Elizabeth Hall Witherell believes this may be the fair copy that Thoreau submitted to the *Dial* for publication (personal correspondence).

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' POETRY INCLUDING PROSE

Insistent and emphatic, William Carlos Williams wrote to poet Parker Tyler in 1948 to explain his use of prose in the long poem *Paterson* and to clarify that poetry and prose are, in fact, "the same thing":

> All the prose, including the tail which would have liked to have wagged the dog, has primarily the purpose of giving a metrical meaning to or of emphasizing a metrical continuity between all word use. It is *not* an anti-poetic device, the repeating of which piece of miscalculation makes me want to puke. It *is* that prose and verse are both *writing*, both a matter of the words and an interrelation between the words for the purpose of exposition, or other better defined purpose of *the art*. . . . I want to say that prose and verse are to me the same thing, . . . (*Selected Letters* 263)

Williams is resolute: prose and verse are "both writing," two ways of doing the same thing, putting words to paper. But even as he stresses their essential similarity, he also affirms their differences. First, he dismisses the commonly held belief that prose is simply the opposite of poetry, the "anti-poetic"; he tells Tyler that it is not a device meant to offset poetry, nor does the elimination of poetic strategies instantly turn words into prose. Williams explains that the prose is in *Paterson* to show its similarity to poetry: even when it overshadows the verse ("the tail which would have liked to have wagged the dog"), prose still shares a "metrical" capacity with poetry. This suggests that meter—a term usually invoked to describe regular sound patterns in poetry—might be useful for understanding systems of prose which, like meter in verse, give "continuity" and order to

texts. The "metrical continuity" between poetry and prose suggests a spectrum of "all word use," not a sameness; Williams might have stopped the letter at "are both *writing*," and saved himself the trouble of these seeming contradictions, but if he struggles, it is because he has a bigger aim in view than Parker Tyler's understanding. He is working to define a "new prosody"—a system beyond traditional English accentual syllabic verse—and by 1948, Williams was convinced that the key to the new prosody was to expand poetry systems to include prose.

His groping bravado suggests how important yet elusive the relationship between poetry and prose is—to *Paterson*, to Williams, to modern poetry, and, as becomes apparent, to his ethical convictions and wish for social equity. Turning next to Chaucer, Eliot, and "the gutter" to enlarge the scope of his aesthetic argument to encompass the socioeconomics of separating prose from poetry, the letter continues:

> I want to say that prose and verse are to me the same thing, that verse (as in Chaucer's tales) belongs *with* prose, as the poet belongs with "Mine host," who says in so many words to Chaucer, "Namoor, all that rhyming is not worth a toord." Poetry does not *have* to be kept away from prose as Mr. Eliot might insist, it goes *along with* prose and, companionably, by itself, without aid or excuse or need for separation or bolstering, shows itself by *itself* for what it is. *It belongs* there, in the gutter. Not anywhere else or whatever it is, it is the same: the poem.
>
> Yours,
>
> Williams

Defining "poetry" is a task for misguided pedants because poetry "shows itself by *itself* for what it is." What Williams describes is akin to what Jonathan Culler and others will

later assert: that poetry is not the result of distinct language properties—like rhymes—but rather of its setting within a text. Williams calls this how poetry "shows" itself; Culler elaborates on such showing: "The typographical arrangement produces a different kind of attention . . . a strategy of reading, whose major operations are applied to verbal objects set as poems even when their metrical and phonetic patterns are not obvious" (163). Williams might have liked Culler's egalitarian language: poetry and prose are both "verbal objects," and pitting them against each other creates a false dichotomy. For Williams, the problem occurs when the dichotomy becomes a hierarchy like a class system, where elevating poetry above prose privileges one over the other. Williams turns to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to illustrate what happens when a poet uses poetic conventions for a social advantage: the "toord" line that Williams quotes comes when the host reprimands the poet character for embellishing the story with a showy and superfluous AABCCB rhyme scheme, especially when everyone else speaks in plain, unadorned heroic couplets. Williams likewise denigrates Eliot whom he sees as a genre "purist." A month later, Williams will explain in a letter to Horace Gregory that when Eliot mixes prose with poetry, it is only to subject one genre to the other: the prose notes accompanying *The Waste Land* are "merely a load for the mule's back" (265). What Williams wants is not a relationship of servitude and superiority but one of equality: he wants poetry to go "*along with* prose . . . companionably." He ends by knocking poetry from its Eliotic pedestal: the poem must be "in the gutter," sordid or at least quotidian, where it cannot be the exclusive property of elitists.

To Williams, separating prose from poetry was a mistake with not just aesthetic implications but political and social ones, too. Thus, many of his major works—from

Spring and All to *Paterson*—layer genres and forms to depict complex textual convergences of poetry and prose even while encountering characters and settings that represent the full social stratum. The poetry and prose in these texts intertwine to become a formal scaffolding where intermingling categories of identity and privilege are represented through multipart textual structures, not just through imagery and description of diverse lives. Using these strategies, Williams worked toward a poetics that recognized the social inequalities within these interwoven portraits of underrepresented lives. Granted, Williams himself was no icon of liberal politics, yet his aesthetic convictions let him struggle toward ethical ones. Further, by instantiating a poetry-prose structure with which to glimpse, if not fully comprehend, complex social interactions, Williams was able to identify his own ignorance and consistently champion those who did likewise, encouraging readers and critics who sought to read the challenging confluences of poetry with prose with "tolerance" for what they did not understand (*Selected Letters* 309).

Understanding Williams's own social and political position is no easy task, one requiring a complex assessment of the social privileges and disadvantages that affected his training as a writer and that manifest variously in his work.[1] Consider the economic implications of Williams's racial background, for instance: Williams was the bi-racial son of a British father and a Puerto Rican mother. By his own account, Williams's childhood home was culturally diverse: French and Spanish were spoken more than English in his early years, lessons in the Unitarian Church Sunday School were matched with regular meetings of "spiritualist" séances, and his mother's family and father's business connections both brought a steady stream of international visitors to his home. The mobility in his parents' circle was matched by Williams's own early travels, which

included school in Switzerland and France, opportunities made possible by his father's financial success. Williams went on to enroll in the ivy-league University of Pennsylvania to study medicine, a sensible, stable decision at odds with the career paths of his closest college friends, like the poets Ezra Pound and Mina Loy and the painter Charles Demuth. Williams' letters home from Penn acknowledge feelings familiar to those of the children of immigrants, like the idea that advantages must be attained through hard work: "We must earn everything," he wrote in encouragement to his younger brother (*Letters of William Carlos Williams to Edgar Irving Williams, 1902-1912* 189). Such a belief precluded studying arts and letters in college, but it did lead to conversations about class *with* poets that would later influence Williams' own work, like an ongoing debate he kept up with Pound that he later recounted in interviews: "When I was at the University of Pennsylvania, around 1905, I used to argue with Pound. I'd say 'bread' and he'd say 'caviar.' It was a sort of simplification of our positions. Once, in 1912 I think it was, in a letter (we were still carrying on our argument) he wrote, 'all right, bread.' But I guess he went back to caviar" ("Talk with William Carlos Williams by Harvey Breit" 18). Retrospectively, Williams also recalled feeling he wanted "so badly not to be considered a foreigner" (Frail 28). But while Williams's ethnicity may have led him to sympathize with the social underclasses, his family's financial standing provoked identification with upper-class Anglo-Americans. In *Yes, Mrs. Williams*, he goes so far as to compare his background with both white New Englanders and Southern slave-holders: "my family is among those who came to America from Europe through the West Indies—so that in the United states—since they still owned slaves in Puerto Rico—

I feel more southern than the southerners, and by virtue of my father, who was born in England, as northern as if I had come from Maine" (28).

While Williams's Caribbean-American background brought him both struggles and advantages early on in life, his later life is marked mostly by the privileges that went along with being a middle-class, well-educated white man. After college, his cosmopolitanism coupled with his somewhat flexible schedule and comfortable doctor's salary allowed him to move comfortably among the New York and Paris aesthetic elite. There, even while engaged to his future wife, Williams began to cultivate a reputation as a womanizer, a tendency that developed into a brand of sexism that Williams tended to celebrate throughout his career, even linking his poetry with unabashed objectification of women: "Somehow poetry and the female sex were allied in my mind. The beauty of girls seemed the same to me as the beauty of a poem" (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 14). Williams's approach to women grew complicated through his career as an obstetrician to the working poor of northern New Jersey. Williams's biographer Herbert Leibowitz writes that the poet's sexism collided with deep sympathy for and yet sexual objectification of his downtrodden women patients, many of whom show up as sex symbols in need of rescuing in his poems (137-38). Indeed, Williams's experience as a doctor inspired poems and stories depicting the hardships of poor populations of New Jersey; he called this the "plight of the poor" and mentioned it as a particular focus of more than one of his books (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 63).

To Williams, such writing was not necessarily political, a word he reserved for discussions of government and party politics. Indeed, he was wary of any ideology overshadowing poetry, as he wrote to Kay Boyle in 1932: "All I want to do is to state that

poetry, in its sources, body, spirit, in its form, in short, is related to poetry and not to socialism, communism or anything else that tries to swallow it" (*Selected Letters* 131). Yet Williams frequently drew connections between issues of class and social standing and the forces that promoted poetry and arts. He painted himself as one who opposed establishment poetics steeped in high-class snobbery, his "bread" to Pound's "caviar." He imagined that his views met with violent opposition, especially from upper-crust scholar-poets and academics: "They are threatened in their tenure of office. They literally want to kill me" (270).

But while Williams sometimes felt like an outsider because of his sociopolitical convictions, he certainly found himself in plentiful company because of his interest in the relationship between poetry and prose in modern verse. Williams' letter to Parker Tyler offers a microcosm of a larger conversation among modernists about poetry and prose. Williams' forebear—Thoreau is among them—had experimented with integrating poems and prose, but his contemporaries debated and discussed the nature of these experiments in ways his forebears had not. To them, combining poetry and prose in a text was not just a formal choice with stylistic implications but a challenge to real and perceived rules of form. As Timothy Steele has shown, modernist poets were unparalleled in their suspicion of formal constraints, entirely rejecting any notion of prosodic traditions when meter and rhyme seemed too inextricably tied to outmoded Victorian verse styles. Thus, while writers had integrated verse and prose before, formal experimentation took on greater ideological significance to modernists as experimental works became not just innovative but counter-cultural.

Discussions about the nature of mixed-mode texts inevitably led to conversations about the essential nature of verse and of prose. But for all their attempts to define "poetry" and "prose," modernists were never able to put forward meaningful distinctions between the two. At first, some settled on rigid definitions of verse and prose: poetry must have rhyme and meter while prose must not; poetry suits emotions and sensibilities while prose suits logic and sense. Eliot, for example, in his 1917 excoriation of free verse, holds closely to the idea that poetry, even if it does not rhyme, should at least be measured in traditional rhythm patterns; remove rhyme and "the poet is at once held up to the standards of prose," as if without rhyme, a poem falls suddenly into another generic category (36). Yeats, too, described rhythm as requisite to poetry: to disregard a poem's rhythm "is to turn it into bad, florid prose" (508). Yet Yeats retrospectively explains that Eliot's poetry taught that "poetry must resemble prose," at least in diction, with "no romantic word or sound" save the mundane speech of the everyday. In a 1921 issue of *The Chapbook* dedicated to the topic of differences between prose and poetry, Eliot now agrees that modern verse will gain from adopting strategies from prose, even though it must maintain its own distinctions: "verse is always struggling, while remaining verse, to take up to itself more and more of what is prose, to take something more from life and turn it into 'play'" (9). The same is true for prose, he explains, though, like verse, prose must be kept separate from poetry even as the two grow in similarities: "prose, not being cut off by the barrier of verse, which must at the same time be affirmed and diminished, can transmute life in its own way by raising it to the condition of 'play' precisely because it is not verse." Thus, even as Eliot seeks to break down "barriers" between the two ways of writing, he continually confirms the necessity of such divisions. Eliot and Yeats

conclude that verse and prose are best understood and appreciated through their differences, even if certain elements of either may blend in practice. In the end of his *Chapbook* piece, Eliot magnanimously calls for "tolerance" that allows for generic convergences even while deeming them "trespasses," as if they yet offend: "we must be very tolerant of any attempt in verse that appears to trespass upon prose, or of any attempt in prose that appears to strive toward the condition of 'poetry'" (10). Speaking in terms of the kind of hierarchy that Williams abhorred, Eliot explains that it is just such "trespasses" that become the "Monna Lisas of prose," the exceptions that are "raised to the dignity of poetry."

In their debate with Eliot in the pages of *The Chapbook*, Frederic Manning and Richard Aldington undertake what will later become Williams' task of dismantling the perceived superiority of poetry to prose. Aldington dismisses differences between the two modes when he declares, "there is no defined frontier between poetry and prose," for "there are as many passages in prose from which in all essentials are as much poetry as Keats and Shakespeare" (24). Manning, in fact, works to subvert Eliot's assertions, elevating prose above poetry. He dispels the idea that prose is "no more than the rude material with which the poet works," asserting instead that "poetry is continually tending toward the form of prose" (14). Prose allows refined, reasoned expressions, he explains, while "Verse is a primitive, a spontaneous and irrational mode of expression." Elsewhere, Pound, too, promotes prose; in "A Few Don't's," Pound cautions would-be poets not to underestimate the intricacies of prose when he warns, "don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths." Pound

implies that writing prose is just as difficult as writing poetry, thus the two forms should be held in equal esteem.

The range of views explored in theories scrutinizing prose versus poetry corresponds with the variety and expanse of experiments in writing. Chris Beyers explains that modernist experiments with poetry and prose achieved new heights of innovation, especially in poems that featured prose: "While it is not difficult at all to find pre-Modern prose works quoting poetry, few poems contain prose passages, and those that do make clear demarcations. Many earlier writers allude to prose, but this is very different, formally, from including prose passages as part of the poem's texture" (56). Steele, too, notices an important shift in works of verse that incorporate prose: "Whereas in earlier times prose writers experimented with incorporating verse cadences into prose, poets now begin to experiment with integrating the relative rhythms of prose into verse. Prose becomes, in short, the primary art" (9). Aside from Williams' *Spring and All* and *Paterson*, these critics are likely thinking of works like Jean Toomer's 1922 *Cane*, which mixes lyric poetry, narrative prose, and drama, and Muriel Rukeyser's 1938 *Book of the Dead*, which consists predominantly of lyric poetry but also incorporates prose court transcripts and medical reports as documentary forms in its reportage of the Gauley Bridge tragedy. Similarly, Vera Brittain's 1933 memoir of life as a nurse during World War I, *Testament of Youth*, is more prose than poetry, but each narrative chapter is introduced with short lyric that Brittain wrote during her service, and Wallace Stevens' "Lettres d'un soldat" also integrates prose accounts of war with poetry. Published in *Poetry* in May 1918, Stevens' work combines excerpts from French painter Eugène Lemercier's letters from the front with Stevens' lyric poems. Pound's *Cantos*, too,

incorporated historical documents and treatises as well as letters to the poet amid poems, much as *Paterson* did later on. These works maintained clear distinctions between sections in prose and sections written in verse, but those that blurred formal boundaries also abounded. Such texts selected elements from each mode and combined them into a hybrid form that is neither strictly prose nor strictly poetry. Manning's first work, the 1907 novel-in-verse *The Vigil of Brunhild* is one example, and Williams' 1920 *Kora in Hell*, a collage of prose poems, is another. Similarly, Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* has been called more prose-like than poetic in content, although its short narrative sequences are lineated as poems, and David Jones' epic *In Parenthesis* has been called prose though it, too, is in verse form. Another famous example is Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* which likewise mixes attributes traditionally associated with both poetry and prose: the visual form of the book, with sentences arranged in paragraphs, suggests prose, while the prevalence of alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and hermetic language place this work in the domain of poetry. Similarly hybrid forms are evident in many novels from the period—think of works by John Dos Passos, James Joyce, and William Faulkner, for example.

But modernist enthusiasm for writing hybrid texts was not matched by their readers, who were no more sympathetic toward these works than Thoreau's had been. There is little doubt that the challenge of texts like *Paterson* contributed to Williams' inability to find a popular audience during his lifetime. Even many critics struggled to read such works: the chief complaint about *Paterson* was its lack of organization, and critics invariably found that the trouble lay, at least in part, in the poem's mix of poetry and prose.[2] Many critics thought that cutting the prose would improve the poem. Early

reviewers such as Isaac Rosenfeld and Robert Lowell wondered if the composite form would be difficult to sustain over all *Paterson*'s parts, and they suggested that Williams might do well to stop incorporating prose in *Paterson* as he continued to write it (173, 186). Lowell illustrated the prose's secondary status by describing how the poetry "digests" the prose, as if it were meant to support and sustain the poetry (188). Others found the prose tedious and extraneous: Edwin Honig called the prose "interlarding, which one instinctively wants to skip on rereading the poem" (183). Randall Jarrell, instead, worried about the poetry but only because it was too much like prose: it "sounds exactly like the stuff you produce when you are demonstrating to a class that any prose whatsoever can be converted into four-stress accentual verse simply by inserting line-endings every four stresses" (238).[3] To Jarrell, Williams had gone too far in mixing poetry with prose. He explained that even the sections of the text that looked like poetry were actually prose, and boring prose at that: "the telephone book put into accentual verse" (239).

A few critics rose to defend what they saw as a groundbreaking use of prose amid poetry in *Paterson*, and those who did received fervent praise from Williams. An early defender, Ralph Nash, praised the prose in his 1953 article, calling it an "innovation in technique; no major, or even relatively successful, poem has previously explored its possibilities" (20). In his attempt to explore *Paterson*'s prose, Nash, like so many of *Paterson*'s early champions, is preoccupied with finding order in a poem that appears disordered even when the poem resists his efforts. Ironically—considering Williams' desire to integrate prose with poetry—Nash tries to impose a three-part classification system on the prose: first, he identifies a group of factual documents like newspapers,

usually little altered; second are historical documents that Williams paraphrases; and, third, the letters. But even as he describes them, he avers that the types are "not always easily distinguished," and he goes on to present examples of each type that invariably overlap with other types. In fact, in order to establish even this imprecise order, Nash must exclude much of the poem's prose: at the beginning of his essay, he explains that he chooses to focus on only "that prose to which Williams calls attention by differentiating type. *Paterson* does contain obvious prose that is undifferentiated from the surrounding verse." As if in testimony to Williams' assertions about the futility of separating prose from poetry, Nash's distinctions yield few insights; when it comes to assessing the effect of the prose, he does little but pose questions and call for further analysis. As he continues to have difficulty with the distinctions he makes about the poem's prose, his difficulty transforms into questions about the differences between poetry and prose:

> how much does the prose work with the poetry, and how much against it? Do the rhythms of the prose set up defiantly a world of 'fact' against which the poetry batters? For all that may be said of their contribution to the total poem, do the prose passages by their nature keep up a posture of opposition to the poetry, because of their movement and sound, and subject matter, too? And if the prose does this, in varying degrees, may it not provide some measure for the same kind of thing—gradated, no doubt—*within* Williams' verse? (27)

While provoking Nash to decipher differences between prose and poetry, Williams' writing also invites questions about the nature of separations—how "oppositions" are sustained, how one thing "batters" against another, and how things "work" together or against each other. Finally, Nash's question about "gradated" opposition in both poetry

and prose winds up arriving at the idea of a spectrum of prose and verse effects in *Paterson*, similar to what Williams himself had explained to Parker Tyler.

Thus, although Nash's questions arrive at few conclusions about the prose in *Paterson,* his work impressed Williams.[4] Williams responded to Nash with gushing thanks and even awe in a personal letter: "I was left speechless," he declares, "You have penetrated to a secret source of whatever power I possess and it has frightened me" (*Selected Letters* 323). To Williams, Nash not only understood the purpose of the prose in the poem but also grasped an essential element of Williams as a poet:

> no one to the present moment has so looked within me, if anyone has been interested in me enough to make the attempt, to discover why I have used prose as I have used it. But the point for me is that I have not myself gone sufficiently beyond instinct, very often, to discover the reasons. It is too deep-seated for that and goes to the very core of why I am a writer. You have laid me bare, as I say, for whatever I am worth, and at the same time reinforced in me the feeling that I am worth something, a feeling which very often the world of my contemporaries tends to break down. It has been a revelation which, as I say, is frightening.

Williams' response almost painfully reveals that dismantling the poetry-prose hierarchy has wound up injuring its fiercest advocate, exposing him to oppressive critical scorn. But Nash has revived Williams' hopes. He expects Nash's work will inspire more attention to "prose *within the poem itself*," analysis that would serve not only *Paterson* but also all modern poetry: "It has much to do with the whole of poetry, and what must be its place, its modern place, in our world" (324).

Why Williams responded to Nash with such gushing gratitude may be understood in part by noting just how long Williams worked to gain recognition for the importance of mixing poetry with prose. His interest in combining the two blossomed early in Williams' writing career; by his own account, it began at least as early as college, where he encountered the "wonders" of poetry and prose together in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, a medieval French fable (*Autobiography* 52). *Aucassin et Nicolette* is an apt representation of Williams' early interest in the collaboration of poetry and prose since it clearly delineates one mode from the other, as Williams initially did, too. In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, each segment of text is numbered and introduced to label clearly which mode is which: "Or se cante" ("now is sung") prefaces each segment of verse and "Or diënt et content et fablent" ("now they say and tell and relate") introduces sections of prose.

In his early theories of prosody, Williams likewise sought to establish clear distinctions between poetry and prose even as he began to develop the ideas that would lead to formally hybrid innovations. Williams' famous preoccupation with the concept of measure, for example, and its application beyond poetry, begins in the 1913 essay "Speech Rhythms." Here, Williams explores the idea of a loosely defined rhythm-based scansion intended to supersede metrical scansion: "The rhythm unit is simply any repeated sequence of lengths and heights" (qtd. in Weaver 82). Later in his career, Williams will apply this definition of rhythm toward the theory of prose in *Paterson* glimpsed in the 1948 Parker Tyler letter: he will argue that written rhythm is an attribute of both poetry and prose, and he will press *Paterson* to show the range of written rhythm available in both modes. But in this early essay, Williams uses his speech-rhythm theory to differentiate prose from poetry by arguing that poetry alone has rhythm. Further,

therefore, "*Vers libre* is prose," he declares, making a stark division between poetry and prose that he will later disavow.

Williams' understanding of rhythm in poetry is perhaps why so many of his early poems were composed in traditional metrical forms and patterns of rhyme, but it was not long before he began to experiment with the strategies of prose in verse. For example, hardly a year after writing "Speech Rhythms," he published "Peace," which adds prose strategies to a short lyric form. The poem suggests that the "peace" of day-to-day life is like wartime for those who must labor at menial tasks to make a living:

> I grant you: peace is desirable. War being, in a figure, its antithesis is wholly detestable to the lover of peace.
>
> But there are lovers and lovers.
>
> It is stupid to advocate peace in order to have me work in a factory or a field or a mine or a quarry or a forest or on the sea or at a desk or on the ice or at the sea's bottom—unless I please to do these things.[5]

The speaker argues that true "peace" is total release from the workaday world—the "lesser war"—and freedom to live without the demands of earning a daily wage: "Peace is noble only when it sends me out a tramp— / my peace made with the world—a lily of the field if you / will" (8, 12-14). In the poem, segments of text are spaced on the page like stanzas, white space separating one from another, yet each stanza's initial indentation, justified margins, and period-stopped lines resemble prose paragraphs. While

the poem argues that "war" is not simply the inverse of "peace," so, too, its form suggests that poetry and prose are not simply opposites either.

Williams' first extended foray into mixed poetry and prose does not at first glance resemble poetry at all: the "improvisations" of *Kora in Hell* jettison line breaks as well as traditional meter and rhyme to "break with banality" found in traditional forms, as Williams explained in the volume's prologue (*Imaginations* 11). Yet *Kora*'s mostly prose form was part of a new focus for Williams' career, one that featured experimentation in mixed poetry and prose form. In his *Autobiography*, Williams explains how writing *Kora* in 1917 was a response both to his growing awareness of "a reawakening of letters"—the avant-garde work of the modernists—and realization of World War I's devastations: "everything I wanted to see live and thrive was being deliberately murdered in the name of church and state" (158). *Kora* responds with a form epitomized in its title: Kora—a figure for springtime, new life, new birth, and, for Williams, a new poetics—descends into hell and is enshrouded in chaos just as the poet and poetry disappear into the disorder of improvisational prose. But even if prose reigns in *Kora*, Williams insists on its poetic qualities: when Williams struggled years later to identify the form of *Kora*, he continually compared the work to poetry, although traditional poem or prose-poem forms were far from adequate: it was not a French prose poem and certainly not simply "verse" "by any stretch of the imagination" (29). That Williams classified *Kora* as some sort of poem is a reminder not only that the work encompassed poetry as well as prose in its inception but also that its purpose was to incubate a new poetry infused with prose. For Williams, poetry's emergence from *Kora* was more than the seasonal rebirth of the traditional Kora myth; it was the birth of a new phase in his career.

Williams' *Kora* blossomed into *Spring and All*, Williams' official debut into modern poetry and enlistment in the modernist "battle" against the idea that art merely imitates real life (16). *Spring and All* campaigns against recent literary movements—Realism and Symbolism, especially—by explaining that in these trends, art is always mimicking or "plagiarizing" something exterior to itself; such art is merely a series of symbols with real-life correspondents (16, 10, 3). Instead, *Spring and All* calls for art that may bear similarities to the natural world but is foremost a "reality itself"—a unique, distinct existence (45). Williams identifies the imagination as the force artists apply to an art medium that makes it more than a mere copy, to "give created forms reality, actual existence" (49). Seeing art as only representational is a "barrier," then, one that precludes a full understanding of art's capacities, and one that Williams wants to dismantle with *Spring and All*. The aim of *Spring and All* is "cleavage," breaking art away from the natural world: "to separate things of the imagination from life" (67, 30). Dismantling the barrier, cleaving "imagination from life," and winning the modernists' battle requires work that directs attention to the fact of its own creation; in *Spring and All*, this requirement is both explained and exampled by the text's mixture of poetry and prose. "Invention of new forms . . . must occupy all serious minds concerned," Williams instructs in prose, and he takes his own advice not only by devising unique forms for the *Spring and All* poems but also by surrounding lyric poems with argumentative, disjointed, self-referential prose (36).

Much of *Spring and All* works to define "prose" and "poetry" as separate but related categories, yet the distinctions drawn suggest poetry is the preferred form in the *Spring and All* world. Distinguishing between the two is important in the text because

poetry is better suited than prose to the kind of truly imaginative art that *Spring and All* calls for, as is explained, ironically, in a prose section that immediately follows the famous poem later known as "To Elsie":

> or better : prose has to do with the fact of emotion ; poetry has to do with the dynamisation of emotion into a separate form. This is the force of imagination.
>
> prose : statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectua states, data of all sorts – technical expositions, jargon, of all sorts – fictional and other –
>
> poetry : new form dealt with as a reality in itself. (67)

Here, poetry, not prose, is "the force of imagination." Poetry is a "new form dealt with as a reality in itself" perhaps because even traditional verse conventions such as rhyme, meter, and figurative language do not pretend to be realistic or mimetic; instead, they flaunt their distinctly poetical qualities (67). Conversely, prose befits realism, the text declares: its form is suited for "facts" and "data." Throughout the book, the text distinguishes between poetry and prose typographically, too, differences which also suggest an unequal relationship between the two modes. It is easy to tell poetry apart from prose at a glance, and a glance is enough to reveal that poetry even *looks* better than poetry on the page. The poems are orderly: generally printed flush-left, they are numbered chronologically and words are spelled correctly. The prose, meanwhile, in page-wide paragraphs, has its chapter numbers out of order and occasionally upside-down, and it is peppered with spelling errors, like "intellectua" above.[6] Then, too, the narrator voicing the book helps set poetry above prose: the first-person narrator in the

prose comes across as silly in his pretentious bombast, while the short, efficient lines of the poems exude poise and control. We must acknowledge, too, that the poems have won far more critical attention—not to mention admiration—than the prose.[7] Indeed, Williams himself seems to have found the *Spring and All* prose downright expendable: after the book appeared in 1923, Williams was quick to publish many of the poems without the prose context, first in a small pamphlet, *Go-Go* (1923), then in *Collected Poems* (1934), *Complete Collected Poems* (1938), and *Collected Earlier Poems* (1951) (it was not until 1970, after Williams' death, that New Directions reprinted the original edition with the prose). When Williams recalled the 1923 *Spring and All* late in his life, he described the prose pejoratively and the poetry positively: "The prose is a mixture of philosophy and nonsense" while "the poems were kept pure—no typographical tricks when they appear—set off from the prose" (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 37). Now, the separation between poetry and prose is almost too clear, too simple—especially for the later champion of egalitarian hybridity.

But the certainty of the "pure" versus "nonsense" hierarchy grows hazy as Williams continues describing the "pure" poems. He concludes almost dismissively, "Some of the poems were considered good. 'By the road to the contagious hospital' has been praised by the conventional boys for its form' (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 37). To Williams, the fact that the "conventional boys"—certainly here a dismissive epithet—admire the *form* of the poem is a bad sign at best. Perhaps Williams means to signal retroactive distaste for *Spring and All*'s overzealous distinctions between poetry and prose. But if so, then Williams himself was denying the complexity of *Spring and All*, which, for all its assertions about poetry's differences from prose, ends up less certain

about either than it initially appears. First to break down is the idea that poetry is best for "imaginative" art, art beyond mere representation. Often, it is *Spring and All*'s prose that does the most to call attention to its own construction: the misspellings and upside-down chapter numbers are material textual elements that interrupt any illusion of realism. And indeed, if prose "depends on clarity," then why does the *Spring and All* prose constantly interrupt itself, leaving sentences unfinished, unconcluded, and unclear? The prose speaker wonders this himself in prose questions and comments, like "Is what I have written prose?" (78). Eventually, toward the end of the book, the prose engages in a discussion remarkably like Williams' later letter to Parker Tyler, asserting that there is, in fact, no certain property unique to either verse or prose. Therefore, "it may be argued, that since there is according to my proposal no discoverable difference between prose and verse that in all probability none exists and that both are phases of the same thing" (83). The text concludes that perceived differences between the two occur because there is "a separate origin for each," an intent or design which guides texts into these categories (84). Now he is close indeed to the idea that "prose and verse are both *writing*, both a matter of the words and an interrelation between the words for the purpose of exposition, or other better defined purpose of *the art*" (*Selected Letters* 263). Instead of "cleavage" separating prose from poetry, then, *Spring and All* shows how prose cleaves *to* poetry.

Further, elsewhere in *Spring and All*, prose is elevated above poetry when the poems themselves prove insufficient. The prose that jumps in after "To Elsie," for example, starts with the transitional phrase "or better" just after the poem, as if to say that the prose that follows is a better way of making the point. Granted, the point "Elsie" makes is complex and multipart, to say the least—the poem has been read as an argument

against racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, nationalism, and more.[8] But while critics may dispute what, exactly, comprises the main political point of "Elsie," they tend to agree about the poem's comments on aesthetics, and that the "imagination strains / after deer / going by fields of goldenrod" suggests that the hackneyed pastoral mode no longer tells "the truth about us" as well as Elsie does with her "broken brain." So, the text's turn to prose—"or better : prose . . ."—suggests that prose, perhaps better than the poem, points the way toward an aesthetic "truth about us." Of course, the "truth" is not simply that prose is better any more than poetry was but rather that a kind of aesthetic multiplicity—overlapping systems of poetry with prose—complements our complex social reality.

Ultimately, *Spring and All* is comprised of this productive tension: attempts to differentiate the forces of poetry and prose fail throughout the book, but this failing is an imaginative poetic in its own right. In the end, the tension is productive, which is perhaps why Williams returns to this hybrid mode in *Paterson*. *Paterson* indeed begins where *Spring and All* leaves off, for in between the two, Williams published little mixed-genre work. In fact, he wrote only a few new poems but quite a bit of prose, including the revisionist American history *In the American Grain* (1925), three novels—*A Voyage to Pagany* (1928), *White Mule* (1937), and its sequel *In the Money* (1940)—three short-story collections—*A Novelette and Other Prose* (1932), *The Knife of the Times and Other Stories* (1932), and *Life Along the Passaic River* (1938)—as well as two plays. As James Breslin argues, this was certainly a period when Williams honed his prose style and strategy, preparing for the challenge of the epic *Paterson* (169). As a result, Williams was as practiced in prose as in poetry when he began to write the epic. But though many years

had passed, *Paterson*, like *Spring and All*, still argues for the cooperation of poetry and prose, and while it still makes distinctions between poetry and prose, such distinctions highlight the productivity of juxtaposing the two genres and probe the possibilities of what they can achieve together. The possibilities are, indeed, vast, and the *Paterson* experiment is likewise ambitious. This was Williams' intent, his ultimate statement: *Paterson* is his attempt "to embody the whole knowable world about me" (*Autobiography* 391).

Too often, critics have focused on what eludes Williams about poetry and prose in *Paterson* and ignored what is productive about the formal juxtaposition of the text. They have taken the incoherent style of Williams' poetics at face value and viewed the poem itself as disorganized and confused, too. At best, *Paterson* has been labeled an ongoing "search" for a poetry-prose form, a series of false starts that fail to cohere (Dickie "Williams Reading *Paterson*" 653).[9] In this assessment, the structure of *Paterson* is always changing and evolving, formless because of its inability to stabilize its aesthetic *raison d'être*. But if *Paterson* reads as a searching poem, it is because it probes the potential of both poetic forms and prose forms to determine their range of similarities. What appears in *Paterson* as evolution or constant reinvention is in fact vacillation across a spectrum of poetry to prose: the text entertains the idea of modal distinctions by using poetry and prose as each end of the spectrum, but it continually returns to the indistinct middle range in which the two modes share attributes and effects. *Paterson*'s shifting form is Williams' way of investigating a series of hypotheses about the relationship between poetry and prose: by showing what poetry and prose can do separately and what they can do together, *Paterson* explores how poetry and prose can be "the same thing."

That this investigation of poetry and prose happens in Williams' distinctly American epic is no accident; *Paterson* matches Williams' ultimate aesthetic statement of hybridity with his most ambitious statement about the breadth and diversity of American life. It is this formal, topical complexity that leads Erin E. Templeton to call *Paterson* "a new kind of epic that more accurately captures modernity in the rapidly changing and growing United States of America" (106). Indeed, *Paterson* takes as its subject what Williams saw as an American everyman and every place: Noah Faitoute Paterson, the person, and Paterson, New Jersey, the town that Williams saw as the epitome of the American city. As person and place, Paterson stands for all people: he is a "man like a city" of people. But, specifically as a person, he is also a character from history (the "old time Jersey Patriot"), a figure for the poet or Williams himself, and a composite of Williams and David Lyle, who provided Williams with much of the source material for *Paterson* (*Paterson* 15, 259). As a city, Paterson symbolizes Williams' hope for American letters, a hope based in the idea that American literature would serve average Americans, not just an intellectual elite. Williams also wanted American literature to distinguish itself from European literature, and Paterson embodies American self-sufficiency apart from Europe: Paterson's industrial centers were built to fulfill early America's need for industrial independence, and the Passaic River falls of Paterson were harnessed to power mills that created various goods, from textiles to weapons. While Paterson became one of the earliest and most productive industrialized cities in the US, it was also the site of initial labor unrest when, in 1913, mill workers staged a series of strikes. These prompted reconsideration of child labor laws and workplace conditions and safety, while lowering the maximum number of working hours for employees per week

and raising the cap on minimum wage. Thus, not only does Paterson the place embody independence from European influences and styles, but it also demonstrates that a productive working-class force must represent and sustain the American populous, a force that Williams considered equally as vital for fueling industry as for fueling literature.

Paterson's vast scope is reflected in Williams's writing process: the fact that Williams wrote it over a long period of time serves the critical narrative that the poem is a process of development. Williams himself draws a comparison between *Paterson* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: he considered it his masterwork, a record of his intentions as a poet, and one that was necessarily ongoing throughout his career (*Autobiography* 392). Content relevant to what would become *Paterson* is evident from as early as the 1914 long poem "The Wanderer," and parts of *Paterson 1* came from the 1927 poem also titled "Paterson." In the 1940s, the poem began to take the shape of an epic story. Eventually, the primary body of the text grew to encompass four books of three sections each, organized by location more than plot (*Paterson* xiii). The first book of *Paterson*, which came out in 1946, introduces Paterson the place and person, and it begins at the falls, *Paterson*'s central symbol for the onslaught of unorganized language in need of poetic composition. The second book, set in the park abutting the falls, appeared two years later, in 1948; it loosely sketches many present-day inhabitants of Paterson the town. In 1949, *Paterson 3* came out; its subject is the destruction by fire of the town library, and it uses the loss of the library as an illustration of how American literature needs to start afresh. Book 4, which takes the outskirts of New York City as its setting, came out in 1951; here, the idea of leaving Paterson is a metaphor for inventing new literary modes. Then, by

1951, Williams realized four books were not enough: “I have been forced to recognize that there can be no end to such a story I have envisioned with the terms which I had laid down for myself,” he wrote (xv). So, he kept writing: in 1958, he published *Paterson 5*, in which the epic’s characters return to Paterson and renew their efforts to revitalize language there. And, shortly before his death, Williams had even begun work on *Paterson 6* (202).

Williams took alterations to his plan in stride: “There were a hundred modifications of this general plan as, following the theme rather than the river itself, I allowed myself to be drawn on” he wrote (*Paterson* xiii-xiv). Indeed, while *Paterson* remained loosely based on the river, place, and narrative of Paterson, its primary focus became a theme, language itself, which Williams returns to again and again, even reminding himself by the end of Book 4: “Haven’t you forgot your virgin purpose, / the language?” (186). Ultimately, *Paterson*, like *Spring and All*, both calls for and answers its own call for a democratic renewal of American literature: its meta-commentary on language is acted out in the poetry-prose depictions of a modern mind and landscape, Paterson himself and itself. It is *Paterson*’s generically hybrid language that delivers poetry to the everyday, inclusive “us,” rather than to the elite few; “This seemed to me to be what a poem was for, to speak for us in a language we can understand” (xiii). In *Paterson*, such poetic language must not only include prose but depend on it; the prose sections of the text are not merely “criticism or commentary about the text: they are as much a part of *Paterson* itself as any of its verses” (105)

Paterson is constantly reiterating this claim, constantly demonstrating the importance of combining prose with poetry by demonstrating the ineffectiveness of

separating the two. Through a process of assertion and question, *Paterson* explores traditional conventions or confines of prose and poetry genres, as if the poem is a laboratory for "testing" poetry and prose in order to determine that they are the same. From its start, *Paterson* stages just such a debate between prose and poetry, where any distinctions between the two are scrutinized almost as quickly as they are presented. The Book I "Preface" begins:

> "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?"
>
> To make a start,
> out of particulars
> and make them general, rolling
> up the sum, by defective means—[10]

"To make a start" starts to answer the opening question in a formal response to the opening sentence, drawing in both the left- and right-hand margin, as if to argue that conventions of poetic form like left-justified text and contrived right-hand line endings are a way to unlock the mind and find beauty. If the second sentence is poetry, then we might assume that the first was prose; indeed, the opening question runs against the right-hand margin, as if the line were a sentence of prose following the dictates of a paragraph rather than stanza form. Then, too, the line is set apart by quotation marks, which suggests it is an epigraph, perhaps another writer's words poised as a preface to Williams' poetry. Just as epigraphs are often written in a different mode from the primary text—conventionally, poetry often prefaces prose, or prose, poetry—the quotation marks seem at first to set up another point of distinction between a line of prose and lines of

poetry. Indeed, much of what appears later on in *Paterson* as prose—that is, text that is formatted in conventional prose paragraphs—is quoted from other strictly prose sources, such as histories of Paterson and letters between Paterson residents. But this sentence is not quoted from elsewhere; it is Williams' own construction. It expands on the phrase "rigor of beauty," a refrain throughout *Paterson*. Why it is in quotation marks here is unclear; it does not invoke another writer, and it is not even really an epigraph. As such expectations disintegrate, the similarities between the two sentences—rather than their differences—start to emerge. Further, the distinction of line lengths set up in these first two sentences begins to break down as the "quest" set in motion by the opening sentence continues down the page when the poem goes on: the left-hand margin jogs part-way back out in the next stanza, only to be pulled back in again in the first line of the stanza after that, a zigzag that continues intermittently throughout the preface.

The "Preface" introduces line length and line breaks as the building blocks of poetry and prose conventions, making it clear from the beginning that these are inessential elements associated variously with poetry and prose. Line construction is then explored extensively to probe false genre dichotomies and discover productive collaborations between prose and poetry in two central narratives that originate in Book 1, those of Sarah Cumming and Sam Patch. Both are stories of death and waterfalls, elements that become significant in *Paterson*'s symbolism. Sarah Cumming and her husband, Reverend Hooper Cumming, visited Paterson in June 1812, and in a visit to the falls, Cumming slipped and fell to her death. In contrast to Cumming, Paterson resident Sam Patch did not die on his first jump into the falls—he launched his career as a stunt diver by jumping from the top of the Paterson falls, a seventy-five-foot drop—but, later

on, Patch, too, lost his life in an ill-executed stunt at the Genesee River falls. Several months after the incident, Patch's body, encased in ice, was recovered at the site. The prose histories are both imported from outside source material, and quoted prose is usually rendered in a smaller font when first presented. [11] With a smaller font size and margin width, the prose contrasts with the poetry typographically, and the two genres initially appear to serve different purposes in *Paterson*, too: while the prose stories have clear connections to Paterson the place, they maintain a distance from the larger thematic project of the text, while poetry incorporates the stories into the text's larger themes by excerpting and interpreting them. Yet, as in the "Preface" where poetry and prose only pose as opposites, the two modes relate inextricably in the *Paterson* narrative, and their similarities obscure their distinctions as the text progresses.

In the Patch and Cumming sequences, language is compared to water to depict how either prose or poetry might emerge distinct from the other in the first place. The text introduces the relationship between water and language when water imagery is juxtaposed with an aside about language at the beginning of Book 1. Here, the text describes the falls: how the river comes "pouring in above the city / and crashes from the edge of the gorge / in a recoil of spray and rainbow mists" (7). Then, the text pivots to a parenthetical reference on the subject of language, drawing a parallel between the river's process and the process of writing:

> (What common language to unravel?
> . . combed into straight lines
> from that rafter of a rock's
> lip.) (7)

By following the tercet describing the falls, the "common language" quatrain continues the narrative of the water falling even as it changes subject, and together, these seven lines tell two parallel stories simultaneously: one about the river and one about writing. Speaking of the river, this section tells that the Passaic runs from a gorge high above the city then drops at a sudden end of the gorge, forming the seventy-five-foot falls before it settles again into a "straight line" river bed below. Then, at the same time, this section claims that the straight lines of poetry originate from a mass of "common language": lines are selected through a tumultuous process that forces that mass to a precipice and breaks it apart with a force like a "recoil" that "unravels" its sentences and syntax.

The claim about the writing process foretells what will happen with the Patch and Cumming stories in *Paterson*, where the masses of text are the prose paragraphs, and the "straight lines" are the poetry these stories inspire. Indeed, the recycled prose passages, like those from Williams' source materials, are the "common language" that is unraveled: these texts are held in common among several different sources, the populous lore of Paterson itself. These particular masses of text offer little interpretation of the central events in these stories, the deaths. Both prose stories maintain a sense of ambiguity about the details surrounding each death—especially what each character's intention was in the action, what role they played in their own destruction. In Cumming's story, for example, 10-point, quoted prose explains that Reverend Cumming brought his wife with him to the falls overlook to show her the view, where they "took their station on the brow of the solid rock, which overhangs the basin, six or eight rods from the falling water, where thousands had stood before" (14). The details of the place—its geographical features and the habits of its visitors—foreshadow the tragedy to come by establishing that the drop is

fatal and that such accidents are rare. But the improbability of Cumming's fall also contributes to the mystery of it, since it suggests that an accidental fall would be unlikely. Further, Mrs. Cumming's death happens in the moment when Mr. Cummings is not observing her. No one witnesses her death:

> When they had enjoyed the luxury of the scene for a considerable length of time, Mr. Cumming said, "My dear, I believe it is time for us to set our face homeward"; and at the same moment, turned round in order to lead the way. He instantly heard the voice of distress, looked back and his wife was gone! (14)

Acting much like Reverend Cumming, the prose does not observe the event of Sarah Cumming's death: it does not attend to the act that killed her; it does not surmise whether she tripped, slipped, or jumped. It only remarks euphemistically that she "was gone," and—after a full paragraph on Mr. Cumming's grief that does not address Sarah Cumming directly at all—finally reports that her "mortal part was found in a depth of 42 feet." In fact, even as the prose avoids Sarah Cumming and turns to her husband, it registers its own shortcomings. When there is a need for portraying complexity of feeling and emotional response, the prose admits that it cannot perform: "Mr. Cumming's sensations on the distressing occasion may, in some measure, be conceived, but they cannot be described," it acknowledges.

But the poetry that appends this version of Cumming's last moments identifies that these important details are lost in the onslaught of the mass of prose. Working as interpreter of the prose—unraveling it—poetry critiques this loss:

> A false language. A true. A false language pouring—a
> language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without

dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear. At least

it settled it for her. Patch too, as a matter of fact. (15)

The poetry calls the prose both "false" and "true": prose presents some facts, but obscures others, such as what really happened when Cumming fell. Further, the event is "misunderstood" and "misinterpreted" by the prose. This transition from prose to poetry also expands on the book's earlier narrative about the writing process: when the verse critiques the prose, calling it an undifferentiated mix of "false" and "true" that is both "misunderstood" and "misinterpreted," it is calling for composition that will make sense of the mixture, "comb" the prose into poetry. The poetry then observes that the prose was only useful to "settle it" for Cumming, suggesting that reporting a death is the minimum service that prose can perform; it is implied that a complete understanding of the event—including why and how Cumming fell—is preferred. The pun on "minister" references Cumming's clergy husband, who is unable to save her, as well as the prose which, standing alone without poetry in its previous iterations, does little to rationalize and explain Cumming's death.

The poetry proceeds to extract the "true" from the "false" when it goes on to explore the significance of both deaths throughout Book 1. After verse identifies the fact that details about the deaths are missing, it goes further in Book 1, part II, by drawing comparisons between Cumming and Patch, analyzing similarities and differences in order to understand the significance of these deaths both to the victims and to those who may respond to the story, as the speaker, the "I", does here:

Patch leaped but Mrs. Cumming shrieked

and fell—unseen (though

she had been standing there beside her husband half

an hour or more twenty feet from the edge).

: a body found next spring

frozen in an ice-cake; or a body

fished next day from the muddy swirl—

both silent, uncommunicative

Only of late, late! begun to know, to

know clearly (as through clear ice) whence

I draw my breath or how to employ it

clearly—if not well (20-21)

If Cumming and, eventually, Patch are metaphorically drowned in the onslaught of their own prose stories, their bodies are recovered here in poetry—"found" and "fished" out of prose into poetry—suggesting the vital power of this medium when the poet uses it well. But here in Book 1, the speaker has only "begun to know" how to use poetry to communicate clearly; it takes until Book 2 draws to a close to find a way to represent Cumming's death on the page, where verse forms depict words tumbling down the page like a body falling into the water—or like a waterfall:

She was married with empty words:

better to

stumble at

the edge

to fall

fall

and be

—divorced

from the insistence of place—

from knowledge,

from learning—the terms

foreign, conveying no immediacy, pouring down (83-84)

Here, the text compares Cumming's marriage to Reverend Cumming with her "marriage" to "empty words," like the prose that failed to acknowledge her death. The verse is "better," but just when it seems that poetry has redeemed Cumming, the text pivots to acknowledge what is lost when her experience moves out of prose and into poetry. By asserting that she is divorced from "insistence of place," "knowledge," and "learning," the text mourns the loss of what the prose rendition of her death could do: tie Cumming to the bigger history of Paterson and connect her individual history to a compendium of knowledge about New Jersey, like that of the source material Cumming's story is taken from, the *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey*. The text concludes that in this stage of "divorce"—prose from poetry—there is "no invention more," suggesting that as Cumming's life ends, so, too, does the creative process that traced its source from prose.

When, further down the page, a "she" admonishes the poet, "You have abandoned me!," it is as if Cumming is asking for a return to this compositional process and a fuller

representation using both poetry and prose. In response, on the following page, the process of deriving poetry from prose begins again, though this time, with the poetry acknowledging the importance of the prose:

Faitoute ground his heel

hard down on the stone:

> Sunny today, with the highest temperature near 80 degrees; moderate southerly winds. Partly cloudy and continued warm tomorrow, with moderate southerly winds.

Her belly . her belly is like

a cloud . a cloud

at evening . (85)

Now in the role of the poet, Faitoute digs in and starts to assemble the woman's body in poetry, using prose as a source for his language and imagery. Responding to a prose weather report, his process is slow and halting: the spaces suggest pauses in which he struggles to find his next word, and the repetition indicates a grappling for words. Though the process is difficult, the "divorce," at least, has ceased, and the text returns to using the two genres together.

Book 4 states that the difficulty of using poetry and prose together is not only a sign of productivity but the means to it: "antagonistic cooperation is the key" (176). This catchphrase for the mix of poetry and prose rationalizes the constant vacillation between the two in *Paterson*, a dynamic of struggle that propels the text. Still, struggle does not ensure success: *Paterson*'s attempts at aesthetic resolutions and reconciliations often fall short of the mark, with Cummings as with others. Indeed, Faitoute's efforts to reconstruct

a female body using similes drawn from nature revisits the very worn-out tropes of pastoral poetry that "To Elsie" declaimed. Likewise, critics have exposed the pitfalls in so many of Williams' efforts to depict the lives of the diverse Paterson community. The objectification that happens in Book 3 when a black character is associated with the phrase "Beautiful Thing" is an obvious example, one that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar notice—along with Terence Diggory, Paul Mariani, and Louis Martz—and they state that Williams' best attempts at racial inclusion may yet dehumanize through damaging stereotypes. Sometimes, "antagonistic cooperation" is simply antagonistic.

It may be true that *Paterson*'s sociopolitical failings are common to its era, but that should not excuse it. Yet what is admirable is that Williams anticipated the need for a mechanism to broaden the *Paterson* scope beyond the limited purview of one writer, even if he could not see what his text excluded. To Williams, *Paterson*'s prose was an integral piece of that mechanism. He delineated this conviction in a 1951 letter to Sister Mary Bernetta Quinn, a letter where Williams acknowledges in himself just such a social failing as Gilbert, Gubar, and others locate in parts of *Paterson*. The letter contains feedback responsive to Quinn's draft dissertation work on *Paterson*, work Williams admired and that Quinn would later publish as an article in *PMLA*. In the letter, Williams seems surprised that Quinn's Catholic faith had not soured her to his poetry or at least sparked her censure; his excessive acknowledgement of her Catholicism suggests as much: "You realize, of course, being a Catholic, that I am not a Catholic. Yet you have not once taken advantage of your position to lay imputations against me. I find that tremendously impressive" (*Selected Letters* 309). Williams' conciliatory acknowledgement of Catholic Quinn's astute, unbiased analysis of *Paterson* suggests she

has incited him to recognize his own preconceived bias about how a woman of Catholic faith would respond to his work. His prejudice exposed, Williams is reminded that this is just the kind of personal weakness he sought to address with the *Paterson* prose, which he describes as a way to incorporate the "irrational"—his catchall term for those things he does not yet comprehend—in the text:

> . . . in life (you show it by your tolerance of things which you feel no loss at not understanding) there is much that men exclude because they do not understand. The truly great heart *includes* what it does not at once grasp, just as the great artist includes things which go beyond him. Perhaps, if you understand what I mean, you and I share something bigger than ourselves when we are tolerant—each of the other—as I have seen you to be. The irrational enters the poem in those letters, included in the text, which do not seem to refer to anything in the 'story' yet do belong somehow to the poem—how, it is not easy to say" (*Selected Letters* 309)

Certainly, Williams means to give Quinn advice on her *Paterson* piece here, and it is likely that he felt she was misinterpreting or oversimplifying elements of *Paterson* not so easily explained—perhaps, especially, the letters that Williams quotes. Yet even as he aligns himself with Quinn's tolerance by suggesting such sentiments motivated the letters in *Paterson*, Williams also subtly apologizes for any bias toward Quinn as a woman when he admits, "there is much that *men* exclude." Indeed, though he ends by talking about *Paterson*'s prose, Williams's aesthetic of inclusion clearly extends beyond the epic poem, an ethic that informs great artists but also great hearts, art as well as life itself.

In his discussion with Quinn, Williams suggests that including prose letters was literally a way to incorporate others' voices, ideas, and perspectives in *Paterson*, even

though these materials may have very little to do with the *Paterson* story. What Williams describes is a method of demoting himself as author, ceding control of his text by forfeiting the ultimate control of his poetic "I." While not all of the prose in *Paterson*—or elsewhere in Williams' works—was directly quoted from others, Williams' prose-poetry hybrids all ultimately favor polyphony over a single voice and others over self. In the letter, Williams signs off to Quinn by expressing just such a sentiment about her perspective relative to his *Paterson*, privileging Quinn's reading even over the text itself: "Even if the poem were now lost I should be satisfied: it CAN be understood" (*Selected Letters* 310).

Notes

[1]For more on Williams's politics, see Frail, *The Early Politics and Poetics of William Carlos Williams* and Beck, *Writing the Radical Center*. For evaluations of Williams' associations with women, his sexism, and his influence on women writers, see Kinnahan, *Poetics of the Feminine*. Williams's racial identity and its influence on his writing is discussed in Marzán, *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams,* Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora*, and Colón, "Here's to You, Meestair Robangson." Many of these studies connect Williams's political convictions to his aesthetic practices, as does this essay. Sánchez González reminds us that Williams has long been "defined in academic discourse as 'white' American," yet many critics attribute his facility with multiple forms and styles of poetry to his cultural fluency (43). For example, when he compares Williams' sensitivity toward his mother's stories of life in Puerto Rico to the poet's formal experimentation, Colón writes that "Williams was a master of synthesizing experience and aesthetics" and "Williams's greatest contribution to poetry was his synthesis of preexisting poetic forms and subsequent invention of new patterns of poetic diction, innovations importantly related to his inter-American experience (6).

[2] Reviewers have employed a variety of terms to describe *Paterson*'s unorganized style: Isaac Rosenfeld called it a "scrap-book" (173), Parker Tyler said it was put together in "an 'inspired' jig-saw fashion" (179), and Honig, too, saw the text as a conglomerate of disparate pieces that "insist on their own self-distractedness, their own 'deformity'" (182). Randall Jarrell boldly declared that the poem was not, in fact, organized at all: *Paterson* demonstrates "the Organization of Irrelevance (or, perhaps, the Irrelevance of

Organization)" (239). Jarrell's frustration is palpable when he advises critics to stop imposing "*ex post facto* organization" on a work that does not merit the effort. He warns, "if something is somewhere, one can always find Some Good Reason for its being there, but if it had not been there, would one reader have missed it?"

[3] Jarrell's assessment relies on the premise that concision is the hallmark of good poetry: the idea—long associated with the lyric in particular—that nothing extraneous should enter a poem and that excess of detail is rightfully the purview of prose works like the novel. This idea had particular purchase for those who subscribed to Pound's "A Few Don't's" dictum, "Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something." Jarrell's assessment also aligns him with the prevalent criticism of the day such as Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn*, which was published in the same year as *Paterson* 2. Famous for its celebration of close reading, the book hypothesizes that poetry must demonstrates a "principle of unity," a balancing force that encompasses all its disparate parts (195).

[4] While Williams clearly admired Nash's essay, we can imagine he would have taken issue with parts of it. Nash goes so far as to suggest that the prose *is* the "anti-poetic," Stevens' old label for Williams' work that Williams strongly declaimed in his letter to Parker Tyler. Nash writes, "can we at least admit that the prose is not poetry, and starting from there build up some kind of meaning and definition for the quality of Williams' verse that Wallace Stevens blandly and reasonably chose to call 'anti-poetic'?" (27). Given this blatant use of a designation that Williams' so despised, his extreme appreciation of Nash's work is somewhat surprising. That Williams excuses Nash's appreciation of Stevens' idea helps us appreciate the extent to which Williams craved critical attention for the poetry-prose form of *Paterson*: he was willing to overlook Nash's failings in favor of his overall focus on *Paterson*'s prose.

[5] Poems will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number when first introduced and then cited by line number thereafter. This poem is on pages 41-42 of *The Complete Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, and these lines are 1-7.

[6] Oftentimes, spelling errors like "intellectua" and typographical irregularities like the upside down chapter numbers were adjusted in subsequent editions of *Spring and All*, usually to conform with conventional grammar and typography. But as I've noted, these were not the only changes to the text, which was repeatedly revised and reissued by Williams in various forms. Thus, I agree with Hatlen and Steinman who argue that such changes suggest that there is no single, authoritative version of *Spring and All*, and each distinct iteration deserves attention to each of its component parts. The fact remains that the prose but not the poems of the 1923 *Spring and All* is riddled with grammatical irregularities and spoken by a contradictory and bombastic persona, textual features of the first edition that demand being read as fundamental to that edition's poetics.

[7] J. D. Scrimgeour writes that in *Spring and All*, "the prose is almost always presented as separate and inferior" while "the verse […] puts these theories into action"

(65). While Brian Bremen give some credence to the prose, he does so by identifying passages that are more like poetry and prose: of the prose passage after "Elsie," he suggests that, "Williams is obviously toying with the imaginative possibilities of prose here. What Williams is writing is not strict prose, but a highly charged language that both breaks down our traditional notions of prose and yet remains distinct from what he calls 'poetry'" (224).

[8] For example, the anthropologist James Clifford's ethnographic reading of "To Elsie" located the poem at the center of what Clifford identified as Williams's "ethnic modernity," a phrase which encompasses for Clifford Williams's sympathy with ethnic and racial minorities (3). Linda Kinnahan reads "Elsie" as an example of Williams's awareness of gender oppression (230-3). And James Breslin argues that the poem encapsulates "the national desire for quick, easy wealth" and the corresponding "myth of success" (69).

[9] The idea that *Paterson* is a search for its own form emerged as early as 1950 when Vivian Mercier called it "a poem about how difficult it is to write a poem (210). James Breslin was the first to explore the idea at length and his examination led him to see *Paterson*'s lack of coherence as a successful quality: to Breslin, *Paterson* as a poem about its own construction, the poem "*is* the act of its creation" (171) and this generative power offers the hope that it is possible to create something meaningful (202). Ralph Nash, too, describes *Paterson*'s shape as "inventive" (198); Nash uses the word to explain how the poem traces a process of arriving at the correct content in the correct form. But what is a hopeful process to Breslin and Nash is instead "a compilation of false starts" to Margaret Dickie ("*Paterson*" 103). To Dickie, the "constant rebeginning" indicates that Williams was unable to handle the long-format poem. The poem's "constant search for form" is not performative but indicative of the poet's failure ("Williams Reading *Paterson*" 653).

[10] Passages from *Paterson* will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number. This poem is on page 3.

[11] Williams used John Barber and Henry Howe's 1844 *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* as a source for the Cumming story, although Barber and Howe in turn used Timothy Alden's *A Collection of American Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, volume five, as their original (*Historical Collections* 413, *A Collection* 238-243). The Sam Patch story was originally derived from the 1934 *Dictionary of American Biography* and Charles P. Longwell's *A Little Story of Old Paterson as Told by an Old Man*.

CHAPTER IV

ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POEMS "TEETERING ON THE EDGE" OF PROSE

Especially when compared to her poetry, Bishop's prose has received little scholarly attention. Yet critics are constantly admiring the prosiness of her poetry.[1] Consider Howard Moss's warm review of *Questions of Travel*:

> she is revolutionary in being the first poet successfully to use all the resources of prose. Her poems are so natural to read that they seem to teeter on that edge, where, for a moment, we think, "Why all this could be changed into prose!" Fine prose indeed, but prose still. But if one tries, say, to write out a Bishop poem as if it were prose, one soon realizes it is impossible to do so. (259)

Of course, Moss's task is not really "impossible," even if his point is logical: adding prose conventions to Bishop's poem—or taking away poetic ones—would fundamentally alter the text. Yet what is intriguing about what Moss describes is that he begins by assuming a fluid relationship between prose and poetry, where a text can pass easily from one category to the next, but he ends up deciding that the distinction between the two is integral to what makes Bishop's poetry what it is. It's as if he is saying, *the poems are like prose in everyway except that they are not prose*. While Moss's reasoning may be fuzzy, I find his assertion insightful. By "teetering on that edge" between poem and prose, Bishop's poems—and, I would add, her prose—are a constant reminder of the boundary between poetry and prose, that illusory yet illuminating line.

Since we continue to find ourselves curious about the prose in Bishop's poetry, perhaps it is time to turn to her prose itself. One of the first clues that Bishop's prose was

integral to her career and work as a writer is the sheer volume of it. The most recent edition of her stories and essays, *Prose* (2011), exceeds its partner volume, *Poems* (2011), in page length, with sixteen short stories, twenty literary essays and reviews, a travel book, *Brazil*, and Bishop's translations: *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* and the short stories of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. Further, prose stories were some of Bishop's earliest writings—in high school and college, she worked on a set of semi-autobiographical short stories and contemplated turning them into a novel. She wrote and published stories up until the final years of her life: *Prose* contains fourteen fragments and drafts that Bishop left unfinished at her death. In a different vein, Bishop's voluminous letters and journal writing also bear witness to her productivity and prowess in prose; Bishop's interest in the poetics of letter writing has led to analyses comparing her epistolary practice to her poetic practice, analyses that have brought scholars to notice that Bishop's concept of prose and poetry genres was fluid enough to allow for the productive intermixture of the two.[2] Finally, we must remember, too, that while the topics and concerns of her prose inspired many of her poems, there was at least one occasion where poetry inspired prose: Bishop's poem "First Death in Nova Scotia" provided the seed for her later story, "Memories of Uncle Neddy."

This poetry-prose feedback loop is formalized in *Questions of Travel*, where the prose story "In the Village" appears at the center of the volume of poems. It forms the hub of this text of memories and experiences, and some consider it a backdrop to the poetic speakers' explorations, autobiographical context for the less strictly autobiographical poems. But for all its difference from the poems in the book, it, too, is a text teetering on the edge of prose, tipping toward poetry. This is what Moss is getting at

when he describes “In the Village”: “Without using any of the conventional trappings of narrative—exposition, transition, climax—the narrator reconstructs a childhood day” (261). We can tell by the conventions Moss enumerates that he is thinking of the trappings of short story narratives, typically written in prose. Even though he does not find these conventions in Bishop’s story, he is still certain that the text is not a poem even though it is surrounded by them. He says as much when he notes that, although Bishop herself divides *Questions of Travel* into two sections, “Brazil” and “Elsewhere,” he thinks that, “it consists, really, of three,” and the third is, of course, “In the Village” (258). But Bishop decidedly did not divide *Questions of Travel* into poetry and prose. As Sandra Berry reminds us, “separating Bishop’s genres from each other, privileging poetry over prose, is something that Bishop herself did not do” (99). Yet by dwelling near the borderline between poetry and prose in these writings about identity and selfhood, Bishop’s versions of life narratives always point to their own gaps and fissures. As in the pictures of life that Bishop’s text presents, some gaps are literal, from the white space on a page between poems to the oceans separating the real Brazil from elsewhere, for example. But some are less certain, like the difference between poems and prose, perhaps, which compares to a tenuous bond between a mother and a child. In its complex explorations of boundary lines and divisions, those of self and identity as well as genre and form, *Questions of Travel* suggests that all boundaries are worth questioning and exploring—and, so often, they do not fall where we might expect.

Early on in her career, Bishop was fascinated by perceived differences between poetry and prose. In early discussions with Lowell about her first published short story “Gwendolyn,” for example, Bishop tried to work out the difference between the two

when she noticed that writing "the truth" in poetry felt different from writing it prose: "It's almost impossible not to tell the truth in poetry, I think, but in prose it keeps eluding one in the funniest way" (*Words in Air* 161). Bishop originally thought writing prose was easier than writing poetry. For a writer who agonized over her poetry, often revising a single poem for years, writing prose was, at first, faster, which brought her relief. In a 1953 letter to Lowell, she describes the unusually painless writing process of "Gwendolyn," for example: "I feel a debt of gratitude to it because it's the first thing I ever wrote right off on the typewriter, in one day, just the way it is, and it started me off on several more that have been going much more easily than they used to" (*Words in Air* 141). But what started easily soon became more complicated. Bishop quickly grew interested in the aesthetics of the story: by August 29, 1953, she found herself describing her curiosity to Kit and Ilse Barker, "I am really getting interested in what I now think is the Art of story writing. I just wrote off some prose-poetry from time to time before . . . but now I am taking it more seriously" (*One Art* 272). As Bishop took prose more seriously, any easy distinctions between it and poetry began to dissolve. By the time she published her second short story, "In the Village," she was referring to her prose style as "poetic" or "poetic-prose," and "In the Village" was "a prose-poem." (*Elizabeth Bishop and* The New Yorker 90, 95, 113, 291, 431). As her easy distinctions between poem and prose began to fall away, writing prose (and, it turns out, publishing it, sharing it, and talking about it) became increasingly more complicated and complex for Bishop. Tracing "In the Village" from Bishop's desk to the *The New Yorker*, from *The New Yorker* to Robert Lowell's revision of "In the Village" as a conventional poem, "The Scream," and from there to its inclusion in *Questions of Travel* and finally into Bishop's collected

prose, reveals how Bishop continually resisted distinguishing poetry from prose even as she mined their apparent division for creative opportunities.

"Village" is the result of a long apprenticeship in the semi-autobiographical short-story form: as early as high school, Bishop began to write in prose about her childhood memories, particularly the events that led to her mother's removal to a sanitarium. The memories that the poet drew from were a few, hazy recollections: Bishop only knew her mother, Gertrude Bishop, intermittently and only at the beginning of her life. In 1914, Gertrude Bishop was first hospitalized for mental illness that had resulted from the untimely death of her husband William Bishop, the poet's father, who succumbed to complications of a kidney disease just eight months after Bishop was born. Bishop's mother was in and out of hospitals after that, and when she was not hospitalized, she stayed with her family in Great Village, Nova Scotia—often, with Bishop's grandparents, William Brown Boomer and Elizabeth Hutchinson Boomer. Thus, young Bishop spent her earliest years with her Boomer grandparents, awaiting her mother's occasional returns home. This meant that Bishop's earliest regular caretakers were her maternal grandparents and aunts, not her mother, Gertrude.[3] In 1916, Gertrude Bishop became a permanent resident in a sanatorium in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and Bishop never saw her again. But her mother was not out of her thoughts: during high school, Bishop started to write short stories about her childhood, stories that focused on Lucius, a young boy living in Great Village, whose mother, Easter, bore a personality and behaviors similar to Gertrude's. When Gertrude Bishop died during Bishop's college years, Lucius once again became a focus for Bishop's writing, and she began to develop the stories into a novel.[4] But the novel was set aside when Bishop met Marianne Moore

and, at Moore's encouragement, began to shape a career as a poet instead of a novelist. It was not until Bishop moved to Brazil in the 1950s that she revisited her childhood writings and began again to write prose in earnest. When she returned to the idea of Lucius, he became the forebear for Bishop's main character in "In the Village."

"In the Village" was written following "Gwendolyn" in 1952; both are Nova Scotia stories, part of a series that would eventually include several pieces. "Village" shares much with "Gwendolyn," especially the setting, era, and characters from Bishop's past. Yet from the beginning, Bishop spoke of the form of "Village" differently from the way she spoke of the form of "Gwendolyn": "Gwendolyn" was a conventional short story, but "In the Village" was something else. Bishop's publishers seemed to agree: "Gwendolyn" was warmly received for publication at *The New Yorker* but "Village" was not. Bishop carried out a long, tense exchange with her publishers over the work, and in her letters, Bishop mostly resists all attempts to make the piece conform to editorial expectations for a traditional short story. Katherine White, Bishop's primary correspondent, explained that *The New Yorker* was enthusiastic about the "poetic quality" of "Village" but concerned that the story did not have a strong "thread of narrative": "In one or two places this thread is so thin that it seems to break entirely," she wrote. White assured Bishop: "We do not mean by this that you need to turn your lovely prose poem into a conventional short story," yet she went on to request changes that would indeed conventionalize Bishop's poetic prose, such as supplying quotation marks and pronouns to indicate characters' speeches, restructuring single lines into paragraphs, and adding exposition. Bishop's letters in response defend the poetic features of the prose: "I'm not sure that I'll feel able to change as much as you may want changed—the paragraphing,

for example, and the quotations. I've worked over them for a long time to try to get a certain tempo that I *think* I've got" (98). When neither could satisfy the other, Bishop set the story aside for several months and did not return to it until the next summer, 1953, when she once again revised it extensively. In July, she tried the story on White again, meanwhile venting to Kit and Ilse Barker, "I'm so sick of re-typing my best story—I gave up after long correspondence with the N Yer last January. Now I've re-done it a little, but will not concede another comma for clarities sake [. . .] But one tires of typing even a masterpiece I find—" (113 n. 1). Bishop's correspondence with the Barkers reveals how important the story had become to Bishop. Of course, the content of the story—Bishop's memories of her mother, the only parent who survived past Bishop's infancy—would have been emotionally meaningful, yet "best story" and "masterpiece" suggest aesthetic value, pride, and a recognition of her own talent that Bishop rarely acknowledged. In the end, the final round of revisions satisfied *The New Yorker*. White wrote to accept the story on July 29, and the story appeared in the magazine on December 19, 1953.

The story *The New Yorker* printed had become as much a narrative about creating art as a story about Bishop's childhood, an ars poetica that depicts the process of using art to respond to significant trauma—here, the loss of a mother and father.[5] Bishop's story begins and ends with the depiction of the mother's trauma: a scream in reaction to a purple dress that would be her first colorful clothing after wearing only black since the loss of her husband. In the context of the story, the scream expands to symbolize the mother's bereavement and distress. Apart from one flashback, the scenes are presented in chronological order, beginning with the dress fitting that results in the scream and closing

with a scene depicting the mother's absence, shown by the fact that the child must now mail her grandmother's care package off to the mother in the sanitarium. In the opening frame, the scream resounding in the village symbolizes an enduring painful feeling:

> A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village. No one hears it; it hangs there forever; a slight stain in those pure blue skies, skies that travellers compare to those of Switzerland, too dark, too blue, so that they seem to keep on darkening a little more around the horizon—or is it around the rims of the eyes?—the color of the cloud of bloom on the elm trees, the violet on the fields of oats, something darkening over the woods and waters as well as the sky. The scream hangs like that, unheard, in memory—in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came there to live, forever—not loud, just alive forever. Its pitch would be the pitch of my village. Flick the lightning rod on top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it. (*The New Yorker* 26)

The scream is subtly troubling—a "stain" that lingers "forever," a note of panic that pervades all memories of the narrator's life in the village, "the pitch of my village." But right away, the text begins working to alleviate the pain of the scream. Locating the sound within the description of the town minimizes its damaging effects: the source of the scream becomes the spire of the village church, and the church itself becomes like a model church scaled to a hand, a hand with the power to call up the sound of the scream and to control the sad memories. The construction of the passage also ameliorates the effects of the scream: a sentence that begins by distinguishing "stain" from "pure blue skies" ends by conflating them, as commas and hyphens compound to confuse one object

from another so that it is difficult to tell whether the pictorial descriptions—the "cloud of bloom" on the elm, the violet cast of the oats, the darkening—are meant to illustrate stain or skies, effectively blending the stain into the skies. The text works similarly in the closing frame of the text, where the narrator explains the disappearance of the scream simultaneous to the presence of another sound, the "beautiful, pure" sound of the blacksmith shaping a horseshoe, a "clang" (34). Here, too, the grammar of the passage enables the descriptions of sound to refer to either scream or clang:

> Now there is no scream. Once there was one and it settled slowly down to earth one hot summer afternoon; or did it float up, into that dark, too dark, blue sky? But surely it has gone away, forever.
>
> *Clang*.
>
> It sounds like a bell buoy out at sea.
>
> It is the elements speaking: earth, air, fire, water.
>
> All those other things—clothes, crumbling postcards, broken china; things damaged and lost, sickened or destroyed; even the frail almost-lost scream—are they too frail for us to hear their voices long, too mortal?
>
> Nate!
>
> Oh, beautiful sound, strike again!

At the end of the story, the scream is at once "gone away, forever," and "almost-lost," a paradox upheld by the grammar that allows the "it" that "sounds like a bell buoy" and "is the elements" to refer to either scream or clang.[6] Thus, the clang does not entirely supplant the scream but pairs with it, just as, in the opening passage, the "stain" of the scream is not erased but joins with the sky. The convergence of clang and scream

conflates a crafted sound—the blacksmith's clang—with the mother's cry of pain and bereavement. Critics have noticed that the role of the blacksmith in the story parallels that of a poet: the blacksmith adroitly wields fire and metal to shape valuable and even beautiful things, like horseshoes and a ring for the girl, much as a poet may transform difficult, dangerous life circumstances to create poems.[7] Fire is useful in the blacksmith's control but dangerous when it destroys a neighbor's barn in the night, an event that is portrayed as the catalyst for the mother's final breakdown and removal from her daughter. In Bishop's story, the event of the fire—and, by extension, the little girl's loss of her parents—is transformed into textual art, an emotionally precise depiction of a terrible experience that may not alleviate the pain but assuages it, just as the traumatic scream is not entirely lost but, as it is transformed by the story, becomes a "beautiful sound" that is at once a memorial and representation of the original trauma of loss as well as an aestheticized version of it.

While the "Village" stands astride realism and lyricism, presenting depictions of Bishop's real experience and as well as aesthetic representations of emotion, it also straddles the modes traditionally used for realism and lyricism respectively—prose and poetry.[8] If we set aside Moss's assertion that the story is missing the "conventional trappings of narrative," we see that the text actually bears clear resemblances to traditional prose stories. For example, this piece shares with many short stories brevity, a small cast of characters, and a largely self-contained plot, and, like many prose memoirs, it looks back to past events in the writer's life, considering real places and real people. *New Yorker* readers would have intuited that "In the Village" was prose fiction based on its appearance on the page: then, as now, *The New Yorker*'s genre distinctions are evident

in its printing customs, with prose always appearing in orderly, evenly spaced journalistic columns and poetry inset in spaces that interrupt two columns of prose together.[9]

But "Village" also, at times, borrows conventions from poetry. On the pages of *The New Yorker*, the columns of prose are frequently interspersed with sentences forming a jagged right-hand margin, short sentences printed on a single line that are more reminiscent of lines of poetry than the journal prose. These moments are easy to pick out as typographic disturbances on the page, and they may also be distinguished within the story by the disruption they signal for the narrator. An example early in the story marks the mother's scream itself:

> *Clang*.
>
> The pure note: pure and angelic.
>
> The dress was all wrong. She screamed.
>
> The child vanishes. (*The New Yorker* 26)

The scream has a marked effect on the child: she "disappears," suggesting she is fearful of the mother's disproportionate outburst, and so she escapes, traumatized. Likewise, the text's usual shape is interrupted in this moment: before now, the child's world has been relatively calm, and paragraphs have been longer and more developed before the outburst. When Bishop mentioned the "tempo" of the piece, she may have been referencing moments like this one, where line breaks draw out the story, literally creating more length on the page and pauses between the short sentences. These pauses dwell on moments of confusion and, oftentimes, pain where the child's world and the world of the text are equally unsettled. Something similar happens later on during the neighbor's house fire, another traumatic moment of the story. Here, conventional dialogue abuts

unusually formatted prose description as the narrator presents a conversation she overhears in the night when the family is scrambling to console the mother after an episode of anxiety brought on by the fire:

> But now I am caught in a skein of voices, my aunts' and my grandmother's, saying the same things over and over, sometimes loudly, sometimes in whispers:
>
> "Hurry! For heaven's sake, *shut the door*!"
>
> "Sh!"
>
> "Oh, we can't go on like this, we…"
>
> "It's too dangerous. Remember that…"
>
> "Sh! Don't let her…"
>
> A door slams.
>
> A door opens. The voices begin again. (32)

This is perhaps one of the instances where Bishop's *New Yorker* editors might have preferred more pronouns, yet the typical markings of a prose dialogue—which are also, significantly, a form of lineation—bring enough order. Imagine, for example, how chaotic this section would seem if these voices were grouped in a prose paragraph, perhaps undifferentiated by punctuation and spacing, rather than presented as above. In this case, the convention of writing dialogue in lines serves the narrator well. This, then, stands in contrast to what happens next. When the text continues into the description, the line break between "A door slams" and "A door opens" does not follow the rules of good prose, and it likewise signals a moment of eerie quiet that would be anything but comforting for the child. This subtle interplay between poetry and prose forms draws

attention to how arbitrary formal signification may seem yet how meaningful it may be: something as simple as drawing in the right-hand margin has different effects based on its application. When conventions of line and lineation are appropriate to the larger prose form, they generally advantage the narrator, but when a similar typographic effect upsets prose conventions, it coordinates with a disturbance in the narrative, too. Emotional stability depends on rules and regularity, the story seems to suggest, both in the world and in representations of it, and it can be disorienting and frightening when life and texts fail to meet expectations.

These subtle arguments about form and genre were lost on readers like Robert Lowell, who always made clean, simple distinctions between Bishop's prose and her poetry. Still, he unfailingly encouraged Bishop in both, often lavishing praise on her prose. "In the Village" was a particular favorite. Reading "Village" in *The New Yorker*, he gushed: "Your *New Yorker* story is wonderful. A great ruminating Dutch landscape of goneness. I could weep for the cow" (*Words in Air* 151). Over the course of the next decade, his enthusiasm for this particular piece never waned. First, his interest spilled over into his own writing: in 1956, he wrote a similarly autobiographical story of his own, "91 Revere St.," which described his stuffy Boston upbringing. But although the piece was well received—it ended up featuring prominently in *Life Studies*, the book that won him a Pulitzer—it did not measure up to Bishop's story in Lowell's eyes: it is "thin and arty after your glorious Nova Scotia mad mother and cow piece," he told her (181). As Bishop kept writing autobiographical prose throughout the 1950s and 60s, he kept prodding her to publish the stories. He suggested "a Nova Scotia growing-up novel," and he encouraged her to consider publishers—"By the way, Jason Epstein at Random House

would very much like to see the manuscript of your stories, if it is clear of ties to Houghton and Mifflin," (141, 367). In 1962, when "In the Village" was reprinted in the *New Yorker*'s short story anthology, Lowell returned to his theme of Bishop as prose writer with broad encouragement: Lowell wrote to Bishop on January 13, 1962, "You are a prose classic to ever so many people, as well as a poet classic" (383). Bishop definitely entertained the idea of a prose volume—we know she planned a table of contents for a volume to be called *In the Village & Other Stories* or *In the Village: Stories and Essays*. But on January 22, 1962, she responded to that letter from Lowell with characteristic anxiety, now directed at the quality of her work in the stories: "I've been going over the stories and don't think they're good enough" (386). This time, Lowell responded by displaying his admiration of "In the Village" in a new way, enclosing, along with his March 10, 1962 response, a draft of "The Scream," a poetic rewriting of Bishop's story. In the letter, he explained the poem and his process, how he had used the text from Bishop's story and added only two lines of his own, ostensibly derived from his kindergarten-age daughter:

> I tried versing your 'In the Village.' The lines about the heart are Harriet's on her kindergarten society, the rest is merely your prose put into three-beat lines and probably a travesty, making something small and literary out [of] something much larger, gayer and more healthy. I let the scream throw out the joyful *clang*. Anyway, I send it with misgivings. Maybe you could use it for raw material for a really great poem. (390)

Lowell's "misgivings" likely had as much to do with "Scream" as with another draft poem enclosed, "Water," a poem that recollected what he later described as the moment

he decided to propose marriage to Bishop. But he was also clearly worried about taking liberties with Bishop's work and reducing something "larger," "gayer," and "healthy" to a "small" and "literary" piece.

And indeed, worries marked the exchange that unfolded, an uneasy back-and-forth with implications extending beyond the story and its poem offspring, touching on the two poets' ideas about their writing processes and the role of both poetry and prose within that process. Until now, Lowell had championed Bishop's prose for its own qualities, but now, his tinkering with "Village" suggests he sees Bishop's prose as a stop along the way toward poetry, as if the prose version should not stand alone. Lowell's suggestion recalls Bishop's mentor Marianne Moore here, who, in a December 20, 1922 letter to Ivor Winters, posited that poetry and prose might function together as "steps" in a writing process, one leading ultimately toward poetry: "prose is a step beyond poetry I feel, and then there is another poetry that is a step beyond that" (*The Collected Letters of Marianne Moore* 192). At this moment in 1962, Lowell presents this "raw material" to Bishop as a chance for her to follow Moore's order of operations with "Village." Of course, Moore's and Lowell's thinking aligns with a long-held belief in a literary hierarchy that prizes poetry above prose, and Moore's "steps" could also refer to levels in a hierarchy. At any rate, Lowell's encouragement is certainly meant to spur Bishop toward her best work, but "Scream" and Lowell's explanation of it are an unavoidably backhanded compliment to Bishop, ultimately suggesting that Bishop's prose story could yet be improved.

It's no wonder, then, that Bishop's response to Lowell's "Scream" carries a note of despondency. When she wrote back to Lowell on April 4, her praise for "Scream"

comes paired with self-mockery over her own struggles with a new prose piece she was then drafting, "Uncle Artie" (which would in time become "Memories of Uncle Neddy"):

> I don't know why I bother to write 'Uncle Artie' really. I shd. just send you my first notes and you can turn him into a wonderful poem. He is even more your style than the Village story was. 'The Scream' really works well, doesn't it. The story is far enough behind me so I can see it as a poem now. The first few stanzas I saw only my story—then the poem took over—and the last stanza is wonderful. It builds up beautifully, and everyone of importance is there. But I was very surprised. (402)

Certainly, Bishop is chiding both herself and Lowell when she proposes sending her "first notes" on "Artie" to Lowell for "a wonderful poem." Yet it is also as if she, too, signs on to the idea that her prose was only a step along the way to her best work—that is, her poetry. Indeed, "Artie" itself was prose derived from "First Death in Nova Scotia," published just that March of 1962 in *The New Yorker*. Going along with Lowell's (and Moore's) hierarchy, Bishop seems to forget that "Artie" was already "a wonderful poem,"—one that Lowell had pointedly admired in the letter forwarding "Scream," in fact (390). Perhaps Lowell sensed he had taken a misstep in presenting "Scream" as he did, for when he wrote again, it was to reinforce his enthusiasm of "Village" as prose, not poetry: "Glad this and my tampering with 'In the Village' didn't annoy you. When "The Scream" is published I'll explain, it's just a footnote to your marvelous story" (405). Bishop, in turn, employed italics to affirm Lowell and his poem in her next letter: "No—*I was very pleased with 'The Scream*' (412). But despite her strained enthusiasm for the prose-turned-poem, Bishop never did send "Artie" to Lowell (although it did take many

more years before "Uncle Neddy" was published in a 1977 issue of *Southern Review*). As this exchange between Lowell and Bishop reveals, Bishop saw prose as more than an exercise for generating poetry. But Lowell misses the nuances of Bishop's project with prose, that "Village" was already as much poem as prose as it needed to be, and that he had indeed made something "literary"—that is, conventionalized a genre-bending piece—when he devised "Scream."

That Lowell continued to miss the point is evident in the way he published "The Scream." In *For the Union Dead*, "Scream" is not presented as a "footnote" or addendum to Bishop's story, nor as "raw material" for a poem, but as a separate, stand-alone work: right below the poem's title, Lowell explains that it is "derived from Elizabeth Bishop's story, *In the Village*."[10] Indeed, what Lowell published in *For the Union Dead* is certainly distinct from Bishop's original; despite their shared lineage, the two works are strikingly different. As he notes in his first letter, Lowell created the poem using Bishop's own words and phrases—Harriet's lines and the final stanza are the only exceptions—yet the words he uses come primarily from the beginning of Bishop's story. Seven of the eight "Scream" stanzas derive their imagery from the first page of the *New Yorker* piece. Lowell's narrative thus excludes the scenes depicting the fire and the resulting portrayal of the family's anxiety toward the mother's condition—the climax of Bishop's text—and Lowell also excludes parts of the story that explore the relationship between the narrator and the grandmother. Then too, Lowell himself was certainly aware of that fact that he had removed the central coupling of *clang* with *scream*: "I let the scream throw out the joyful *clang*." Yet his brief observation of this key component hardly acknowledges the importance of the two sounds together in Bisohp's "Village," where the pairing of such

opposite signals of trauma and delight, respectively, is indicative of the story's artistic methods. In fact, "The Scream" removes both the narrative about creating art from Bishop's story as well as the effects of that art, the formal functions that worked to assuage the trauma of the these memories. Ultimately, what divides Lowell's text from Bishop's is the fact that another central pairing—the poetic interplay within the prose—is lost in Lowell's conventional poem. Lowell's poem eschews prose resources and instead relies only poetic conventions that set up boundaries between the beautiful and troubling memories even as poetry is now separated entirely from prose.

Lowell's changes are apparent from the beginning of "Scream": like "Village," the poem borrows the strategy of the remembered scream as a frame for the whole text, but where Bishop's frame introduces the story as both a past event and something with active significance in the present, Lowell's casts the events as strictly history. Bishop's story opens by describing the scream, "A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village," and then pivots to discuss the skies before returning to the scream, which is "in the past, in the present, and those years between" and "alive forever," something with an ongoing effect on the narrator (*The New Yorker* 26). "Scream" copies the opening few words of "Village" and then likewise turns to the sky, yet Lowell does not depict the scream as "alive forever" but rather as something that is "thinning" or fading:

> A scream, the echo of a scream,
>
> now only a thinning echo . . .
>
> As a child in Nova Scotia,
>
> I used to watch the sky,

Swiss sky, too blue, too dark. (1-5)

Ominously, Lowell's "thinning echo" is already in danger of disappearing, an alteration that is heightened by the addition of the ellipsis concluding line two. Then, too, Lowell's speaker introduces the past tense "used" as soon as line four, whereas Bishop's narrator talks of the sky's color in present tense, as one that "travellers *compare* to those of Switzerland." Where Bishop's text hovers between temporal spaces, Lowell's is immediately in the past.

Lowell's ending is as starkly different from Bishop's as his opening is: Lowell ends "Scream" with loss, a contrast to the hopeful convergence of the terrible scream and the beautiful "clang" in Bishop's story. Recall that in "Village," the scream's existence becomes a paradox—"gone away, forever" yet also "almost-lost"—that lets the narrator retain her memory although it is lessened, with mitigated pain (*The New Yorker* 34). In "Scream," however, all of the people and voices of the past have now disappeared:

A scream! But they are all gone,
those aunts and aunts, a grandfather,
a grandmother, my mother—
even her scream—too frail
for us to hear their voices long. (36-40)

Like so many of Lowell's lines in the poem, the final phrase "too frail / for us to hear their voices long" is quoted directly from "Village" yet significantly recontextualized in his poem. In Bishop's story, the phrase is part of a question about "things," not family members, although in Bishop's list, these things take on metaphysical as well as material significance: "All those other things—clothes, crumbling postcards, broken china; things

damaged and lost, sickened or destroyed; even the frail almost-lost scream—are they too frail for us to hear their voices long, too mortal?" (34). In the story, the question gets answered indirectly by the narrator calling to the blacksmith, a correlative for the poet: "Nate! / Oh, beautiful sound, strike again!" It is as if Bishop calls upon herself to respond in the story's wake, a suggestion emphasized by the fact that the text shifts into poetic form here, as if a poet's response were already underway. Bishop's story is evidence that one of the poet's roles is to give voice to the things and people of memory that are "too frail" to speak for themselves—entities in danger of being forgotten. "Village" emphasizes the importance of depicting complex worlds of people *and* things to convey memories, ideas, and feelings; for example, creators and their creations are intertwined when the blacksmith's labors become the "clang" that evokes such significance for the narrator. Heightening the differences on this point, Lowell's poem eliminates both "clang" and the dialogue of Bishop's characters. In "Scream," the only quoted speech is given from the narrator's perspective: "When she went away I thought / 'But you can't love everyone, / your heart won't let you," (33-35). Lowell's poem stays rigidly within the purview of a reminiscing narrator, while Bishop's text is imaginatively unfixed, not only exploring multiple temporal perspectives but representing the things and people of the story's environment sympathetically, enlivening them even through memory. It may not surprise us that Bishop's poetry invokes the lyric despite her realist prose, but that Lowell's poem is so strongly realistic is indeed unusual.

The sense that Lowell's speaker is isolated within her own perspective is reinforced by the attributes of the stanzas in Lowell's poem. Unlike Bishop's story, where scenes and events are so closely juxtaposed on the page as to run into each other

semantically and formally, each of the five-line stanzas in "Scream" depicts a distinct scene from Bishop's story, and each is correspondingly comprised of separate syntactic units, removed from each other on the page by stanza breaks. Stanza three, for example, describes the blacksmith's shop, borrowing phrasing from page 26 of Bishop's *New Yorker* text:

> In the blacksmith's shop,
> the horseshoes sailed through the dark,
> like bloody little moons,
> red-hot, hissing, protesting,
> as they drowned in the pan. (11-13)

Two stanzas down the page, the dress-fitting scene appears, borrowing Bishop's wording from a paragraph that originally appeared just above the description of the blacksmith's shop on *New Yorker* page 26. Aside from the switch in order of appearance, the significant alteration here is that the connective tissue between Bishop's versions of the two scenes has been removed, one of the moments where Bishop's text segues into poem-like lineation, as I discussed in full above, that begins: "*Clang*. / The pure note: pure and angelic. / The dress was all wrong. She screamed" (26). Thus, whereas in "Village," the dress fitting is suffused with the sights and sounds of the blacksmith's shop, stanza five of "Scream" depicts the dress fitting as an isolated scene:

> One day she changed to purple,
> and left her mourning. At the fitting,
> the dressmaker crawled on the floor,
> eating pins, like Nebuchadnezzar

on his knees eating grass. (21-23)

Heightening the sense of separation, this stanza adds temporal distance, placing the dress fitting on a new day as well as in a different space, all of which is isolated within its own stanza. It is true that by retaining Bishop's image of the dressmaker's discomfort, Lowell's poem preserves a symbol of the uneasiness felt by all of Bishop's characters in this moment, from the dressmaker herself whose work triggered the scream to the family seeking to accommodate the agitated mother. The image recalls the accumulated anxiety that Bishop's narrator absorbs all at once and then ponders for the rest of the story—a process facilitated through Bishop's disparate sensory pairings like *clang* with *scream*. But in "Scream," the disassociation of events with the feelings they evoke, coupled with the fact that Lowell's stanzas each conclude with the end of a sentence, underscores the fact that this poem does not seek to make connections as Bishop's story does. Further compartmentalization is evident when the scream itself appears, not presented as a result of the fitting as it is in Bishop's story, but happening "later"—two stanzas later, in fact, divorced now from the dress-fitting scene by time and space on the page (31). Thus, "Scream" does not fuse opposites as "Village" does, that key strategy Bishop employs to assuage difficult memories, especially the dress fitting. Remember, it is the poetic moments of Bishop's text that pair disparate things, moments of connection that also serve as formal ligaments between bodies of prose. When the text becomes strictly poetry in Lowell's hands, these formal connections are dissolved and their psychological functions along with them.

It is not surprising, then, to find that when Bishop herself revisits "Village," she chooses to heighten the formal hybridity of the text rather than conventionalize it as

Lowell had done. She does so by setting the story in an unusual context: she finally takes Lowell's advice to publish her prose in her own book, but she does so by making "Village" part of her 1965 poetry collection, *Questions of Travel*. Ironically, as soon as she decided to put "Village" in a book of poems, Bishop found herself defending and explaining the hybrid text all over again. If *The New Yorker* editors questioned whether "Village" was prose-like enough, wouldn't *Questions of Travel* readers wonder if it was enough like poetry? Bishop seems to have imagined that they would because when she first mentions the idea to Randall Jarrell, for example, she jumps to justify herself by once again identifying the text as a mix with poetry, more "prose-poem" than "story": "I'm also thinking of putting in that story of mine called 'In the Village'—the one Cal wrote a poem on. There are three or four poems that go with it, and it is more a prose-poem than a story, anyway" (*One Art* 431). But to gain the approval of her publishers, Bishop faced real, not imagined, objections: Robert Giroux initially balked at the idea of publishing "Village" in a book of poems because the move was too imitative of Lowell's with "91 Revere Street" (*Words in Air* 573). Giroux had forgotten that it was "Village" that originally inspired Lowell's piece. When he read Bishop's story, however, he changed his mind; he would have noticed how different "Village" is from "91 Revere Street"—the latter is more family history than short story or lyric poem—or maybe Giroux, like Lowell before him, was simply taken by the excellence of the piece itself. He likely realized what Bishop had been saying all along: that "Village" "goes with" poetry, and it complements and extends the poems of *Questions of Travel*. When Bishop explained Giroux's decision to Lowell, she once again found herself defending the idea of putting "Village" among poems, repeating her stance on the correspondence between

"prose-poem" and poems, now to the longtime champion of her prose and author of "Scream":

> Giroux is being very nice about my book, I think, and I wish I felt better about its contents. I decided I'd put in "In the Village," too—to go with the several Nova Scotian poems.—At first he said no, it was imitating you too much (it was)—but then when he'd read the story he changed his mind, and is now all for including it. (*Words in Air* 573)

Calling her idea "too much" an imitation of Lowell, it is as if Bishop herself has forgotten that "Village" predated "91 Revere Street." But Bishop sticks to her original pronouncement: that "Village" "goes with" the poems. And in the end, Bishop didn't even imitate the structure of *Life Studies*: when *Questions of Travel* was published in October of 1965, "Village" appeared at its center, not its start—*with* the poems.

Indeed, given its role in the book, it is not enough to say that this text merely "goes" with the Nova Scotia poems. In fact, to say that poems of *Questions of Travel* merely go together is an understatement, too. Together, the pieces within this volume accrete to a picture of a life—loosely, Bishop's life. Indeed, the two sub-sections of the volume correspond to Bishop's life at the time of writing: the "Brazil" section contains poems inspired by her experiences living in Rio, and the poems of "Elsewhere" mostly comprise her earlier memories of life in Nova Scotia or the surrounding New England area. "Brazil" opens with Bishop's arrival to the continent, and together the first three poems explore the idea of traveling to a new place and making a new home there. The remaining eight poems of the "Brazil" section illustrate life in the new home, and these poems can be loosely divided into the poems of everyday Brazil life—"Squatter's

Children," "Manuelzinho," "Electrical Storm," "Song for the Rainy Season," and "Armadillo"—followed by three poems that describe local and historical Brazilian life beyond Bishop's immediate purview—"The Riverman," "Twelfth Morning; or What You Will," and "The Burglar of Babylon." These poems illustrate other lives in Brazilian "villages," anticipating the village of Bishop's childhood in "In the Village." Thus, "In the Village" now links the book's two sections, appearing just after the final poem of "Brazil" and at the beginning of "Elsewhere." Following "Village," the poems of "Elsewhere" start by moving chronologically through Bishop's childhood in Nova Scotia in "Manners," "Sestina," "First Death in Nova Scotia." Then "Filling Station," "Sunday, 4 a.m.," "Sandpiper, "From Trollope's Journal," and "Visits to St. Elizabeths" are loosely North American, sometimes pertaining directly to Bishop's New England life.

Together, poems and prose glaringly evoke a life narrative, yet the book debates the idea of story, questioning especially what counts as "story," what form it should take, and who should tell it. The book's vagueness on the idea of story starts to explain Lowell's genre confusion when he first saw "Village" in the book. He picks up on the narrative arch with "Village" as its keystone and even wishes for more of Bishop's prose pieces, but his vocabulary shifts here, and for the first time, he calls "Village" a poem: "You were very right to put your story in, it's one of your finest poems, and bridges the two sections. I rather wish you'd thrown *all*, or almost all, your stories in, even though it would have made jags in the books pattern" (591). As if anticipating this slippage, Bishop lists "Village" as "In the Village (a story)" in the table of contents. But the distinction rings hollow: "Village" is flanked by poems that are equally as narrative. Preceding "Village" in the "Brazil" section is "The Burglar of Babylon," a ballad—a traditional

poetry story-telling form—that depicts the tragic capture and death of Micuçú, a thief who lives in Rio de Janeiro (35-44). On the other side of "Village" is "Manners," another ballad, this one set in Nova Scotia; it depicts a child and her grandfather on an afternoon wagon drive and describes the people they meet along the way in sequence (78-79).

Even to say that all the poems share an autobiographical perspective would be too simple. When the poems in *Questions of Travel* seem most autobiographical, their poetic speakers resist easy equivalence to the poet. The speaking personae change considerably from poem to poem, with multiple speakers who we might call "autobiographical." For example, "Manners," "Sestina," and "First Death in Nova Scotia" all include a child speaker, yet even in this trio, the perspective changes, moving from the first-person narration of a child's perspective in "Manners," to omniscient narration in "Sestina," and back to the first-person child speaker in "First Death." Though each text clearly represents Bishop's childhood memories, to read the personae of these poems as renditions of Bishop may cause us to overlook questions of how and why the perspective fluctuates so greatly and frequently. Even when the narrator seems most like a unified lyric speaker, she contradicts and interrupts herself, constantly questioning and denying her attempts to define her own unified speaking voice. This happens most noticeably in prose: in "Village" the frame narrative introduces a reminiscent older version of the child as primary narrator. But the narrator then moves in and out of the child's psyche, sometimes using "I," as in "I had watched my grandmother and younger aunt unpacking her clothes," and sometimes saying "the child" instead (26-27). In poems, such shifts are subtler, but still present: sometimes, the tone of the voice modulates so abruptly and disruptively that the effect is the creation of a second personal voice, someone who not

only sounds different from the first narrator but also seems to think differently and understand the action of the poem differently. In other poems, the speaker seems to step outside of herself, transforming from a first-person speaker to an omniscient narrator. In both "Arrival at Santos" and "Questions of Travel," she identifies other personae by name: the "tourist" and the "traveller," respectively. The speaker may seem as if she is talking to herself, but the interaction between the speaker and other personae and their different ways of understanding the events taking place in the poem suggest a more deeply divided speaker.

The first few poems of *Questions of Travel* help establish that the book is a disjunctive narrative of self. "Arrival at Santos" introduces the personal narrator and immediately revokes any sense that she is a conventional lyric speaker by depicting her in conversation with another version of herself (3-4). We know from Bishop's letters that "Arrival at Santos" is based on her passage by boat to Brazil (*Words in Air* 130). The poem is clearly taken from her experience and, given Bishop's effusive description of Miss Breen in her letter to Lowell, the tourist who befriends Miss Breen in the poem seems an obvious correlation for Bishop. Yet the other voice in the poem, the one who speaks first, is clearly Bishop, too: not only do the pronouns in the poem eventually combine the two voices into one "I," but the narration also shows that the first voice has access to the tourist's thoughts and feelings. As Eleanor Cook puts it, the "'campy,' fussy" tourist "reads like a self-consciously dramatized part of Bishop's own persona that her better self keeps an eye on" (200). The dialogue begins in the second stanza as the first voice addresses the second: "Oh, tourist, / is this how this country is going to answer you" the narrator asks,

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension?

Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag.
So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
I somehow never thought of there *being* a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen.
And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen (7-20)

The conciliatory tone of the narrator softens her incredulity at these "immodest demands" which, as she acknowledges, are not likely to be met in just eighteen days. The instruction "finish your breakfast" also connotes a soothing parental attitude, like a parent guiding a child to focus. The first voice, "Oh, tourist," seems most authoritative and knowledgeable about the characters and events of the poem, so we might read her as the voice of poet-narrator. But even a cursory knowledge of Bishop's life would lead one to guess that the demanding tourist matches the historical Bishop with her dreams and desires for a new life in Brazil. Finally, in the fourth stanza, the pronouns "your" and "I" that seem to differentiate the personae and the tourist meld into "we" and then "myself"

as the two voices become one voice, the voice of someone who descends with Miss Breen to the dock. But then, the tone of the speaker modulates again from the placating voice of the first narrator to the anxious and irrational voice of the tourist. As the speaker descends to the dock, she finds obstacles at every step, even where there are none to be found. She is fearful of the dock activity: "Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook! / Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's / skirt! There!" (23-25). Yet, there is apparently no cause for fear: Miss Breen is a retired police lieutenant and likely capable of climbing down on her own through the clamor. The first speaker reveals that the tourist's panic is unnecessary, likely displaced from her underlying fears about Brazil and whether it will live up to her expectations. But the form of the poem betrays that the first speaker, too, is affected by the trauma of transitioning from ship to port. In order for the rhyme scheme to work in the seventh stanza, the possessive "s" is pushed to the beginning of the eighth stanza so that the rhyme will sound on lines two and four, with "tall" and "Fall" (26-29). The "s" literally falls from one quatrain to the next, haltingly elongated, as if the speaker is jostled or pushed while speaking. "There. We are settled," she concludes (29), as they leave the dock and enter the country. Working together, the two voices navigate the crossing from the boat to the shore by sharing the physical and mental duress of the transition.

Where "Arrival at Santos" ends, the next poem begins, as the speaker leaves the dock to drive inland—"we are driving to the interior"—and arrives in the dense rainforest of "Brazil, January 1, 1502": "Januaries, Nature greets our eyes / exactly as she must have greeted theirs: / every square inch filling in with foliage—" (5-7). Calendar time also brings these two moments together in the poem, since "Arrival at Santos" is dated

January 1952. In addition, the reference to "January" alludes to the location: the Rio de Janeiro, or "January River," was the name Portuguese explorers gave to the site when they first encountered Guanabara Bay in 1502. As the story goes, the Portuguese mistakenly thought that the bay was the mouth of a river, a chance to travel by boat into the continent, but in reality, the bay marked a dead-end for water travel: the landscape was not as it seemed. In the poem, the conceit of the tapestry recreates the effect of seeing a beautiful but unreal setting, as if the colorful appearance is only an artful mirage that represents, perhaps incorrectly, the real scene. Like the explorers, the speaker is not able to get to the "interior" of the country yet, but is still on the outskirts looking in. In an attempt to understand her position, the speaker once again turns to another perspective, yet this time, instead of imagining another version of herself, she attempts to envision a perspective from the past. The focus shifts from personal history to national history as the speaker imaginatively explores what the Portuguese of 1502 might have seen as they looked from the shore toward the jungle.

In the sixteenth century, tapestries often depicted symbols and emblems as well as scenes; using the conceit of the tapestry, the speaker describes a Brazilian landscape laden with symbols. The "five sooty dragons" are described as "Sin", the mosses grow as "lovely hell-green flames," and lone female lizard has a "wicked tail" (24-25, 28-29, 35). Strangely, the most obvious symbol, the "big symbolic birds," seems obscurely defined: the birds are "pure-colored" as well as "spotted," and also half-hidden (21). While the speaker was able to adjudge the symbolic morality of the other plants and animals, she is unable to say conclusively what the symbol of the birds means; perhaps their silence deflects her attempts to understand them. In the third stanza, the speaker turns from her

description of the forest and imagines the Portuguese arriving on the Brazilian shore. Compared to the lush and colorful scenery, they are mechanical and metallic, "hard as nails, / tiny as nails, and glinting, / in creaking armor" (37-39). As "Christians," she explains, they would have found the scene "not unfamiliar" because they would have understood the symbols of good and evil as "an old dream of wealth and luxury" perhaps like an Eden (40, 44). Yet instead of caring for the land, the speaker illustrates how they take advantage of it:

> they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
> each out to catch an Indian for himself—
> those maddening little women who kept calling,
> calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
> and retreating, always retreating, behind it. (49-53)

While the speaker seeks to expose the injustice of the colonizers, she is interrupted by a parenthetical aside that questions her historical judgment. The comment in parenthesis effectively questions her rendition of history by claiming that the sounds of the women are just birds. Here, the differing perspectives seem problematic—one innocently denies the other's moral condemnation of the historical Portuguese. Yet perhaps the comment is not so innocent but merely mindful of the limits imposed by the metaphorical tapestry: the interrupting voice justifiably has difficulty making the comparison between "our eyes" and "theirs" since there were no women in the description of the jungle in stanzas one and two, just birds. Instead of accepting the third stanza as history, the parenthetical aside insists on the limits of the retrospective view and, by recalling the ongoing comparison between past and present, recalls the outsider status of the modern view as

well. While the comment does not support the atrocities of the Christians, it protects the obscurity of the women by halting the attempts to speak for them. The aside acts as a corrective to the speaker who seeks to recreate a historical perspective, as through the course of the poem, the speaker comes to understand the limits of imaginative memory.

In "Questions of Travel," the speaker attempts another investigation of past personae, this time exploring personal rather than national history (8-10). As the speaker grapples with understanding her own experience of travel, her attempts to define what she has seen only lead her to more questions. The poem expands beyond Brazil, although again, it begins with a suggestion of carry-over from the previous poem: the lush scenery in the first stanza suggests the similar forested landscape in "Brazil, January 1, 1502." However, in "Brazil" the speaker was close enough to the jungle to see wildlife, while here her perspective is panoramic: the waterfalls are indistinguishable from the clouds spilling over the cliffs, all looking small as "tearstains" on the mountainside (6). The aqueous air is moving past the mountains so quickly that it looks like they are boats in water, "capsized," because they could not keep up with the fast-paced travel of the air (11). Everything in the first stanza moves too fast, from the "crowded streams" to the "quick age or so" that it would take for the cloud actually to become a waterfall. Time passes and everything changes too quickly, the speaker seems to say. The speaker does not dwell on the landscape, but it acts as a background to her thoughts as she considers what it means to live in a world of movement. Implicit in her discussion of travel is the idea that we change, too, not only in terms of physical relocation but also in terms of a changing self and perspective on the world. Like the capsized mountains, even those bodies of matter that seem most solid are set in a changing landscape and will inevitably

change or be changed by their surroundings. The first question, which resurfaces at the end of the poem, stands out here because of its rhythm: “Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?” is a line of iambic pentameter (14). The question is paired with another question, still in iambic rhythm: “Where should we be today?” (15). Together, these two questions form the central discussion of the poem: not only “should we or shouldn’t we travel” but “what should we do about the fact that we must ‘be’ somewhere?” The very context of the poem examines the verb “to be,” suggesting that even when we are in one place, our existence is in a constant state of change. Always moving, the speaker does not pause to answer her own questions but keeps asking more questions. The speaker’s active mind demonstrates that even if she were to stay at home, her thoughts would still “travel” and explore new ideas.

The speaker pursues her questions of travel with memories of travel: the sites she is glad to have left home to see. Yet these memories are all presented as stories from along the way, not experiences of travel as a destination but valuing the journey rather than the idea of simply existing in a place. The speaker enjoys “trees along this road,” the sound of wooden clogs intoning over pavement and grease during a stop for gas, and a singing bird who seems to have wandered into an odd gasoline-pump-filled corner of an old church—but none of these is a likely site the speaker set out to visit (31, 35-39, 43-45). Her hasty contemplation of the history of places she has visited also suggests that she views even the activity of her mind as pleasingly transient: it would have been a pity “not to have pondered, / blurr’dly and inconclusively / on what connection can exist for centuries” (47-48). The speaker continues to remember until her memories take her to a quiet moment in which all of the activity stops. In the middle of a recollection of the

incessant rain—"like politicians' speeches: / two hours of unrelenting oratory"—the speaker remembers the comparative quiet that came after: "and then a sudden golden silence" (55-57). The unusual pause offers an opportunity for the speaker to stop and analyze a version of herself: as in "Arrival at Santos," the speaker seems to step away from herself, suddenly becoming an omniscient narrator who is able to view her remembered self objectively. Before, the speaker called herself the "tourist," but now she is the "traveller," and the shift connotes her ironically more permanent status as someone who does not stay in one place. Yet for the first time in the poem, she pauses long enough to attempt to answer the questions of travel and to draw a conclusion that would settle the speaker's debate with herself:

> *"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come*
> *to imagined places, not just stay at home?*
> *Or could Pascal have been not entirely right*
> *about just sitting quietly in one's room?* (60-64)

At first, the traveler copies the interrogative form of stanza two, where questions only generate more questions. In the final stanza, she begins to compose an answer but then gives up halfway through, her mind ever moving and constantly readjusting her position in the debate:

> *Continent, city, country, society:*
> *the choice is never wide and never free.*
> *And here, or there… No. Should we have stayed at home,*
> *wherever that may be?"* (64-67)

The speaker fails to come to a conclusion, leaving her questions unanswered. In addition, the idea of home, which just a few lines ago was the opposite of "travel," has now become a changeable location as well: one of the few things that seemed to represent a physically and mentally constant concept for this speaker is now under question, too. Yet, as throughout the poem, the speaker's tone is not panicked, emotionally distant, or mournful but rather engaged in the discussion with herself and not disappointed to return to a central, if unanswerable, question. Similarly, the end rhymes in the final stanza suggest coherence between the initial two lines and the final two: "be" resounds with "society" and "free," emphasizing the final word of the poem and giving it a sense of inevitability. Likewise, it is fitting that the last question returns to the first, altering it so that the interrogation of the word "be" is an even more central focus. Indeed, although she fails to work out the assertion "And here, or there," she does affirm her own unending questions with a resounding "No" in response to the attempt at a conclusion. It is as if this speaker is now at peace with constant change and instability.

As these first three poems of "Questions of Travel" suggest, an unsettled mental and physical perspectives does not necessarily preclude moments of peace. Here, Bishop's personal narrators remind us that an individual's perspective changes frequently in response to emotional and physical environment, yet fleeting moments still have beauty, and even transient and inconclusive ideas have value. For Bishop's speakers, such moments become memories that the present self can reflect on and build from—if not to draw conclusions, then at least to ask more questions.

The flexibility and changeability of the narrative perspectives in these first three poems of "Brazil" continue in the "Elsewhere" section, especially the Nova Scotia

sequence that opens it. With "Village" and the Nova Scotia poems, the temporality of the book changes once more, now moving back in time in a series of associated texts, not just changing from poem to poem as in "Brazil." In this way, the book invites us to read the past through the lens of the present since reading the book from start to finish requires one to experience the poet's present before considering her past. Eleanor Cook calls this shift into the Nova Scotia texts "time-travel": "With 'In the Village,' the question of travel becomes the question of time-travel back in memory and especially the question of home" (163). Indeed, the opening paragraph of "Village" introduces retrospection, with the narrator herself looking back at her childhood. Yet when "Village" is paired with the other Nova Scotia poems, the process of looking back appears disjointed and disorderly. In "Elsewhere," time-travel is fluid, never linear, a text that wanders through the self of memory and her experiences.[11]

Even the order in which these texts appear disrupts a sense of sequential time. In *Questions of Travel*, the Nova Scotia sequence begins with "Village," which is followed by "Manners," "Sestina," and then "First Death in Nova Scotia."[12] Bishop knew, of course, that this order was not chronological. If she had been concerned about presenting her own biography chronologically, she would not have placed "Manners" in the middle of the sequence: "Manners" which dates itself to 1918 with its subtitle, "For a Child of 1918," is set at the latest date of the quartet of poems. "First Death," is the earliest, depicting the death of Bishop's cousin, Arthur, which Bishop's biographers date to 1914 (Marshall 11, Millier 329). For a poet as concerned about facts as Bishop, this rearrangement of chronological time is surprising. Of course, the reordering of events was not glaring for Bishop's general reader, who would not necessarily know that 1918

dates after the institutionalization of Bishop's mother. But the Nova Scotia poems contain enough allusions to time, dates, and sequences of events—coupled with similarities among characters and setting—to make even an uninitiated reader question the chronology of the sequence. The child interacts with her mother in "First Death," for example, whose events took place before the mother's departure in "Village."[13]

Questions of time and sequencing grow more complicated in "Sestina." The poem is not without temporal markers: the very first line declares that this poem takes place in September. But the scene of grandmother and child sharing tea and tears on a rainy day could take place anytime in any cozy kitchen equipped with a woodstove and an almanac. Critics have both used and resisted using Bishop's biography to pierce the opacity of "Sestina," which, in addition to avoiding temporal certainty, studiously avoids revealing the cause of the tears and sadness of both grandmother and child. The context of *Questions of Travel*, however, seems to invite reading "Village" as the back-story for "Sestina." This is precisely what Brett C. Millier, Peter Sanger, Janine Rogers, and Eleanor Cook do in their analyses of "Sestina," and Cook goes as far as to say that "Village" explains "Sestina": "Some readers have found 'Sestina' mysterious, but it was not in *Questions of Travel*, because it was preceded by 'In the Village'" (Millier 13, Sanger 47, Rogers 67, Cook 165). Cook points to a paragraph in "Village" depicting grandmother and child in the kitchen, as if the poem were an extrapolation of this paragraph: "My grandmother is sitting in the kitchen stirring potato mash for tomorrow's bread and crying into it. She gives me a spoonful and it tastes wonderful but wrong. In it I think I taste my grandmother's tears; then I kiss her and taste them on her cheek" (*Questions of Travel* 57). In Cook's reading, "Sestina" is Bishop's answer to Lowell's

"Scream": prose translated into a poem. Maybe; but Bishop never spoke of "Sestina" as an extension of "Village," and the two were composed separately, not together as with "First Death" and "Memories of Uncle Neddy." Then, too, the poem and story were published separately before they were together in *Questions of Travel*: they were printed nearly three years apart in separate issues of *The New Yorker*. Attentive *New Yorker* readers might have made the autobiographical connections, yet each work certainly stood alone before Bishop put them together in her book. The apparent separation between Bishop's autobiographical writing in "Village" and the lack of distinct biographical markers in "Sestina" suggests that reading biographically is not the only way to read "Sestina;" thus, Rogers contends that the poem bears meaning beyond Bishop's biography, that the poem's opacity invites its readers to connect it to their own lives since sadness is a human condition: "The poem's highly figurative quality resists any singular interpretation; after all, there are many children and many grandmothers, many houses, and much, much unspoken sadness" (67).

Rogers is right to avoid limiting the poem to Bishop's life story, yet given the autobiographical context of *Questions of Travel*, we should also be wary of too quick a move to generalize it. Indeed, the disjuncture of self in *Questions of Travel* warns against any easy biographical connections in this book. Consider, for example, what happens when we read "Sestina" as an offshoot of "Village": the grandmother becomes Elizabeth Hutchinson Boomer and the child is Elizabeth Bishop, the location is Great Village, the September date must be 1916, and the tears from sorrow are provoked by Gertrude Bishop's institutionalization. But "Sestina" does not identify the gender of the child.[14] Then, too, by focusing on grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter, the "man with

buttons like tears" gets overlooked: he is more evocative of a father or a son. And what if the September were another September, like the month in 1917 when Bishop left Great Village and moved to Boston to live with her paternal grandparents? Bishop later recalled life in Boston as a period of extreme sadness: she suffered under the strict rules and elite mannerisms of her wealthy, urban American relations.[15] Bishop returned to Great Village every summer, spending the warm months with her maternal grandparents even after leaving Boston for boarding school in 1923, seasonal travel that connects to the language of seasons in "Sestina," like the grandmother's equinoctial tears or the almanac and its instructions, "*Time to plant tears*," as well as the cyclicality of the sestina form itself, with its rotation of terminal words and its repetitive final stanza (37). Considering the references to September in this light, as well as the hint of a man with a "rigid" house reminiscent of the Boston Bishops' austerity, isn't it just as likely that "Sestina" recalls this sadness, the impending separation of the grandmother and child and the child's relocation to her father's family home in 1917? Granted, such detailed dating requires access to the Bishop biography and particulars that few readers would have known. But it is just this kind of investigation that the opacity of "Sestina" and the associated particularity of "Village" invite; these are the questions of self in *Questions of Travel*, which explore both the speakers' selves and their locations in time.

Associations between "Sestina" and "Village" call attention to their differences as well as their similarities, and the plot discrepancies that I describe above parallel disparities between the elaborate complexity of the sestina form compared to the form of a story like "Village." Bishop called "Village" "poetic-prose," but "Sestina" is certainly poetic, its form drawn from one of the most complex lyric forms of the early troubadour

tradition.[16] That Bishop named her poem for its form draws questions of form to the forefront of the poem, yet sestinas are self-conscious about poetic form even without naming themselves so, their end-words rotating through six six-line stanzas before completing their cycle, repetition that can make them quite conspicuous.[17] From writing her first sestina, "A Miracle for Breakfast," Bishop learned two ways to use the sestina's attributes to advantage: be "highly seasoned" or be "colorless." As she wrote to Marianne Moore in 1937,

> It seems to me that there are two ways possible for a sestina—one is to use unusual words as terminations, in which case they would have to be used differently as often as possible—as you say, 'change of scale.' That would make a very highly seasoned kind of poem. And the other way is to use as colorless words as possible—like Sidney, so that it becomes less of a trick and more of a natural theme and variations. I guess I have tried to do both at once [in "Miracle for Breakfast"]. (*Poems, Prose and Letters* 744)

She goes on to suggest how she uses words unusually in "Miracle," by deploying "crumb" as both noun and verb for example, but it is clear she is unsatisfied by these clever turns and changes of scale. She refers to these end-words as forgivable "faults," as if the "colorless" sestina is really preferable. In fact, using colorless, commonplace end-words seems to be her strategy in "Sestina," where "house," "grandmother," "child," "stove," "almanac," and "tears" are not only common but used only as the nouns that they are.

In "Sestina," these common words do suggest "a natural theme and variation." "House," for example, reverberates from stanzas one, two, and three—

where the word denotes the exterior of the poem's setting, the outside of the house with rain falling on it—to stanza four, where it shifts to depict the interior and connotes the cold atmosphere in the kitchen, which is at once the grandmother's physical feeling and an effect of the emotions grandmother and child seem to share, a chilling sorrow. "House" then becomes the house the child draws in stanzas five and six, which is followed by a second drawn house in the sestina's envoi, now "inscrutable." Meanwhile, the theme picks up variations elsewhere, particularly in stanza four where the "bird-like" almanac "hovers half open above the child" and grandmother, its shape suggesting a house's roof overhead. Whereas in stanza one, the rain falls down onto the roof of the house, now, rain falls out of this almanac-roof and onto the grandmother and child. The falling rain in turn conflates with the theme-and-variation on the end-word "tears," a word which itself correlates with rain, tea, and the almanac's "little moons" throughout the poem, as reverberations conjoin and continue (19-20).

The formal intricacies of "Sestina"—as well as differences of plot and characters—separate the text from "Village," yet the two still reach toward each other across the pages of *Questions of Travel*. Critics' tendency to match the characters, scenery, and events of the two may lead to critical oversights, but the tendency itself reveals the tensions that abound in Bishop's work: linkages that seem likely never quite align, differences that seem absolute fail to stand up under scrutiny. This is as true of the similarities and differences between self and representations of self as between poetry and prose, two concerns that are likewise brought together in Bishop's work. "In the Village," with its complex

composition and publishing history, is a salient reminder that this is so—for today as it was then for Bishop's best readers. Even seven years after *Questions of Travel* was published, Lowell, for example, found himself still thinking of the prose story as he wrote out his praise for Bishop's new poetry, "Poem" and "In the Waiting Room," eventually to be published in *Geography III* (1977): "The picture poem and the dentist one are in the clearest of narrative styles, of the best short stories . . . I want to see more of these poems. I'm sure they roll up, a huge story maybe like 'In the Village,' gaining in what can be held on to, in graspableness by being poetry" (*Words in Air* 717). Poems and prose are still distinct entities for Lowell, but when reading Bishop's poems, he can't help but think of her prose.

Notes

[1] Sensing the poet's strong affiliation with prose, critics of Bishop's poetry have long spoken of prose tendencies in her verse. Vidyan Ravinthiran records a long list of critics who use "prose" as an adjective in response to Bishop's verse: Anne Stevenson, Nancy L. McNally, Victoria Harrison, Jeredith Merrin, Penelope Laurans, Thomas Travisano, Gillian White, and Lloyd Schwartz. Ravinthiran's *Elizabeth Bishop's Prosaic* is one of the few works dedicated to Bishop's prose. Ravinthiran argues that what criticism has overlooked about Bishop's prose strategies is indicative of an overarching gap in our knowledge of prose prosody. Ravinthiran suggests that these critics who compare Bishop's poetry to prose are merely observing the proximity between poetry and prose Bishop herself intuited, especially in terms of the rhythmic opportunities of prose. Bishop was a faithful student of prosody, Ravinthiran observes, and was especially fond of literary theory texts that discussed figures of sound in both poetry and prose, like George Saintsbury's three volume *A History of English Prosody*, which she reportedly read and re-read throughout her career (*WIA* 595). This suggests that Bishop was thinking of prose as a resource for her poetry—that the strategies and tools of prose genres were tools she could bring into her work. Ravinthiran's argument supports the idea that Bishop saw poetry and prose as equally suited to inform her writing.

[2] While the vast majority of Bishop's letters remain unpublished, three recent collections represent a large body of her letter-writing: *One Art: Letters* (1994), *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (2010), and *Elizabeth Bishop and the New Yorker* (2011). The Library of American edition, *Poems, Prose and Letters* (2008), also includes a selection of letters. For critical assessments of Bishop's letters and the importance of her epistolary writing within the scope of her literary career, see Langdon Hammer and Siobhan Phillips. Phillips' analysis of the letters and writings between Bishop and May Swenson—especially Swenson's poem, "Dear Elizabeth," derived from the language of their letters—inspired and my analysis of Lowell's poem, "The Scream," which is derived from Bishop's short story. In both cases, Bishop's friends used her prose as groundwork for their own poems. See Swenson's *Dear Elizabeth* for selected correspondence and poems exchanged between Swenson and Bishop.

[3] The last name of Bishop's maternal family is alternatively spelled "Boomer" and "Bulmer," homonyms since the "l" in the spelling of the latter was silent. Bishop's biographers generally use "Boomer," so I have followed suit in this chapter.

[4] See Bret Millier, pages 6-9, for an explanation of the Lucius character in Bishop's early writing and for an analysis of the connections between the Lucius stories and "In the Village."

[5] For an assessment of the context of this December issue of *The New Yorker*, see Fiona Green, "Elizabeth Bishop's 'In the Village' in *The New Yorker*." Green argues that readers encountering Bishop's story would have read "Village" as a Christmas story, and she notes many connections between the material items of the story and the products advertised on the pages of the magazine.

[6] David Kalstone also notices the grammatical confusion of this passage (165).

[7] David Kalstone credits James Merrill with first noticing the parallels between the blacksmith character and the artist (164). Thomas Travisano points to an earlier passage on the blacksmith and calls the clang "symbolic of the consoling power of art," a force that "stands against the eternal sound of the mother's scream" (171). He goes on to note how this portrayal of the blacksmith "typifies Bishop's work in general," suggesting, as I do, that "Village" sets the course for Bishop's work to follow. Kalstone, too, notes that, "Writing fiction that served to define the limits of fiction, Bishop found the means to reenergize her poetry," an observation that inspired this study (166).

[8] While critics have not analyzed the formal qualities of "In the Village" as a mixed-mode text, they often describe the story as poetry. For example, Thomas Travisano writes, "This prose is of stunning poetic intensity" (169).

[9] Further, the placement of "Village" after two other humorous prose pieces

signaled its gravity as a literary short story or memoir. Former mid-century *New Yorker* employee Francis Kiernan recalls that the organization of each issue of the magazine followed a pattern: "the first piece of fiction was light or humorous, but because humor was hard to come by, they sometimes had to put two stories together. The third piece, which ran in back, was usually but not always reminiscence. At the *New Yorker*, memoirs had always been handled as fiction" (85).

As if to heighten the sense that distinctions between poetry and prose are arbitrary yet fundamental distinctions, page 28 of *The New Yorker* version features a prose-like poem inset amid Bishop's prose: "I Can Manage Multiplicity" by John Holmes. It has long been a practice of *The New Yorker* to embed poems within prose texts, arranging the columns of prose around the poem text. Holmes's poem is a rambling meditation on material excess, focused on the ephemera of catalogs and magazines. The speaker laments the excess but admires his own ability to control it, "I ask you to listen to the noise of the disposal of all this. // Every day I throw away five times as much as comes into the house. / But I'm still in charge of throwing it away; I manage multiplicity" (20-22). The poem ends ironically, registering the speaker's complicity in the consumer society, something he, however, does not recognize: "I've ordered a new trundle for the trash barrels, to roll out / The catalogues, the tired old magazines, and the bill for the trundler" (25-26). Almost equal to the unremitting junk mail are the long sentences of the poem, which exceed the long lines of each tercet and are frequently enjambed, as if the poem, like the trash barrels of mail, barely manage to contain the overrunning lines.

[10] Poems will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number when first introduced and then cited by line number thereafter. This poem is on page 326 of Robert Lowell's *Collected Poems*.

[11] Without "In the Village," this disordered representation of time would be lost, and the Nova Scotia sequence would indeed represent linear time travel, moving back in time from 1918 ("Manners"), to 1917 ("Sestina"), to 1914 ("First Death"). This is worth noting because since so many of Bishop's collected works continue to separate her poetry from her prose, and a *Questions of Travel* without "Village" is, in fact, what many still read today. Once the 1965 first edition of *Questions of Travel* went out of print, readers relied on the collected *Poetry*, which prints *Questions of Travel* without the story. The text of *Questions of Travel* did not appear in full again until the 2008 publication of the Library of America volume, *Poems, Prose, and Letters*.

[12] "Filling Station," which appears after "First Death," prolongs the small-town scenery depicted in the Nova Scotia sequence and seems to correspond with these preceding poems, but I do not consider it a part of the sequence because it does not depict events from Bishop's childhood memories. In fact, the poem was inspired by a filling station in Brazil, although Bishop insisted on keeping the poem's title general in order to evoke any "out-of-the-way" filling station, a choice that allows this Brazil poem to blend easily into the scenery of "Elsewhere" (*Elizabeth Bishop and the New Yorker* 159).

[13] In February 1962 when Bishop was writing "First Death in Nova Scotia," she received a history of Great Village from her aunt, Grace Boomer (Millier 329). The history would have helped her fill in details of her Nova Scotia experience, which suggests she would have been aware that she was re-ordering the historical chronology in *Questions of Travel*. "First Death in Nova Scotia" was first published in *The New Yorker* after receiving this history, on May 10, 1962.

[14] See Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, "An Almost Illegible Scrawl," for an analysis of gender roles in "Sestina."

[15] For an account of Bishop's life in this period and her memories of it, see Millier, pages 19-29. Once Bishop was removed to Boston, she returned to Great Village for the summer months until 1923, regular visits that instilled in her an appreciation for her mother's home.

[16] The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* calls the sestina the "most complicated of the verse forms initiated by the troubadours" (1296).

[17] In his explanation of the challenges of the sestina form, Lewis Turco explains, "The problem with the sestina is, generally, that the repeated end-words can be obtrusive. To draw the reader's attention *away* from the repetitions, poets often enjamb their lines so that sentences and phrases are not-endstopped on the teleutons [end-words], or they may use, on occasion, homographs of the end-words" (339).

CHAPTER V

KATE RUSHIN'S "BRIDGE POEM" BRIDGES AND BORROWS PROSE

In the first pages of the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), Toni Cade Bambara was already looking toward the legacy of the groundbreaking anthology: "Quite frankly, This Bridge needs no Foreword. It is the Afterward that'll count" (viii). In their own introduction a few pages later, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa add that "a hundred other books and projects are waiting to be developed. . . . This is exactly the kind of service we wish for the anthology to provide. It is a catalyst, not a definitive statement on 'Third World Feminism in the U.S.'" (xxvi). Bambara, Moraga, and Anzaldúa's predictions were prescient: *This Bridge* did provoke a movement advocating accurate representation and recognition of North American women of color, one that is still ongoing. But the word "catalyst"—that is, something that precipitates change without itself undergoing change—does not do justice to the role *This Bridge* continues to play in shaping "Third World Feminism": thirty-five years, one Spanish and four English editions later, *This Bridge* reflects a transforming women-of-color feminism, with alterations in its content dating even as recently as the 2015 fourth edition. If *This Bridge* framed intersectional theory, as so many have claimed, it has also renewed that frame in a vital afterward of its own.[1]

While the anthology itself responded to the shifting needs of protest movements, its individual texts served similar roles on their own, sometimes by traveling beyond the anthology's pages. Most notable is Kate Rushin's "Bridge Poem," the only poem included in the anthology's front matter, and the text that lent the anthology its name and illustrates the book's animating force: that women of color must serve the sociopolitical

needs of women of color first, eschewing the racist exclusions of white feminism, in particular, as well as the sexism, homophobia, and other repressive impulses latent in the era's liberation movements.[2] As shorthand for the impetus behind the *Bridge* project, the poem is an emblem of the anthology as a whole, which partly explains why it has been mentioned and quoted so frequently beyond the pages of the anthology. But to say that the poem merely epitomizes the anthology would be to underestate its unique role in social and political movements from 1981 on. Indeed, the list of "Bridge Poem" reprints is long and varied: the poem finds its place in poetry anthologies and in Rushin's own collection of poems, *The Black Back-Ups* (1993), but also in fiction and theory, including Danielle Evans' collection of short stories, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* (2010), the *Feminist Theory Reader* (2003) edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, *Sister Citizen* (2011) by Melissa Harris-Perry, and *Intersectionality* (2016) by Ange-Marie Hancock.[3] Each of these books and collections invites distinctive and sometimes conflicting readings of the poem. Meanwhile, the poem itself changes, too: new locations result in different diction, punctuation, and stanzaic structures, changes that reveal the poem revising, responding, and updating its position amid new material and, by extension, amid shifting literary forms and ideological contexts.

Today, reading "Bridge Poem" fully, with its complicated publishing history, requires simultaneous attention to multiple versions of a single text, each printed in a variety of politically revolutionary works that span almost four decades. In these activist texts, "Bridge Poem" challenges and delimits social and political boundaries, registering the evolving social structures that promote or inhibit the lives of women of color and stimulating opposition to stereotypes of female identities even as it charts expansive

intersectional selves among women of color. Then, too, reading each version of "Bridge Poem" within its host text means reading the interactions between a single lyric poem by Rushin and, variously, other lyrics, short stories, life narratives, and manifestoes by a number of other writers. The generic and authorial diversity present in so many of these texts by and about women of color is strategic: the mixed form acknowledges and supports differences between individuals while simultaneously building coalitions among them, countering invisibility through each writers' distinct statement but binding them together literally between the book's covers.[4]

The notion that a literary form may enact inclusive feminist politics is not new; *This Bridge*, for example, has been lauded for just such work.[5] Critics observe that the structure of the feminist anthology—where texts by multiple writers representing various perspectives are together in one volume—acts out the kind of embracing but not universalizing feminism called for by women of color, one where a cohesive vision is comprised of disparate experiences. Writers gain a community beyond the pages of these books, too: anthologies bring people together to produce such texts, often through feminist presses, and communities extend as publications are distributed, whether at bookstore reading events or in university classrooms.[6] The material advantages of the anthology form are then extended when readers pick up the volumes and use them: even as they turn the pages, readers rehearse the process of recognizing differences signaled through form as much as through content, like switching from "Bridge Poem" to the prose "Reflections of an Asian American Woman" by Mitsuye Yamada, to take an example from the original *This Bridge*.

Of course, the attributes that make the anthology so well suited for third-wave feminism are not exclusive to it, but critical attention to the political valences of these features in feminist texts has focused so far on the anthologies only; in fact, these features extend well beyond this type of book and its production. Writers throughout third wave feminism transport anthology features into other literary forms and genres: hybrid poetry-prose works by individual authors abound in this era, as do densely allusive works that not only refer to other writer's texts but quote from them extensively. Different though the many host texts of "Bridge Poem" may be, they are together a striking example of this phenomenon, each one bearing important resemblances to the anthology form. Tracing the publishing history of "Bridge Poem" reveals the malleability of such formal and authorial hybridity in women of color feminist texts and measures the persistence of these innovations. While the many versions of "Bridge Poem" themselves narrate the difficult process by which women escape the burden of serving others and strive for their own self-development, the poem's many contexts tell a complementary story: that sociopolitical change happens as a result of collectively diverse expressions even as it is grounded in discrete and unique experiences.

Rushin asserts that she did not write "Bridge Poem" with Moraga's and Anzaldúa's anthology in mind; but to the editors, receiving the poem must have felt more than fortuitous: it not only voiced their frustrations with white feminists and other political groups but also matched their efforts to rewrite an old bridge metaphor even as they sought to revise the position of servitude that the metaphor signified.[7] The bridge metaphor gets unpacked and refigured in Moraga's and Anzaldúa's prefaces to *This Bridge*. They explain that in the old metaphor, women of color serve as a "bridge" for

others by mediating between groups—explaining black people's experience to white people, for example, or women's perspective to men. This line of thinking finds that women of color are ideal translators among social groups because they embody and therefore understand multiple marginalized positions, especially within categories of race and gender. When she illustrates the problems with the concept of the bridge woman in her 1981 "Preface," Moraga uses herself as an example, describing a meeting she held with a group of mostly white women who were interested in publishing *This Bridge* but who, despite their excitement for the book, struggled to articulate ideas about race and turned to Moraga to do it for them:

> I watch the white women shrink before my eyes, losing their fluidity of argument, of confidence, pause awkwardly at the word, "race," the word "color." The pauses keeping the voices breathless, the bodies taut, erect – unable to breathe deeply, to laugh, to moan in despair, to cry in regret. I cannot continue to use my body to be walked over to make a connection. (xv)

These white women are physically distressed: "breathless" and "taut," they are "unable to breathe," stifled by their own inability to talk about race. Moraga is expected to secure their comfort by sacrificing her own, being "walked over." The trampling and flattening implied by this phrase provide a way of understanding the injustice experienced by women of color when they are cordoned into any one category of oppression as Moraga is here for her race: such a narrow categorization of Moraga's experience elides the complexity of her person and disregards the immense subjugation caused by the compounded conditions of her identity. Moraga is anticipating what Kimberlé Crenshaw will officially term "intersectionality" in 1989; this notion, long present in writings by

women of color, comes to the forefront of *This Bridge* in Moraga's preface and gets full treatment in the "Black Feminist Statement" of the Combahee River Collective, reprinted in the 1981 *Bridge*.[8] In their statement, the women of the Collective write that race, gender, sex, class, and other modes of oppression like those in Moraga's life "are interlocking," and nothing less than the "synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives" (210). The white women's mistake was to think of Moraga as just like them in all ways but race, a painful underestimation.

When Moraga asks, "*How can we—this time—not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap?*" her question suggests the twofold ambition of *This Bridge* both to dismantle the old bridge and build a new one (xv). While efforts like Moraga's and the intersectional theory of the Combahee River Collective seek to dismantle the old figure, Moraga's preface identifies two ways to rebuild the bridge: first, women of color must turn their energy to their own assertive self-expression and self-definition. Moraga describes the importance of self-understanding to her own process of working on the collection: "I know now that the major obstacle for me, personally, in completing this book has occurred when I stopped writing it for myself, when I looked away from my own source of knowledge" (xvi). Second, while pursuing self-definition, women of color must also connect as a community. Moraga explains that systems of oppression have worked not only to inhibit individuals but also to destroy connections among the oppressed: "It is a calculated system of damage, intended to ensure our separation from other women, but particularly those we learned to see as most different from ourselves and therefore, most fearful. . . . Call it racism, class oppression, men, or dyke-baiting, the system thrives" (xvi). Thus, when Moraga dreams of a new

bridge, it is one that connects her to a community of women of color, like the writers of *This Bridge*: "For the women in this book," she states, "I will lay my body down" (xix). Unlike the one-sided sacrifice of self that the white women expected of Moraga, this act of giving her body to others is matched by others' sacrifices: she is "always met at the river" by those seeking to engage in the same revolutionary rebuilding.

The pieces of the new bridge figure come together in the construction of the book itself—individual women's poems, memoirs, stories, and letters of self-expression and self-definition join in *This Bridge*, a textual community acting out on the page what Moraga envisions in her preface. But from the beginning, Moraga worried that the book would not be enough and wondered what else she could do: "I should be talking more 'materialistically' about the oppression of women of color, . . . I should be plotting out a 'strategy' for Third World Revolution" (xix). Indeed, Moraga could already see that *This Bridge* was only a start; rebuilding the bridge figure would be years in the working.

The struggle to demolish an old metaphor and build it anew is evident in the earliest version of Rushin's poem, which chronicles the moment when the speaker realizes the need for change and musters the strength to demand it. Appearing immediately after Moraga's preface in the original anthology, the poem would have been read as an echo to Moraga's refusal, "I cannot continue to use my body to be walked over," especially when the poem begins with a refusal of its own:

> I've had enough
>
> I'm sick of seeing and touching
>
> Both sides of things
>
> Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody (xxi)[9]

But after the bold opening, the poem vacillates, confident in its own assertions at one moment and subtly doubtful the next. For example, in stanza three, the speaker lists the many people that she "translates" in a long list that trails off in an ellipsis, as if her efforts to serve are yet too overwhelming to recount in full (10-12). In future versions of the poem, this stanza will prove especially pliant—a bellwether for shifting perspectives toward these categories of identity, and, indeed, toward the notion of identity categories itself—and already it is distinct from the others because it extends toward the right margin more like a prose paragraph than poetry, a contrast to the short lines at the beginning of the poem:

> I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
> My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
> The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
> To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
> Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents . . . (9-13)

Conversely, further down the page, line endings signal the speaker regaining some control through a similar process of tallying her efforts for others. Where stanza three trailed off haphazardly to the right-hand margin, these lines extend right in controlled increments:

> I'm sick of filling in your gaps
> Sick of being your insurance against
> The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
> Sick of being the crazy at your holiday dinners
> Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday Brunches

Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white people (21-26)

The irregular line breaks from earlier in the poem now contrast with the more orderly repetition here, where each "I'm sick," "Sick," "Sick," "Sick," initiates a new line. Now, the speaker gains power as the repetitions accrue, moving from an inventory of her service for others to a battery of commands: "Find another connection to the rest of the world / Find something else to make you legitimate / Find some other way to be political and hip" (27-29). So the poem develops from its opening assertion—"I've had enough"—to affirmations that demolish the old bridge metaphor at a crux occurring halfway through the poem: "I will not be the bridge to your womanhood / Your manhood / Your human-ness" (30-32).

But after declaring what she will *not* be, the speaker struggles to articulate what, precisely, she *will* be. Thus, where "I" statements have dominated the first half of the poem—"I've had enough," "I explain," and "I'm sick"—now, "you" is omnipresent in the second half, preoccupying the speaker just when she had claimed to refocus on herself. In lines that will later accrue significance in Danielle Evans's short story collection, the speaker rebukes the "you" for demanding so much attention even while she attends myopically to that "you":

I'm sick of reminding you not to

Close off too tight for too long

I'm sick of mediating with your worst self

On behalf of your better selves

I am sick

Of having to remind you

To breathe

Before you suffocate

Your own fool self (33-41)

It is not until the penultimate stanza that this second-person address disappears, and the speaker turns fully to first-person self-development, reworking the bridge metaphor as a way to serve herself instead of others: "The bridge I must be / Is the bridge to my own power" (45-46). But her assurance crumbles almost as soon as she begins. In the couplet, "I must be the bridge to nowhere / But my true self," the ultimatum she attempts to give herself enunciates exactly what she means to deny: we cannot help but hear "I must be the bridge to nowhere" as an assertion only weakly and belatedly countered by "But my true self." It is as if she fears she may well become as useless and disconnected as "to nowhere" suggests, as if the speaker herself is the one who might "close off too tight for too long." Then, too, the links forged in the off-rhyming pairs "fool self" and "true self," distort the firm boundaries she tries to draw between "you" and "I." Similarly, "the bridge to my *own power*" and "the bridge to *nowhere*" make a sonic pair out of the two contrasting bridge figures, joining two ideas that should be opposites. Now, even her diction is working against self-definition. The tepid final couplet is indicative of her struggle to define herself: "And then / I will be useful" is perhaps a hopeful promise, yet the fact that she ultimately aspires to be "useful"—which implies that she is still in service to others just as she was under the old bridge model—suggests, at best, a tenuous

hope and, at worst, a complete inability to see her way out of a service role. Like Moraga, she is poised "at the river" by the end of the text, ready to build a new bridge model beyond the old trope of usefulness to others, but she is unable to see beyond the shore of servitude. Here, in its first instantiation, the poem registers the immense efforts necessary to change the status quo for women of color, efforts repeatedly undermined by the very tools of trope, address, verse conventions, and structure that allow them to be expressed.

Two years after the first anthology appeared, the editors produced a second edition, and the struggle to imagine change continued with Moraga, in particular, still working to develop a new bridge metaphor. It may not be a surprise that she turns again to "Bridge Poem," but the lines she selects are surprising: "If the image of the bridge can still bind us together, I think it does so most powerfully in the words of Donna Kate Rushin, when she states: 'Stretch . . . or die'" (n.p.). On the one hand, Moraga seems to misread the poem, applying advice aimed at the second-person "you"—the speaker's family, the white feminist, the Black church folks, et cetera—instead of at the first-person "I," the woman of color speaker. In the poem, the speaker tells her addressee in the stanza just prior, "I am sick / Of having to remind you / To Breathe," making it seem as if the tercet Moraga quotes—"Forget it / Stretch or drown / Evolve or die"—is also directed to the second-person "you" other, not the "I" self. Indeed, when the speaker says "Forget it" earlier in the poem, her command is clearly leveled at the "you": "I do more translating / Than the Gawdamn UN // Forget it"—in other words, *I'm not doing this for you anymore*. If "forget it" here means the same thing that it does later in the poem—if it is a dismissal directed at the oppressor—then by quoting these lines and applying them to the "us" of women of color, Moraga is shrinking the distance between the "I" and "you" of

the poem even further than the rhyming pairs and the unsatisfying conclusion have already done. But, on the other hand, Moraga's quotation brings out the ambiguity of these lines as they stand in Rushin's poem: if we look at the poem another way, we see that the tercet comes just before the poem's close, preceding the speaker's return to the bridge metaphor and her attempt to revise it to her own benefit, and these lines could easily be connected to the speaker's final exhortations to herself: "Evolve or die // The bridge I must be / Is the bridge to my own power." From this angle, "Forget it" is the speaker talking to herself, trying to get herself to stop dwelling on the needs of the other, to stop worrying about the "you," and to focus on herself. Ultimately, Moraga's quotation teases out the ambiguity of leaving the old bridge model behind and creating anything new.

The extent to which *This Bridge Called My Back* helped or didn't help establish alternatives to systems of oppression became a particular concern of the critics of the first two *Bridge* editions. Some felt that *Bridge*'s focus on experiences and reaction against theory left it with little material for envisioning a new order.[10] But others were optimistic: over the course of the 1980s and 90s, Catharine A. MacKinnon, Alison M. Jaggar, Teresa de Lauretis, Cynthia Nelson, and Norma Alarcón credited *Bridge* with a major shift in the trajectory of feminist theory, a corrective to shortsighted views of how gender identity is impacted by other social forces. Some attributed this shift to the multi-author, multi-genre form of the anthology itself, its ability to establish groups without overlooking the diversity of individuals within the groups.

Many of the writers featured in *This Bridge* went on to publish their own works that reflected the mixed composition of the anthology but featured a single subject

voice.[11] These single-author texts use the multi-genre form to speculate and anticipate change, exceeding the consciousness-raising aesthetic of the anthologies' life narratives and memoirs. For example, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldúa's mix of poetry and prose grounds her theory of mestiza or border consciousness: she argues that just as the physical space of the border between the United States and Mexico is a tangible representation of the overlapping and intersecting cultures of biracial peoples, so mixed literary genres, like a lyric poem within a short story, illustrate mestiza code-switching, the ability of these individuals to communicate within multiple cultures and languages. Anzaldúa observes that literary conventions and traditions are like languages or, more broadly, like cultural fluencies—the ability to function in English-speaking America or Spanish-speaking Mexico, for instance—modes that border dwellers must use interchangeably to communicate with the dominant cultures. Because border peoples are fluent in multiple cultures at once, their identities contain both cultures in combination. This is an asset to mestizas; Anzaldúa insists that people and cultures are richer for such intersections. The same is true for mixed-genre texts: "Each of these genres enriches the others," she explained to Karin Ikas in 1999 (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 272). Yet the value of hybrid identity may be unrecognized by the dominant culture, resulting in hardship for those on the borders, a difficulty that mixed literary genres illustrates well. Anzaldúa detected this:

> So there are certain traditions in all the different genres—like autobiography, fiction, poetry, theory, criticism—and certain standards that you have to follow. . . I have to struggle between how many of these rules I can break and how I still can have readers read the book without getting frustrated. . . . It is the same kind of

> struggle mestizas have living at the borders, living in the borderlands. How much do they assimilate to the white culture and how much do we resist and risk becoming isolated in the culture and ghettoized? The issue applies to everything. (272)

Anzaldúa believed that by enacting this real-life struggle on the written page, she could improve understanding between people of differing cultural backgrounds. Her texts rely on the premise that readers gain cultural understanding not only by reading texts about different peoples and cultures but by being required to switch literary "languages" or codes as they read. In Anzaldúa's and other single-authors' works, that code-switching may occur within one speaker's perspective—rather than between multiple writers' texts, as in an anthology—underscores the fact that multiplicity exists within individuals, not just among people groups.

Anzaldúa's theories illuminate Rushin's 1993 poetry collection, *The Black Back-Ups*, where prose conventions infiltrate poetry and probe the borders between the two genres, a complement to the volume's exploration of boundaries between categories of identity. The book is a loose narrative of self-formation, the speaker's reflections on the black community she grew up in and her efforts to reconcile that past with the present landscape of her adult life. Rushin gives special attention to her hometown's conservative Christian mores of heterosexuality, which she seeks to reconcile with a lesbian identity. Like *This Bridge*, the book is comprised of semi-autobiographical experiences, especially Rushin's memories of her family members, who are often mentioned by name in the poems. Some first-person narratives are interspersed throughout the book as prose poems: they are short, untitled, single paragraphs isolated on the page. These are told from a

child's perspective, snapshots of memory ranging from the benign, like staying up late while her aunts gossip, to the troubling, like wondering why the well-dressed son of her schoolteacher isn't allowed to play with her. In typographic contrast to the prose poems are titled, left-justified, lineated lyrics, usually longer than the prose poems. They blend memories with present-day experiences; they also combine portraits of family and neighbors with those of public figures, personal experiences with the imagined ones of others, and the child's perspective with that of the adult poet-speaker. The interactions between the two forms—prose poems and lineated lyrics—suggests that the lyrics are circumscribed by the landscape of memory presented in the snapshot prose poems and that to understand the black woman speaker's self is to experience her identity ranging across the complex context of past and present communities. In this way, *Black Back-Ups* moves beyond the forward-looking, unified first-person testimonies of *Bridge* in order to write a fluid and multifaceted "I," one who breaks with her past even as she remains vitally—and literally—akin to it.

For example, in the opening piece of the collection, a prose poem, the speaker finds herself in both past and present as a Sunday dinner after her return from school sheds light on similar dinners of the past:

> When I came home, the weeping willow had finally fallen.
> There used to be snapdragon, cockscomb and chrysanthe-
> mum. There was an apple tree, a dogwood, a mimosa.
> And there were roses! Twenty tons of roses! I haven't seen
> Floating Island Pudding since Sunday Dinner: white linen
> table cloth, yellow cake no icing, lemons snuck out of the

ice-tea glasses. Nobody at the school had ever heard of
it. Maybe Gramom made it up. The island part is beaten
egg whites. The pudding is the water. (11)

Almost as soon as the poem establishes the past-tense, with a speaker comparing a recent homecoming dinner to dinners of her past, the temporal terrain shifts: she who "came home" and the willow that "had fallen" are layered with the imprecision of the present-perfect tense when the speaker says not "I hadn't seen," as we would expect, but "I haven't seen / Floating Island Pudding since Sunday Dinner." This glimpse of a festive family occasion quickly establishes the complex relationship this speaker has with her past, a past that she cannot yet relegate to history, one that she easily reenters with a present-tense voice. While boundaries between past and present are surprisingly permeable, other borders in the poem are more fixed: the distinction between meringue and pudding as "island" to "water" is echoed in the lemons that bob out of their glasses, and all of the colorful food is set apart yet again from the white linen cloth on the table. These are not-so-subtle reminders that the black people of Rushin's book built their lives within but not part of white culture, especially people like Rushin's Gramom and others who worked as maids and nannies in white people's homes, a subject of more than one poem in the book. Here as elsewhere in Rushin's collection, the presence of whiteness and its impact on this community, both past and present, is obliquely implied and crucial to the subject matter, even though black lives take center-stage. These women of *Black Back-Ups* may, like mestizas, navigate multiple cultures with fluency, but Rushin's imagery suggests that some borders, especially those established through phenotype, may not be crossed.

The narrative of blocked crossings turns on the book's version of "Bridge Poem," now a pivot between poems mostly about the speaker's youthful perceptions of the world around her and those that discuss her adulthood (33-35). In general, this "Bridge Poem" tones down where its *Bridge* counterpart ratchets up: the strength that the speaker had gained through repetition and the power signaled by the gradually extending lines—"I'm sick," "Sick," "Sick," and "Find," "Find," "Find,"—in the previous version is diffused by lineation that eliminates the repetition altogether, drawing out this section down the left-hand margin:

> Sick of being the crazy at your Holiday Dinners
> The odd one at your Sunday Brunches
> I am sick of being the sole Black friend to
> Thirty-four Individual White Folks
>
> Find another connection to the rest of the world
> Something else to make you legitimate
> Some other way to be political and hip (20-26)

The subdued phrasing may suggest a speaker more confident of being heard, the rhetorical emphasis no longer necessary, but it could also signal resignation, a speaker grown weary of fighting for change, frustrated by continual struggle. Indeed, the focus on the "you" in the second half of the poem now includes new line breaks, interrupting what sounded like insistence in the earlier poem. The lines "I am sick / Of having to remind you / To breathe" now read as if the speaker herself is exhausted and suffocating, panting for breath:

Sick

Of having

To remind you

To breathe

Before you

Suffocate

Your own

Fool self (34-41)

Finally, the end of the poem is even more uncertain of self-realization than before, as Rushin adds words and line breaks that make the "true self" ever more elusive:

I must be the bridge to nowhere

But my own true self

It's only then

I can be

Useful (52-56)

"My *own* true self" and "*only* then" are specifications that suggest the speaker's increased anxiety and frustration toward the circumstances that hold her back. It is as if she grows weary of repeating her message. Perhaps her insistence and persistence suggest a speaker with a better idea of what she needs in order to become the bridge to herself, but the conditional forms "I will" to "I can" both maintain the sense that her hope for change remains tenuous.

But while these alterations suggest an increasingly demoralized speaker, changes to the prosey third stanza offer hope, pointing her in a different direction from before by

renewing interest in the potential of the translator role. What already looked more like a paragraph than a stanza is here revised to stress its prose attributes: now, the stanza corresponds in style with the book's prose poems, with text flush to the margins:

> I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister my little sister to my brother my brother to the White Feminists the White Feminists to the Black Church Folks the Black Church Folks to the ex-Hippies the ex-Hippies to the Black Separatists the Black Separatists to the Artists and the Artists to the parents of my friends… (6-11)

The *Black Back-Ups* speaker, like her *This Bridge* counterpart, is still "sick" of translating everybody to everybody else. But the correspondence between this stanza and the other prose paragraphs—the snapshot of the family dinner, as well as church events, evenings at home, school scenarios, and others throughout *Black Back-Ups*—is unmistakable. Not only do those prose poems look like this stanza, they also do what this stanza describes: they "explain" and bear witness to those individuals and groups within the poet-speaker's world. The stanza registers the speaker's changing attentions toward these groups by exchanging the lower case letters in labels like "church folks" for uppercase—"Church Folks"— and, indeed, the churchgoers in *Black Back-Ups* are specific characters with proper names, not abstract entities: Sissy Wells and her mother Miss Jeanie, Junie Hightower, and Miss Miriam in the choir loft (51, 58). Thus, if "Bridge Poem" is a hinge in the book's narrative of self in relationship to others, the poem's chameleon third stanza is the lynch pin, with its changed form suggesting the speaker's altered perception of her work for others. If "Bridge Poem" now celebrates

bridges within and among the black community, then it is fitting that many more prose portraits of Rushin's hometown come after "Bridge Poem" than before. Although the speaker declares her intent to abandon the role of translator, *Black Back-Ups* proves otherwise, as she continues "seeing and touching / Both sides of things" throughout this collection.

Even if the role of the translator in "Bridge Poem" is still a somewhat constraining position, it is one that gives the speaker control and the ability to institute changes in her community. This is visible in the evolution of the prose poems through the course of *Black Back-Ups*: they take a decided turn after "Bridge Poem" as the speaker gives her attention to members of her community whose lives transect multiple categories of identity, primarily focusing on categories that relegate people to the margins of the society. Some vignettes portray church folks whose actions deviate from Christian mores, like Sissy Wells who became pregnant outside of marriage (51).[12] By introducing the stories of people like Sissy, Rushin's speaker builds a coalition for herself, as if to prove that she is not alone in deviating from the religious strictures of her elders. Other prose poems bring forward a community of people who do not conform to gender expectations, like Ruby who, in addition to her rowdiness, "pounds you on the back, and throws a softball better than anybody" (59). The black community maligns Ruby's breach of their feminine stereotype, but the speaker isn't persuaded by their judgment: "We know there must be some sin in this, but we can't figure out what it is." In another, the speaker's sympathetic portrayal of Penny, with his light skin and red hair, defends an individual disparaged by the community because he does not fit the standards for appropriate sexual behavior (37). Boys laugh at Penny behind his back, teasing each other at the expense of

what they presume about his sexuality, "*Hey / Man, I saw you and Penny in the milkweeds last night*." But the speaker's attention to Penny's light skin and red hair suggests her understanding that Penny's appearance is as much a source for his persecution as his sexuality:

> Penny has freckles and red hair and a process. Man, can
> that Penny skate. On Colored Night, down Watsontown,
> He rolls onto the rink with his shirt tied up so his belly
> shows. To tease each other the boys snicker and say, *Hey*
> *Man, I saw you and Penny in the milkweeds last night*.
> He swoops. He glides. Penny has red hair and skin the color of sand. (37)

Penny's red hair is in "a process," a chemical straightening procedure, and he is skating at the rink on "Colored Night" even though he is light skinned, particulars that suggest he identifies as black but may not fit the category by phenotype. By emphasizing these elements of Penny's identity, the speaker suggests that, for Penny, overt homophobia may be compounded by racism within the African American community. That Rushin's black woman speaker turns her powers of description to the marginalized members of her community suggests that her role as a translator, as described in "Bridge Poem," has evolved: now, she examines both her own life and the lives of others who share her experiences of difference. In this way, *Black Back-Ups* seeks to enact change in a way that the *This Bridge* writers did not: by imaginatively inhabiting the lives of others.

Just as Rushin's new version of "Bridge Poem" became available in *Black Back-Ups*, the old *Bridge* version was becoming increasingly scarce. By 1995, the anthology was once again out of print, and Kitchen Table Press had folded. But *Bridge*'s advocates

would not let the anthology stay unavailable for long, believing in its continued importance to women of color and their allies. Within five years, Third Woman Press was exploring the idea of a third edition, which appeared in 2002. "Despite its intermittent out-of-print status it has weathered the generations well," Anzaldúa writes of the anthology in a new preface, and, indeed, the composition of *Bridge* III suggests that the editors felt little need to update the text: aside from Anzaldúa's new preface and a publisher's note, there are few changes in the text itself.[13] But while the fact that *This Bridge* hardly changes between 1983 and 2002 may signify the editors' belief in its ongoing relevance, it also points to their desire to install the volume as a historical monument to a political moment of the past. Indeed, for the first time in *Bridge*'s publishing history, the volume received support from an academic institution—the University of California, Berkeley—reflecting its growing value to scholars and students as an object of study, not only a tool for political change.

Reading the third edition of *Bridge* as a monument to a moment in history perhaps explains why the 2002 *Bridge* reprints the 1981 "Bridge Poem" rather than the more recent version in *Black Back-Ups*. But meanwhile, Rushin herself kept revising the poem: in 2009, "Bridge Poem" was altered again for inclusion on the poet's personal web page, katerushinpoet.com, this time in ways that standardize line lengths across the poem. In particular, that third stanza has changed once more. Recall that in 1981, the irregularity of the stanza suggested a harried, frustrated speaker, and in 1993, a hesitant but sympathetic speaker. Now, the 2009 speaker is in control, allotting one line each to every duo she translates, with each break between pairs offering her a pause as if to catch her breath:

I explain my mother to my father

my father to my little sister

My little sister to my brother

my brother to the white feminists

The white feminists to the Black church folks

the Black church folks to the ex-hippies

the ex-hippies to the Black separatists

the Black separatists to the artists

the artist to my friends' parents… (9-17)

That the stanza looks less like a prose paragraph and more like poetry also suggests a difficulty now managed: what was nearly and then completely rectangular in *This Bridge* and *Black Back-Ups*, respectively—disrupting the visual impression of a lyric poem—is now drawn in from the right-hand margin, corralled within the poem's prevailing lyric form. While the stanza conforms to other stanzas more fully than before, it still remains distinct from others parts of the poem: once the stanza with the longest lines, it is now the stanza with the most lines. But as such, it is no less overwhelming as a catalog of the speaker's work—if anything, the increased number of breaks draws out the list, emphasizing its tedious length.[14] The stanza continues to register an attempt at management that, even after nearly three decades, can only go so far.

Thus, the "Bridge Poem" that is reprinted in the 2000s is still a poem in flux, a legacy represented by the divergent ways the poem appears in the short story collection *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* by Danielle Evans and the book of political theory *Sister Citizen* by Melissa Harris-Perry, each published within a year of each other. In these books, each writer must balance a consideration of the poem's past with attention

to its ongoing effort to articulate the burdens on women of color and envision an alternative to the role of translator. Given the poem's long history of ambiguity and malleability, it is not surprising that each writer sets up strikingly different interpretive frameworks that not only respond to the poem's tensions differently but also recast the poem's argument yet again.

Sister Citizen confronts the myth that the Obama administration ushered in a post-racial United States, and Harris-Perry argues that black women, in particular, still face significant obstacles to full citizenship. Because the book responds to persisting problems, part of Harris-Perry's text recounts recent scholarship to revisit its relevance: she focuses on racial myths that continue to prohibit black women from full participation in public and private spheres, reviewing the predominant stereotypes—Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and the strong black woman myth. While the first three stereotypes derive from long histories of racism and patriarchy, the fourth emerged to counter negative perceptions of black women, empowering these women to overcome the forces that tyrannize them. Together, these four stereotypes comprise a sociopolitical environment that Harris-Perry terms black women's "crooked room," a phrase that she derives from a cognitive psychology experiment designed to test individuals' ability to perceive vertical alignment relative to skewed surroundings. When test subjects were placed in a crooked room and asked to stand up straight, many aligned themselves in relation to the warped surroundings, significantly tilted, although they reported feeling perfectly straight. The Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and strong black woman stereotypes have a similar effect, Harris-Perry explains, forcing black women to contort toward and even fit stereotypes in surprising, irrational ways: "To understand why black women's

public actions and political strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their behavior. It can be hard to stand up straight in a crooked room" (29).

Sister Citizen assesses the broad effects of these roles: the emotional states they engender as well as the psychological efforts required for black women to overcome imposed limitations and reshape the politics of their recognition (43). Because of the far-reaching implications of these stereotypes, *Sister Citizen* does not present these effects using traditional political science methods alone, such as analyzing voting patterns or probing the potential for certain practical policies and initiatives, for "Fair distribution alone cannot solve the problem of misrecognition, nor can accurate recognition alone fairly redistribute resources," she asserts (42). Thus *Sister Citizen* draws from a much wider base of evidence and support than the quantifiable data of traditional works of political science. This is where "Bridge Poem" comes into the picture—it is one of many interpolated texts that reinforce key ideas and explicate main themes of *Sister Citizen*. Thus, the book is part political theory and part multi-genre anthology. Like *This Bridge*, *Sister Citizen* makes a political argument through a patchwork of theory, poems, stories, testimonies from focus groups, excerpts from memoirs, and examples from the lives of public figures. Harris-Perry aligns herself specifically with a *Bridge* lineage by quoting from Rushin as well as from another *Bridge* writer, Audre Lorde; then she draws from a much broader base of prominent African American women writers as well.[15] First, an echo of Lorde's *Sister Outsider* is heard in the work's very title, with Ntozake Shange's play, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, also

alluded to in the book's subtitle, *For Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough*. Other works by black women are prominently invoked—titled, introduced, and excerpted at length—as they would be in anthologies like *This Bridge*. The book is organized so that a work of prose or poetry precedes every one or two chapters; "Bridge Poem" is one such preface, and others include chapters from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, lyrics from Sweet Honey in the Rock's "No Mirrors in My Nana's House," and Elizabeth Alexander's poem "Praise Song for the Day," written for Barak Obama's 2009 presidential inauguration. Analyses of other works by black women pervade the book: scholarly works of theory, like Patricia Hill Collins', are joined by novels like Toni Morrison's and Toni Cade Bambara's, poetry from Lorde and others, memoirs like Phyllis Montana-Leblanc's of Hurricane Katrina, *Not Just the Levees Broke*. These publically recognized women's voices are complemented by the anonymous voices of working-class black women from Harris-Perry's focus groups, studies that she carried out in several major urban areas in order to gather empirical evidence for her work. Like the multiple authors of *Bridge*, these many voices in *Sister Citizen* comprise an implicit argument for the value of diverse experiences as a tool for identity politics: *Sister Citizen* represents a broad range of black women's lives in the United States even as it presents a general theory of the forces that shape these lives.[16] Harris-Perry hopes that by exposing the persistence of the myths and stereotypes across so many lives and experiences, we may not only eliminate them but also develop "new forms of politics rooted in a deep and textured understanding of black women's lives" (22).

Although when Harris-Perry quotes "Bridge Poem," she uses the most recent 2009 text, what she sees in the poem is a protest as relevant and necessary in the 2000s as it was in 1981. "Bridge Poem" introduces Chapter 1, the "Crooked Room" chapter, which is where Harris-Perry describes the four constraining stereotypes and their negative impact on black women's development of selfhood. In her introduction to the poem, Harris-Perry provides a brief gloss of "Bridge Poem" that focuses on the poem's signature third stanza where the speaker describes the burden of explaining mother to father, father to sister, and so on: "'Bridge Poem' articulates the burdens many African American women experience as a result of attempting to fulfill multiple, competing roles that serve the needs of others more than themselves" (24). By pairing the poem with her chapter, Harris-Perry proposes that the "Bridge Poem" speaker's acts of translations work like the stereotype roles that black women must navigate: both are actions that take energy away from black women's efforts to be a "true self."

But when Harris-Perry tries to use the poem to imagine a future for black women that escapes stereotypes, she struggles just as the poem's speaker has long struggled to imagine what she will be or even what she can be. Just after "Bridge Poem," the "Crooked Room" chapter opens with a discussion of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and imagines Hurston's main character, Janie Mae Crawford, as another version of the "Bridge Poem" speaker. Harris-Perry then explains the poem as a version of Janie's story: "by choosing her own burdens rather than allowing the burdens of others to be heaped on her back, Janie refutes her grandmother's prophecy that black women are the mules of the world" (28). Harris-Perry uses the same word—*burden*—to describe what both Janie and Rushin's speaker resist, casting both as examples of women who

"find the upright" and navigate the "crooked room" of a broken, racist culture, without succumbing to stereotypes (31). Yet because of Harris-Perry's assiduous assessment of the "strong black woman" myth, stories featuring such a heroine are always under scrutiny in *Sister Citizen*. Granted, Harris-Perry would not say that Janie or the "Bridge" speaker should bear such burdens, but she would warn that for a black woman, self-sufficiency that may lead to good could also lead to ill, like debilitating feelings of guilt and shame that come from falsely blaming herself for any failure. Thus, while these stories offer models for black women who seek to avoid the limitations of stereotypes, they also perpetuate the illusion that self-sufficiency alone can overcome systemic social patterns. Because Harris-Perry so thoroughly exposes the pitfall of the strength imperative, she inevitably reveals that fault line in the "Bridge Poem" speaker's righteous indignation.

In *Sister Citizen*'s concluding chapter, "Michelle," Harris-Perry responds to the double-edged sword of these assertions of strength—the problem that any single story of a black woman overcoming adversity does little to dismantle "crooked room" stereotypes and may give credence to the strong black women myth. "Michelle" describes the successful ways that Michelle Obama overcame character distortions that aligned her with Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes during Barack Obama's 2007-2008 presidential campaign and in the early days of his presidency. Harris-Perry juxtaposes Michelle Obama's story with simultaneously occurring examples of women who did not overcome similar misrepresentations, such as USDA representative Shirley Sherrod, a black woman who was unjustly accused of discrimination against a white family's farm, then summarily dismissed from her position and unjustly vilified by the press for

Sapphire-like anger (293-98). By comparing the two women—both of whom are in public political roles—Harris-Perry suggests that Michelle Obama's success, while notable, may not point to a "meaningful or permanent shift in our national understanding of African American women" (293). She concedes conclusively that without real systemic change, black women are caught in a vicious circle: "the realities of black women's lives militate against achieving the mythical position of unwavering strength, and the resulting disillusionment and sense of failure have real effects on their emotional and physical well-being" (299). Yet just as she acknowledges this problem, she pivots to affirm the very myth she warns against, concluding her book by lauding black women for the self-reliance she warns against: "And yet somehow, stunningly, they continue to fight for recognition. Many are emotionally injured in the process, but the irrepressible desire to be seen—truly seen and understood as human and as citizen—compels individual and collective efforts to achieve gender and racial equality" (300). In her attempt to provide a consolatory ending to her text, Harris-Perry seems to turns to the very language of the strong black woman myth, applauding the "fight" and "efforts" of black women.

Yet *Sister Citizen*'s very multi-genre format implies that while no single story of a black woman's success will shift public perception—and indeed may contribute to a false tale of individual strength—when collected and recounted in concert, such stories may make a difference. Joined together, these narratives track developing opportunities for black women's selfhood and work toward undistorted depictions of black women that, eventually, dismantle the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel stereotypes as well as the myth of overweening strength. Indeed, discussions of oppression based on identity, like *Sister Citizen*, rely on the paradox that collective experience must be defined yet is not

definitive. Through its multi-genre form, *Sister Citizen* asserts that individual strength joined with public, broad-base efforts can succeed in rectifying the misrecognition of black women.

If *Sister Citizen* works to identify problems that persist, *Before You Suffocate* seeks to diagnose new problems. In short stories that depict the lives of an upcoming generation, with primarily teenage and college-age characters, Danielle Evans looks for differences, not continuities: "how is my generation's 'blackness' different from our parents' 'blackness,'" she asks, and her book poses the same question about other groupings, like gender and sexuality ("Five Questions for…Danielle Evans"). In fact, one difference she points to is that, for people of color, the focus on race and ethnicity may overshadow the nuances of individual identity:

> a lot of minority characters in fiction get that treatment – their 'blackness' or 'ethnicness' is the first and only thing about them. So I wanted the characters I was writing to feel like fully rounded individuals who were dealing with race in specific and human ways, and also dealing with issues in life that didn't revolve around their identities. ("Five Questions for…Danielle Evans")

Evans' stories still concern the major social ills taken up in works like *This Bridge*, *Black Back-Ups*, or *Sister Citizen*; almost all of Evans' characters find themselves facing systemic oppressions associated with particular identity categories, like sexism and classism as well as racism. So Erica in "Virgins" is sexually exploited, Tara in "Snakes," who is mixed-race, faces the violence of her white grandmother's racism, and valedictorian Crystal in "Robert E. Lee Is Dead" ends up as an unwitting accomplice to arson in order to prove she is not too good for her working-class town. But these stories

of categorical oppressions only emerge amid complex depictions of characters, and it is often the case that the features of identity that end up exposing characters to cruelty are downplayed in the narration itself. In "King of a Vast Empire," for example, Terrence's skin is "brown," but he only reveals what ethnicity he is not: when police mistake Terrence for a Latino man, he registers his surprise, explaining, "I may have been brown, but my Spanish was pathetic, and I had a wallet full of crap with my name on it: license, employee ID, college ID, ID from the university where I'd pretended I was going to get a master's, library card, Giant discount card, Hollywood video card, et cetera. Enough to prove that I never let go of things, and that I was not who they were looking for" (118). From the contents of his wallet, we know Terrence's level of schooling, financial standing, and that he seems disorganized, but we do not know his race or ethnicity. This snapshot of Terrence is emblematic of the variety of social factors beyond race and ethnicity that matter to characters' conceptions of themselves in *Before You Suffocate*.

These stories never quite lose sight of major social categories of oppression, but Evans, like Harris-Perry, focuses on the complexity of emotional and psychological responses to a variety of converging obstacles, systemic as well as local and personal. To foreground the distinct perspectives of her characters, almost all of Evans' protagonists narrate their stories from first-person perspectives, a strategy in keeping with the collection's efforts to give voice to "characters who don't often get to tell their own stories in their own words, as Evans puts it ("A Note on the Collection's Title"). [17] This design recalls the original *Bridge*, where the editors sought to "reflect a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles, and cultural tongues" by "retaining . . . each writer's

especial voice and style" (xxiv). But if Evans' draws attention back to the primacy of the individual's voice, she does so to call attention to the cost of narrating one's own story.

Thus, one of the major sociopolitical obstacles that Evans's work observes is the trauma of what she calls "endless translation," the interminable process of transmitting stories depicting different lives and experiences of oppression in order to make a case for understanding ("A Note on the Collection's Title"). Not surprisingly, the third stanza of "Bridge Poem" holds significance for Evans, a stanza she calls "the section on translation" when she talks about it on her web page. By way of introducing that stanza, she describes how it resonates with her life and writing process: "The section on translation, in particular, was really meaningful to me on both a personal level and as a synthesis of some of what I was struggling with as an emerging writer." She then proceeds to quote stanzas three, four, and five from Rushin's 2009 version of the poem, beginning "I explain my mother to my father / my father to my little sister / My little sister to my brother," and so on. She applies the stanza to her collection, too: "I could see some of the characters in the collection identifying with that need for endless translation, and also with the line *I am sick of being the sole black friend to 34 individual white people*," Evans explains. But, as she goes on to state, she chose to highlight a different portion of the poem for her title in order to underscore the complicated relationship between those who translate and those who need the translation:

> But the particular line I chose as the title I like because it has layers of meaning. In the poem itself, it's directed by the speaker to someone else, and the implication is that the someone else is one of the people who has been using the speaker to define him or herself, or expecting the speaker to explain herself all the

> time. So, there's an element of the title that's confrontational, that's directed at the reader, saying something to the effect of *try to understand my experience before you drown in your own* . . . But of course, removed from the poem itself, the title also reflects back on many of the characters in my book, who have often gotten themselves into their own messes, or are at a moment where they need to make a choice about who they're going to be, and whether their best selves will hold their worst selves at bay, so the title also works as a link between the stories in the collection and a directive to the characters.

What Evans describes is akin to the complications intrinsic to "Bridge Poem" all along: wanting to escape playing "bridge" once and for all, yet feeling trapped within that figure for her own self-actualization. When Evans plumbs the effects of these mutually conflicting circumstances through the literary strategies of short fiction, she exposes the pitfalls of deploying life narratives for political purposes, especially when such narratives are used to highlight any one category of identity in particular. Thus, Evans's stories advance the intersectional theories at work in *This Bridge*, and they are a reminder of Rushin's speaker's original "suffocation" within her own declarations of selfhood.

Such is the focus of "Snakes," a story told from Tara's point of view, a retrospective look back on a summer spent as a child at her grandmother's house in Tallahassee, Florida, with a cousin, Allison. Similar to the way that Terrence's racial identity is only revealed in part in "King of a Vast Empire," it is not until several pages into the story that we learn that Tara, the child of a white woman, is not white like her mother, grandmother, and cousin. When Tara's grandmother expresses dismay at Tara's

hair, we find out that it is because it has been styled into cornrows, the first indication that Tara does not look like her mother's side of the family

> My mother could barely do my hair herself, and knew I'd never manage to keep it untangled on my own. It was one of those things white mothers of black children learn the hard way once and then tend to remember. Just before I'd left, she had gotten one of her undergraduates to braid my hair in tight pink-lotioned cornrows, so recent they still itched and pulled at my scalp. (31)

At the beginning of Tara's story, race is like the itch and pull of the cornrows: always on the periphery of Tara's awareness but out of sight, secondary. Throughout the course of "Snakes," Tara gains awareness of the fact that others view her race as her primary feature, but Evans continually draws attention to the other forces that give shape to the identities of Tara and her family. Indeed, even from the first time Tara's grandmother sees her, it is not only the cornrows that raise the grandmother's gall but also the fact that Tara reminds her grandmother of the strained relationship she has with Tara's mother. Even before Tara's mother disappointed the grandmother by marrying a black man and producing Tara, she had already run away from home at sixteen and missed her father's sudden death and subsequent funeral, then later failed to visit when Tara's grandmother grew sick from cancer. Animosity between Tara's mother and grandmother has much to do with the ill will Tara receives in Tallahassee. Allison, on the other hand, is the favored grandchild not only because she is white but also because her grandmother is highly involved in Allison's life—monitoring her education, for example—though Allison is no fonder of her grandmother for her overbearing control than Tara is for her scorn. Thus, while race tensions contribute to the discord in Tara's family, they are only a part of a

complex whole. In "Snakes," familial relationships are a large part of what "we're talking about when we talk about race."

But as Tara discovers that her appearance as a non-white person is disproportionately important to many around her, "Snakes" proceeds to critique the strain of identity politics that is singularly focused on racial identity. Tara learns that, regardless of the complications involved, the story of her summer in Tallahassee will always be a story about race: tongue-in-cheek, she labels the tale "My Youth as Real Live Tragic Mulatta" (47). But the tragedy, like Tara's identity, is comprised of multiple forces: racial violence plays a role, but the unrequited love neglected children experience for their parents is also central to the story. Both Tara and Allison feel abandoned by their parents that summer in Tallahassee, and what will culminate as a series of events as a racial drama begins as their attempt to regain their parents.

Like the itch of the cornrows, what sets the events in motion seems innocuous at first: Tara's grandmother, in an attempt to get the girls to play closer to home, devises a story about pythons living in the lake and grounds near the house. Allison knows the story is false, but the giant snakes seize on Tara's imagination and her fear grows to be debilitating—so much so that she eventually refuses to leave the house, planting herself in the center of her room out of fear that the snakes are in the walls. Allison, who has been Tara's playmate, confidant, and champion until now, soon grows weary of Tara's phobia and begins to tease her. The grandmother is even less patient, and when Tara refuses to accompany her grandmother and Allison on an outing, Tara's grandmother goes into a rage, rushes at her menacingly with scissors, and cuts off all her cornrows. While at this moment, the grandmother's initial frustration with Tara was not due to

Tara's racial identity, the fact that she vents her anger by attacking the marker of blackness that so provoked her at summer's start suggests her continued underlying animosity toward Tara's black lineage. Protecting Tara, Allison grabs her hand and pulls her away from their grandmother, and they run out of the house together. They take refuge in a tall tree over the lake, and from here it is unclear what, precisely, happens to Tara, who ends up falling from the tree and narrowly missing a rock that would have killed her. In the end, both Allison and Tara claim responsibility for the accident—when Tara is still unconscious in the hospital, Allison tells authorities that they fought in the tree and Allison pushed Tara, causing her to fall, but at the very end of the story, Tara reveals that she jumped, imagining in her distress that her act would release her from her grandmother's control and bring her parents back.

The ambiguity surrounding Tara's fall underscores the fact that it is the telling of the story itself that matters: whatever really happened in the tree is secondary to the ways Tara and Allison both use the story and, in turn, the way the story uses them. That summer, both girls felt oppressed at their grandmother's house—Tara for her grandmother's dislike, stemming from racism and a family history of discord, and Allison because she resents her grandmother's control in her life, wishing her parents would care for her instead. Both saw their parents' return as the primary solution to their struggle. Because of what happened, both girls received their wish, at least at first—their parents promptly returned to Tallahassee to sort out the chaos. But from there, the tragedy that ceases for Tara begins in earnest for Allison: Tara's parents become increasingly attentive, but Allison's parents sentence her to a life with her grandmother, whom they deem strict enough to straighten out the young delinquent. Allison's life becomes worse

as Tara's improves: Tara finishes college, excels at law school, then meet and marries a devoted spouse—Jason, who is white—while Allison passes through multiple unsuccessful marriages and, eventually, attempts suicide and ends up living in a rehabilitation facility.

Still, Tara's outward successes are a thin veil for an interior life as scarred as Allison's is on its surface. The real tragedy of "Snakes" is that a complex series of events—tied to the intricate psychological and emotional needs of two young girls—is flattened into a simplified tale of racial prejudice, and this distortion of her summer continues to haunt Tara. When, in a conversation with her mother, Tara extends sympathy to Allison—"Allison might have wanted to go home, more than she wanted to hurt me"—her mother refuses to listen to what is, in fact, also her own child's state of mind (53). Instead, Tara's mother draws a connection between Allison's act and the grandmother's evident racism: "This is all your grandmother's doing. I'm sure if she hadn't been treating you so badly, Allison wouldn't have thought she could do the same." Tara's mother's assessment of the summer becomes the predominant interpretation for others in Tara's life: to everyone but herself, Tara truly is a "Real Live Tragic Mulatta," persecuted by her own white relatives because of her dark skin. This half-truth causes Tara increasing discomfort, especially as she learns that she profits from having lived through such seemingly blatant racial oppression.

Tara finds that her story brings recognition and awareness for the dynamics of her identity, like the stories of *This Bridge* before hers, but she is dubious about the interest she gains. "Snakes" traces her anxiety in order to expose the trauma of telling, living with, and growing beyond stories that, to others, become parables of social—and,

especially, racial—mores. At first, Tara is indifferent to her story, taking for granted the attention it brought to her: "It was the sort of thing that made a person interesting in college" (47). But later on, when her fiancée, Jason, tells her he was initially attracted to her because of her sad tale, she is disturbed, unable to sleep: "I wondered which part of the story had drawn him to me. . . . Was it the part of the story where I was strong that made me special, or the part where I was weak? It mattered more than I could say" (48). If "Snakes" is about a complicated story becoming too simply about race, then Tara's anxiety may be lingering guilt from those oversimplifications—over not exonerating Allison, not revealing her true feelings of abandonment to her parents, and using partial truths for personal gain. But the story's frame narrative—the fact that Tara is recounting a story from her childhood, trying to reconstruct an emotional landscape that she was only then partially aware of—is a reminder that even Tara's adult self struggles to understand fully what happened that summer in Tallahassee. Tara even admits that she is prone to manipulate the facts: "When I was very little, my mother used to say there was something of my grandmother in me, in how I tell stories the way I need them to be and not the way that they actually happened" (55). Of course, Tara's anxious narration leaves open the possibility that either Allison's or Tara's version of the fall from the tree is correct—or even that something else happened, something Tara is as yet unable to recount. The imprecision shows the difficulty of telling stories about identity and the events that give shape to who we are—a difficulty compounded exponentially by the trauma of emotional wounds and physical violence.

Further, to the extent that Tara's becomes a "tragic mulatta" story in the eyes of others, her anxieties align with the fault lines of the trope, and comparing the full

"Snakes" with the reduced story that becomes widely known about Tara reveals how easily stereotypes cloud a rigorous and complete understanding of complicated situations and identities. Initially deployed to prompt white audiences to pity black slaves, tragic mulatta stories have long been criticized for drawing awareness to the struggles of non-white others only through stories about people who are the direct descendents of white ancestors.[18] This teaches white audiences to view the ethnicity of multi-racial individuals as divisible, allowing them to regret only the non-white part of the characters in these works. Such stories failed to argue for the humanity of black people—which meant that these stories were not effective enough in raising awareness for black slaves who were not of white descent—and they further perpetuate misunderstanding of the position of mixed-race individuals. So, when Tara wonders which part of her character attracts Jason, she is wondering whether she won his admiration for her fortitude as a whole person—"the part of the story where I was strong"—or his pity for her black heritage, perhaps coupled with regret for that part of her identity that left her susceptible to violence—"the part where I was weak." If it is the latter, and it follows that Jason pities her blackness, then he, too, sees Tara's racial identity first and foremost without seeing her for herself, just like Tara's grandmother does at the story's start. More deeply disturbing, Jason's reaction implies not only that he fails to appreciate Tara as a multi-racial person but that he feels sorry that Tara is part black or even that he wishes she were only white.

By exposing the fissures of the tragic mulatta trope, this story reminds us that it is just as impossible to divide Tara into a black self and a white self as it is to isolate the force of race in hers or anyone's story—and it is likewise limiting to elevate race to the

predominant force. In the end, Tara's story encompasses more than her race—not in order to negate the importance of the racism Tara experiences but to reveal its contours. "Snakes" chronicles the complexity of suffering that is compounded by racism to reveal the depth to which racial identity infiltrates other identity categories.

In this way, "Snakes" explicates anew the challenge of navigating marginalized and persecuted categories of identity and the danger that survivors of identity-based oppression face. Even in the aftermath of telling their stories, those like Tara must heed that warning Rushin initially leveled at her oppressors—don't "suffocate / your own fool self"—as they seek to move beyond painful experiences to envision change. Thus "Snakes" and *Before You Suffocate* continue on where "Bridge Poem" and *This Bridge* leave off, imagining a "true self" and a "useful" self, a task Evans carries out by turning to fiction to gain perspective on the life narrative genre. In Evans' story, Tara nearly does suffocate in her fall into the lake, and the truth of what happened to her is likewise smothered by an overwhelming oversimplification of her summer. But Evans' frame narrative draws attention to the plight of the life story narrator, revealing that even what is "truly" told by first-person witnesses, like many *Bridge* narrators, may only touch the surface of deeply complex, ongoing stories of social and emotional injustices. When it focuses on the complexities of those who tell stories of oppression, Evans's book risks erasing the original "Bridge Poem" protest against the other, a historical context integral to the poem's first version in *This Bridge*. But if so, then this revision comes at the expense of the other, not the speaker: it resolves the original poem's ambiguity in favor of the speaker, finally letting the speaker focus on herself. When the whole poem is about the woman-of-color speaker, the troubles tangled amid her own semantic struggle are

brought to the surface, letting us acknowledge the difficult work of bridge building, of movement-making, and of developing a true self.

So Evans' take on the "Bridge Poem" may signal hope for our capacity to recognize the physical and emotional trauma that women of color continue to face as they seek accurate representation. Still, the amorphous history of "Bridge Poem" reminds us to be skeptical of notions of progress and alert to the continual need for social and political redress. Consider, for example, the newest *This Bridge*, the fourth edition of the anthology, published by State University of New York Press in 2015. What is at once the most recent reprint is also the oldest version of the poem: once again, "Bridge Poem" looks like it did in 1981, its third stanza restored to its original ragged, long lines and its beleaguered final stanza still striving to imagine a true self beyond a "useful" self. In a new preface, Moraga addresses this lack of change, admitting that *This Bridge* is "dated," not up-to-date—but we need it for that very reason: "I watch how desperately we need political memory, so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever-inventors of our revolution; so that we are humbled by the valiant efforts of our foremothers; and so, with humility and a firm foothold in history, we can enter upon an informed and re-envisioned strategy for social/political change in decades ahead" (xix). Collectively, these many "Bridge Poem" versions represent just such a strategy yet at work. In its many iterations, "Bridge Poem" is at once a site of memory and of new strategies, and it is always a poem that demands change.

Notes

[1] Jillian Sandell, Kayann Short, Rebecca Aanerud, and Cynthia Franklin all echo Teresa de Laurentis when she claims, "the shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade [the 1980s] may be said to have begun . . . with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*" (Sandell 281, Short 4, Aanerud 71, Franklin 31, de Laurentis 10). See Franklin for a list of anthologies influenced by *This Bridge* (31). See Ange-Marie Hancock for the role *This Bridge* plays in the history of intersectional thought (24).

In this essay, I define "intersectionality" according to the 1989 essay by Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," where Crenshaw coined the term to explain that categories of structural oppression overlap—racism and sexism in the lives of women of color, for example—and have a compounding effect that differs from that of any one category alone. Crenshaw's term illuminates an idea with a long history in Black feminist thought; see Hancock for a complete intellectual history of intersectionality.

[2] The Combahee River Collective's "Black Feminist Statement" is another text from *This Bridge* with a significant publishing history, dating before the 1981 anthology and continuing on today; see Norman.

[3] This essay focuses on the versions of "Bridge Poem" printed in *This Bridge* (all four editions), *The Black Back-Ups*, *Before You Suffocate*, *Sister Citizen*, and on Rushin's web page. Other volumes that reprint the poem in part or in full include the anthology of multicultural American writing, *Braided Lives*, where "Bridge Poem" is printed in a section entitled "African American Selections," the *Feminist Theory Reader* edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, where the poem serves to illustrate the historical roots of intersectionality in Section II, "Theorizing Intersecting Identities," and the intellectual history, *Intersectionality* by Hancock, which quotes selectively from "Bridge Poem" to introduce its chapter "Bridges, Interstices, and Intersections: Experience(s) and Narrative(s) as Tools of Revolution" (212-13, 172-73, 124-25).

[4] For an overview of how intersectionality engages the need for individual and group advocacy among women of color, see "Bridges, Interstices, and Intersections: Experience(s) and Narrative(s) as Tools of Revolution" in *Intersectionality* by Hancock.

[5] Jane Gallop's seminal text, *Around 1981*, was the first to link the anthology format to feminist thought; *Writing Women's Communities* by Cynthia Franklin addresses anthologies by women of color, especially *This Bridge* in chapter 1, "Another 1981." Franklin, Norma Alarcón, Short, and Sandell argue that the anthology format is integral to the feminist argument of *This Bridge* and to the political work of women of color feminisms in general.

[6] See Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, for a historical account of how feminist bookstores worked as an institution to promote *This Bridge* and other anthologies of the second and third wave feminism.

[7] Hammonds' biography states, "according to Rushin, the poem was not written expressly for the anthology" (477); likewise, in the editors' telling, the title of the anthology was decided before they received Rushin's poem. Short explains that the editors first considered the title "Smashing the Myth" for the anthology, and the bridge concept emerged later in response to Moraga's meeting with white women publishers, the same experience she describes in the 1981 *Bridge* preface, page xv. According to Gaye Williams, Barbara Smith comforted Moraga after the difficult meeting, "It's so hard to be a bridge: that's the thing, a bridge gets walked over" (14). The phrase stuck with Moraga, who then suggested the bridge theme to Anzaldúa. It must be noted that "bridge" and "back" metaphors circled widely among social and political groups of this era: for example, the feminist newsletter *Off Our Backs* began circulation in 1970, the journal *Bridges: An Asian American Perspective* began circulation in 1971, and the anthology of black women in literature, *Sturdy Black Bridges* was published in 1979.

[8] Originally written in 1977, "A Black Feminist Statement" is, like "Bridge Poem," a key text of third wave feminism with a substantial history of reprinting: see Norman for a history of the statement's authorship, publication, and its genesis within the context of The Combahee Collective's work. This manifesto is central to Crenshaw's formulation of intersectional theory: she opens her essay by giving credit to the title of the Black women's studies anthology *All the Women Are White, All the Men Are Black, but Some of Us Are Brave* (1982), a title that distills the "single-axis framework that is . . . reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics" (139). That anthology, like *Bridge*, includes The Combahee River Collective "Statement," pages 210-218.

[9] I indicate page numbers the first time a version of "Bridge Poem" is mentioned or quoted and then proceed to cite by line numbers.

[10] For example, Jenny Bourne questioned whether life narratives like those in *Bridge* would ever lead to systemic change since such writing focuses on the need for small-scale change within individual's lives (1). Alarcón also argued that *Bridge* fails to question the Western paradigm of identity formation which presumes a unified, single identity rather than one based on multiple forces and fails to account for those not in a position to form their own singular identity of this nature (152). Of course, the editors' original soliciting letter called for "experiences," not solutions or visions, as Frances Smith Foster notices. Foster points out that visions come after the call for change: "the writers are candid in their recognition that reconstruction of experiences is easier and preliminary to the construction of alternatives" (133).

[11] The list of single-author, multi-genre works produced by *Bridge* writers in the wake of the anthology is extensive. Among them are Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*

(1983), Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Nellie Wong's *The Death of Long Steam Lady* (1984), which all mix verse and prose; Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run: Poems and Stories* (1988), which intersperses poems with short narrative prose pieces throughout each of its four sections; Chrystos's collections—*Not Vanishing* (1988), *Fire Power* (1995), and *Fugitive Colors* (1995), which all combine lyrics with prose monologues and short stories; and Genny Lim's *Winter Place* (1989), which includes a short story, "A Secret Place," that begins with a poem and includes dialogue written in verse throughout its prose chapters.

[12] The prose poems in *Black Back-Ups* are untitled; I refer to them by their first line.

[13] Although Anzaldúa writes confidently of the continued relevance of the *Bridge* anthology as it stands, without significant alterations to the composition of the book, the extent to which her preface advocates for change as "our only option" belies her confidence. Indeed, in the same year that *Bridge* III appeared, Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating collaborated on *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, which included new works by many of the original *Bridge* contributors as well as criticism and analysis of *Bridge*. Keating later reported that *this bridge we call home* was motivated by Anzaldúa's dissatisfaction with the original anthology (*Transformation Now!* 32).

[14] Then, too, the letter cases in this stanza are inconsistent, not even aligning with that of early versions of the poem, as if an attempt to organize the stanza could only go so far. For example, the capital *B* for "Black" is consistent with all earlier versions of the poem, but while the capitals *M* and *T* correspond with the lineation in *This Bridge*, where all lines begin with capital letters, the *T* for "to the ex-hippies," is lower case here whereas in *Bridge* it is not.

[15] Many critical reviews of *Sister Citizen* remark on the significance of the interpolated texts, suggesting, as I do, that Harris-Perry seeks to align her work with black women's literary traditions: see reviews by Toni Pressley-Sanon, Adryan Wallace, and Sheri Parks.

[16] Others share my observation that the scope of *Sister Citizen*'s political theorizing requires a broad range of evidence and support. For example, Charles P. Henry observes, "Harris-Perry is one of the few political scientists to understand that empirical data alone cannot tell the full story of the emotional impact these negative stereotypes have on black women" (52).

[17] The only exceptions are "Someone Ought to Tell Her There's Nowhere to Go" and "Jellyfish."

[18] See Eve Allegra Raimon, *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*, for an assessment of the tragic mulatto trope in sentimental white fiction.

CHAPTER VI

A POETICS OF INCLUSION

Histories of American poetry are often recounted in terms of the choices poets make to exclude, choices made possible through binaries like the one I explore here between poetry and prose. Consider again Robert Lowell's "raw and cooked," or a variety of other examples: closed and projective, formalist and anti-formalist, symbolist and immanent, speech-based and text-based, or Language and Lyric, to name a few. Such divisions are not always reducible to concrete formal distinctions, like whether to use rhyme schemes or employ pentameter, say. Yet they each lead to questions of form, and, more importantly, they are rooted in a national landscape marked by poets' obsession with the significance of these forms. As Stephen Cushman observes, American poets tend to share an ever-present yet often unacknowledged conviction that certain formal operations and strategies are uniquely suited to express American life and that a poet's job is to select the right and proper form. When Cushman first pointed out such "fictions of form" in his 1993 study by that title, he did so not to correct them, "not to judge their truth value, not to call them wrong or false," but only to reveal the impact of their guiding force: "the unique ways in which it [American poetry] promotes the significance of its own formation" (5-6). Yet the "unique ways" that poets have acted out these pervasive fictions are often freighted with judgments of their own; Cushman himself notices how frequently formal convictions surface as pejorative forces, where what *to* do is inherently superior over what *not* to do. It is "the dark side of the American will toward poetic independence," Cushman explains, marked by "Anxiety, compulsion, self-consciousness, desperation, frustration, tension, obsession, fratricidal intensity"—all terms Cushman

extracts from earlier, germinal studies of US formalisms by Harold Bloom, David Bromwich, Roy Harvey Pearce, Edwin Fussell, John Hollander, and Daniel Hoffman (8). Indeed, binary divisions may allow factions that in turn let poets (and critics) take sides, place blame, and assert dominance.

Desiring to escape models that seem only to enable ill-will, recent critics have been eager to understand US poetry without this narrative of rifts and disagreements. Thus, even as he notes the pervasiveness of many formal divisions, Cushman himself stresses that, for poetry analysis in general, "Least useful are those approaches that insist on binary pairings of opposites," because "the differences they identify are superficial and not the differences that make a difference" (13). More recently, when, in the 2012 edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Michael Davidson looks toward a more unified future for American poetry, he does so with a decided note of relief: "It seems clear that the emergent poetry of the 21st c[entury] no longer can be described by binaries" (1495). Notably, Davidson adds social divisions into his assessment of binaries to conclude his thoughts: ". . . and categories of identity seem both limiting and beside the point. The strong lyric tendency of poetry of the 1970s and 1980s is now matched by an equally strong commitment to narrative, prose poetry, performance, and satiric verse. To adapt the title of a recent anthol[ogy], we live in an age of the Am[erican] hybrid, linking formalists and experimentalists, proceduralists and stand-up poets."

Davidson's post-identity, non-binary forecast is overly optimistic, at best, and tone-deaf, at worse, especially considering the ongoing systems of supremacy that often require us to recognize separate identity categories if only as an antidote to oppression

through invisibility. Indeed, Davidson himself would likely revise his statements from 2012 in light of the political realities of the US in 2017, where liberal democracy is threatened anew by rising fascist powers. But more importantly, whether in a present-day or historical context, we should not be so quick to dismiss as superficial the dichotomies and distinctions that emerge among US poets and poems, many of which signal complex social and aesthetic positions. Indeed, these categories are useful both for what they reveal about poets and poetry and also for how they have spurred poets to reach for and imagine particular kinds of poetries. As my study has shown, even seemingly ungrounded territorialism sparked by poets' fears of the encroachments of prose may lead from anxieties and frustrations to an optimistic, hopeful aesthetic; in the case of poetry and prose, the tradition of foregrounding distinctions between the two speaks to a history of American poetry that is less "dark," closed-off, and excluding, and more open and inclusive—all due to the very opportunities of aesthetic "fictions" of difference.

The social and political productivity of poetry with prose is both a tradition in literary history and also a presently unfolding phenomenon: in contemporary US poetry, such works have gained increased visibility, and many of them—like the writings of Thoreau, Williams, Bishop, and Rushin before them—draw strategies and forms from both poetry and prose traditions, probing that too-easy aesthetic dichotomy in order to press against limited understandings of social and political issues. The list of such works is long and growing, and it is beyond the scope of this project to enumerate them all here, but it may suffice to mention some of the most obvious examples, like the poetry collections of Susan Howe, Ilya Kaminsky, C. S. Giscombe, Tyehimba Jess, Shanxing Wang, and Monica Youn—which all include prose forms among traditional lineated

verse forms—or prose works by Karen Tei Yamashita, Lily Hoang, R. Zamora Lindmarck, and Henry Gordon, Jr., all writers who experiment with lineated verse forms in their recent novels. Of these, Tyehimba Jess's *Olio* is a prominent and telling example, one worth explaining further as an illustration of these kinds of contemporary works. *Olio*, the 2016 Pulitzer prize winner for poetry, is a collage of lyric forms that depicts the lives of several notable African American performers from the Reconstruction period. The book is divided into sections that each tell the life story of one performer at a time, narration that takes place in sequences of poems. These groups of poems are interspersed with sections of prose that narrate one speaker's attempts to recover the history of ragtime pianist Scott Joplin, particularly his final days in a mental care facility. Together, these poems and prose interludes argue for greater recognition of post-Civil War Black American artists as well as a deeper understanding of the social barriers and prejudices that undermined—and continue to undermine—wide appreciation of African American artistic productions. Why Jess reaches for multiple forms to articulate this argument is illuminated by explanations from his fellow poets who practice a similar poetics: Shanxing Wang describes his choice to use both prose and poetry forms in *Mad Science in Imperial City* as a way to exceed the "limits of poetry," and Monica Youn's *Blackacre* explains that she tends to "distrust any approach that would mean that you would have fewer choices – rather than expanded choices – when you're in the middle of writing any particular poem" ("The Politics of Error," "'Transformation, however limited . . .'"). That Wang speaks of poetry's limits and Youn seeks to maximize craft-based "choices" suggests that both resist the idea that poetry alone offers the one right way to write—or that there is one right form or mode for their work; the poetics that drives these writers is

not a search for the best form but rather the understanding that they need to draw on the resources of many forms, even prose forms, to fully articulate the complexities of culture that their texts confront. Perhaps for *Olio*, as for so many of these texts, including both prose and poetry demonstrates a formal diversity on the written page that underscores the text's argument for great social and political inclusivity within US culture.

Perhaps no writer's oeuvre represents this confluence of poetry-prose hybridity with sociopolitical concerns so well and so noticeably as that of Claudia Rankine. Much of Rankine's work explores the categories of race and gender by drawing from a variety of formal and generic modes: her poetry collections often incorporate prose conventions, and her artistic output extends beyond texts to film collaborations, "Situation videos," that she writes and produces with her husband, John Lucas. Rankine openly acknowledges that her multi-genre, "interdisciplinary" design is aimed at extending the reach and expanding the audience of a work like her 2014 book, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Interview with Rachel Zucker). *Citizen*, which is largely a chronicle of both micro- and macroaggressions against African Americans, vacillates between poetry and prose, which sometimes come together and sometimes stay separated in the seven parts of the book.

When they can be differentiated, the sections of *Citizen* may be understood like this: the book starts with paragraphs of prose, which Rankine refers to as "essays"; these often narrate moments of racist aggression against a Black individual, and they range from brief, single-page stories, to prose paragraph "scripts" for film productions, to the long-form exposition on Serena Williams which comprises section II. The text shifts to a poetic mode when it moves from specific events to generalized reflections, and the text

on the page shifts from the paragraph form to stanzas. In addition, photographs of visual art objects are interspersed throughout both the poetry and prose like a motif uniting the seven sections, one that incorporates other artists' work in a way that recalls the community created on the pages of works like *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Sister Citizen*.

When Rankine explains that, in *Citizen: An American Lyric*, these different modes and genres of writing appeal to different readers, she also affirms that each mode invites different kinds of communication, with poetry holding a special capacity for exploring emotions:

> I'm also interested in, sort of, interdisciplinary approaches to writing and poetry and I think that that is another reason why my recent work has a more general audience because people are given different ways in. To me, all of the things that get included in any given book are essential to the investigation of its subject, but it also allows someone who's more comfortable visually to work that way primarily, someone who's more comfortable in terms of text can negotiate the visual that way, somebody who's used to lineation might reside there longer than with the essay, for example, so, you know, I think that helps. But the most important thing for me, though, is that poetry is the place where feeling gets investigated. I don't think we have another genre quite as committed to the investigation of feeling as poetry. ("Episode 4: Claudia Rankine")

That Rankine imagines her readers will pick and choose between focusing on "visual," "text," and "lineation"—by which she means perhaps the art, prose-paragraph essays, and lyrical verse—suggests the extent to which *Citizen* thinks in discernable boundaries

among its component parts. Yet, as Rankine affirms, all pieces of the book are "essential to the investigation of its subject," and *Citizen*'s multiple genres and forms are much more than a scattershot method of engaging readers.

Indeed, poetry, prose, and visual art overlap and interweave throughout the book. For example, rather than print a photo of Glenn Ligon's canvas *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)* on a page facing the text that mentions it in part II, the piece appears pages later, only after the phrase, "thrown against a sharp white background," has already appeared once again in the prose itself (27, 29, 52-53). Other reoccurring phrases forge links between sections of prose and verse, like Rankine's use of the second-person "you" throughout the volume, focalization which invites readers to inhabit the subjectivity of the speaker. Another thematic phrase is "yes, and," as opposed to "yes, but," a construction that suggests "a life with no turn-off, no alternative routes" or the inability of Black individuals to escape a raced identity (8). That these textual strategies take place across prose, poetry, and visual art pieces reflects the fact that experiences of race cannot be isolated to any one mode of understanding or artistic representation, and, further, that representing complex social issues like race and racism must draw widely from any artistic resources available. Rankine's *Citizen* takes for granted that no one mode of communication—poetry, prose, or anything other—will suffice, yet it also confirms that even when acting together, these modes must retain their differences to be effective.

Indeed, if these writers, from Thoreau to Rankine, forecast a future for American poetry, it is not one where differences converge into homogeneity, where binary pairs, categories, and groupings—aesthetic or otherwise—resolve by disappearing. On the

contrary, these writers argue that these differences are central to our lives, and we erase them at our peril. But by recognizing these differences and charting their territories in writing, they imagine ways of navigating and healing rifts, working through the trauma of opposition and oppression, and existing, even thriving, amid these categories and distinctions.

REFERENCES CITED

Aanerud, Rebecca. "Thinking Again: *This Bridge Called My Back* and the Challenge to Whiteness." *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, Routledge, 2002, pp. 69-77.

Adams, Raymond. "Thoreau's Mock-Heroics and the American Natural History Writers." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 52, no. 1, Jan. 1955, pp. 86-97. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4173123.

Alarcón, Norma. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back*." *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*, edited by Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, Duke UP, 1991, pp. 140-152.

Alden, Timothy. *A Collection of American Epitaphs and Inscriptions with Occasional Notes*. Vol. 5, S. Marks, 1814.

Aldington, Richard. "A Note on Poetry in Prose." *The Chapbook (A Monthly Miscellany)*, vol. 22, April 1921, pp. 16-24.

The American Novel to 1870. *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, Edited by J. Gerald Kennedy and Leland S. Person, vol. 5, Oxford UP, 2014.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute, 1987.

Anzaldúa, Gloria and AnaLouise Keating, editors. *This bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. Routledge, 2002.

Aucassin et Nicolette. Edited by Francis Williams Bourdillon. Manchester UP, 1930.

Barber, John Warner and Henry Howe. "Paterson." *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey*, S. Tuttle, 1846, pp. 407-413.

Beck, John. *Writing the Radical Center: William Carlos Williams, John Dewey, and American Cultural Politics*. State U of NY P, 2001.

Bell, Roseann P., Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, editors. *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature*. Anchor, 1979.

Beyers, Chris. *A History of Free Verse*. U of Arkansas P, 2001.

Berry, Sandra. "In the Village: Bishop and Nova Scotia." *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*. Edited by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis, Cambridge UP, 2014, pp. 97-110.

Bishop, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth Bishop and* The New Yorker. Edited by Joelle Biele, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2011.

-----. "In the Village." *The New Yorker*, 19 Dec. 1953, pp. 26-34.

-----. *One Art: Letters*. Selected and edited by Robert Giroux, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.

-----. *Poems*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

-----. *Prose*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

-----. *Questions of Travel*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.

-----. *Poetry, Prose and Letters*, edited by Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz, Library of America, 2008.

Bishop, Elizabeth and Robert Lowell. *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*. Edited by Thomas J. Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Breit, Harvey. "Talk with William Carlos Williams by Harvey Breit." *The New York Times Book Review* vol. XV, no. 3, 15 January 1950, pp. 18.

Bremen, Brian A. "'The Radiant Gist': 'The Poetry Hidden in the Prose' of Williams' *Paterson*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 32 no. 2, Summer 1986, pp. 221-241.

Breslin, James. *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist*. Oxford UP, 1970.

Bridgman, Richard. *Dark Thoreau*. U of Nebraska P, 1982.

Brittain, Vera. *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*. Macmillan, 1933.

Brogan, Jacqueline Vaught. "'An Almost Illegible Scrawl': Elizabeth Bishop and Textual (Re)Formations." *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century*, edited by Angus Cleghorn, Bethany Hicok, and Thomas Travisano, U of Virginia P, 2012, pp. 239-254.

Bode, Carl. *Collected Poems of Henry Thoreau: Enlarged Edition* by Henry David Thoreau, Johns Hopkins P, 1964.

Bodenheim, Maxwell. "The Decorative Straight-Jacket: Rhymed Verse." *The Little Review: Literature Drama Music Art*, vol. 1, no. 9, December 1914. Modernist Journals Project, http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=

1288980726447000.

Bornstein, George. *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge UP, 2001.

Bourne, Jenny. "Homelands of the Mind: Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics." *Race and Class: A Journal for Black and Third World Liberation*, vol. 29, no. 1, Summer 1987, pp. 1-24.

Buell, Lawrence. *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*. Cornell UP, 1973.

Burton, Hatlen. "Openess and Closure in Williams' *Spring and All*." *William Carlos Williams Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 15-29.

Canby, Henry S. *Thoreau*. Houghton Mifflin, 1939.

Chrystos. *Fire Power*. Press Gang, 1995.

-----. *Fugitive Colors*. Cleveland State U Poetry Center, 1995.

-----. *Not Vanishing*. Press Gang, 1988.

Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Harvard UP, 1988.

Colón, David. "Here's to You, Meestair Robangson: The Inter-American William Carlos Williams." *Label Me Latina/o* vol. 4, Spring 2015, pp. 1-9, http://labelmelatin.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/David-A.-Colón-The-Inter-American-WCW.pdf. Accessed 14 March 2017.

Cook, Eleanor. *Elizabeth Bishop at Work*. Harvard UP, 2016.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimation Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *Feminism in the Law: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, U of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, 139-167.

Culler, Jonathan D. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*. Cornell UP, 1975.

-----. *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard UP, 2015.

Cushman, Stephen. *Fictions of Form in American Poetry*. Princeton UP, 1993.

Davidson, Michael. "United States, Poetry of the." *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. 4th ed., 2012, pp. 1480-1495.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Indiana UP, 1987.

Dickie, Margaret. "*Paterson*." *On the Modernist Long Poem.* U of Iowa P, 1986, pp. 77-123.

-----. "Williams Reading *Paterson*." *ELH* vol. 53, no. 3, 1986, pp. 653-71. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873044.

Diggory, Terrence. *William Carlos Williams and the Ethics of Painting*. Princeton UP, 1991, p. 51.

Eliot, T. S. "Reflections on *Vers Libre*." *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode, Harcourt Brace, 1975, pp. 31-36.

-----. "Prose and Verse." *The Chapbook (A Monthly Miscellany)*, vol. 22, April 1921, pp. 3-10.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*. W. W. Norton, 2001.

-----. "Woods, A Prose Sonnet." *Collected Poems and Translations*, edited by Paul Kane, Library of America, 1994, p. 366.

Evans, Danielle. *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*. Riverhead, 2010.

-----. "Five Questions for…Danielle Evans." *SheWrites*, interview with Dolen Perkins-Valdez, 30 Aug. 2010, http://www.shewrites.com/blog/view/1936520/five-questions-fordanielle-evans.

-----. "A Note on the Collection's Title." *Danielle Evans: Book News, Writing Talk, and Shameless Self Promotion*, 24 May 2010, https://daniellevevans.wordpress.com/2010/05/24/a-note-on-the-collections-title/.

-----. "Secrets and Revelations: An Interview with Danielle Evans." *Fiction Writers Review*, interview with Melissa Scholes Young, 23 Mar. 2011, http://fictionwritersreview.com/interview/secrets-and-revelations-an-interview-with-danielle-evans/.

Evans, Robert O. "Thoreau's Poetry and the Prose Works." *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance* 56, 1969, pp. 40-52. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, edited by Ellen McGeagh and Linda Pavlovski, vol. 30, Gale Group, 2000. *Literature Resource Center*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=euge94201&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CH1420033067&asid=776034040c868f8acbd195ce2d80317c.

Foster, Frances Smith. "The Struggle Continues: A Review of *This Bridge Called My Back*, by Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua." *Callaloo,* vol. 18, 1983, pp. 132-134. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2930537.

Frail, David. *The Early Politics and Poetics of William Carlos Williams*, UMI Research P, 1987.

Franklin, Cynthia. *Writing Women's Communities: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Multi-Genre Anthologies*. U of Wisconsin P, 1997.

Fuller, Henry B. "A New Field for Free Verse." *The Dial*, vol. 61, no. 731, December 14, 1916. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/books?id=AWY6AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA515&lpg=PA515&dq=henry+b+fuller+a+new+field+for+free+verse&source=bl&ots=cD8ohqX1Xr&sig=6fXLeKlhO9s4lIvIp30EtFKowQU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjvx_HW4PfSAhUBR2MKHa1qDTwQ6AEIHDAA#v=onepage&q=henry%20b%20fuller%20a%20new%20field%20for%20free%20verse&f=false

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Vol. 1, The War of the Words*. Yale UP, 1988, p. 48.

Godzich, Wlad and Jeffrey Kittay. *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics*. U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Hammer, Langdon. "Useless Concentration: Life and Work in Elizabeth Bishop's Letters and Poems." *American Literary History*, vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 162-180. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/490099.

Hancock, Ange-Marie. *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*. Oxford UP, 2016.

Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau.* Knopf, 1965.

Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale UP, 2011.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *Passages from the American Note-books*. *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by George Parsons Lathrop, vol. 9, Jefferson Press, 1896.

Henderson, Alice Corbin. "Poetic Prose and Vers Libre." *Poetry*, vol. 2, no. 2, May 1913, pp. 70-72. *Poetryfoundation.org*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse? volume=2&issue=2&page=38.

Henry, Charles P. Rev. of *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes and Black Women in America*, by Melissa Harris-Perry. *Black Scholar*, vol. 41, no. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 52-53. *Academic OneFile*,

go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=s8492775&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA293544181&asid=8f63141c81798420833245ff294b309d.

Hodgson, Thomas. *An Essay on the Origin and Process of Stereotype Printing*. Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1820. *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/anessayonorigin00hodggoog.

Hogan, Kristen. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Duke UP, 2016.

Honig, Edwin. "The City of Man." *Poetry* vol. 69, no. 5, February 1947, pp. 277-284. *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Feminist, 1982.

Jaggar, Alison M. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1983.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell UP, 1981.

Jarrell, Randall. "*Paterson* Has Been Getting Rather Steadily Worse." *Partisan Review* vol. 18, no. 6, 1951, pp. 698-700. Reprinted in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Charles Doyle, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 238-241.

Jess, Tyehimba. *Olio*. Wave Books, 2016.

Johnson, Linck C. *Thoreau's Complex Weave: The Writing of* A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. U of Virginia P, 1986.

-----. "*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*." *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, edited by Joel Myerson, Cambridge UP, 1995, pp. 40-56.

Jones, David. *In Parenthesis: Seinnyessit e gledyf ym penn mameu*. Faber and Faber, 1961.

Kalstone, David. *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

Keating, AnaLouise. *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*. U of Illinois P, 2013.

Kiernan, Francis. "Fiction at *The New Yorker*." *The American Scholar*, vol. 67, no. 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 81-92.

Kinnahan, Linda A. *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition*. Cambridge UP, 1994.

Leibowitz, Herbert A. *"Something Urgent I Have to Say to You": The Life and Work of William Carlos Williams*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton UP, 2015.

Lim, Genny. *Winter Place*. Kearney Street Workshop, 1989.

Longwell, Charles P. *A Little Story of Old Paterson as Told by an Old Man*. Charles Longwell, 1901.

Lowell, Amy. "Vers Libre and Metrical Prose" *Poetry*, vol. 3, no. 6, March 1914, pp. 213-220. *Poetryfoundation.org*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=58923

Lowell, James Russell. "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, vol. 3, December 1849, pp. 40-51.

Lowell, Robert. "A Sort of Anti-Cantos Rooted in America." *Sewanee Review* vol. 55, Summer 1947, pp. 500-503. Reprinted in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, Edited by Charles Doyle, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 184-187.

-----. "The Scream." *Collected Poems*, edited by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003, p. 326.

MacKinnon, Catharine. "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory." *Signs* vol. 7, no. 3, Spring 1982, pp. 635-658.

Manning, Frederic. "Poetry in Prose." *The Chapbook (A Monthly Miscellany)*, vol. 22, April 1921, pp. 10-15.

-----. *The Vigil of Brunhild: A Narrative Poem*. John Murray, 1907.

Mariani, Paul L. *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*. McGraw-Hill, 1981.

Martz, Louis L. *Many Gods and Many Voices: The Role of the Prophet in English and American Modernism*. U of Missouri P, 1998, pp. 65-67.

Marshall, Megan. *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

Marzán, Julio. *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams*. U of Texas P, 1994.

Masters, Edgar Lee. *The Spoon River Anthology*. Touchstone, 2004.

McCann, Carole R. and Seung-Kyung Kim, eds. *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Routledge, 2003.

McGill, Meredith L. "Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*." *American Literary History*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2007, pp. 357-74. *Project Muse*, muse.jhu.edu/article/215818.

Mercier, Vivian. "Review." *Commonweal*, March 1950, p. 565. Reprinted in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, Edited by Charles Doyle, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 210-211.

Millier, Brett C. *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It.* U of California P, 1993.

Minnesota Humanities Commission, comp. *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*. Minnesota Humanities Commission, 1992.

Moore, Marianne. *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*. Edited by Bonnie Costello, Knopf, 1997.

Moraga, Cherríe. *Loving in the War Years*. South End, 1983.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa. "Anzaldua and Moraga: Building Bridges." Gaye Williams. *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, vol. 7, no. 2, October 1981, p. 14.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Persephone, 1981. Rpt. Kitchen Table, Women of Color, 1983. Rpt. *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces de Mujeres Tercemundistas en los Estados Unidos*. Eds. Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo. Trans. Ana Castillo and Norma Alarcón. ISM, 1988. Expanded and rev. Third Woman, 2002. Rev. State U of New York P, 2015.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Ana Castillo, eds. *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces de Mujeres Tercemundistas en los Estados Unidos*. ISM, 1988.

Moss, Howard. "Review: All Praise." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 28, no. 2, March 1966, pp. 255-262. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4334647.

Nash, Ralph. "The Use of Prose in 'Paterson.'" *Perspective*, vol. 6, 1953, pp. 191-99. Reprinted in *Studies in* Paterson, edited by John Engels, Charles E. Merrill, 1971.

Norman, Brian. "'We' in Redux: The Combahee River Collective's *Black Feminist Statement*." *differences*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2007, pp. 103-32.

O'Hara, Frank. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. Edited by Donald Allen, U of California P, 1995.

Parks, Sheri. "The Crooked Room." *The Women's Review of Books* vol. 29, no. 3, May-June 2012, p. 29. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41553391.

"Patch, Sam." *Dictionary of American Biography*. Edited by Dumas Malone, vol. 14, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934, pp. 291-292.

Perloff, Marjorie. *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. U of Chicago P, 2003.

Phillips, Siobhan. "Elizabeth Bishop and the Ethics of Correspondence." *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 19, no. 2, April 2012, pp. 343-363. *Project Muse*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/480191.

Pressley-Sanon, Toni. Rev. of *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, by Melissa Harris-Perry. *Feminist Review* vol. 103, 2013, e4-e6. *Palgrave*, https://link-springer.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/article/10.1057/fr.2012.31.

Price, Leah. *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot*. Cambridge UP, 2000.

Poetry in Prose, special issue of *The Chapbook (A Monthly Miscellany)*, vol. 22, April 1921.

Pound, Ezra. "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste." *Poetry* vol. 1, no. 6, March 1913, pp. 200-206. *Poetryfoundation.org*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=58900

-----. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. New Directions, 1965.

-----. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Faber and Faber, 1986.

"prose, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford UP, March 2017, http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/152927?rskey=iryhFL&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.

Raimon, Eve Allegra. *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*. Rutgers UP, 2004.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*. Graywolf, 2014.

-----. “Episode 4: Claudia Rankine.” *Commonplace: Conversations with Poets (and Other People)*, interview with Rachel Zucker, 15 Jul. 2016, http://www.commonpodcast.com/home/2016/7/15/episode-4-claudia-rankine.

Ravinthiran, Vidyan. *Elizabeth Bishop’s Prosaic*. Bucknell UP, 2015.

Rogers, Janine. “Life Forms: Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘Sestina’ and DNA Structure.” *Unified Fields: Science and Literary Form*, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2014, pp. 66-82.

Rosenfeld, Isaac. “The Poetry and Wisdom of *Paterson*.” *Nation*, vol. 24, August 1946. Reprinted in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, Edited by Charles Doyle, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 173.

Rowe, John Carlos. “The Being of Language: The Language of Being” in Thoreau’s *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.” *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Modern Theory*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1982, pp. 28-51.

Rukeyser, Muriel. “The Book of the Dead.” *U.S. 1. The Collected Poems*. McGraw-Hill, 1978, pp. 73-111.

Rushin, Kate. *The Black Back-Ups*. Firebrand, 1993.

-----. “The Bridge Poem.” *Kate Rushin*, http://katerushinpoet.com/poem3.html. 2009. Accessed 21 Jul. 2016.

Salt, Henry S. and Frank B. Sanborn. *Poems of Nature*. By Henry David Thoreau, Houghton Mifflin, 1895, pp. xi-xix.

Sanborn, F. B. *Henry D. Thoreau*. Houghton Mifflin, 1882.

Sánchez González, Lisa. *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora*. New York U P, 2001.

Sandell, Jillian. “This Bridge Called My Book: Anthologies of Women’s Life Writing and the Problem of Community.” *Prose Studies* vol. 26, nos. 1-2, April-August 2003, pp. 278-298. *Taylor and Francis Online*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0144035032000235927.

Sanger, Peter. “‘It Was to Be’: Elizabeth Bishop, the Burning Boy, and Other Childish Marvels.” *Divisions of the Heart*, edited by Sandra Barry, Gwendolyn Davies, and Peter Sanger, Gaspereau, 2001, pages 47-67.

Sattelmeyer, Robert. "Thoreau's Projected Work on the English Poets." *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1980, pp. 239-57. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30228172.

-----. *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History With Bibliographical Catalogue*. Princeton UP, 1988.

Scrimgeour, J. D. "Coarse, Irregular Features: Prose in William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*." *Connecticut Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, Summer 1989, pp. 64-77.

"Sestina." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by Roland Greene, 4th ed., Princeton UP, 2012, pp. 1296-97.

Seybold, Ethel. *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics*, Yale UP, 1951.

Shelley, Percy B. "A Defense of Poetry." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edition, Norton, 2002, pp. 509-35.

Short, Kayann. "Coming to the Table: The Differential Politics of *This Bridge Called My Back*." *Eroticism and Containment: Notes From the Flood Plain*. New York UP, 1994. 3-44.

Sidney, Philip. "Apology for Poesie." *An Apology for Poetry: Or, the Defence of Poesy*. Edited by Geoffrey Shepherd. T. Nelson and Sons, 1965, pp. 93-142.

Simic, Charles. *The World Doesn't End*. Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989.

Steele, Timothy. *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against Meter.* U of Arkansas P, 1990.

Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. C. Marie, 1914. Print.

Steinman, Lisa M. "'No confusion – only difficulties' in Williams' *Spring and All*." *The Cambridge Companion to William Carlos Williams*. Edited by Christopher MacGowan, Cambridge UP, 2016, pp. 37-52.

Stevens, Wallace. "Lettres d'un soldat." *Poetry*, vo1. 2, no. 2, May 1918, pp. 59-66. *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org. Accessed 15 April 2016.

Swenson, May. *Dear Elizabeth.* Logan, Utah: Utah State UP, 2000.

Templeton, Erin E. "*Paterson*: an epic in four or five or six parts." *The Cambridge Companion to Williams Carlos Williams*, edited by Christopher MacGowan, Cambridge UP, 2016, pp. 101-114.

Thoreau, Henry David. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Edited by Carl F. Hovde, Princeton UP, 1980.

-----. *Collected Essays and Poems*. Edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell, Library of America, 2001.

-----. *Journal 1: 1837-1844*. Edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell et al., Princeton UP, 1981.

-----. *Journal 2: 1842-1848*. Edited by Robert Sattelmeyer, Princeton UP, 1984.

-----. "The Moon." *The Dial*, vol. 3, no. 2, Oct. 1842, p. 222.

-----. "To the Maiden in the East." *The Dial*, vol. 3, no. 2, Oct. 1842, p. 222-24.

-----. *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings.* Edited by William Rossi, W. W. Norton, 2008.

Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. Norton, 2011.

"To Our Young Poets." *The Crisis*, vol. 9, no. 5, March 1915, p. 236. *Modernist Journals Project*, http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=1302704449328127

Travisano, Thomas. *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development*. UP of Virginia, 1988.

Turco, Lewis Putnam. *The Book of Forms*, UP of New England, 2012.

Tyler, Parker. "From the Poet of *Paterson Book One*." *Briarcliff Quarterly*, vol, 3, October 1946, pp. 169-70. Reprinted in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, Edited by Charles Doyle, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 210-211.

Wallace, Adryan. Rev. of *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, by Melissa Harris-Perry. *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, vo. 36, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 116-118. *Taylor & Francis Journals Complete*, http://www.tandfonline.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/doi/abs/10.1080/1554477X.2014.955410.

Wang, Shanxing. "The Politics of Error: An Interview with Shanxing Wang." *Jacket2*, interview with Nathan Brown, Oct. 2007, http://jacketmagazine.com/34/brown-iv-shanxing.shtml.

Weaver, Mike. *William Carlos Williams: The American Background*. Cambridge UP, 1971.

Williams, William Carlos. *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*. 1949. Random House, 1951.

-----. *The Complete Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: 1906-1938.* Edited by Christopher MacGowan, New Directions, 1988.

-----. *I Wanted to Write a Poem*. Edited by Edith Heal, Beacon, 1958.

-----. *Kora in Hell.* Reprinted in *Imaginations*. New Directions, 1970, pp. 3-84.

-----. *The Letters of William Carlos Williams to Edgar Irving Williams,1902-1912*. Edited by Andrew Krivak, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2009.

-----. *Paterson*. Edited by Christopher MacGowan, New Directions, 1992.

-----. *Selected Letters.* McDowell, Obolensky, 1957.

-----. *Spring and All*. 1923. New Directions Facsimile Edition, 2011.

-----. *Yes, Mrs. Williams: A Personal Record of My Mother*. McDowell, Obolensky, 1959.

Witherell, Elizabeth Hall. "Thoreau As Poet." *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, pp. 57-70.

-----. "Thoreau's Watershed Season as a Poet: The Hidden Fruits of the Summer and Fall of 1841." *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1990, pp. 49-106. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30227588.

Wong, Nellie. *The Death of Long Steam Lady*. West End, 1984.

Yamada, Mitsuye. *Desert Run: Poems and Stories*. Kitchen Table: Women of Color, 1998.

Yeats, W. B. "Modern Poetry." *Essays and Introductions*, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961, pp. 491-508.

Youn, Monica. "'Transformation, however limited that transformation may be': An Interview with Monica Youn." *Prairie Schooner*, interview with Eric Farwell, 4 Oct. 2016, http://prairieschooner.unl.edu/blog/transformation-however-limited-transformation-may-be-interview-monica-youn.