The World Lyric:
Towards a Poetics of the Global

Walt Hunter
Wynnewood, PA

A.B., Harvard College, 2004

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ABSTRACT

"The World Lyric: Towards a Poetics of the Global" argues that the modern lyric poem imaginatively constructs a global subject. This project considers a group of writers whose poetry makes visible the rise, expansion, and development of modern forms of globalization: from mid-nineteenth-century diaspora, to early twentieth-century empire and colonization, to the financialization of the world economic system after World War II, and finally to the economic and social conditions of the present. I argue that the modern lyric's attachment to the "I," so often considered the vehicle of self-expression, uniquely captures the tensions between the subject of accelerating global convergence and the "I" of political and economic oppression. Building on the important conversations about the role of lyric poetry and the centrality of literary genres to political agency launched by critics as various as James Longenbach, Jacques Rancière, and Virginia Jackson, the project also brings to bear on modern poetics the new considerations of global theory and political ethics, from the thinking of Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, and Gianni Vattimo to the issues of "precarious life" in Judith Butler and Paulo Virno, along with questions of global solidarity and scarcity.

The first chapter explores the forging of a diasporic Irish lyric by Jane Wilde, Lady Gregory, and W. B. Yeats from the mass emigration and economic oppression of the Great Hunger. Next, I turn to lyrics of empire by the Caribbean poet Claude McKay, whose dialect ballads and sonnets address the condition of colonized subjects on the move from Kingston to New York to North Africa. Bringing the lyric into the Cold War period of US hegemony, my third chapter focuses on James Merrill, who merges the lyric

with the epic in order to sing global crisis. Building on the work of social theorists and philosophers who have recently turned to lyric to understand precarity (Berlant, Berardi, Badiou), the coda considers a group of contemporary poets who take up classical lyric modes of exhortation and blame, dynamically transforming the sovereign "I" into a precarious "we."

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Introduction

The World and the Lyric

A poem in the *Book of Songs*, the collection of 305 lyric poems with which the Chinese literary tradition begins, memorably addresses a lover in the lyric mode of exhortation:

> Cold blows the northern wind,
> Thick falls the snow.
> Be kind to me, love me,
> Take my hand and go with me. (35)

A much later poem, Walt Whitman's "Small the Theme of My Chant," from the 1869 *Leaves of Grass*, brings the hortatory lyric into the modern period, but not without difficulty:

> Small the theme of my Chant, yet the greatest—namely, One's-Self—a simple, separate person. That, for the use of the New World, I sing.
>
> Man's physiology complete, from top to toe, I sing. Not physiognomy alone, nor brain alone, is worthy for the Muse;—I say the Form complete is worthier far. The Female equally with the Male, I sing.
>
> Nor cease at the theme of One's-Self. I speak the word of the modern, the word En-Masse.
>
> My Days I sing, and the Lands—with interstice I knew of hapless War.
>
> (O friend, whoe'er you are, at last arriving hither to commence, I feel through every leaf the pressure of your hand, which I return.

> And thus upon our journey, footing the road, and more than once, and link'd together let us go.) (627-8)

Whitman's exhortations point to a certain problem of representation at the heart of modern and contemporary lyric poetry: how can the singular pronoun "I" of the poem contain both "One's-Self" and the "word of the modern, the word En-Masse?" While we might think of lyric poetry as being directed towards a single person—"O friend"—Whitman immediately makes the lyric accommodate itself to the "word En-Masse": "whoe'er you are, at last arriving hither to commence." From within the intimate address that is constitutive of the lyric as a form, Whitman breaks open the poem to accept the unknown friend. For the small chant to contain a world of difference, it must hold out a kind of radical hospitality, a sense of hopeful expectation for "the certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others" (Whitman 308). Exhortation, then, is one of the stances poetry takes towards the world as it attempts to call forth a collective "we" through the singular "I" of the lyric poem, a "we" of displaced, oppressed, exiled, and vulnerable lives.[1]

The following chapters tell the story of the modern lyric poem as it shapes and is shaped by collective global processes. The lyric poem proves to be a remarkably prescient and durable literary form for diagnosing and tracking these processes, since its reliance on singularity allows the lyric to register tensions between the particular and the

[1] In her work on the "we" in poetry, Bonnie Costello writes against a notion of plurality as "imperial authority or forced consensus," instead suggesting that poetry "often tries to bring into being a particular 'we' that has been obstructed in history" ("The Plural of Us").

universal, the intimate and the public, the self and the other, the national and the transnational. In the account that follows, poetry by Speranza Wilde, W. B. Yeats, Claude McKay, James Merrill, and a set of contemporary poets retells the history of global transformation from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The lyric poem is unique in its ability to glimpse alternative ways for the person, the nation, or the minority group to be considered representative of a global polity. Although discourses of political theory, journalism, law, or human rights might provide more direct engagement with inequality and poverty, the lyric is transformative for a consideration of global politics and geoculture because it captures alternative stances towards the world and possibilities for agency. The lyric's "I" occupies a position not of intellectual mastery or expertise, but rather one of questioning, witnessing, uncertainty, madness, ecstasy, exhortation, wonder, and spiritual possession and passion. The lyric's traditional placement of the "I" against a background of complex schemes of rhyme and meter, clashing dialects, and performative modes of address, praise, and blame makes these lyric designs the pressure points where poets register the global. Lyric poetry is therefore one means of exploring the world-system during the long twentieth century, when genocide, colonization, underdevelopment, and neoliberal globalization perpetuate inequality, foreclose conceptions of human agency, and assert, in radically different ways, the sovereignty of the one over the solidarity of the many. I argue that this group of world lyrics emphasizes the first-person pronoun "I" in order to crowd into this "I" collective, global experiences.

Poetry and globalization might seem at first to have very little to do with each other. We usually think of poetry as a record of individual experience, as a private

confession, an embarrassing truth, or a whispered address. The blind singer, the prophetic voice, the lovelorn sonneteer: these classical figures of the poet fit in oddly among the global capitalists or digital innovators who feature prominently in triumphalist narratives of the global. The poet seems equally out of the place in "counter-geographies" (Sassen 2005, 3) of globalization that draw attention to refugees, sweatshop workers, and precarious lives. Neither comfortably situated in the upper tier of globalization nor grimly trapped within the lower "survival circuits," the poet appears to drift to the outskirts of modern and contemporary history.

The lyric poem, in particular, has long represented a turning away from the world, and a deviation from other forms of knowledge and other kinds of discourse. Succinctly defined in 1957 by M. H. Abrams as "any fairly short, non-narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling" (89), the lyric was just as succinctly undefined by René Wellek a decade later in the *Festschrift für Richard Alewyn*. After trolling through the various claims made for the immediacy, intensity, and interiority of the lyric, Wellek writes, "one must abandon attempts to define the general nature of the lyric or the lyrical" (412).[2] Wellek's terse dismissal is perhaps the most well known adaptation of Samuel Johnson's remark, in his *Lives of the Poets*,

[2] But cf. Lewis Turco: "Most *lyric* poems are written in the subjective voice" (120). Turco cites, as does Daniel Albright, T. S. Eliot's essay "The Three Voices of Poetry," in which Eliot distinguishes between "the poet talking to himself—or to nobody," "the poet addressing an audience," and "one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character" (2009, 19). Gérard Genette notes that the classical division of genres into lyric, epic, and dramatic is a "retrospective illusion" (5) and that the lyric falls outside the purview of Aristotle's analyses of genre (10).

that "to circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer" (251).

In the modern genealogy of lyric criticism, two prominent branches lead to perceptions of the lyric as an otherworldy, even anti-worldly, literary form. The first tests whether the lyric is a rarefied language, distinct from other kinds of discourse and other ways of knowing and doing.[3] These attempts to locate the essence of lyric tend to identify it with either a gap or an excess in a text. Prominent examples of the negative approach to lyric include Abrams's non-narrativity; Emil Staiger's theory that "wherever in a narration the thread of a sentence is lost we feel the passage has a lyric quality to it" (67); and Daniel Albright's suggestion that "whenever we read a text and say to ourselves *Something is missing*, whether that something is a recognizably human author, or a customary world representation, or simply sense, we are in the domain of the lyrical" (3).[4] Others, however, characterize lyric not as the absence of narrative or sense, but as the virtuosic display of unique powers of compression or musicality.[5] Jonathan Culler

[3] Paul Zumthor begins his work on medieval poetry with the question, "How does poetry relate to the language I speak, which has made me what I am and which provides the medium in which I and my forebears have lived and do live?" (xii).

[4] See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: "A poem has nothing to recount, nothing to say; what it recounts and says is that from which it wrenches away as a poem" (20).

[5] Many critics have used other criteria. Staiger defines the lyric as pristine and economical: "Every word, every syllable in a lyric poem is completely indispensible and irreplaceable…. The more lyrical a poem is, the more untouchable it is" (46). Roland Greene notes that in the early modern period "the artifice of lyric,

contends that the lyric contains much that is "not drawn from ordinary speech acts" (2009, 891), and Mark Jeffreys explains, "Lyric poetry does not acquire its distinctiveness by the extremity of its difference from ordinary discourse but by the extremity to which it takes the compressive process of ordinary discourse" (1994, 129).[6] In the same vein, Robert von Hallberg argues that a poem provides "access to the remainder of language use that lies outside expository prose" (2008, 4). The world of the lyric rests in a poetic idiom defined largely by its non-paraphrasability, its difference from common usages, or its heightening of everyday language.

A second, related strand of lyric criticism has to do with its strong focus on the first-person pronoun "I"—the "simple, separate person" with whom Whitman juxtaposes a modernity defined by the "En-Masse," by diaspora, and by mass migration. From the rapturous "I" of Romanticism to the jaundiced "I" of modernism, the lyric has long been considered the least "other-centered" and the most self-centered of literary forms. The form of agency captured by the lyric has most often been individuality, rather than sociality, collectivity, or solidarity. In Northrop Frye's famous description of the lyric, the poet "turns his back on his listeners" (271). According to Eric Hayot, the lyric's "emphasis on diegetic emotion and a bipolar, interpellative relationship between the I and the you" is evidence of its refusal to adapt to a "modern world-view" (181). As Hayot's

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especially material artifice, is one of the properties treated as definitive of the genre at large and used to foreground lyric from other instances of poetry in general" (1999, 218).

[6] See also Mutlu Konuk Blasing, who argues that the lyric poem presents a kind of language that is "not oriented in relation to reference and rational discourse" (2007, 2).

comments suggest, the individual speaker of the lyric has made it particularly difficult to incorporate poetry into global theories of world literature and world-space. The notion of lyric poetry as synonymous with private expression—the "imperial assertion of self," to borrow Mark Jeffreys's phrase (1995, 197)—has identified the form with a sovereign "I," not a global "we."

The lyric poem, then, has frequently been defined in terms of an opposition to other types of speech and writing. In a cluster on the "New Lyric Studies" in the January 2008 issue of *PMLA*, Rei Terada argues that the publication of Chaviva Hošek and Patricia A. Parker's *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* in 1985 marks the end of such attempts to specify the nature of lyric. At present, Terada suggests, critics have moved from a defensive rejection of lyric exceptionalism to an exploration of the lyric's continuity with other discourses. After listing a series of recent MLA talks in which the lyric appears alongside rap and hypertext, Terada expresses her relief that "the lyric zone of electrification is dissipating along with belief in the autonomy of the lyric object and in the specialness of the lyric mode" (196). For Terada, the work of Virginia Jackson in *Dickinson's Misery* (2005) marks a turn towards the historicization of the lyric. In Jackson's book, the question of "why" the lyric emerges at various points in history replaces the question of "what" the lyric is and supplements the question of "how" the lyric works. Following Jackson, Terada writes, "what most needs explanation in lyric occurs before and after the poem, in the motives for the materialization of lyric or lyricism" (198). Jonathan Arac, whose conclusion to *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* anticipates Jackson's argument, also urges against essentializing the lyric as a genre: "we

could usefully go on to define 'lyric' as the possibility of a certain kind of reading…but even if texts from any period may occasion lyric reading, the question will then be whether that mode of reading is available at all times and places" (353).

This study of a world lyric builds on the transformative work of the new lyric theorists. It departs from the work of Jackson, however, by offering an alternative history for the emergence of the lyric "I." Instead of casting lyric as the name for a particular way of reading poetry, I provide a set of global, material, and historical "motives for the materialization of lyric" (Terada 198). "The World Lyric" contends that the persistence of the lyric has not rendered moot the question of poetry's orientation toward the world, but has left it still largely undefined. I argue that lyric poetry, because of its apparent investment in autobiography and identity, makes a good limit case for working out some of the tensions between the individual and the social or political during periods of catastrophe and global change. Broadly speaking, "The World Lyric" brings together literary studies of poetry with historical and sociological approaches to understanding the modern world-system from about 1850-2012.[7] It examines inequality, poverty, social vulnerability, marginalization, mass migration, genocide, colonization, underdevelopment, and changes in work and labor through its analysis of the cultural, the literary, and the aesthetic.

Current notions of the worldly, the global, globalization, and globalism are useful for their attention to processes that both deeply affect and yet extend beyond the

[7] More specifically, this account begins with the Great Hunger in Ireland in 1847 and ends with the global crises of democracy in the early twenty-first century.

individual—processes of mass migration, diaspora, and displacement, as well as nascent forms of solidarity and collective political organization. In Paul Jay's account of the global—with which this study closely aligns itself—globalization has a long history that encompasses "the various epochs of colonization, decolonization, and postcolonialism in all their historical complexity" (51).[8] Although I do not often use the word "postcolonial" in the account that follows, my choice to use "the global" agrees with Simon Gikandi's observation that "the postcolonial" and "the global" are both "concerned with explaining forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, and they seek to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change" (628). The political subject becomes a global and collective subject when the experience of the individual actor is immersed within the materiality and the "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" of global processes (Appadurai 6).

The attempt to identify what is global about the lyric poem combines two zoom settings on a critical apparatus: a close focus on the micro-level of poetic tropes and schemes, personal affect, ordinary life, and discrete moments in time; and a panoramic view of massive global processes that involve diasporic populations and take place over decades. Superimposing two scales of attention and analysis, a global poetics takes inspiration from the Annales School of history, and in particular from Fernand Braudel's

[8] For Arjun Appadurai, globalization refers primarily to the contemporary "technological explosion…in the domain of transportation and information" (2). For longer histories of globalization as a phenomenon extending into the early modern period, see especially Bayly and Wong.

magisterial account of the development of modern capitalism, *The Mediterranean* (1949; English translation 1995), and Immanuel Wallerstein's multi-volume *The Modern World-System*. World-systems theory, first elaborated by Wallerstein in the 1970s, has recently found a broad audience among literary scholars as a framework with which to understand global inequality in the wake of independence movements, as well as an account of the *longue durée* of capitalism from the mid-16th century onward. Wallerstein charts the emergence and expansion of a capitalist world-economy based on "an axial division of labor that leads to the construction of different zones…the core, the periphery, and the semi-periphery" (2011, v).[9] Work by Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Bruce Robbins, David Palumbo-Liu, Eric Hayot and Neil Brenner shifts attention to the world and the world-system as a unit of analysis, partly by looking to the social sciences for theories of globalization. And groundbreaking studies of the novel, such as Alex Woloch's *The One Vs. the Many*: *Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003) and John Marx's *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel* (2012), examine the novel's participation in the re-arrangement of global socio-political space.

Still, Wallerstein's theory poses certain methodological problems for literary critics, the most significant of which may be the uncertain role that Wallerstein accords to cultural production in a system devoted to analyzing the division of labor across

[9] Though sometimes attributed to Wallerstein, the terms "core" and "periphery" are borrowed from the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, as Wallerstein notes (2011, v).

nations.[10] Some literary approaches influenced by world-systems theory, such as those by Moretti and Casanova, emphasize "the violent nature of literary competition" (Casanova 2007, 9) and "the inequalities that make some literatures central and the others peripheral" (Friedman 502). For Susan Stanford Friedman, a world-systems paradigm, when adapted in this way, is problematic, because a "center/periphery model of world literature" has at its heart "the reassertion of the 'old' internationalism" (502). Friedman identifies an alternative paradigm that draws from the work of Arjun Appadurai and James Clifford. This "circulation" model for world literature emphasizes cultural hybridity without positing a Eurocentric model for literary influence and production (503). Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1990) remains a central text for considering the powerful role of the imagination as a "social practice":

> No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simply escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ("individuals") and globally defined fields of possibility. (5)

[10] On this point, see Lee, "The Modern World-System" (29-32).

Appadurai's framework of five "scapes," or mappings of the flow of people, capital, technology, images, and ideologies, views globalization in terms of the "fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" (6). While Appadurai's disjunctures avoid the reduction of the cultural to the political or the economic, Bruce Robbins cautions against too celebratory a model of culture that would posit "cultural silencing as our world's characteristic form of injustice, while ignoring, say, political subjection or economic deprivation" (52). As Robbins notes, world-systems theory, as a "theory of power at the global scale," is useful because it accounts for "the failure of seemingly victorious movements of national liberation to change the basic political and economic inequality between developed and underdeveloped countries" (49).

Following these global theorists, I invoke the "global" and the "worldly" to refer to the possibilities for ethical and political subjectivity and agency under globalization, as well as to the hybridity and interculturation that define the positions and identities of the poets I consider.[11] The world lyric's "I" brings into view a global subject—that is, a subject who emerges from globalization and "the material experiences of everyday life and survival" associated with it (Gikandi 632). While other genres of writing—from Descartes's *Meditations* to Rousseau's *Confessions* to Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*—also investigate subjectivity, the lyric has often claimed special privilege for

[11] David Damrosch's definition of world literature is somewhat more general than the definitions of the "world" and the "global" I am using here. Damrosch writes that "a work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (6).

doing so. Underscoring the centrality of the lyric to political and social thought in the early modern period, Roland Greene argues that "after Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, lyric poetry comes to be seen as perhaps the most readily available fictional space" for dramatizing and exploring "questions about subjectivity" (1999, 224). "The World Lyric" argues that the lyric continues to be such a fictional space for registering and rethinking subjectivity in specific ways during the modern and contemporary period. Rather than isolating an individual actor, the lyric locates the subject within the global processes through which it is constructed. Although at some historical moments the lyric's song becomes the vehicle for symbolic or actual resistance to hierarchies of power and inequalities of resources, the world lyric does not primarily depend on slogans or direct political themes. Nor do I intend the phrase "world lyric" to imply the instrumentalization of lyric poetry in the service of the political struggles that shape the world-system. Rather, I hope to show more generally that the lyric is a hitherto unrecognized critical space for reflections on the many possibilities of agency under globalization. At multiple points, the world lyric is distinguished by its ability to navigate between the placement of the global subject within a set of particularized interests, ethnoscapes, or status-groups, and the assertion of a universal subject based on common ideals.[12] The lyric poetry in this study thus acknowledges various kinds of plurality and collectivity—ranging from philosophical notions of universality to political movements of precarious workers—that

[12] On this point, see Clayton, who argues persuasively that "Vallejo's insistent positioning of the lyric subject as a contingently located social subject produces a self-critical poetics of resistance, transformation, and potentiality" (17).

can be hard to see when globalization is understood primarily as the triumph of rational choice and individual freedom.

The discipline of poetry and poetics has in the last few decades taken on a new worldliness with the help of Édouard Glissant, Edward Said, and Jahan Ramazani. Ramazani's "transnational poetics" shows how modern and contemporary poets understand the poetic imagination as "a nation-crossing force that exceeds the limits of the territorial and juridical norm" (2009, 2). Ramazani argues that the "cross-cultural dynamics" of "creolization, hybridization, and the like" are not "exotic or multicultural sideshows" to developing poetic traditions, but central vehicles for literary innovation (2009, 3). In the Preface to the 2012 edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman describe the encyclopedia's transformation from an "antiquarian" project to something properly "historical and cross-cultural" (x). The new edition of the *Encyclopedia* provides ample evidence of a renewal in poetry and poetics under the sign of the transnational, postcolonial, planetary, and global.

Recent formulations of the ethics and politics of lyric poetry, meanwhile, are indebted to Theodor Adorno's "Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957). In that essay, Adorno argues that the lyric, by virtue of its form, avoids trafficking in the concepts society uses to explain itself; the lyric offers, at best, a glimpse of society that is free of the critical lenses interposed by existing concepts and categories. As Robert Kaufman explains, "the lyric poem must work coherently in and with the medium – language – that human beings use to articulate objective concepts, even while the lyric explores the most subjective,

nonconceptual, and ephemeral phenomena" (2006, 363). The "descent into individuality," in Adorno's account, is one of these concepts: the lyric "I"

> raises the lyric poem to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light things undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed—and thus the poem anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities…can bind and chain that which is human. From a condition of unrestrained individuation, the lyric work strives for, awaits the realm of the general. (Adorno 213)

Adorno makes a connection between the individual, subjective experience and its potential aggregation or augmentation into a larger collective, the "realm of the general."

Such a notion of the lyric "I" closely resembles conceptions of political subjectivity that identify a collective "we" not with a utopian "global society," but with subordinated or marginalized social groups (Sklair 156). In particular, critical conceptions of universalism and political representation developed by Slavoj Žižek and Glissant lead the way towards a global lyric subject. According to Žižek, politics "involves the paradox of the singular that appears as a stand-in for the universal, destabilizing the 'natural' functional order of relations in the social body" (989).[16] A

[16] Žižek continues, "This *singulier universel* is a group that, although without any fixed place in the social edifice (or, at best, occupying a subordinated place), not only demands to be heard on an equal footing with the ruling oligarchy or aristocracy (that is, to be recognized as a partner in political dialogue and the exercise of power) but, even more, presents itself as the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, in its universality, against the particular power interests of aristocracy or oligarchy. This identification of the nonparty with the whole, of the part of society with no properly defined place (or which resists its allocated

political subject, like the lyric "I," comes into being when the singular experience of one person or group is put in the place of standing for the "all"—namely, when the "I" grasps onto the "we" (988-9). In a different context, Glissant writes about the relationship between singular experience and collective social injustice. In *Caribbean Discourse* (1981), Glissant brings to light forms of solidarity, universality, and collectivity that have seldom been uncovered at the roots of lyric:

> When the oral is confronted with the written, secret accumulated hurts suddenly find expression; the individual finds a way out of this confined circle. He makes contact, beyond every lived humiliation, [with] a collective meaning, a universal poetics, in which each voice is important, in which each lived moment finds an explanation. (4)

According to Glissant, the poetic "confrontation" sets for itself no less a global task than "to risk the Earth" and to "establish in so doing our own dwelling place." Glissant's analyses of poetry as a literary form that brings into existence a political subject open the way for a poetics of the global: I argue that the "generality" to which the world lyric aspires is often the material experience of collectivities who bear the costs of globalization, those "with no firmly determined place in the hierarchical social edifice" (Žižek 988). The lyric poem is one of the vehicles by which "the individual finds a way

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subordinated place) with the universal, is the elementary gesture of politicization, discernable in all democratic events…" (989)

out of the confined circle," not simply a clearer vision of confinement (Glissant 4).[17] Far from consolidating the solipsism of an individual "I," the lyric expands our sense of what forms of collective thinking and doing are possible.[18]

The present analysis of a world lyric and a global poetics is also allied with recent work on the ethics of collectivity and the poetics of everyday life, though it departs in some significant ways from the latter. While the first decade of ethical work on the lyric shows a strong preoccupation with Emmanuel Levinas's notion of radical alterity, the new studies of a lyric ethics tend to eschew questions about the Other in favor of

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[17] Rather than presenting another version of identity politics, the lyric takes aim at monolithic truths, offering what Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala call a "politics of interpretation" in place of a "politics of description." As Vattimo and Zabala write, "hermeneutic weak thought is the thought of the weak, of those who are not satisfied with the established principles imposed on them and who demand different rights, that is, other interpretations. In this politics of interpretation, conversation becomes the realm where the powerful describers of the world can listen to the requests of the weak and perhaps change their selfish priorities. But if they do not listen, today the weak can finally come together" (119).

[18] See Costello's recent work on the pronoun "we" in Elizabeth Bishop and others. Helen Vendler develops an ethics of the lyric based on the inhabitability of the lyric "I" by the reader: "the lyric was a script for performance…When you read a lyric, you are expected (by the poet) to pronounce the words as if they were your own" (2010, 6; "Author's Notes for Teaching" insert). Similarly, Greene's theory of lyric ritual describes an ethical encounter between the reader and the "society of the text": "the participant [in the lyric] might be said to shed his or her all-too-specific person, and to take on the speaking self of the poem. After meeting in the society of the text and submitting to its revalorizations—of what we bring to it, and of its own sounds and meanings—we take those everyday selves back, restructured or reanimated" (1991, 6).

questions about community.[19] "In what circumstances and in what terms might the poet speak of 'we'?" Bonnie Costello asks in her study of the first person plural in Elizabeth Bishop (2009, 194). Costello's "impersonal personal" is a recent addition to Anglophone theories of a plural subject, which also include W. R. Johnson's "choral poetry" (176-195) and Sharon Cameron's "amplified voice" (207-8, 270n).[20]

The noticeable shift in some Anglophone criticism over the last two decades towards ethical and socio-political discussions of poetry aligns it with a well-established European discourse that relates the lyric to a collective self. While the New Lyric Studies historicizes and demystifies the term *lyric*, European poets and critics theorize new links

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[19] For work on ethics and poetry, see Nicholls, Woods, Xiaojing, Matthew G. Jenkins, Potkay, Parikh, Wrighton, and Cole. Although several recent books follow a Levinasian model for linking postwar poetry to an ethics of alterity, I find that this approach lacks historical specificity. See R. Radhakrishnan's caveat that "the Levinasian model works with an allegorical blitheness that refuses to engage with history and its many lowercase selves and others" (793).

[20] See, especially, Phillips, who argues that her poets "articulate a common good" by "admitting the burden of quotidian banality" (2); Izenberg's account of a "universal" poetic personhood (4); and Nickels's examination of "the encounter between the artist and the multitude" in Williams and Stevens (36). This collective emphasis on various forms of community or common ground has its detractors, and Izenberg's claim for a "new humanism" might exasperate those still intent on eradicating the old humanism that clings to the lyric (4). Yet all of these studies, even as they assert what Izenberg names "the ground of social life," remain critical of an understanding of community as the nostalgia for a lost group identity. They share this concern with sociologists and moral philosophers, for whom definitions of community have been and remain notoriously elusive. See David Gilbert for an overview of *community* and its protean shifts as a keyword for sociologists (32-53).

between poetic and political subjectivity. In the work of Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Rancière, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Alain Badiou, theories of poetry are paired with political conceptions of the subject and of community. Rancière's idea of "political subjectivation," for instance, has clear implications for the study of lyric.[21] Rancière writes, "a political subjectivation is the constitution of a collective capable of speaking in the first person and of identifying its affirmation with a reconfiguration of the universe of possibilities" (250). The European interest in a universalist poetics can also be recognized in the poetry and essays of Michel Deguy, Philippe Jaccottet, Yves Bonnefoy, and Pierre Alferi. Among other things, the advent of the New Lyric Studies in the United States and the exploration of the lyric in European political philosophy together broaden the study of poetry to incorporate historical, ethical, and political-economic approaches.

The ethical turn in poetics has been accompanied by a revaluation of the common, the ordinary, and the everyday. The lyric has often occupied a definite position at the far end of the critical axis between the extraordinary and the ordinary, but Siobhan Phillips's

[21] See also Agamben's analysis of testimony, for which he looks to Fernando Pessoa and Primo Levi: "Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and the speaking, the inhuman and the human enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the 'imagined substance' of the 'I' and, along with it, the true witness" (2002, 120); and Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of singularity, which he ties to a reading of Paul Celan: "Speaking in its own name or its own individual cause, speaking the language of singularity…the poem hopes…to speak 'in the cause of the strange,' in the name of the strange and the alien" (59).

Poetics of Everyday Life renegotiates the boundary between lyric and quotidian life. Phillips teases out some of the ordinary rhythms and repetitions of "common living" in twentieth-century poetry. Her "everyday poetics" joins a substantial body of Anglophone work that has built on the French discourse of the "ordinary" and the "everyday" as elaborated by Henri Lefebvre, Braudel, and Michel de Certeau.[22]

Phillips's word *common* suggests a different, more global, direction that a poetics might take as well. While poems may defamiliarize the everyday, and in so doing draw us together in mutual perception of the ordinary acts that we share, poetry also speaks for and through those whose access to the "structures of living that all people share" is precarious, intermittent, or nonexistent—that is, those for whom the "ordinary" is a socially constructed norm, not a basic fact.[23] Global transformation, in its more modern and contemporary forms, has not only been accompanied, but often led by poetry that speaks through an oppressed or marginalized crowd—from the songs of the Irish famine and diaspora to the hoisting of the Jamaican poet Claude McKay on the shoulders of Russian revolutionaries at the Kremlin to the tweets and graffiti of the Arab revolutions

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[22] See Liesl Olson's review of "everyday life studies" (2011). As Derek Schilling explains, the study of the quotidian arose in postwar France as an alternative to both structuralism and existential phenomenology. While these approaches analyzed the "discrete components of signifying systems," theories of the everyday examined "the contexts in which these systems evolved" (2003, 23). Phillips's book might be understood as redressing a similar bias toward "signifying systems" in American poetics.

[23] A growing set of works in political and social thought turn to the lyric for help in explaining global processes and the resistance to them. See Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*; Berardi, *The Uprising*; and Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

in 2011. These poets are joined below by others who register more contradictory and ambivalent viewpoints as they explore the global within the bounds of the lyric. The poets of a world lyric whom I consider are thus the makers, maybe not of an everyday poetics, but of a complexly global one.[24]

The following three chapters and coda together sketch out a global poetics, a history of twentieth-century poetry in which a global subject moves into the "I" of the lyric. The first chapter shows how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish poetry transforms the lyric subject into the subject of genocide, nationalism, and revolution. I argue that the traces of a world lyric emerge from the first modern diaspora: the two million Irish who emigrated or starved to death during An Gorta Mór, The Great Hunger (1845-1852). This chapter traces the development of an Irish world lyric by considering four case studies: Lady Jane Wilde's "The Famine Year," published in nationalist newspapers in the 1840s and collected in her 1864 *Poems*; Lady Gregory's staging of lyric collectivity in her play, *The Rising of the Moon* (1907); the faery poetry in Yeats's *Crossways* (1889); and Yeats's elegiac lyric, "Easter, 1916." In different but related ways, Wilde, Gregory, and Yeats employ the lyric "I" to imagine an Irish nation linked with revolutionary struggles for nationhood around the globe. Forged out of the genocide of the Great Hunger, the lyric explores the possibilities of grounding a counter-discourse of the Irish nation in "inviolable hospitality," "universal emotions," and hopes for freedom.

[24] See Butler, *Precarious Life*, and the introduction to le Blanc's *Vies ordinaires, vies précaires*.

My second chapter examines the collective subject of empire and colonization across the early twentieth century as it appears through the lyric. This chapter introduces dialect and linguistic code switching into my analysis of the lyric by focusing on the Jamaican ballads and the worldly sonnets of Claude McKay. I look first at McKay's early ballads from 1911-1912, recovering their original publication in a Jamaican newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*. McKay's unstable congeries of dialect and Standard English capture the condition of colonized subjects filling the interstices of empire before and after World War I. The second half of this chapter turns to McKay's sonnet sequence "Cities," written during his travels around the world in the 1930s. From Fez to Cadiz, Barcelona's Barrio Chino to Harlem's Lenox Avenue, "Cities" charts the wayward course of McKay's "International Spirit," as the lyric "I" is swept up by the crowd and sent "pilgriming over the gutters of life" (*Complete* 228). McKay's disjunctive balladry and rhapsodic sonneteering are addressed to a globe filled with unprecedented movement by colonized subjects, from porters on trains in Pennsylvania to dancers on stages in Harlem to the crowds that carry the poet himself to an international audience in the Kremlin.

Chapter three turns to the work of James Merrill, a quintessential lyric poet of the modern "I," and the scion of one of the firms that would engineer the global hegemony of the United States in the post-war period. From Merrill's standpoint in Greece in the late 1960s and 1970s, the "we" of the lyric voice represents not the elite of a new global capitalist class, but the paradox of an "elite of sufferers" (*Collected Prose* 65). Through his lyric "Days of 1964" and his epic *The Changing Light at Sandover*, Merrill channels the premonitory signals of a compound catastrophe that includes, but is not limited to, the

rapid emergence of inequality, social vulnerability, democratic crisis, and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Far from representing a retreat into an exquisite personification of the self, Merrill's work represents a unique post-war conjuncture of global relations, political economy, lyric poetry, and epic form.

A coda captures the emergence of the global subject of precarious life, a term that I borrow to designate the effects of contemporary globalization, which include radical uncertainty, endless war, exclusion from social norms, and the proliferation of contingent or temporary labor contracts. A set of world lyrics by Sean Bonney, Myung Mi Kim, Agha Shahid Ali, and Claudia Rankine provides a matrix through which the voices of precarious lives become newly audible. Although these poets write in very different lyric modes, their work together shows how the world of the lyric grapples with global norms of austerity, totalizing regimes of English as a world language, and ideals of sovereignty.

Chapter One

"Song shall be the only treasure": The Irish World Lyric, 1847-1921

Focusing on the subject of Irish diaspora after the Great Hunger (1845-1852), this chapter uncovers the centrality of the lyric and of the Hunger in the global imagination of an Ireland that had yet to become a nation. In Ireland, the lyric and the Hunger, "An Gorta Mór," together shape early ideas of the nation that bear the imprint of suffering and oppression on a global scale. Tracking the collisions between the singular subject of the lyric and the ghastly subjects of cultural and economic oppression, this chapter follows a major pathway of the modern lyric that extends from the revolutionary poems of Speranza, the pseudonym of Lady Jane Wilde, through the dramatic performance of the collective possibilities of a world lyric in Lady Gregory's drama. The rise of an Irish world lyric culminates in the twilit faery poems of Yeats and in his later poems of crisis and revolution. Each Irish lyric intersects with the Great Hunger—and its creation of an Irishness positioned between a backward look towards catastrophe and an aspiring vision of possibilities for nationhood—in a slightly different way. In Speranza's "The Famine Year," the lyric gives voice to the "gaunt crowd" of the Hunger dead (*Poems* 5). In Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, a ballad singer and a policeman work out the possibilities for an Irish nationality through the singing of a ballad from the Great Hunger. For Yeats, the lyric occupies a different relation to the Great Hunger: the traces of the Hunger can be found in its disastrous effects on the oral traditions and faery folklore in which he immerses himself at the beginning of his career. And in his later

poems, the lyric is oriented towards a national, revolutionary horizon that the Great Hunger makes all the more urgent.

According to contemporary histories of the Irish famine, the Great Hunger marks the first historical moment in which the modern "I" is forced by the state (in this case, the British government) to undergo starvation and mass mortality. As John Kelly writes in *The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine and the Saga of the Irish People* (2012),

> What turned a natural disaster into a human disaster was the determination of senior British officials to use relief policy as an instrument of nation building in one of the most impoverished and turbulent parts of the Empire…The result was a relief program that, in its particulars, was more concerned with fostering change than with saving lives. (3)

Accounts by Kelly, Ian Baucom, Robert James Scally, Christine Kinealy, and Stuart McLean describe the Great Hunger as the first catastrophe of its scale that is directly produced by global markets, by the attempts "to facilitate agricultural modernization" and "to promote self-reliance" (3).[25] Kelly begins his study of the Hunger with Terry Eagleton's "fair assessment" of the Hunger as "'the greatest social disaster of 19th century Europe—an event with something of the characteristics of a low-level nuclear

[25] See McLean, who notes that some colonial administrators considered the Hunger a regrettable but unavoidable step towards replacing potatoes with corn, culminating in "the eradication of subsistence agriculture and the creation of a new class of Irish subjects schooled in the lessons of political economy" (65). Contributing to the scale of devastation, the 1847 amendment to the Irish Poor Law shifted the responsibility for famine relief onto local tenants during the worst year of the Hunger (63-5).

attack'" (qtd. in Kelly 2). The Great Hunger left approximately two million dead out of a population of eight million, making Ireland the only European country with fewer people today than in 1840 (Kinealy 2). An 1852 report by the Quaker Central Relief Committee underscores the ubiquity as well as the sheer quantity of death: the effects of the Great Hunger were not limited to certain classes, but spread rapidly across society from the peasantry to poor tenants to shopkeepers, merchants, tradesmen, and artisans (*Transactions* 51-53). As Baucom writes, the Hunger also marks the moment at which a complicated and agonized "Irishness" comes into being. Baucom reads the circulating letters of emigrants and ballads sung at American Wakes as evidence of an Irish nationality that "encompasses more than an island, more than a nation, more than a fatal past" (120). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the Great Hunger inaugurates a modern, global subject.

It is not surprising that the relation between colonial genocide and incipient nationalism appears prominently in Irish lyric poetry and song, since the lyric has often served as a discursive basis for national politics in Ireland[26]: the writing and singing of poetry is very much part of what Michael Davitt, founder of the Land League, calls the

[26] As Seamus Deane explains, "there was a mobilization of poetry to the national purpose of reawakening and recovering the sense of Ireland's uniquely tragic and heroic history. As a result, poetry as popular song became an important weapon in the long war against colonialism. Since it was then widely assumed throughout Europe that the ballad was the original poetry of the people, nationalist movements tended to give it an unprecedented political prominence. It was assumed, therefore, that when the old Irish music was put to new English lyrics, the native spirit would hibernicize the English language rather than be anglicanized by it" (4).

"genius of Irish nationality" in advance of nationhood (*Irish Literature* 833). The lyric singer, as "genius of nationality," is not a marginal figure confined to the library or academy, but rather the omnipresent bard of everyday life, lyre in hand. In his 1874 comparative study, *Ireland Among the Nations; or The Faults and Virtues of the Irish Compared with Those of Other Races*, James O'Leary argues for Ireland's future nationhood on the basis of the Irish "love of song, minstrelsy, and music" (134). The Irish proclivity for song and balladry, O'Leary writes, is the sign of an "inviolable hospitality" directed towards both "the stranger and the friend, the relative and the enemy" (134). In his early essays on the poets of the Great Hunger, W. B. Yeats stresses that poets "sing of the universal emotions…they sing for all men" (*Early Articles* 29). Yeats, often associated exclusively with fascism and classism, in these essays on the Great Hunger imagines poetry as one of the vehicles by which a desire for freedom is shared among oppressed populations.

This chapter looks at four periods in which Irish poetry tests, questions, and explores what forms political subjectivity might take in the future. The lyric voice registers—sometimes thematically, sometimes more obliquely through the resources of poetic scheme and trope—the universality, collectivity, or solidarity required to address the genocide of the Irish people. In particular, the lyric captures some of the varieties of a collective political subject that evade what Jahan Ramazani calls a "monochromatic nationalism" (2009, 79). The Irish world lyric is a counter-discourse for thinking about the nation: summoned into the service of Irish nationalism, the lyric imbues that project with the terror of a global past and the potentialities of a global future.

I

Jonathan Culler argues that "what lyrics demand of the world is often something to be accomplished by the performativity of lyric itself" and that this performativity inheres in aspects of lyric artifice, "from rhythm and sound patterning to performative address" (2009, 887). Extending Culler's claim, Roland Greene writes that the "ritual mode" of the lyric—the "rhythm and sound patterning" Culler describes—embeds the singular subject within a "collective act…which distributes a uniform event among actors who may be otherwise held apart by time, space, ideology, or other divisions" (1999, 7). Speranza's famous poem "The Famine Year" is a good test case for the significance of lyric poetry as a "collective act" during the imposition of famine. Using the lyric as a mode of address during a time of genocide, Speranza amplifies the "we" of a spectral army—the "human corses" and "fainting forms" of the Great Hunger (*Poems* 5). This collective voice takes up, at the end of the poem, the stance of witnessing. In the process, the "we" of the Hunger's spirits also activates the traditional lyric mode of blame poetry, which, as Gregory Nagy notes in his study of Pindar, Hesiod, and Bacchylides, functions along with praise poetry as a binding agent, "a formal affirmation of the *philotes* [friendship] that flourishes among *hetairoi*, 'comrades' in society" (241).

Speranza was the mother of Oscar Wilde and the wife of William Wilde, a surgeon and epidemiologist whose statistics on illnesses and deaths remain key data of

the Great Hunger (McLean 2).[27] "The Famine Year" appeared in the newspaper of the Young Ireland movement, the *Nation*, in 1847 and was later collected with other lyrics of oppression, poverty, and revolution in her 1864 volume *Poems*, including "The Voice of the Poor" and "To a Despondent Nationalist." While "The Famine Year" was instantly famous for transmitting news of the Hunger's devastation and for rallying political opposition, it has not been read for its use of lyric modes of witnessing and blame, nor has it been seen to have the rhetorical flexibility and virtuosity that its long lines contain.

The speaker of "The Famine Year" addresses, and is addressed by, the plural voice of a crowd of the starving and the dead. This voice first emerges through a concise set of questions and answers that reveal and explain the colonial machinery behind the Hunger's deaths:

> Weary men, what reap ye?—Golden corn for the stranger.
>
> What sow ye?—Human corses that wait for the avenger.
>
> Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?
>
> Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.
>
> There's a proud array of soldiers—what do they round your door?
>
> They guard our master's granaries from the thin hands of the poor.
>
> Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?—Would to God that we were dead—

[27] Seamus Heaney has written about the relationship between Speranza and Oscar Wilde: "Speranza…was from a well-to-do Dublin Unionist background, so her association with Charles Gavan Duffy and other activists and intellectuals in the circle was already an act of rebellion, an embrace of the forbidden other which foreshadowed her son's more extreme rejection of the conventional pieties" (1995, 98).

Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread! (*Poems* 5)

It is especially significant that the poem begins by addressing the reapers of corn, since corn was one of the food products that Ireland was exporting even as its populace was starving (Kinealy 1; McLean 65). In the images that follow, "The Famine Year" registers the attenuation of life to its barest physical forms, the expulsion of masses of individuals to the margins of the society, and the consignment of hundreds of thousands to death. But "The Famine Year" concludes with the voices of the dead and dying having taken over the voice of the lyric, casting themselves as resurrected "witnesses" who will testify against the British:

We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride,
But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.
Now is your hour of pleasure—bask ye in the world's caress;
But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,
From the cabins and the ditches in their charred, uncoffined masses,
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.
A ghastly spectral army, before great God we'll stand,
And arraign ye as our murderers, o spoilers of our land! (5)

While they may be viewed as "wretches" and "tools," the "charred, uncoffined masses" have the final word—an apostrophe, one of the definitive figures of lyric, that "arraigns" the British: "o spoilers of our land!" This is one manner in which the lyric takes on a worldly stance: the capacity of the lyric for certain kinds of public address is here brought into the service of those against whom physical and rhetorical force has been directed.

Although the poem closes with explicit invective—an arraignment and an indictment of the British—its rhetorical and metrical structures capture an even more complicated and nuanced form of collective political address. "The Famine Year" highlights the potency, lability, and capaciousness of the ballad line as a vehicle for public speech. Speranza employs lines of six, seven, and eight beats—the alexandrine, the fourteener, and the octameter—to accommodate a wide variety of rhetorical modes and patterns of thought. Her particularly expansive lines include, for instance, the elaboration of a set of objects through asyndeton and *enumeratio*: the Hunger dead will die "without a tear, a prayer, a shroud, a coffin, or a grave" (5).[28] The lines can feature discursive moments of concise explanation and interpretation, as in the first stanza's questions and answers. Speranza's lines also create, through extended dialogue, miniature dramatic scenes, as in the second stanza:

> Little children, tears are strange upon your infant faces,
> God meant you but to smile within your mother's soft embraces.
> "Oh! we know not what is smiling, and we know not what is dying;
> But we're hungry, very hungry, and we cannot stop our crying.
> And some of us grow cold and white—we know not what it means;
> And as they lie beside us, we tremble in our dreams."
> There's a gaunt crowd on the highway—are you come to pray to man,
> With hollow eyes that cannot weep, and for words your faces wan? (*Poems* 5-6)

[28] See Lausberg 315 for an extended discussion of asyndeton.

Other long lines in the poem join successive clauses through anaphora: “The wild bird, if he’s stricken, is mourned by the others, / But we—we die in Christian land—we die amid our brothers” (5). The rhetorical restlessness of the poem, its frequent modulations to a different figure or scheme, is nevertheless bound or limited by a strict lattice of end-rhymes. This heightened drama of spontaneity and expectation—one aspect of the “performativity” of lyric (2009, 887), to recall Culler’s term—helps to distinguish Speranza’s poetic discourse from her other political tactics, genres of writing, and modes of address.

These effects are tied closely to the fractious, collective speech that the poem tropes through the dilation and expansion of its lines. Lines three through six of the second stanza, voiced by starving children, exemplify the clamoring, competing rhythms of the poem. “Oh! we know not what is smiling, and we know not what is dying” most likely has six beats with a medial caesura before “and,” as does the following line “But we’re hungry, very hungry, and we cannot stop our crying.” Both lines are also evenly divided into pairs of eight syllables, making for two sixteen-syllable lines; both are end-stopped with an exact rhyme, “dying” / “crying.” The next line—“And some of us grow cold and white—we know not what it means”—breaks violently into a fourteener, with eight syllables before the caesura and six following it. An even shorter alexandrine follows: “And as they lie beside us, we tremble in our dreams,” with thirteen syllables total. Despite the difference in line lengths of the last two lines, “we know not what it means” and “we tremble in our dreams” match perfectly in terms of accent and syllable count. These details reveal a characteristic effect of Speranza’s revolutionary poetry. Her

lines not only change unexpectedly, but they also contain many more syllables than their metrical patterns would demand. Key to the rhetorical force of "The Famine Year," and central to its version of lyric collectivity, is the accumulation and sonic layering of these rhythms into a vast and dissonant echo chamber: not a harmonious, unified voice of opposition, but a stuttering mass of accents, stresses, pauses, and stark, conclusive end-rhymes.[29]

If we read "The Famine Year" in this way—namely, for its pluralizing of the lyric pronominal "I," its occupation by the dead as witnesses and testifiers, and its

[29] The stretched lines of "The Famine Year" are haunted with the history of lengthening a single lyric line that begins, as Hollander notes, with Surrey's translation of Psalm 55 and continues through the successive adoption of the six-foot alexandrine by Spenser, Sidney, Milton, Shelley, and—eventually—Yeats (170). Speranza's prophetic lines are also reminiscent, in apocalyptic urgency and sheer length, of their revolutionary precursors in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). At the same time, the repetitions of "fainting forms," "stately ships," and "wherefore weeping" perhaps signal a different lyric tradition: the alliterative hemistichs found in Old English elegies and riddles. But while the poem's lines may be traversed by certain British precursors, the built-in expectations and allusions to the lyric tradition that tend to accompany modern uses of longer verse lines, such as the stanzaic closure associated with the Spenserian alexandrine or the regular alternations between alexandrine and fourteener in "poulter's measure," are radically disturbed. "The Famine Year" splices and divides its rhythms, creating a jolting beat that often challenges an easy metrical categorization. Speranza activates a different metrical backbone or skeleton for each line in the poem, so that the previous line gives no reliable indication of what verse-length will follow. This metrical contingency impresses the ear with the sense that the poem is always beginning again, or urgently appearing in the middle of something, rather than proceeding by the set pattern that the rhyming couplets might imply.

heterogeneous species of rhetoric and rhythm— the poem does not only reflect an immediate political reality, but also embodies and performs a unique kind of political expression. As Speranza writes in her essay "The American Irish," poetry "is not merely the result of the spirit of the age, but the spirit itself" (*Speranza* 299). As a starting point for this history of a diasporic Irish lyric, the performativity of the lyric line is given over to the spirits either starved to death by colonial measures or forced to emigrate. In the context of the Great Hunger and its politics, the "we" of Speranza's poem gives voice to a social vulnerability not only through its direct political themes, but also through its rhetorical and rhythmical schemes, placing elements of a lyric tradition in the power of a spectral army of witnesses.

"The Famine Year" thus brings into view the political subject of economic and cultural oppression in part through its lyricality. Looking at Speranza's work more broadly, the lyric is complexly linked to revolutionary nationhood. Although Young Ireland may not come to mind immediately as a transnational or global movement, many of Speranza's poems and essays reveal a tendency towards thinking about the Irish nation as leading a global movement for justice. Her *Poems* collects not only the lyrics she published in *The Nation* in the 1840s, but also her translations from German, Danish, Russian, Italian, and Portuguese, which appear in a second section called "Wanderings through European Literature." Although the first words of *Poems* are "my country," Speranza imagines Ireland's future as a nation not in order to restrict our attention to Ireland, but rather to tease out the interconnectedness of Ireland with revolutionary movements all over the world. Titles in this collection, such as "Sympathies for the

Universal" and "France in '93," introduce poems that situate the suffering of the Irish Great Hunger within the larger context of transnational sympathy and identification. In the former, the poet's lyre generates a "wailing planet music" (87) in the midst of a global apocalypse; in the latter, the "famished cry for bread" rises from a "wildered multitude" and a "human ocean" that spans Ireland and France (53-4). These poems are representative of the collection as a whole, which uses the Irish experience of the Great Hunger as the impetus for thinking beyond the nation—sometimes in the generalized, abstract terms of "Sympathies for the Universal," sometimes in the direct historical terms of "France in '93."

When we look closely at Speranza's essays, her focus on Ireland again presses up against a global horizon, given immediacy and urgency by the Great Hunger. A lesser-known essay, "The Poet as Teacher," couches Speranza's concern for the Irish diaspora precipitated by the Hunger in the apocalyptic terms familiar from her poetry. In that essay, she warns against mistaking "sectarianism or one-sidedness in literature" for "nationality": "The mind, like the mystic city of the Apocalypse, should have portals open to all points of earth and heaven, from which a thought, a holy and ennobling thought may come. Heroism from all lands and of any age is still vital and will kindle heroism" (Wilde, *Essays* 55). To replace the current world-system, Speranza proposes a "new system of things" in which "a higher object even than to increase the material prosperity of a country is to create the moral dignity of a people, to bring the torpid, slumbering energies of Ireland within the influence of the powerful electric forces that everywhere else are stirring humanity into new life" (Wyndham 212). Looking to the

American Irish for a way to articulate Ireland's struggle with a "worldwide movement," Speranza adopts a perspective "beyond all merely local aims" and "the progress of one's own race and country" (213).

Finally, Speranza's inclusion in one of the many compilations entitled *Lyra* from the period indicates how the term "lyric" is used strategically by editors and translators in the late-nineteenth century to generate an alternative mode of organization to supplement poetic genre, religion, or national affiliation. *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* (1878) includes four of Speranza's poems and resembles earlier volumes "partaking more or less of a national character" (i) such as *Lyra Anglicana* (1865) and *Lyra Germanica* (1855). *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* also contains four "Sacred Lyrics" by her son Oscar, as well as poems by several Great Hunger poets, including William Allingham, Samuel Ferguson, and Aubrey De Vere. As the editors explain, the compilations entitled *Lyra* are "to be distinguished from regular and systematic collections" (vi). While their authors "are outwardly separated by attachment to diverse religious creeds" (v), their works bear "the stamp of heart-utterances" and "politics of every shade have been designedly, indeed of necessity, ignored" (vi). *Lyra Germanica*, the template for the later compilations, is a translation by Catherine Winkworth of *Versuch eines allgemeinen evangelischen Gesang- und Gebetbuchs* (1833) by Christian Charles Josias Bunsen, the Prussian diplomat. Winkworth's rendering of the German *Versuch* into *Lyra* thus marks one of the points at which the world lyricization of poetry is made visible. In these collections, the transnational term *lyric* is used as much to bridge differences of religion and politics as to group poems under the rubric of "short, fugitive, and lyrical," in contrast to earlier

collections of odes and ballads (*Lyra Hibernica Sacra* vi). Speranza's inclusion in *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* indicates a transnational consensus, gradually developing after the national revolutions of 1848, about what "lyric" signifies.

Writing in the context of the Great Hunger and its politics of genocide, Speranza links Ireland to the proliferation of many concurrent and future struggles throughout Europe. Using the lyric and its traditional modes of performativity to imagine the subject of mass diaspora and genocide, Irish poets writing after Speranza have her work as a precedent for the casting of poetry as the discourse of global struggle. One of the next places in which a world lyric appears is in performance itself: the following section turns to a play by W. B. Yeats's friend, patron, and collaborator Lady Gregory, *The Rising of the Moon* (1907). *The Rising of the Moon* dramatizes the possibility of a collective subject within the bounds of the single "I." Lady Gregory's work thus provides a critical link between the lyrics of the Great Hunger and the activation of a revolutionary political subject in the later poetry of Yeats.

II

In her essay "The American Irish," Speranza looks past the 1793 and 1848 revolutions to a future struggle that links Irish republicans in solidarity with the masses of Europe:

> The next great movement in Ireland *will not be a rising of the peasantry against the police*, it will be as a part of the European struggle of the masses against a

> dominant minority. Lines, like hidden electrical wires, or republican feeling, traverse unseen the whole soil of Ireland; a touch will waken them into action. (Wyndham 238; emphasis mine)

These hidden "lines" are uncovered, the electrical wires bared, in Lady Gregory's play about the peasantry and the police, *The Rising of the Moon* (1907). They are the poetic lines of "Granuaile," a ballad sung by the main character, who is a nationalist on the lam from prison and has disguised himself as a ballad-singer. Granuaile, or Grace O'Malley, was a popular figure for the Hunger poets as well: Samuel Ferguson's "Grace O'Malley" extends the poem another thirteen stanzas. Later, Patrick Pearse, one of the fifteen executed after the 1916 Rising, would write a version in Gaelic (Marsh 122). The second lyric that appears in the play is "The Rising of the Moon," by John Casey, a Fenian poet. While the ballad-singer uses "Granuaile" to elicit a police sergeant's help, he uses "The Rising of the Moon" to communicate with a friend arriving by boat to help him escape. The first poem appears as a kind of switch in the play, the second as a signal. By the recitation of these poems, *The Rising of the Moon* performs the collective possibilities for a world lyric that nevertheless retains a single "I."

The first performance of the play, on March 9th, 1907 by the Abbey Company, has been overshadowed by the performances, one month earlier, of J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, which drew international attention for its scathing portrayal of the west of Ireland and caused riots not only in Dublin but also in American cities. Although *The Rising of the Moon* had little of the *Playboy*'s effect—Synge's play was a Don Juan among the Eunuchs, as Yeats would famously defend it in a short poem

from *Responsibilities* (*Collected Poems* 111)—it offers an equally subversive vision: the play imagines a nascent common sympathy that exists between the worker (in this case, a policeman) and the nationalist (a ballad singer).

The play unfolds as a tense standoff between a Loyalist sergeant and a Republican convict/ballad-singer. Neither is named. In her journal, Lady Gregory writes that she heard the story from a friend and Gaelic League organizer, Tomas O'Concannon, who, when his bicycle broke down, received help from a policeman with nationalist sympathies (*Selected Plays* 358). While putting up "Wanted" placards for the convict, the sergeant encounters a ballad-singer carrying a bundle of ballads to sell to sailors. After telling the singer to "stop that noise," the sergeant begins to listen, and finds that his loyalties are tested when the man allows him to participate in the singing of "Granuaile." Yet this participation comes about not by the sergeant joining in, but by the man singing a false line, tempting the sergeant to correct him. When the man sings "her lips so sweet that monarchs kissed" and trails off, the sergeant interrupts him: "That's not it…'Her gown she wore was stained with gore.'…That's it—you missed that." The sergeant and the man then enter into a dialogue, in which the sergeant gradually swings into the orbit of the poem's "I":

> MAN. You're right, sergeant, so it is; I missed it. (*Repeats line.*) But to think of a man like you knowing a song like that.
>
> SERGEANT. There's many a thing a man might know and might not have any wish for.

MAN. Now, I daresay, sergeant, in your youth, you used to be sitting up on a wall, the way you are sitting up on this barrel now, and the other lads beside you, and you singing 'Granuaile'?...

SERGEANT. I did then.

MAN. And the "Shan Van Vocht"?...

SERGEANT. I did then.

MAN. And the "Green on the Cape?"

SERGEANT. That was one of them.

MAN. And maybe the man you are watching for tonight used to be sitting on the wall, when he was young, and singing those same songs…It's a queer world… (148)

At the end of the dialogue, the Sergeant reflects on the Man's reasoning, and moves from a state of "knowledge" to one of active "wish":

SERGEANT. That's a queer thought now, and a true thought. Wait now till I think it out…If it wasn't for the sense I have, and for my wife and family, and for me joining the force the time I did, it might be myself now would be after breaking gaol and hiding in the dark, and it might be him that's hiding in the dark and that got out of gaol would be sitting up here where I am on this barrel…And it might be myself would be creeping up trying to make my escape from himself, and it might be himself would be keeping the law, and myself would be breaking it, and myself would be trying to put a bullet in his head, or to take up a lump of

stone the way you said he did…no, that myself did…Oh! (*Gasps. After a pause*)

What's that? (*Grasps man's arm*) (150)

For the sergeant, hearing, singing, or correcting the words of "Granuaile" is not quite enough for the ethical switch to happen. He must imaginatively change places with the singer, and reconstruct the narrative situation in which the song would be used. The chain of thought even leads him to confuse the pronoun, putting himself in the place of the ballad-singer. At the end of the play, the ballad-singer conflates the event of revolution with the event of the poem: "Maybe I'll be able to do as much for you when the small rise up and the big fall down…when we all change places at the Rising (*waves his hand and disappears*) of the Moon" (151).

Lady Gregory's use of the lyric "I" in a play about changing places and occupying an alternative subject-position stages the rise of the lyric in a post-Hunger world. *The Rising of the Moon* shows how the lyric can be a concrete form for a political strategy: the formation and mutual translation of communities scattered across world space. In a modern world-system composed of status-groups with conflicting goals of social equality and national liberty, the lyricization of poetry, the frisson between the singular "I" and its appropriation by collective movements, might be necessary in order to move from an ethics based on difference to an ethics based on the "we." From this perspective, the lyric is a revolutionary practice: the lyric grants agency to the weakest elements of society, and thus becomes one of the grounds of political and ethical self-determination. Its "I" becomes charged with ethical possibility, open to its appropriation by conflicting subject positions, interests, agendas, priorities, and conceptions of the good, which mingle in

what Roland Greene has called the "society of the text" (1991, 6). *The Rising of the Moon*, which coincides with the rise of the world lyric, is the moment when identities, status-groups, and minorities, struggling to advance conflicting goals, can "change places."

III

In Speranza's "The Famine Year," the lyric becomes the form in which the starving crowd speaks out against the austerity and oppression of the Great Hunger's colonial politics. Lady Gregory's play moves poetry into dramatic performance to think through a political subject that is neither identitarian nor universalist, but lyric: a political subject for whom mass experience can be channeled through a single "I." For W. B. Yeats, writing forty years later, the lyric occupies a different relation to the Hunger and to the emigration and diasporization caused by it. In his early essays, Yeats is sensitive to the collective plight of the Hunger poets; many of his first reviews are written on Mangan, Ferguson, and others from the Young Ireland movement. While the nation-making and the person-making effects of W. B. Yeats's early poetry have drawn the careful attention of Ramazani and Oren Izenberg, Yeats's focus on Irish folklore and on the particularities of the faery "world" also offer an account of the lyric's world-making capabilities.

Yeats's early interest in collecting folklore directed his attention to the effects of the Great Hunger on oral tradition. As R. F. Foster explains, Yeats's first book, *Faery*

and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (1888), is heavily influenced by his acquaintance with Speranza, whom he visited several times in the late 1880s (76). Yeats gleans some of the material for this book from conversations with Speranza and from books by her husband William Wilde—physician, census-taker, father of Oscar—who were together responsible for preserving a great deal of the folk culture destroyed by the Great Hunger. In his 1852 *Irish Popular Superstitions*, William Wilde invokes the Hunger to explain the sudden disappearance of Irish culture and folklore. Wilde diagnoses the effects of cultural devastation on the "foundations of social intercourse," the myths and folktales of the country (10). As Wilde writes, "the hum of the spinning-wheel has long since ceased to form an accompaniment to the colleen's song; and that song itself, so sweet and fresh in cabin, field, or byre, has scarcely left an echo in our glens, or among the hamlets of our land" (10).[30] With echoes of Wilde, Yeats interprets the effects of post-Hunger modernity in his introductory essay to the twelve-volume anthology *Irish Literature* (1904), compiled by Douglas Hyde, A.E., Standish O'Grady, and Lady Gregory, among others. Here, Yeats argues that the Great Hunger marks the advent of a modern Irish poetry (xiii). Later, in his *Autobiographies*, Yeats theorizes in more detail the influence of Irish emigration on his poetry. Recalling a visit to the Young Ireland Society with his father,

[30] In his description of the European Revolutions of 1848, Wilde uses the Famine to distinguish Ireland's fate from that of France, Germany, and Italy: "all these countries will settle down, more or less, into the conditions in which they were before 1848…not so the Irishman; all his habits and modes of life, his very nature, position, and standing in the social scale of creation, will and must be altered by the loss of his potato" (19).

Yeats attributes his own "escape from rhetoric and abstraction" in poetry to a revelation that occurs while reading newspaper verse by a dying emigrant (1927, 128).

While Yeats's faery poems might not feature overt, thematic references to the Hunger or to emigration, they may nevertheless bear the traces of Irish genocide and emigration in their mode, structure, and design, as well as in certain place-names that identify the overlapping territories of faery land and famine death. Placing Yeats's early poetry in relation to the Great Hunger shows a new side of poetry that has often been taken as evidence of Yeats's "*antithetical* relationship to the world of humanity" (Savage 124; emphasis in original). The poems have traditionally been understood as representative of Yeats's aestheticism, which D. S. Savage in 1945 describes as the mind's attempt to "dissociate itself from the realm of collective values and to center itself upon the *personal life of the individual*" (118; emphasis mine). Replete with fairies and heroic figures, Yeats's poetry from this period treats subjects from Irish folklore, such as the abdication of King Fergus in pursuit of an eremitic life in the forest, or the friendship between a man and the allegorical figure of Sorrow. These poems of symbolism and subjectivity are influenced as much by Yeats's early association with the Pre-Raphaelites and with Speranza and Oscar Wilde as by his trip to Paris in February 1894 to see a production of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axel* (*Uncollected Prose* 320). Highlighting many of the aspects of the poetry from the 1890s that have become definitive of the lyric in general, Yeats's early poetry has been described as so much style in search of a subject: in Pound's 1914 review of *Responsibilities*, the "glamour" of the early poems becomes the "hard light" of the later style (*Poetry* 324). Similarly, Declan Kiberd describes "the

elevation of style over subject" in the "liminal, twilit world of wavering rhythms and half-said things, wherein the critical faculties are dulled but not annihilated" (*Poetry* 342).

Yet while poems such as "The Stolen Child" continue to bear the standards of fin de siècle decadence and aestheticism, some recent accounts of Yeats's poetry have hardened their glamour. Sinéad Garrigan Mattar argues that Yeats's "Irish faery lore reveals something new about the relationship between the materialist narratives of nineteenth-century social science and the concurrent, related 're-enchantment' of the world by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century litterateurs" (138). Edward Said, Ramazani, Michael North, and Kiberd position Yeats's early poems in critical relation to his project of cultural nationalism. As North argues, "the aesthetic can complete its assigned task and reconcile social and political contradictions only by remaining aloofly aesthetic; its political power rests in a way on its power to resist politics" (1991, 189). And in Kiberd's account, "if pain can be transmuted into art, and assuaged by it, then something has been achieved" (*Poetry* 341). Yeats's aristocratic fetishes and fascist collaborations are well known, and his inability to reconcile the contradictions of politics has led to assertions, like North's and Kiberd's, of poetry's status as a compensation for life.

An exemplary lyric from Yeats's early period, "The Stolen Child" (1886), is often imagined to be the formed artifice of the lyric subject's emotions, what Kiberd calls an "achieved self-expression" (340). "The Stolen Child" describes the abduction of a child by the faeries and their departure together for the faery world. It is voiced by the

company of departing faeries, who tempt the child with evocative descriptions of the plenitude and largesse of the faery kingdom, its "faery vats / Full of berries, / And of reddest stolen cherries" (8). In contrast, the everyday world of the child is "full of weeping" (9). The poem, which was included in both *Faery and Folk Tales* (1888) and the nationalist collection *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*, published the previous year, was a favorite of Yeats's early reviewers (Foster 75).

But while "The Stolen Child" stands as a testament to the liminal beauty and enchantment of Yeats's faery poems, it might also be read for its worldliness, by attending to the tradition of poetic invitation in which it participates. Analyzing poetic invitations from the Song of Songs to Marlowe and Milton, Erik Gray argues that the "erotic energy" of the invitation "is channeled into a description of the landscape" (371). This process, in which physical desire becomes "locodescriptive fantasy," brings about an ethical transformation, since "what could be an abrupt demand (*come to me, here*)" becomes "something more equitable: *Come with me, to a distant place we can share*" (371). Gray identifies a double movement that complicates the invitation poem's relation to place: "the addressee is invited to a desirable and welcoming place….Yet the proposition is not simple, since she is being asked at the same time to take a difficult, even fearful, step, by leaving the familiar surroundings of home" (373). Reading "The Stolen Child" as a lyric of invitation reveals similarly conflicted dramas of departure and return, overlaid worlds of trouble and safety.

In "The Stolen Child," the mode of invitation is clearly marked by the refrain, which concludes each of the poem's four stanzas:

Come away, O human child!

To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand,

For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand. (9)

As the refrain shows, the poem fits a little uncomfortably within the tradition of lyric invitation, most often addressed to a single lover (Gray 371). Instead of the intimacy desired by Marlowe's passionate shepherd, the faeries usher the child into an anonymous community. Moreover, by the end of each passage of refrain, "The Stolen Child" is not so much dialogic, like the Song of Songs, as it is ruefully conclusive. This tone is reinforced by the metrical peculiarity of the final line of the refrain. Each stanza, which begins with the ballad quatrain of alternating seven- and six-syllable trimeter lines in an abab rhyme scheme, diverges from a traditional ballad structure in the middle lines, only to return to another abab quatrain in the refrain. Yeats's unusual twist on the ballad quatrain is his addition of an alexandrine, a twelve-beat line with a strong caesura, to conclude each refrain.[31] While the ballad structure implies a collective voice, a company joined in song, the dilated line of six stresses is ghosted by its history of use in the long poems of Spenser and Shelley, such as *The Faerie Queene* and "The Witch of Atlas," not to mention its anchoring presence in the ottava rima stanzas of Tasso. The alexandrine brings an odd flavor of epic argument into the brevity of the lyric invitation; its

[31] Common in the couplets of French verse and in the ottava rima stanzas of Italian epic poetry, the alexandrine also concludes each stanza of Shelley's "To a Skylark," which, like "The Stolen Child," is composed of trimeter lines.

appearance could imply that the stakes of faery carnival, dancing, and play are somewhat greater than we might expect.

The final stanza suggests why this might be the case:

> Away with us he's going,
>
> The solemn-eyed.
>
> He'll hear no more the lowing
>
> Of the calves on the warm hillside;
>
> Or the kettle on the hob
>
> Sing peace into his breast;
>
> Or see the brown mice bob
>
> Round and round the oatmeal chest.
>
> *For he comes, the human child,*
>
> *To the waters and the wild,*
>
> *With a faery, hand in hand,*
>
> *From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.* (9-10)

This stanza describes the process of sense-deprivation that accompanies the departure into the faery kingdom. Leaving with the faeries is associated with the interruption of the patterns of daily life, figured here as the circuit of running mice, the repetitive sound of lowing, and the predictable peace of a boiling kettle. While the faery invitation brings relief from a future of weeping, it also heralds a departure from safety and comfort. Yeats's poem thus reverses the normal trajectory of the invitation poem, which usually invites the lover away from "the waters and the wild" of the outside world into an interior

world of pleasure characterized by abundant luxury and artifice (Gray 375). While the stolen child flees into abundance, it is also clear that he flees from domesticity in the direction of uncertainty, play, and spontaneity.

"The Stolen Child" can certainly be read as an escapist fantasy, a departure into the aestheticized world of Byzantium. But it might also be read in terms of its final movement from a mode of invitation to one of bald statement. A consensus arrives by the last stanza, marked by a shift in tense; argument is no longer necessary. The tense changes from invitation ("come away") to declaration, or perhaps announcement ("for he comes"). At the same time, the final line alters slightly from causality (he should leave because the world is full of more weeping than he can understand) to description (he is leaving from a world full of weeping). The privation of the Great Hunger, which decimates Irish folklore and banishes the faeries, coincides with the departure of the human child from the domestic world of the final stanza. Attention to the invitational mode of lyric makes the complex worldliness of the poem clear: the world of lyric invitation into which the child enters is, first of all, a world that can be shared, as the plural speaker of the poem implies. But it is also a world of radical uncertainty, no longer to be judged and measured by the senses of sight and hearing that the child once used.

A brief historical reading of the poem adds a concrete link between the faery world and the world of the Great Hunger. One of the place-names in "The Stolen Child" carries a trace of the Hunger's landscape. County Sligo, where the poem is set, contained the highest concentration of faery forts in Ireland (McLean 187n); the Sligo landscape was also one of those hit hardest by the Great Hunger, with the highest percentage

decrease of land under potatoes, along with Tipperary, Clare, and Longford (Ó Gráda 24). The "Rosses," the sand where the fairies dance in the moonlight, is part of the same Sligo landscape as the "Sands" where victims of the Great Hunger dug underground houses, effectively burying themselves and their children alive. In an essay on "Drumcliff and Rosses" from 1893, Yeats identifies the location with "national troubles," and in particular with the ghost of an Irish sea captain who committed suicide while emigrating (*Poetry* 179-80). By including the faery world in the poem, Yeats includes not only the culture that the Great Hunger destroys, but also the topography on which the human tragedies of the Great Hunger occur. For Yeats, the lyric poem is where the faery world is physically coextensive with the ordinary world racked by the Hunger: the history of faery lore is preserved at the same time as the history of famine loss.

IV

The Irish lyric, thought to grow decadent or symbolist in the period between Speranza and Yeats, can be understood differently when we consider its relation to mass starvation and diaspora. The difficulty formation of a political subject, propelled into nationalist struggle, becomes explicit in Yeats's later poetry, and especially in those poems from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), many of which were written just before the declaration of the Irish Free State in 1921. These poems represent a certain end-point for this account of the Irish world lyric, the modern course of which this chapter situates in the poetry of the Great Hunger. Speranza's placement of lyric song in

the voices of the Hunger's starving and dead puts them, and the lyric, in a position of collective witnessing. Later, Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* dramatizes the frisson between singular and collective lyric modes. Yeats's "Easter, 1916" is a later version of an Irish world lyric, one in which the "I" serves as a means for thinking through both political subjectivity and poetic world-making at the moment when an Irish Republic is proclaimed.

Many have noticed that, for Yeats, literary forms provide a vehicle for airing conflicting sentiments about nationalism. In her study of Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore, Elleke Boehmer writes that "nationality for Yeats…had to find its foundation in its own spiritual resources, out of which defining forms might be forged" (193). For Ramazani, focusing on "Easter, 1916," the resources for nationhood and collectivity are not in the Animus Mundi and the "interconnection of souls" (Boehmer 193), but in "the text of revolutionary action" (*Poetry* 397). In Ramazani's reading, Yeats describes a kind of political subject-formation in which the leaders of the Easter Rising contribute to a historical process that exceeds their individual knowledge: "their entry into a historical process larger than themselves engenders an unforeseeable event" (396). But Yeats's thinking, as Ramazani shows, is fraught with uncertainty, especially when we consider that the "extranational tropes and forms" (2009, 82) in the poem—its echoes of Spenser and Tennyson, for instance—reveal how "poetry and song…are traversed, even when doggedly nationalist, by twisted cross-cultural skeins" (81). When read as part of the tradition of elegy, "Easter, 1916" shows signs of "nationalism, equivocal nationalism, antinationalism, transnationalism, and many combinations of these positions" (81).

Building on these readings, I take "Easter, 1916" to be a meditation on the poet's role in the world, as well as the elegiac and equivocal commentary on revolution Ramazani shows it to be. Using the Easter Rising as a conduit for thinking about the poetic vocation more generally, "Easter, 1916" explores how the black tower of the solitary poet and the bloody street of political transformation might occupy poetic space together. For Yeats, a reflection on Ireland's political independence necessitates a critical unsettling of his own position as a political subject and, more important, as lyric archimage. In "Easter, 1916," modes of political and poetic making are bound together; their shifting conjunctures investigate the forms that a world lyric might take. In its four distinct stanzas, "Easter, 1916" situates the process of poetic world-making alongside the process of revolutionary nation-making and anti-revolutionary worries about violence and political dogmatism.

"Easter, 1916" divides and enacts four major, traditional modes of lyric poiesis: addressing, cataloguing, image-making, and naming. These performative stances towards the world, moreover, are placed in shifting, critical relation to the political powers whose street the poet shares. In the first stanza, the poet thinks of his encounters with the leaders of the Rising, emerging from "grey / Eighteenth-century houses," and the "polite meaningless words," the "tale," and the "gibe" with which he would greet them (73). After the Rising, however, these genres of address, like the Volunteers themselves, are "changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born" (73). The second stanza catalogues, or "numbers," the unlikely, ordinary set of nationalists: a socialist, schoolteacher, poet, and a "vain-glorious lout." They, too, are transformed. In the third

stanza, considered in greater detail below, the speaker adopts the Spenserian/Shelleyan lyric mode of image-maker. The poem concludes with a stanza in which the lyric speaker takes on the Adamic role of namer. At each point, the lyric mode that the poet uses is called into question at the same time that national politics are "transformed" by their association with modes of poetic making.

Understanding the poem as the yoking together of lyric poiesis and world creation, both of which, in Yeats's poetry, have a disturbing relationship to violence, death, and "unmaking," helps to explain the mysterious third stanza of the poem and its proliferation of images:

> Hearts with one purpose alone
> Through summer and winter seem
> Enchanted to a stone
> To trouble the living stream.
> The horse that comes from the road,
> The rider, the birds that range
> From cloud to tumbling cloud,
> Minute by minute they change;
> A shadow of cloud on the stream
> Changes minute by minute;
> A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
> And a horse plashes within it
> Where long-legged moor-hens dive,

And hens to moor-cocks call.

Minute by minute they live:

The stone's in the midst of it all. (74)

The poet here turns over the unattractive political possibility that "hearts with one purpose alone" exist out of step with the "living stream." Generic figures and objects—stream, horse, and cloud—move in changing relation to each other, while the "hearts with one purpose alone"—the stone—are unchanging.[32] There is a further contrast between the time of the stone, which is eternal and predictable ("through summer and winter"), and the time of the cloud and the horse, which is ephemeral and contingent ("minute by minute they live"). This stanza is particularly striking, though, because, unlike the other three stanzas of the poem, in which Yeats flits from figure to figure or thought to opposing thought, these lines elaborate a series of images that build on each other and take up a set of twelve lines. It has not been unacknowledged that this stanza represents the most complete and sustained act of poetic imagination in the poem. The flourishing of the poet's craft and imagination accompanies Yeats's worries about the single-mindedness of the heart enchanted to revolutionary violence.

But the poet as image-maker is only one role that the poem imagines. "Easter, 1916" ultimately captures the fluctuation of the poet's various roles in an ever-changing context of political questioning. The images made in one stanza cannot be trusted to carry

[32] These figures for constant change, though celebrated for their mutability, are generic names for common things, and thus somewhat at odds with the final poetic act of the poet. At the end of the poem, the lyric speaker gives the Volunteers their proper names: "MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse."

over into the next stanza, nor can the capacities of the poet be assumed to be the same. We know from Yeats's later work how often he moves back and forth between two considerable anxieties about image-making in particular. First, there is the worry that poetry has political effects that are impossible to predict: in "Man and the Echo" (1939), he writes, "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" (*Poetry* 127) Second, there is the fear that politics generates poetic images that are increasingly difficult to find: "I sought a theme and sought for it in vain" (*Poetry* 128).

In "Easter, 1916," as much as in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" or "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz," Yeats's growing self-consciousness about his own poetic abilities governs the changing architecture and structural patterning of his poetic language. Many critics have written about Yeats's patterns of image-making, and about the increasingly fraught emergence of his "emblems of adversity" and "metaphors for poetry."[33] In a foundational essay, "Spatial Form in the Poetry of Yeats" (1967), Marjorie Perloff proposes that "the cross-referencing of symbols, not the discursive development of the poem" distinguishes the poems of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* from earlier poems in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (449). The structural models proposed by Perloff and others[34] capture Yeats's efforts to understand

[33] As Daniel Albright claims, "every *image* arises out of a void" (349).

[34] Borrowing a term from Yeats's "A General Introduction to My Work" (1937), Perloff calls this structure "phantasmagoric" and suggests that it "must be apprehended spatially rather than sequentially" (450). Perloff continues, "the development of ["In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz"] is…not a sequential or logical one. Its form is discontinuous or *spatial*: the reader must fit the fragments together…" (453). Critical discussion of Yeats's poetry from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* through *The Tower* has

and react to the violence of passing time and the historical time of violence during the struggle for Irish independence. To borrow Perloff's terms, "Easter, 1916" is neither particularly "cross-referential"—the images do not ramify and grow into significance throughout the poem, as they do in "On a Political Prisoner," for instance—nor does it show a regular "discursive development." We have to look to the meter of "Easter, 1916" to grasp more firmly the unique organization of the poem, as well as the political transformations of subjectivity that it charts.

"Easter, 1916" is written in a rough iambic trimeter, with frequent substitutions of trochees and anapests.[35] Given Yeats's careful reading of Shelley, "To a Skylark," also written in trimeter, could be a precursor text for "Easter, 1916."[36] What links these two radically dissimilar poems is their emphasis on poiesis—and, in particular, on the poet's

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adumbrated various new models of temporal progression and spatial organization. Ramazani offers an alternative way to understand the formal development of a Yeats poem that is neither logical deduction nor phantasmagoric tableau but rather a sublime modulation from tragedy to joy. Most recently, Michael Wood, in his study of violence in Yeats, has described "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," written in 1921 but dated 1919, as unsettling binary structures and destabilizing oppositions "between art and fragility, law and violence, solitude and action, mockery and whatever alternative there may be to it, revelation and disenchantment" (4).

[35] According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, trimeter is both the "most speechlike of Greek meters" and the regular meter for Greek tragedy and comedy.

[36] Yeats, sensitive to the indictment of his early poetry as "unIrish," argues, in *First Principles* (1908), for a concept of national literature that admits the borrowing of forms. He writes, "all literature in every country is derived from models, and as often as not these are foreign models" (283). But, he continues, a "personal element" is required for literature to achieve "nationality in a fine sense, the nationality of its maker" (283).

abilities to compare incomparable things. In "To a Skylark," the singing bird defies the poet's powers of description, prompting him to look for the nearest comparable person or object. "What thou art we know not; What is most like thee?" the poet asks. The following four stanzas offer certain possibilities for the other half of the simile: the skylark is like a "poet hidden / In the light of thought," a "high-born maiden / In a palace tower," a "glow-worm golden / In a dell of dew;" and "a rose embower'd / In its own green leaves." The first of these comparisons is the most relevant for Yeats's poem:

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought
Singing hymns unbidden
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not…(305)

The poet, like the skylark, sings with a solitary voice, yet through it the world is "wrought / To sympathy" and brought to an ethical awareness of the "hopes and fears" of others.

Following Shelley, Yeats asks, in "Easter, 1916": What are the options for the role of the poet in the world—a world altered by possibilities for a new nation and the revolution needed to bring it about? This question generates the stanzaic architecture of "Easter, 1916," which enacts, in its discontinuous stanzas of addressing, cataloguing, image-making, and naming, four modes of poiesis, and proposes four poetic figures for the political subject of a potential Irish nation. As "Easter, 1916" suggests, the association between lyric poiesis and world poiesis, between the possibilities for lyric creation and

the possibilities for nation-making, require the embrace of contingency, multiplicity, and constant self-revision. The worry, for a world lyric, is the foreclosure of possibility for both poetry and politics, and the adoption of either a narrowly nationalist view of the Irish polity or a narrowly construed role for the poet. The dynamic transformation that leads to poetic creation, like the utter change that ushers the nation into being and transforms its subjects into a terrible beauty, may require the realization that, at least in the Irish context, the poet and the political subject share the same revolutionary space.

But Yeats's poetry has broader implications still, suggesting the difficulty of taking a global standpoint other than that of the individual, caught within the currents of a national struggle for self-determination. The particular form that this world lyric takes, the peculiar facet of the political mind that it brings into view, is the vacillation between the persuasive totality of a poetic vision and the self-questioning that renders the same vision inherently unstable, always about to be revised, superseded, denied, or decried.

V

Reading Irish poetry in the light of the Great Hunger, and in the period when the Irish nation was not a clear-cut phenomenon, shows the worldly, globalized modernity of Speranza, Lady Gregory, and Yeats. Underscoring the specificity of the Irish case, Deane writes, "there was the difference that the country had just endured one of the most apocalyptic disasters in modern history," thus marking the emergence of a global subject (51). Given the pervasiveness of poetry in Irish daily life as a form of discourse through

which ideas of the nation are argued, the poetry written by Irish poets during and after the Great Hunger is, in this account of the lyric, a first test case for what a global poetics might look like. Although the collective, anonymous subject of the ballad has often been the form most readily available for thinking through Irish political subjectivity, this chapter has focused on the lyric, in part because its singular, particularized "I" allegorizes the way that Irish poets perceive the nation as a single polity formed from collective ideals.

Yeats's later poetry sets up a dialogue between the nineteenth-century bards of the Great Hunger, whose heir Yeats felt he was, and the modern lyricism his images and masks helped to create.[37] In *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (1997), Deane describes the difficulty of founding a "secure subjectivity" when the nature of Irish experience during the Great Hunger is treated as exceptional, ineffable, or otherwise resistant to narrative: "It is obvious that the ease or difficulty encountered by a community in verbally representing itself has an effect on the ease or difficulty it has in being politically represented….Those who speak are correspondingly

[37] Helen Vendler notes that, in Yeats's late experiments with the ballad, the overarching narrative of the literary ballad enters into counterpoint with the undersong of the lyric voice (2007, 112). Vendler establishes a strong connection between Yeats and the Great Hunger. Analyzing Yeats's lifelong debt to the balladry of "Young Ireland," she notes that "Yeats's ballad writing followed on that of the 'Young Ireland' poets, but differed from theirs in that his ballads were consciously worked, not hastily written; they were not topical 'street-ballads' but rather aligned themselves with the ballads of such literary figures as Scott and Wordsworth" (112). Yet when it comes to poets such as Speranza, not to mention Mangan and Ferguson, the conscious artifice of their verse is, of course, inseparable from its political vectors.

marginalized or excluded politically" (150).[38] From the poets of the Great Hunger onward, the lyric, by virtue of its attachment to a singular, non-anonymous "I," presents a unique solution to the problem of political representation. The Irish use of lyric song alters our understanding of the kind of political subject available to the future of the nation-state: Irish poets recast the imperial "I" of the lyric tradition as the collective, radically insecure, socially precarious "I" of a modern apocalypse. The roots of the modern world lyric, then, can be found in the poets of the Hunger, including Speranza, Samuel Ferguson, and James Clarence Mangan, some of whom themselves starved as a result of the Hunger, but also in poets and playwrights with an Anglo-Irish background, such as Yeats and Lady Gregory. In these writers, an Irish world subject appears, who, as Deane describes, is "impossible to recruit into the nineteenth-century normalizing narrative of progress and economic development" (146). While Irish song offers one way of understanding poetic making as worldly—a first logic of global poiesis—the lyric takes on a different form when pressed into anti-colonial struggle. The next chapter

[38] In his introduction to the *Field Day* anthology, Deane argues that the anonymity of the ballad tradition provides a solution to the problem of representation, the "impossibility of finding an *ab extra* vantage-point from which the story could be told" (2). Deane writes that the Irish poets of the Great Hunger "actually sought a kind of anonymity, the fame that would belong, not to themselves, but to their poems. The model for that anonymity was in the ballad tradition" (2). Along the same lines, David Lloyd argues that "the nationalist recourse to the ballad form as one in which the individual is effaced in order to permit the reproduction of a national spirit is largely determined by the need to overcome the break in continuity that the loss of Gaelic as a national language entails" (82).

develops a second notion of the global subject as the lyric “I” that travels between global cities at the center and the periphery of empire.

Chapter Two

Claude McKay's Constabulary Aesthetics: The Social Poetics of Global Cities

Two photos of Claude McKay from the *Daily Gleaner* in 1911 foreground the dual roles of constable and poet that McKay occupied, painfully, in Kingston, Jamaica. In an article from October 7th, he appears in his police uniform with a level gaze directed just past the reader (Stephenson 6). In an article from October 21st, he appears in suit and tie with chin slightly raised, eyes directed toward the reader in a proud and challenging look (17). In the first, McKay stands in for colonial discipline and the law: Winston James notes that McKay's "policeman's badge gave him access to forms of life in the city that he otherwise might not have encountered at all, and certainly not encountered with the same degree of frequency and depth of familiarity" (70). In the second, McKay's image carries the authority of the intellectual and the poet. This chapter contends that McKay's poetry fuses the identities suggested by the two photographs into a difficult hybrid, giving the policeman the poet's gaze, and vice versa. In other words, McKay's aesthetic pose, or the gaze of the poet listening for the lyric voice, overlaps with the pose of a member of the colonial constabulary, policing his own black community under the orders of the colonial governor. McKay's claim to a global poetics lies in the poetry he forges out of these two roles, and in the tenuous forms of reciprocity he develops between the English lyric tradition and the dialect of a Jamaican community under colonization.

McKay's early Jamaican poetry, particularly his dialect poetry, has not received the sort of attention given to the works of high modernism, perhaps because of the unfamiliarity of its cultural and historical context and because his work in traditional lyric

PAGE SIX. THE GLEANER, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1911.

THE WORK OF A GIFTED JAMAICAN

Story of Mr. Claude McKay Whose Volume of Poems Will Shortly be Published Here.

THE GOVERNOR APPRECIATES TALENT OF WRITER

His Poems Will be a Notable Addition to Island's Literature, Says Mr Jekyll Who Predicts Popularity for the Volume.

REMARKABLE VERSATILITY DISPLAYED BY THE YOUNG AUTHOR.

A little over a year ago, I discovered an infant prodigy who created quite a sensation. The boy is still looked upon as a marvel, and large audiences are drawn to hear him in the country.

On this occasion, I lay no claim to discovering the genius who forms the subject of this sketch; but I am pleased to be able to bring before the public a promising young Jamaican of whom more is certain to be heard in the field of literature.

I got to hear of McKay through one who had taken a great interest in the lad; and learning that he was a member of the Constabulary Force, and stationed at Half-way Tree, I took occasion to meet him and have a talk with him.

Modest to a degree, McKay was not inclined to say much about himself.

"I hear you are bringing out a book of poems?" I ventured.

"Yes," he replied; "through the kindness of Mr. Jekyll some of my work is being printed and will shortly be published."

"I should like to hear something about yourself, how you came to join the Police Force—something of your early career?"

The young man smiled. "What can I tell you?" he asked.

"Well, to begin, how old are you?"

"Twenty-two," he said.

"What parish are you from?"

"From Clarendon," was his monosyllabic reply.

"Tell me about your schooldays; I am sure you were a bright, clever little chap?"

"I first went to a school kept by Mr. James Hill, and then I went to Mr. Watts, and to my brother, U. Theo. McKay.

"Is Mr. McKay your brother, then?"

"Yes, and all I know I learnt from him," he said.

HIS FIRST SUCCESS.

"Can you recall your first success?"

"I won a trade scholarship in 1906, and I came up to Kingston in January, 1907—the Friday before the earthquake—to take it up. As a result of the earthquake I had to return home, and I was apprenticed to Mr. Campbell of Brown's Town to learn the trade of a wheel-wright. I next served under Mr. Saunders of Chapelton, but on account of illness the indenture was cancelled.

"When did you join the Police Force?"

"I enlisted last June—on the 7th. of June," he said.

McKay was very reticent as to why he joined the Force. It is said that the underlying cause is a pitiable love story. I hear he has poured out poem after poem on this subject, but he would not discuss the matter. "I cannot touch the public with my heart," he said, "it would be of no interest to them."

I changed the subject and asked him something about his work.

"I began writing dialect verses in 1909, my first attempt being a little thing entitled "Hard Times". Messrs Aston W. Gardner is publishing a volume of 50 poems entitled "Songs of Jamaica," and I expect the book will be through the press in time for publication in December."

Mr. McKay was as diffident to speak of his works as he was to speak of himself. Those who have seen his poems express themselves in the highest terms about them. There is a charming naivete in the love poems, and humour, and pathos; rollicking fun, too, when he lets himself go. His versatility is wonderful. He treats all sorts of subjects. Here is a specimen:—

DE DOG-DRIVERS' FRIEN'.

Stay your hasty hands, my comrades,
I must speak to you again,
For you beat de dog 'dout mussey,
An' dey are we night-time frien'.
Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,
For they are God's creatures, too;
You have no more claim, dear comrades,
On de earth than what dey do.

'Cos you locked him up in barracks
T'rough some failin' point o' his,
You mus' beatin' him so badly
For de little carelessness?
Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,
For they are God's creatures, too;
You have no more claim, dear comrades,
On de earth than what dey do.

When de hours are cold an' dreary,
An' I'm posted on me beat,
An' me tired heavy body
Weighs upon me weary feet,
Oftentimes dem come aroun' me
Wid dem free an' trustin' soul,
Lyin' do'n or gambolling near me
Wid a tender sort o' gro'l:

An' I snap my fingers at them,
While dey wag dem tail at me;
Can you wonder that I love them,
Them, me night-time company?
Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,
For they are God's creatures, too;
You have no more claim, dear comrades,
On de earth than what dey do.

Sometimes dey're a bit too noisy
Wid deir long leave-taking bark;
But I tell you what, it cheers me
When de nights are extra dark.

So, dear comrades, don't illtreat him,
You won't mek me talk in vain:
'Member, when the hours are dreary,
He's de poor dog-drivers' frien'.
Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,
For dey are God's creatures, too;
You have no more claim, dear comrades,
On de earth than what dey do.

In some of the more delicate love songs he is quite at his best. For instance:

AGNES O' DE VILLAGE LANE.

Fancy o' me childish will,
Playin' now before me eyes,
Sadly I remember still
How much once your love I prize',
As I think o' you again,
Agnes o' de village lane.

In de school-room worn an' old
Fus' I saw your pretty smile,
Heard your footsteps firm an' bold,
Loved your face so free o' guile,
An' your soul so clear of stain,
Agnes, Agnes o' de lane.

Oh, I suffered much for you,
For dey t'umped an' beat poor me
Tell me skin tu'n black an' blue,
Tryin' ef dey could part we;
But we closer grew we twain,
Heartful Agnes o' de lane.

Little love t'oughts o' me breast
I wrote by de tin lamp's light:
P'raps dey were not of de best
*(Bunny showed me what to write),
Yet you never would complain,
Easy Agnes o' de lane.

But dere came de partin' day,
An' they took me from you, dear,
An' de passion died away,
But de memory was there:
Long you've lingered in me brain,
Plump-cheeked Agnes o' de lane.

A'ter many a weary year,
Sad, sad news o' you I heard,
News dat brought a scaldin' tear
At de sound o' every word;
An' my mind, filled wid disdain,
Grieved for Agnes o' de lane

Agnes o' de lane no more,
For you went away, my pet,
Agnes once so sweet an' pure,
To a miserable deat';
Oh, de 'membrance brings me pain,
Fallen Agnes o' de lane!

THE GOVERNOR'S APPRECIATION

Young McKay's work has already attracted attention. His Excellency the Governor has seen some of his verses and this is what he says: "I have seen a selection of Mr. McKay's poems, "and I appreciate the talent they exhibit."

The book "Songs of Jamaica" will be published by Messrs. Aston W. Gardner. It is being printed in England and will consist of 140 pages. There are 50 poems grave and gay in it, and it will be sold for the moderate sum of 2/ a copy. Besides a portrait of the author there is an appendix with six tunes to six of the poems. These tunes are McKay's own composition and the publication will be awaited with interest.

Mr. Walter Jekyll who has taken a great deal of interest in the lad and his work, and whom there is no better judge writes:

OPINION OF MR. WALTER JEKYLL

"A notable addition to the literature of the island is about to appear. The corrected proofs of Songs of Jamaica, a volume of fifty poems by Mr. Claude McKay, have just been despatched to England, and we may reasonably expect it to be in the hands of the public before Christmas.

"Judging from the interest taken in the poems by all and sundry to whom I have read them, I venture to predict great popularity for the volume. It contains something for all tastes, for the versatility of the young author is remarkable. The love-songs, ten in number, are charming in their simplicity: there is no straining after effect, and the result is that the maximum of effect is obtained. By kind permission of Messrs Aston Gardner and Co., the publishers, I am allowed to give two specimens of Mr. McKay's work.

"The first of them goes to a haunting tune in six-eight time, and without the music the rhythm is a little difficult to catch. The first six words made a bar of six quavers. Then follow a crotchet, quaver, crotchet; and the first word of the second line goes to the quaver that makes up the second bar. It may be mentioned, in passing, that a feature of the book is the Appendix of tunes, composed by the author, who not infrequently writes music and poem together.

"This first poem will appeal mainly to those who appreciate delicate workmanship, while the second will be enjoyed by everybody for its directness and vigour and fun.

WALTER JEKYLL.

*The servant boy.

MR. CLAUDE McKAY.

TAKEN ABACK.

Let me go, Joe, for I want go home;
Can't stan' wid you,
For pa might go come;
An' if him only hab him rum,
I don't know whateber I'll do.

I must go now, for it's gettin' night
I am afraid
An' 'tis not moonlight:
Give me de last hug, an' do it tight;
Me pa gwin' go knock off my head.

No, Joe, don't come!—you will keep me late,
An' pa might be
In him sober state;
Him might get vex' an' lock up de gate,
Den what will becomin' of me?

Go wid you, Joe?— you don't lub me den!
I shame' o' you—
Gals caan' trust you men!
An' I be'n takin' you fe me frien';
Good-night, Joe, you've proven untrue.

A MIDNIGHT WOMAN TO THE BOBBY.

No palm me up, you dutty brute,
You' jam mout' mash like ripe breadfruit;
You fas'n now; but wait lee ya,
I'll see you grunt under de law.

You t'ink you wise, but we wi' see;
You not de fus' one fas' wid me:
I'll lib fe see dem tu'n you out,
As sure as you got dat mash' mout'.

I born right do'n beneat' de clack
(You ugly brute, you tu'n you' back?);
Don't t'ink dat I'm a come-aroun',
I born right way in 'panish Town.

Care how you try, you caan' do mo'
Dan many dat was hyah befo';
Yet whe' dey all o' dem te-day?
De buccra dem no kick dem 'way?

Ko 'pon you' jam samplatta nose:
'Cos you wear Mis'r Koshaw cloo's
You t'ink say you's de only man,
Yet fus' time ko how you be'n 'tan'.
You' big an' ugly ole tu'n-foot
Be'n neber know fe wear a boot;
An' chigger nyam you' tumpa toe,
Till nit full i' like herrin' roe.

You come from mountain naked-'kin,
An' Lard a mussy! you be'n thin,
For all de breadfruit dem be'n done,
Bein' 'poil up by de tearin' sun.

De coco couldn't bear at all,
For, Lard! De groun' was pure white marl;
An' t'rough de rain part o' de year
De mango-tree dem couldn' bear.

An' when de pinch o' time you feel
A 'pur you a you' chigger heel,
You lef' you' district, big an' coarse,
An' come join buccra Police Force.

An' now you don't wait fe you' pass,
But trouble me wid you' jam [illegible];
But wait, me frien', you' [illegible] wi' come,
I'll see you go same lak a some.

Say wha'?— 'res' me?— you go to hell!
You t'ink Judge don't know unno well?
You t'ink him gwin' go sentance me
Widout a soul fe witness i'?

W. [illegible] S.

BURIED RIVERS.

Publication of Results of Second Competition.

NAMES OF WINNERS.

Extraordinary Interest Created Over the Series of Contests.

Our first Word Puzzle Competition was a remarkable success. But it was nothing in comparison to our Buried Rivers contest, which closed on the 3rd. inst. The Puzzle Editor was deluged with solutions. They kept pouring in within a couple of hours after the announcement first appeared in the "Gleaner," and it was with a sigh of relief the Editor saw the close of the last day of the contest.

The puzzle was

BURIED RIVERS.

"The deaf mute girl began gesticulating with a message, and her delivery was ever neat, with graceful pose in every attitude.

"The names of four well-known rivers are buried in the above sentence. Find them out and write them on the following dotted lines."

Over 2,000 attempted solutions were received by the Puzzle Editor, of which 916 came through the post, the balance being delivered by hand at this office.

With 1d. stamp on each of these 916 envelopes, the amount expended [...]

[...] picked up, is a well known river also, but the names locked away in the Editor's drawer were, Ganges, Thames, Severn and Seine, and so the prize is divided among the two competitors who had the right solution.

NIGHT MARAUDERS.

Like the [illegible]tropolis, Lower St. Andrew has [illegible] claimed the attention of midnight marauders, and reports of thefts are very prevalent.

The latest case is one in which Yap Sam, a Ce[illegible], has suffered to the tune of 15[illegible]

The Chinaman keeps a shop at Cross Roads and he reported that on Thursday night last his place was entered and several packs of thread and a few other articles stolen therefrom.

Miss A. [illegible]costa, a resident of Love Lane, also reported to the police yesterday that her yard was entered the previous evening and several articles of clothing stolen therefrom.

DIRECT LINE QUESTION DISCUSSED.

St. Thomas Board in Favour Of a Subsidy.

VIEWS OF HON. H. CORK.

At the monthly meeting of the St. Thomas Parochial Board on Thursday, the Hon. H. Cork spoke on the question of the Direct Line subsidy. He said that in his opinion a direct line was a necessary thing, and he was going to vote for it in the Legislative Council. He, however, did not want to go into the Council singlehanded. He wanted to be backed by the Board. In his opinion the Direct Line service would benefit the rich and poor man alike. He wanted word from the Board because when a member got up in the Council with a mandate the President was sure to go into the matter, whilst on the other hand, if he went in without it, the President would think it was only his personal views.

The Rev. Mr. Quinlan drew up a resolution in favour of the question. All the members were also in favour of the motion, but it was decided to leave it over until the next meeting.

The Assistant Superintendent of Roads wrote asking for an increase of his salary.

The Clerk of the Board was instructed to reply to him saying that they did not see their way to grant his request.

The Inspector of Poor came in for a rough time at the hands of the members.

This officer was wanted to give some explanation to item 15 on the agenda. It was, however, passed over, and when the Board was on item 32 the Inspector came in.

"You were wanted, sir, long ago and you ought to have been in your place," Mr. Lannaman informed him.

"I am not paid to be here," the Inspector of Poor replied.

Several of the members expressed their disapproval of the officer's conduct and further action was only stopped by an excuse from him.

MEMORIAL CLOCK.

Scheme to Perpetuate the Memory of King Edward.

MEETING OF COMMITTEE

[...] tower, and the Governor's permission was sought to the gentlemen supervising the erection of the structure.

The Governor stated that on receipt of the plans of the tower, he had, after a conference with Messrs. Haggart and Aspinall, called for tenders for the clock. As a result of those tenders he consulted Messrs. Benson, where it was found that a clock which would fit the tower would be a clock with 3 feet 6 inches dials. He accepted Messrs. Benson's tender of £95 6s. for such a clock and £24 9s for the bell, making a total of £119 15/-, and requested that these be put in hand and that the firm await instructions as to their shipment to Jamaica. As regards the proposals of the committee, he was quite sure that so far as the Government was concerned, there would be no objection to Messrs. D'Aeth and Jaques giving the committee any assistance they desired to give. As regards the tower there would be about £70 or £80 in hand for this purpose. He did not know if that amount would [illegible] sufficient, but thought that further [illegible] might be raised by subscripti[illegible]

Mr. Rattigan stated [illegible] he had received promises of [illegible] subscriptions.

The committee then [illegible] out to the Halfway Tree cross[illegible] for the purposes of finally select[illegible] the site. It was determined, as [illegible] above, to erect the tower in the [illegible] of the roadway just at the ju[illegible] of the Hope and Halfway Tree roads.

A STRANGE STORY

Lad Arrested Says Charge Is Only a Ruse.

THE ALLEGATIONS MADE

[...] Detective Allen was detailed to arrest Dean, and yesterday morning as he was boarding the Royal Mail vessel with his arm chair slung over his back, the sleuth held him.

Up to a late hour yesterday Mrs. Lindsay had not returned to the jail, and the lad declares that this is only a ruse of hers to detain him in Jamaica or keep him at home.

THE TRAMWAY COMPANY'S LICENSE

St. Andrew Board and Running of the Market Cars.

PRESSING FOR ACTION.

AGRICULTURAL.

THE GINGER HILL BRANCH.

WE ARE NOW OPENING UP
Our First Shipment of the Coming
SEASONS NEW GOODS,
And We Hasten to Introduce to You
Four New and Delightful Realizations of
THE COSTUMER'S FANCIES:
ARCADIA CLOTH in Light Blue, White, Cream, Pink, Olive, Mulberry, Rose and Grey at 9d yd.
THISTLE SILK in leading shades - - - 9d.
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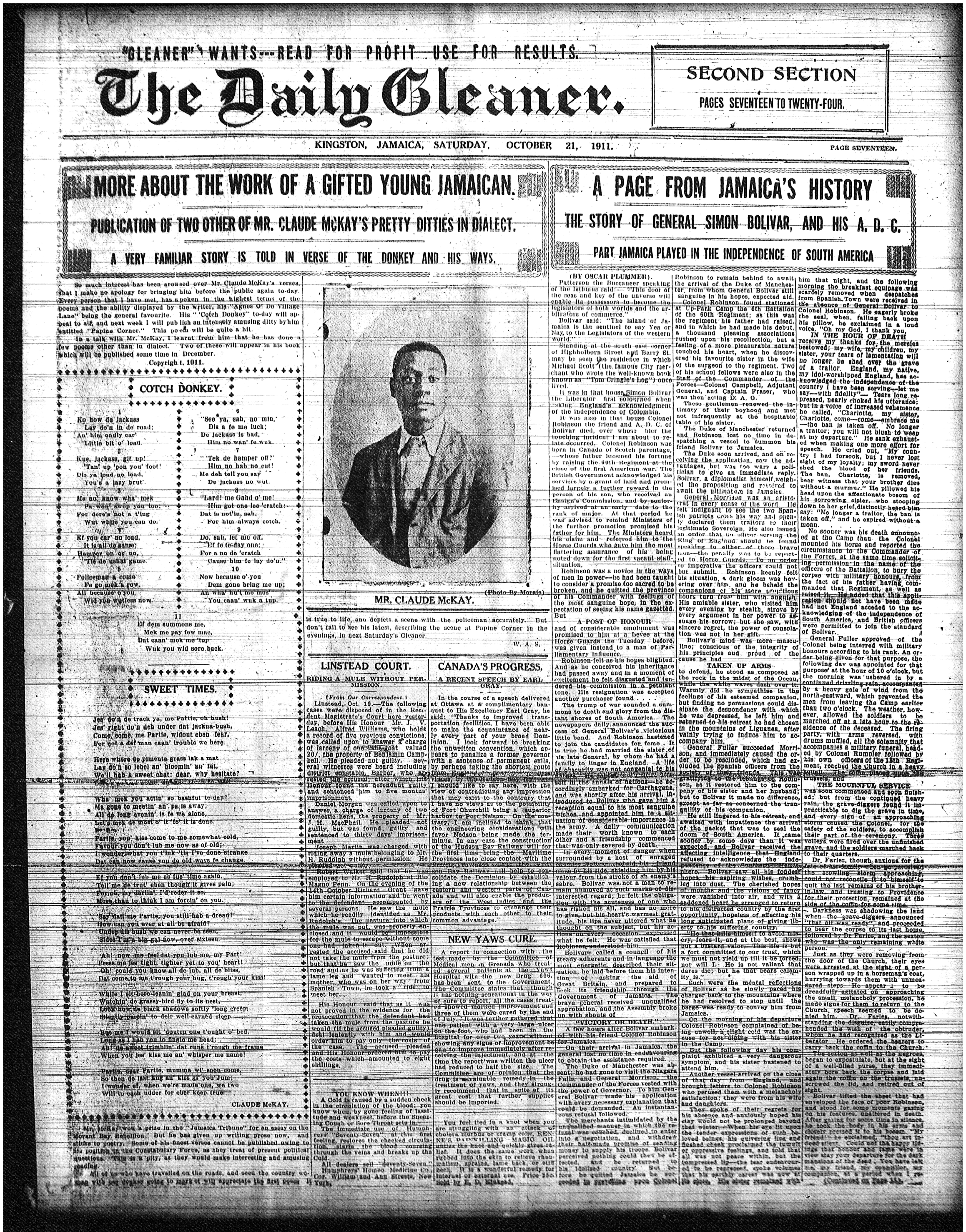

"GLEANER" WANTS—READ FOR PROFIT. USE FOR RESULTS.

The Daily Gleaner.

SECOND SECTION
PAGES SEVENTEEN TO TWENTY-FOUR.

KINGSTON, JAMAICA, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1911. PAGE SEVENTEEN.

MORE ABOUT THE WORK OF A GIFTED YOUNG JAMAICAN.

PUBLICATION OF TWO OTHER OF MR. CLAUDE McKAY'S PRETTY DITTIES IN DIALECT.

A VERY FAMILIAR STORY IS TOLD IN VERSE OF THE DONKEY AND HIS WAYS.

So much interest has been aroused over Mr. Claude McKay's verses, that I make no apology for bringing him before the public again to-day. Every person that I have met, has spoken in the highest terms of the poems and the ability displayed by the writer, his "Agnes O' De Village Lane" being the general favourite. His "Cotch Donkey" to-day will appeal to all, and next week I will publish an intensely amusing ditty by him entitled "Papine Corner." This poem will be quite a hit.

In a talk with Mr. McKay, I learnt from him that he has done a few poems other than in dialect. Two of these will appear in his book which will be published some time in December.

Copyright, 1911.

COTCH DONKEY.

1
Ko how de jackass
Lay do'n in de road:
An' him ondly car'
Little bit o' load.

2
Kue, jackass, git up!
'Tan' up 'pon you' foot!
Dis ya load no load,
You's a lazy brut'.

3
Me no' know wha' mek
Pa won' swop you too;
For dere's not a t'ing
Wut while you can do.

4
Ef you car' no load,
It is all de same;
Hamper on or no,
'Tis de ushal game.

5
Policeman a come
Fe go mek a row,
All because o' you
Wid you wutless now.

6
"See ya, sah, no min,'
Dis a fe me luck;
De jackass is bad,
Him no wan' fe wuk.

7
"'Tek de hamper off?'
Him no hab no cut!
Me deh tell you say
De jackass no wut.

8
"Lard! me Gahd o' me!
Him got one lee 'cratch!
Dat is not'in, sah,
For him always cotch.

9
Do, sah, let me off,
Ef fe te-day one:
For a no de 'cratch
Cause him fe lay do'n."

10
Now because o' you
Dem gone bring me up;
An wha' hu't me mos'
You caan' wuk a tup.

11
Ef dem summons me,
Mek me pay few mac,
Dat caan' mek me 'top
Wuk you wid sore back.

SWEET TIMES.

Jes' do'n de track ya, me Partie, oh hush!
Jes' right do'n deh under dat jackna-bush,
Come, come, me Partie, widout eben fear,
For not a def man caan' trouble we here.

Here where de pimenta grass lak a mat
Lay do'n so lebel an' bloomin' an' fat,
We'll hab a sweet chat: dear, why hesitate?
[illegible]

Wha' mek you actin' so bashful to-day?
Me gone to meetin' an' pa is away;
All de long evenin' is fe we alone,
Let's mek de most o' it 'fo' it is done.

Partie, you' kiss come to me somewhat cold,
Favour you don't lub me now as of old;
I wonder what you t'ink 'tis I've done strange
Dat can now cause you de old ways fe change.

Ef you don't lub me as fus' time again,
Tell me de trut' eben though it gives pain;
For oh, my darlin', I'd reder it so,
More than to think I am forcin' on you.

'Say dat, me Partie, you still hab a dread?'
How can you ever at all be afraid?
Under dis bush we can never be seen,
'Sides I'm a big gal now, over sixteen.

'Ah! now me feel dat you lub me, my Part!
Press me jes' tight, tighter yet to you' heart!
Oh! could you know all de lub, all de bliss,
Dat come to me t'rough your hug, t'rough your kiss!

While I sit here leanin' glad on your breast,
Watchin' de grassy-bird fly to its nest,
Look how de black shadows softly 'long creep,
Silently passin' to deir well-earned sleep.

But me I would sit 'douten one t'ought o' bed,
Long as I hab you to fingle me head:
Ah! de sweet trimblin' dat runs t'rough me frame
When you jes' kiss me an' whisper me name!

Partie, dear Partie, mumma wi' soon come,
So then de last hug an' kiss gi' you' Jum;
I wonder ef, when we're made one, we two
Will to each udder for eber keep true.

CLAUDE McKAY.

Mr. McKay won a prize in the "Jamaica Tribune" for an essay on the Morant Bay Rebellion. But he has given up writing prose now, and sticks to poetry. Some of his finest verses cannot be published owing to his position in the Constabulary Force, as they treat of present political questions. This is a pity, as they would make interesting and amusing reading.

All of us who have travelled on the roads, and seen the country woman with her donkey going to market will appreciate the first poem. It is true to life, and depicts a scene with the policeman accurately. But don't fail to see his latest, describing the scene at Papine Corner in the evenings, in next Saturday's Gleaner.

W. A. S.

(Photo By Morais)

MR. CLAUDE McKAY.

LINSTEAD COURT.

RIDING A MULE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

(From Our Correspondent.)

Linstead, Oct. 19.—The following cases were disposed of in the Resident Magistrate's Court here yesterday, before His Honour Mr. J. V. Leach. Alfred Williams, who holds a record of five previous convictions, was called upon to answer a charge of larceny of one she-goat valued 20/, the property of Benjamin Campbell. He pleaded not guilty. Several witnesses were heard including district constable, Barber, who arrested the accused, after which His Honour found the defendant guilty and sentenced him to five months' imprisonment.

Daniel Morgan was called upon to answer a charge of larceny of two domestic hens, the property of Mr. J. H. MacPhail. He pleaded not guilty, but was found guilty and sentenced to thirty days' imprisonment.

Joseph Martin was charged with riding away a mule belonging to Mr. H. Rudolph without permission. He pleaded not guilty.

Robert Walker said that he was employed to Mr. H. Rudolph at Rio Magno Penn. On the evening of the 14th October Richard Grant gave [illegible]

CANADA'S PROGRESS.

A RECENT SPEECH BY EARL GRAY.

In the course of a speech delivered at Ottawa at a complimentary banquet to His Excellency Earl Gray, he said: "Thanks to improved transportation facilities, I have been able to make the acquaintance of nearly every part of your broad Dominion. I look forward to breaking the unwritten convention, which appears to penalize a former governor with a sentence of permanent exile, by perhaps taking the shortest route from England to [illegible] Provinces, by the Hudson Bay Railway. I should like to say here, with the view of contradicting any impression that may exist to the contrary that I have no views as to the possibility of Fort Churchill being a superior harbor to Port Nelson. On the contrary, I am inclined to think that the engineering considerations will favor Nelson being made the terminus. In any case the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway will for the first time bring the Maritime Provinces into close contact with the Prairie Provinces. [illegible] the Hudson Bay Railway will help to consolidate the Dominion by establishing a new relationship between the eastern and western parts of Canada [illegible]

NEW YAWS CURE.

[illegible]

YOU KNOW WHEN!!!

[illegible]

A PAGE FROM JAMAICA'S HISTORY

THE STORY OF GENERAL SIMON BOLIVAR, AND HIS A. D. C.

PART JAMAICA PLAYED IN THE INDEPENDENCE OF SOUTH AMERICA

(BY OSCAR PLUMMER).

[illegible]

A POST OF HONOUR

[illegible]

TAKEN UP ARMS

[illegible]

"VICTORY OR DEATH."

[illegible]

IN THE HOUR OF DEATH

[illegible]

THE MOURNFUL SERVICE

[illegible]

forms may seem incompatible with conceptions of the early twentieth century's formal iconoclasm.[39] McKay's first poems from *The Gleaner* are representative of his consistent interest in traditional forms, particularly the ballad and the sonnet: his oeuvre includes two volumes of dialect poems from 1912, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*; two collections of ballads and sonnets in Standard English, *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920) and *Harlem Shadows* (1922); "The Clinic," a series written while under treatment for syphilis in 1923; "Cities" (ca.1934), an astonishing collection of sonnets set in Africa,

[39] For an early overview of these poems, see Hansell, who enumerates four types of McKay poems: "poems on commonplace settings and activities, love poems, poems portraying the peasant mind, and poems with racial or social themes" (124). Hansell insists that the "value" of McKay's early verse is in his treatment of these themes, not in his appropriation of the ballad: "What value is there in examining McKay's early dialect verse? The verse itself is almost doggerel; the love poems are at best merely conventional in expressing the pleasures and pains of lovers. Most of his other poems are simple portraits of a land and people dear to the author…The real value, however, of the early poems is that they clearly show that McKay did not learn protest by being the victim of American racism" (138-139). Similarly, Cooper, McKay's biographer, after devoting several pages to close readings of McKay's newspaper verse, gives a qualified judgment that "despite his genuine achievements in *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, these volumes too often betrayed McKay's literary inexperience, emotional confusion, and intellectual immaturity" (46). Laurence Breiner and William J. Maxwell are among those who give detailed readings of the poems. Breiner argues that McKay's early poems "constitute a real commitment to Jamaican speech as a legitimate means of literary expression" (169). Maxwell states, likewise, that McKay "freed written creole from the trap of 'darky' humor and apology" (xx). Kamau Brathwaite, although a strong supporter of McKay's use of nation language, criticizes the poems for being "imprisoned in the pentameter," even though much of McKay's early work is in tetrameter (275). Winston James argues that McKay "succeeded in capturing the pathos and thinking of ordinary Jamaicans in their own language" (139-151).

Europe, and the United States; "The Cycle" (ca.1943), a bitingly satirical sonnet cycle about Harlem in the 1940s; and a set of late Catholic poems.[40] McKay's adoption of fixed forms has been considered symptomatic of personal confusion, of an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the parts of his identity as a black intellectual, a Kingston policeman, and a Jamaican peasant. But his early newspaper poems make it clear that McKay imposes the scheme of the ballad for good reason: its history as a vehicle for social commentary, its consistent meter, and its circling refrains.

In the first part of this chapter, I consider some of the features of McKay's early work—particularly his use of a modified ballad scheme, of dialect, and of the refrain. In the second part, I move to *Harlem Shadows* to draw some connections between the tropes and schemes of the sonnet and the voices of the earlier ballads. Finally, I turn to McKay's recently discovered "Cities" sequence of sonnets, written during the late 1920s as a record of his travels through Eastern Europe and North Africa. In this sequence, McKay recasts the classical associations between lyric poetry and ecstatic possession to examine forms of collective political organization in global cities. As a second case study for the world lyric at the height of colonization, McKay's poetry from his earliest dialect ballads to his late sonnets captures the tensions and contradictions within a global "I" who is at once mobile and cosmopolitan, yet at the same time still the subject of empire.

[40] These poems are collected in William J. Maxwell's invaluable *Complete Poems*, along with a critical introduction, publication history, and extensive notes.

I

On January 14th, 1907, only days after McKay arrived in Kingston, an earthquake devastated the city, destroying the trade school in which he was to study (Cooper 21). When he returned to Kingston in 1910, the partially rebuilt city offered only marginally better opportunities than the countryside, where McKay would have had to work on the farms of absentee landlords. On these estates, a workforce was imported from India and China to keep wages well below the poverty line, circumstances that forced many Jamaican workers to leave to work on the Panama Canal or in the United States (40).[41] One of McKay's few options in Kingston was to join the police force. A series of articles in the *Daily Gleaner*, "Pen and Picture Sketches of Squalid Kingston," gives us a snapshot of the dire poverty of the sections of the city McKay patrolled. Written in a hybrid style somewhere between the travelogue and the urban exposé, "Squalid Kingston" features the author, William Alexander Stephenson, or "W.A.S.," wandering the city, investigating slums and talking to characters of local color. This series appeared on Saturdays during the summer of 1911.[42] On October 7th, 1911 the reader turning to page six and expecting a new picture of a slum would find instead a full-page article, an interview by Stephenson, a picture of a police officer, and four poems representing "The

[41] For a reading of McKay's novel *Banana Bottom* that situates it in the socioeconomic context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jamaica, see Lewis, "Claude McKay's Jamaica" (40).

[42] Parts of the series have been re-published by the University of the West Indies in book form as *"Squalid Kingston" 1890-1920: How the Poor Lived, Moved and Had Their Being*.

Work of a Gifted Jamaican."

The first two poems by McKay that Stephenson publishes, "De Dog-Driver's Frien'" and "Agnes o' de Village Lane," continue Stephenson's investigative journalism by means of the ballad (6). McKay's early poetry from the *Daily Gleaner* describes similar places, local characters, and street scenes, and appears directly alongside the *Gleaner's* prose journalism. The ballad has rarely been connected to modernism, despite the fact that most of McKay's contemporaries—and particularly Hardy, Yeats, Lawrence, Eliot, Pound, Auden, and Bishop—wrote a significant number of ballads or ballad-like poems throughout their careers.[43] Part of the reason for the widespread, though understudied, adoption of the ballad is the form's potential to contest and subvert the single voice or single consciousness of the lyric "I," a project in which most of the modernist poets were, to varying degrees, engaged. The *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes three traits of the ballad: a narrative that focuses on a single, catastrophic episode; a dramatic structure, often including dialogue; and an impersonal voice, with a speaker who expresses a collective (Friedman, "Ballad"). Susan Stewart identifies a similar transfer in the ballad from the expression of a single consciousness to that of a collective voice, although she warns against treating the ballad "as having a particular set of immutable characteristics" (1990, 138). As Stewart describes it, "the ballad singer in turn takes the form of each of the 'characters' in a ventriloquistic fashion. Even when a traditional ballad works by means of third-person narration, the speaker

[43] See, however, Stewart on Hardy ("Lyric Possession" 51-59); Vendler on Yeats (*Our Secret Discipline* 111-146); and, for a discussion of the ballad's fortune later in the twentieth century, Ford (371-395).

'voices' quotes and makes statements with the authority of an observer in context or witness" (150). The speaker of the ballad, by performing in multiple voices, stages "the subject's tragic relation to the social" (151), whether the contending forces are the court and the individual, as in the anonymous "Sir Patrick Spens," or time and love, as in Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening." Yet the ballad's representation and enactment of what David Caplan calls "a community in distress" (112) also highlights one of the ways in which ballads can do the positive cultural work that Maureen McLane has described as "crossing beyond, or at least confounding, barriers" (16).

These stylistic traits of the ballad point toward its border-crossings—its mobile inquiries into otherwise invisible ways of seeing, making, and doing.[44] In "Agnes o' de Village Lane," the work of McKay's ballad is to shift attention from the speaker's grief for and recognition of Agnes to a kind of solidarity with her. As Winston James explains, the name "Agnes" refers to a childhood love of McKay's who moved from the inland towns of Clarendon Parish to Kingston and died in a brothel (James 102).[45] McKay nods to Keats's revision of the legend of St. Agnes's Eve, the night when a virgin supposedly finds her future husband, as well as his "study in bereft love," the ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819).[46] "Agnes o' de Village Lane" relocates Keats from the gothic chambers and "triumphs gay / Of old romance" to the lush hillsides of Clarendon and the

[44] See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (45).

[45] James explains that McKay and Agnes had written love-letters to each other as schoolchildren, for which McKay was beaten by his brother U.Theo.

[46] I am grateful to Herbert Tucker for the reference and the phrasing.

brothels of Kingston. Madeline's angelic weeping for the "blisses of her dream" (Keats 321) becomes the "scaldin' tear" of McKay's nameless speaker, or what Wordsworth might call the "natural and human tears" shed by the lyrical ballad (qtd. in McLane 67).

McKay uses a typical modification of the ballad quatrain for his short, plangent story, concluding every abab stanza with a cc refrain, each a variation on the words "Agnes o' the lane":

Fancy o' me childish will,
    Playin' now before me eyes,
Sadly I remember still
    How much once your love I prize',
As I think o' you again,
Agnes o' de village lane.

In de school-room worn an' old
    Fus' I saw your pretty smile,
Heard your footsteps firm an' bold,
    Loved your face so free o' guile,
An' your soul so clear of stain,
Agnes, Agnes o' de lane.

Oh, I suffered much for you,
    For dey t'umped an' beat poor me

Tell me skin tu'n black an' blue,
Tryin' ef day could part we;
But we closer grew we twain,
Heartful Agnes o' de lane.

Little love t'oughts o' me breast
I wrote by de tin lamp's light:
P'raps dey were not of de best
(Bunny showed me what to write),
Yet you never would complain,
Easy Agnes o' de lane.

But dere came de partin' day,
An' they took me from you, dear,
An' de passion died away,
But de memory was there:
Long you've lingered in me brain,
Plump-cheeked Agnes o' de lane.

A'ter many a weary year,
Sad, sad news o' you I heard,
News dat brought a scaldin' tear

At de sound o' every word;
An' my mind, filled wid disdain,
Grieved for Agnes o' de lane.

Agnes o' de lane no more,
For you went away, my pet,
Agnes once so sweet an' pure,
To a miserable deat';
Oh, de 'membrance brings me pain,
Fallen Agnes o' de lane! (*Complete Poems* 1-2)

In the first stanza, the scheme of chiasmus tropes the process by which Agnes's love initially recedes behind the speaker's attention to his own emotions. Chiasmus, or the repetition of a pair of sounds, words, phrases, or ideas in the reverse order, produces an ABBA structure, as in lines 3 and 4:

1a 2a
Sadly I remember still
2b 1b
How much once your love I prize'

The function of the chiastic scheme here is to draw an antithesis between the present and the past, "I remember" and "I prize[d]." We see the chronic activity of present memory ("still") at odds with the acute feeling of the past experience ("once"). The syntax overwhelms the speaker with adverbs, which span the enjambment in a stuttering grief

("Sadly—still—how much—once…") like that of the shattered voices in Thomas Hardy's elegies for Emma Gifford. It will be the project of the succeeding stanzas to turn the speaker away from the ineffability of grief to the body of Agnes instead.

The second stanza begins this work by organizing, in parallel, a series of prepositional phrases that will ultimately lead us to consider the refrain, "Agnes o' de lane." This stanza catalogues the speaker's perceptions of Agnes, beginning with the "school-room worn an' old" in which she and the speaker meet: her footsteps are "firm an' bold," her face "free o' guile," her soul "clear o' stain." These descriptions are aligned at the end of each line, just as the senses of the speaker—saw, heard, loved—are aligned at the beginning. The syntax places Agnes's footsteps, face, and soul between the speaker's observation and his subjective description of each physical and metaphysical quality. By extension of the previous parallel syntactic schemes, "o' de lane" and its connotations of prostitution become inextricably linked to Agnes. McKay's repetition of "Agnes o' de lane" thus has a function distinct from what John Hollander calls the "fa-la-la" of the refrain (133). In McKay's poem, the refrain departs and returns with Agnes at the end of each stanza to collect another of her attributes, first repeating her name, "Agnes," then the adjectives "heartful," "easy" (in the sense of "uncomplaining"), "plump-cheeked," and "fallen." The refrain sweeps up an Agnes fragmented, phantom-like, and haunts the poem with its insistence on her lingering presence.

As the dialect form of the genitive "of," the "o" in McKay's refrain turns orality into written, poetic trope. A jagged linguistic surface, typical of McKay's Jamaican poems, lies over "Agnes" and her "o." Michael North and Jahan Ramazani have placed

McKay's early poetry on a spectrum between Standard English and Jamaican patois. Ramazani writes that McKay creates "a transnational discursive field in which the forces and counterforces of converging, jostling, competing nationalities meet" (2009, 30). In this sense, McKay's verse resembles *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos*. But whereas other modernist writers juxtapose these voices in order to rupture the stanza and "break the pentameter," McKay retains the scaffolding of the ballad's architecture (Pound 1993, 538). Instead of situating these voices in sequence, as Eliot and Pound would do, McKay layers them upon one another, so that a reading of a McKay poem entails an excavation or archaeology of the composite linguistic strata of each poem. McKay's collages, if we can call them that, occur in time, through simultaneity, in the same space, whereas Eliot's and Pound's occur across time, over space; his are not the "montage poetics" sometimes ascribed to modernist poets—or, if they are, the montage must be re-conceptualized within the traditional, isometric form of the ballad (5). From the very beginning of his career, McKay rejects a unified style in favor of a heterogeneous one, a process analogous to what Giorgio Agamben, in his study of vernacular Italian poetry, calls the "reciprocal deformation" of both languages (1999, 47).

In his discussion of McKay's hybrid style, North draws our attention to the patronage of Walter Jekyll, a wealthy English expat and an early mentor of McKay's who encouraged him to write in dialect (Cooper 23). Jekyll was a peripatetic ex-Episcopalian minister and music teacher, a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson and a brother of the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, who published her own reviews of McKay's poems in *Garden Illustrated* as a guide to Jamaican flora (358 n31). Early reviews of McKay's

Jamaican poems, though positive, insisted on the value of dialect for its verisimilitude, its accurate reflections of Jamaican peasant life, or else its "charmingly naïve" expressions of subjectivity (Jekyll, qtd. in McKay, *Complete* 284). Although North has warned against valorizing dialect, reminding us that "the nonstandard is maintained as a carefully limited escape from the standard," it is the layering of vernacular and Standard English, not the choice between them, that we find in McKay's early work (1994, 104). I argue that the code-switching of McKay's Jamaican poetry is neither a disengagement from the complex aesthetics of modernism nor a capitulation to Walter Jekyll's influence. The formal intricacy of McKay's poems depends on the use of dialect: by rejecting a coherent style, McKay stages the violence directed toward the subjects of his poetry at the same time as he rewrites their histories in terms associated with neither a "wholly colloquial Jamaican dialect" nor a "stereotyped Victorian romanticism" (Cooper 37).

McKay's refusal "to stifle this Babel of voices" is particularly evident in "De Dog-Driver's Frien'," published alongside "Agnes o' de Village Lane."[47] In this dramatic monologue, a plea for compassion and brotherhood, the speaker addresses his "comrades," the policemen:

> Stay your hasty hands, my comrades,
>
> I must speak to you again;
>
> For you beat de dog 'dout mussy,
>
> An' dey are we night-time frien'.

[47] I take the phrase "stifle this Babel of voices" from Jean-Jacques Lecercle's discussion of Thomas Hardy's style (1990, 246).

Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,

For dey are God's creatures, too;

You have no more claim, dear comrades,

On de earth dan what dey do. (*Complete* 101)[48]

In the stanzas that follow, McKay's speaker tries to engender a feeling of solidarity between the policeman and the criminal based on their mutual dispossession and their relegation to the "extra dark" nights and the "cold an' dreary hours."[49] McKay draws on the ballad's penchant for including conversation and dialogue by having the speaker refer to the poem as an act of speaking (line 2) and talking (line 36). As he imagines a tentative common ground between the policeman making his rounds at night and the "gambolling" criminal, McKay creates a composite voice in which the Jamaican dialect and Standard English confront and play off of one another. The first evidence of patois is in the line "For you beat de dog 'dout mussy," or "without mercy": McKay takes advantage of the frequent plosives in Jamaican dialect—the "d" and "t" sounds—and the substitution of "'dout" for "without" to graft a staccato beat, almost a syncopation, onto the trochaic tetrameter line. Here, the generally regular meter of alternating eight- and seven-syllable lines is conjoined with McKay's improvisations on top of it, making the relationship

[48] First published in the *Daily Gleaner*, October 7, 1911, 6.

[49] Maxwell notes that an extra stanza, making the theme of common oppression more explicit, was added to the version published in *Constab Ballads*. The stanza begins "When I think of our oppressors/ Wid mixed hatred an' don'-care…" (McKay, *Complete* 298).

between Standard English and Jamaican patois complexly symbiotic.[50] The ethics of McKay's creole—the resistance "De Dog-Driver's Frien'" poses to a single, unified style—is in its extended negotiation between English meter and Jamaican diction and syntax.

McKay creolizes the ballad to develop, through the metaphor of the "dog-driver," a compound sense of social catastrophe. When the poem appeared, McKay's term "dog-driver" would be a familiar, derogatory nickname for a policeman, as William J. Maxwell notes (*Complete* 298). To readers of the *Gleaner*, however, the term would be familiar for its literal meaning as well. In the weeks after "De Dog-Driver's Frien'" was published, two articles described the controversial killing of stray dogs in 1911 Kingston, or what W.A.S. would call the "Slaughter of the Innocents" (*Gleaner* 6). Stephenson presses the issue by means of a character sketch of "Long John," the amoral dog-catcher. He concludes with a general indictment of a society that produces stray dogs and reminds readers that "to most of these poor creatures death is a relief, for many of their owners are unable to feed themselves" (6). The following week's article, "'Lef Me Dawg,'" begins where Stephenson leaves off, describing "a brawny washerwoman, with all the evidence of her toil about her." Again, the conclusion is that "she doesn't know how to take care of herself, let alone a dog." Yet the writer tries a more moderate strategy, asking "why not do all the dog-catching in the calm, cool and peaceful night when the mots [sic] objectionable curs chiefly roam?" (6) McKay's own appeal, printed several weeks before

[50] Breiner refers to McKay's "sensitivity to the rhythmic features of the spoken language" as a "potential source of counterpoint to the forms used" (109).

these articles, can be seen to set up the same homology between the dog's plight and the poor criminal's. This doubling of dog-driver and policemen does not, however, debase or trivialize one of the two causes. When the metaphor is ignored and the word "dog-driver" restored to its literal meaning, the poem loses none of its contemporary social relevance. Rather, the poem draws as much on the public's anger against the dog-catcher as against police brutality, so that McKay effectively conscripts the audiences of two progressive initiatives. McKay's poem, when placed alongside the articles by Stephenson and "Long Wood," appears to be one of several modes by which the *Gleaner* hoped to raise a public outcry.

Rather than choosing between dialect and Standard English, McKay experiments with what might emerge from their tensed conjuncture. In these early poems, the prominence of the refrain, the archaic name for which is the "burden," is worth a closer look. Two Christmas poems, published in the *Daily Gleaner* and the *Jamaican Times* on December 16th, 1911, entwine the ballad's "burden" with the burden of daily labor (*Complete* 280). Wayne Cooper notes that "McKay's Christmas complaint reflected actual economic hardships" in Clarendon Parish in 1911, hardships that may have influenced McKay's turn to more explicit political themes in his poems from early 1912, such as "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'" and "Passive Resistance" (*Complete* 47-8). In the context of his poems from the period, "Christmas" would have been an overdetermined word for McKay and his readers. The Jamaican Christmas Rebellion of 1831, led by Sam Sharpe, directly contributed to Parliament's abolition of slavery in the British Empire

seven years later (Robinson 219). McKay's poem "George William Gordon to the Oppressed Natives" invokes Sharpe in its exhortations:

> Wil'erforce has set you free,
>
> Sharpe an' Buxton worked for you;
>
> Trample on de tyranny
>
> Still continued by a few! (282-3)

During the Christmas Rebellion, 20,000 to 60,000 slaves revolted against their masters through armed violence, passive resistance, and the destruction of slaveholders's property (Robinson 219). As Cedric Robinson reminds us, slavery of course persisted, despite formal emancipation, in the various guises of "peonage, sharecropping, tenant-farming, forced labour, penal labour, and modern peasanty" (219). The Christmas Rebellion is, quite literally, here in McKay's "air": each successive stanza diagnoses new forms of oppression by "metropolitan capital" and the plantocracy (Craton, qtd. in Robinson 219).[51]

Of the two Christmas poems, published on the same day, the first poem is a joyful celebration; the second, a depiction of squalor. McKay, an inveterate producer of new stanza forms, uses a simple change in rhyme scheme to contrast the family trading Christmas gifts and the family attended by disease and want. In "The Christmas Tree," the final lines link the previous stanzas together:

> What a happy band are we,
>
> Dancin' roun' de Christmas tree!

[51] See also Cooper 48.

De old year is at its close

An' we know nought 'bouten woes:

We're as happy as could be,

Playin' wid de red god-rose. (6)

The scheme here is aabbab. Typically for McKay, all the lines are end-stopped and the close of a rhyme coincides with the end of a complete thought, image, sentence or clause. In this latter respect, he resembles Yeats, who aims for a "complete coincidence between period and stanza" (qtd. in Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 16). Borrowing a rhyme from each, the last couplet binds the two thoughts together in a synthesis that also introduces a new image: the red god-rose, or mistletoe. Here, the red god-rose, an indication of Christ's suffering, is annexed to the joys of Christmas day, summoning up not rebirth but death. In the second poem, "Christmas in the Air," McKay chooses to include a refrain, repeating the first rhyme at the end of each successive stanza:

Dere is Christmas in the air:—

But de house is cold an' bare,

An' me wife half paralize'

Is a-dyin' wid bad eyes;

Food too is so extra dear,

An' dere's Christmas in de air. (7)

The tight economy of rhyme, aabbaa, captures the poverty of the scene, enclosing the middle lines. Whereas "The Christmas Tree" entwines the first four lines, even creating a surplus image in the final couplet, "Christmas in de Air" is a dirge that returns again and

again to a savagely ironic refrain. McKay's speaker takes up, stanza by stanza, the poor trade in coffee and yams (lines 8-9), the failure of bananas to make up for the decline in sugar exports (13), the exclusion of the poor from medical care (19), the shortage of work (25), the high prices of food (31-32), the absence of a progressive tax code (34), and the acknowledgment that "surplus-gain" is only had at the expense of the poor (40). Even while he draws on "Christmas" to summon the outrage that caused the Rebellion, McKay also reminds the reader that a single Rebellion, no matter how successful in eliminating one form of oppression, cannot preclude new forms of slavery brought on by global markets. Read in the light of the Christmas Rebellion, the final refrain of each stanza—"An' dere's Christmas in de air"—becomes more than a hollow platitude or an ironic commentary on Christmas: as the poem unfolds into a catalogue of exploitation, the repetition of the line turns into a charged response.

II

The two Christmas poems, along with "Agnes o' de Village Lane" and "De Dog-Driver's Frien'," give us a more complete picture of the origins of McKay's stylistic innovation in his blending of dialect and the English literary canon. Although readers of McKay have been sensitive to his use of received forms, few have examined these forms as closely as they might. McKay's stanza of choice is the quatrain, common to both the ballad and sonnet forms: nearly every poem in *Songs of Jamaica*, *Constab Ballads,* and *Harlem Shadows* contains some variation on it. It is only partially correct, then, to claim,

as Kamau Brathwaite does, that "in order to be 'universal' McKay forsook his nation language…and went to the sonnet" (275). McKay's sonnets do make up a large portion of the poems in *Harlem Shadows* (thirty out of seventy-four poems); yet all of these poems, sonnets included, test the capacities of the quatrain.[52]

The pentameter line, in which McKay writes most of his sonnets from *Harlem Shadows*, has always had an uneasy, even antagonistic relationship to the ballad: summarizing a claim made by Anthony Easthope in *Poetry as Discourse,* David Caplan writes, "English literary history forms a battle between the ballad and the pentameter, with the ballad as the valiant loser" (111). Despite its victory (and Caplan is certainly skeptical of this claim), contemporary anthologies and poets continue to raise the question whether, as Jeff Hilson says, "the sonnet [is] a form suited to consistent innovation" (8).[53] Instead, the sonnet has been established as a healthy alternative for those poets who "rejected overt modernism": as Stephen Burt and David Mikics write in

[52] Part of the virtue of using the quatrain as a building block for a poem is its adaptability: in addition to the more typical forms of the ballad and sonnet, myriad combinations of quatrains and couplets arise. The variety in *Harlem Shadows* is exhilarating: "Spring in New Hampshire" is a six line ballad with a quatrain and a couplet; "The City's Love," "On Broadway," and "Harlem Shadows" bracket a single quatrain with two couplets; "Flame-Heart" has a stanza with two distinct quatrains and a final couplet, while "North and South" has four quatrains and a couplet; three poems are in couplets—"A Prayer," "Absence" and "Romance"—and one, "Flirtation," alternates A and B rhymes for eight lines. The rest are either sonnets or ballads, except for "When Dawn Comes to the City," which employs a complicated, canzone-like rhyme scheme in its second and fourth stanzas.

[53] See also *The Making of a Sonnet*, ed. Eavan Boland and Edward Hirsch, and *The Art of the Sonnet*, ed. Stephen Burt and David Mikics.

the introduction to their recent book *The Art of the Sonnet*, "those Harlem Renaissance poets who embraced European and English forms in general (such as Countee Cullen and Claude McKay) produced well-turned sonnets; those who sought folk, vernacular or modernist styles for African-American experience (such as Langston Hughes) avoided the form" (*Art of the Sonnet* 22).

Why would a "modernist style" preclude the use of the sonnet? William Carlos Williams, in "The Modern Primer," sets out perhaps the most vehement denunciation of the sonnet as a poetic design:

> Why not write sonnets? Because, unless the idea implied in the configuration can be de-formed it has not been *used* but copied. *All* sonnets mean the same thing because it is the configuration of the words that is the major significance. Because it is a configuration (the sonnet) whose meaning supersedes any idea that may be crammed into it. It is not an invention but anchors beyond the will—does not liberate the intelligence but stultifies it—and by its cleverness, apt use stultifies it the more by making pleasurable that which should be removed. (17)

The sonnet, Williams argues, contains a history in its form that extends "beyond the will"—beyond the ability of an individual to "make it new" (Pound 2003, 620). In effect, the sonnet form is a signifier with a conventional signified, the relation to which neither content nor "apt use" can change.[54] Williams immediately contrasts Stein's *Tender*

[54] See also Brik: "Normally, the requirement of heightened semantics arises whenever life imposes new thematics and whenever the old verse forms are no longer capable of carrying the new thematics—a situation which develops because the old forms are inseparably linked to a set of semantics which has

Buttons (1914) to the sonnet's conservative "configuration": Stein, having removed "the burdensome configurations of grammar and rhythm," allows the mind to be "liberated to function in a new way—a pure pleasure in letters" (Williams, *Embodiment* 18). What Williams values is the dislocation of syntax, line, and meter, "the breakup of the language." The effect of Stein's writing is "to re-enkindle language," something which the sonnet, because of its established "configuration," cannot do. "We do not live in a sonnet world," Williams writes elsewhere (Williams, qtd. in Caplan 64).

But McKay does live in a sonnet world, and it is a world that his sonnets actively reconfigure. Moreover, "liberation" has far more than a formal sense in McKay's world, as the Christmas Rebellion and the Christmas poems insist. If some of McKay's titles in *Harlem Shadows*—"Hard Times," "North and South"—point to his immersion in the realism of Dickens and Gaskell, the poems themselves combine the tragic depiction of everyday life with the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, Stendhal and Balzac via Wordsworth and Coleridge. A moment of vision catalyzed by a scent, a flower, or a footstep gives way to a meditation on the material conditions of their production, growth, and circulation: the perfume "overwhelms and conquers," the flower "cannot bloom in this cold place," the feet "know no rest."[55] When read in the light of his earlier work, McKay's sonnets from *Harlem Shadows* represent not a retrenchment in Williams's sense of anti-modernist "configuration" but rather a version of a global poetics: the

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become irrelevant" (119).

[55] The first and the third of these quotations are taken from "Jasmines," the second from "Harlem Shadows" in McKay, *Complete* 192-193; 161-162.

conflation of the separate positions of the worker and the poet.

I turn now to one of McKay's sonnets to show how an understanding of his *Gleaner* poems recasts his later, well-known sonnets from *Harlem Shadows*. Placed in the context of *Harlem Shadows* as a whole, the sonnet seems more a result of historical contingencies, more an "invention," than an ironclad "configuration." "Jasmines," a fifteen-line sonnet with an irregular rhyme scheme, was first published in 1921 in Max Eastman's radical magazine *The Liberator* (McKay, *Complete* 337). A jasmine is a plant with a small white flower that can only grow in tropical climates; it would be familiar to McKay, not only from Jamaica, but also through his two years of training in applied agriculture at Kansas State. While most of the lines of the sonnet are in pentameter, the poem begins with a shorter line that ends on the word "room"—as if to suggest, by truncating the meter, that this is not going to be one of Donne's "pretty rooms" (96):

Your scent is in the room.
Swiftly it overcomes and conquers me!
Jasmines, night jasmines, perfect of perfume,
Heavy with dew before the dawn of day!
Your face was in the mirror. I could see
You smile and vanish suddenly away,
Leaving behind the vestige of a tear.
Sad suffering face, from parting grown so dear!
Night jasmines cannot bloom in this cold place;
Without the street is wet and weird with snow;

The cold nude trees are tossing to and fro;

Too stormy is the night for your fond face;

For your low voice too loud the wind's mad roar.

But oh, your scent is here—jasmines that grow

Luxuriant, clustered round your cottage door! (192)

Jasmines, in the sonnet, are associated not only with luxuriance, but also with subtlety: a "scent," a "vestige," a "low voice." The enjambment of "luxuriant" highlights metrically and syntactically the first word of the line—a specific type of enjambment known in French lyric as the *rejet* (Shaw 19-20). There is a certain luxuriance and subtlety in the architecture of the sonnet as a whole: in the slow expansion of line three from two to three to five syllables ("jasmines, night jasmines, perfect of perfume"); in the brimming first quatrain, which discovers its b rhyme only in line five, one line later than a typical abab quatrain would have mandated; and, finally, in the latticework of similar sounds that binds together the end of nearly every line with the beginning of the next. The effect of these repeated sounds is to mitigate the closure of the end-stopped lines by echoing or wafting syllables across the end of one onto the other. In the final two lines, where the couplet should be, we find instead a surplus of couplets filling the first six syllables of the lines: "but oh, your scent / Luxuriant"; "is here / Clustered." Through McKay's immersion in the sonnet tradition, the subtle manipulations of the schemes and tropes of the form—rather than any explicit political commitment—makes audible those voices that are too low and visible those smiles that have left only the "vestige of a tear." The ambiguous pronoun "your" in the first line of the poem seems to have two possible

referents: the jasmines themselves and the lover "at the cottage door." Both are linked together with the speaker in a solidarity enhanced by the sonnet form. Reclaiming a native flower for an imperial tradition, the English sonnet itself becomes the "cold place" where McKay's jasmines should not be able to bloom—and yet, paradoxically, the only place they can.[56]

This chapter has argued that McKay's poems from the *Daily Gleaner* benefit from being explored within the context of his discordant roles as constable and poet; his Jamaican poems exemplify the "reciprocal deformation" and reformation that result from the dual adherence to Jamaican patois and the anglophone ballad and sonnet. In his "Author's Word" from *Harlem Shadows*, McKay acknowledges the place of both "revolutionary passions" and "regular forms" in the social life of the community: McKay remembers

> making up verses in the dialect and in English for our moonlight ring dances and for our school parties. Of our purely native songs the jammas (field and road), shay-shays (yard and booth), wakes (post-mortem), Anancy tales (transplanted African folk lore), and revivals (religious) are all singularly punctuated by meter and rhyme. And nearly all my own poetic thought has always run naturally into these regular forms.
>
> Consequently, although very conscious of the new criticisms and trends in poetry, to which I am keenly responsive and receptive, I have adhered to such of

[56] As Herbert Tucker has pointed out to me, there are possible sources for McKay's jasmines in Milton's "Lycidas," Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," and Tennyson's *The Princess*.

> the older traditions as I find adequate for my most lawless and revolutionary passions and moods. (314-5).

McKay's constellation of "older traditions" and "lawless and revolutionary passions and moods" offers a different vision of what is possible in a world lyric. Deploying schemes of rhyme, refrain, and chiasmus in concert with the linguistic formations of Jamaican patois, McKay's poems map out the points of tension and contestation, as well as collusion and imbrication, between the language of a literary tradition and the spoken dialect of the prostitute, the policeman, and the lover "at the cottage door" in early twentieth-century Jamaica. In "Lyric Poetry and Society," Adorno describes a division in poetry between "dialect poetry" and "traditional lyric poetry." Dialect poetry, he argues, has a "collective force" that emerges from "the linguistic and spiritual rudiments of a not yet completely atomized tradition"; traditional lyric poetry, "as the strictest aesthetic negation of modern middle-class values," lacks that force (221). In his early poetry, and in his comments on his poetry, McKay finds the collective force of poetry to be at its strongest where dialect and traditional lyric meet and overlap (65).[57] Moreover, by establishing a continuum between the quatrains of the ballad and the sonnet, McKay imagines an alternative genealogy of the sonnet, which emerges not out of the Italian canzone, "the noblest of lyrics," but instead out of the ballad's political engagement,

[57] In this sense, McKay's poems perhaps effect what Jacques Rancière has called a "redistribution of the sensible," an aesthetic arrangement "that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics* 12).

"simplicity of means" and "collective voice" (Oppenheimer 289, 296). Just as McKay's early ballads attempt to superimpose the policeman and the poet, the modernist innovation of McKay's *Harlem Shadows* might be found in the tension between configuration and liberation, the factory and the olfactory, the burden of the field and the "burden" of the song.

III

Although most accounts of McKay's poetry end with his sonnets in the early 1920s, McKay's poetic production continues through his twelve years abroad, travels that bring him into contact with many of the leading intellectuals of the day at the same time as they immerse him ever more deeply into a consideration of global vulnerability. During the years he spent as an expatriate in Europe and North Africa, McKay had his passport stolen, contracted syphilis, met Trotsky, became a nude model, and bought a rundown house in Morocco, where he threw opium parties until he ran out of money. At many points, McKay's tour diary resembles the guest list at a party for the most prominent twentieth-century artists and thinkers. In Moscow, McKay was a speaker at the Fourth Congress of the Third International; in Berlin, he met Alain Locke, with whom he later quarreled. In Paris, he sought out Sinclair Lewis and avoided Gertrude Stein. After serving as an extra and a reader for Rex Ingram in Marseilles, he acted as a crucial broker between West Indian intellectuals and American expats in Paris, influencing both the journal *Légitime Défense* and the Négritude movement (Cooper 170-290).

The poetic sequence "Cities" (1934) is a peculiar kind of guide to McKay's forced exile from the United States and Jamaica. From Fez to Cadiz, Barcelona's Barrio Chino to Harlem's Lenox Avenue, "Cities" charts the wayward course of McKay's obligatory internationalism, as the itinerant sonneteer witnesses the "embattled workers' day" in Saint Petersburg on May 1st, 1923 and the consolidation of Nazi power in Berlin in 1934. "Cities" transforms the modernist "unreal city" of isolation, in which, as Eliot writes, "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (1980, 39), into the space of a global commons, where McKay finds "man drawing near to man in close commune" (McKay, *Complete* 230). The "Cities" cycle is an important and only recently discovered addition to McKay's earlier work with the ballad and the sonnet: as a sequel to McKay's volumes of Jamaican dialect poems in 1911-12 and to the revolutionary sonnets of *Harlem Shadows* (1922), "Cities" uses the lyric poem and a singular "I" to give voice to "the outcasts of the earth…who live beneath a world-eternal ban" (237).

McKay's "vagabond internationalism"—to use Brent Hayes Edwards's term (187)—produced not only a series of well known novels (*Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom*) but also some less well known experiments in lyric poetry. While McKay's earlier sonnets form a loose affiliation of poems, "Cities" is quite clearly conceived as a sequence. What did the sonnet sequence offer to McKay as he attempted to capture the precarious life of the city in the decades between the wars? As we have seen, the sonnet and the ballad are often treated as modernist poetry's Others: colonial entrapments or epistemological prisons from which to escape, or through which to dramatize the pressures exerted against the poet. McKay's tenacious hold on the sonnet

during the interwar period can tell us much more—not about McKay's identity as a colonial subject deluded or trapped into writing in colonial forms, but about the lyric poem and its relation to a global modernity. The final section of this chapter thinks through some of the ways that the lyric, for McKay, brings along a history of ecstatic possession by a force greater than the "I." This visionary fervor, or "International Spirit," as McKay calls it, is the unlikely foundation for a transnational political organization, as a reading of "Cities" reveals.

"Cities" departs in some obvious ways from the tradition of sonnet sequences. Unlike most of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* or Shakespeare's sonnets, these poems are titled for, and situated in, determinate places; they take on the dimension of space as well as time. In McKay's sequence, the fractured temporality in Petrarch, Sidney, Spenser, Wroth, or Donne shifts axes and becomes a series of loosely connected places. Yet the order of "Cities" does not match up with the route McKay actually traveled. The "Cities" sequence is carefully composed, McKay's actual stops rearranged: whereas McKay himself begins in New York, travels through Paris and Marseilles, and ends up in North Africa, "Cities" starts in Barcelona, moves through Tangier, Fez, Marrakesh, Tetuan, Xauen, and Cadiz, heads east to Berlin and Moscow, and finishes in the metropole: Paris, London, and New York. As I argue below, the decision to reverse the itinerary reflects McKay's understanding of the sonnet sequence as an engine for dynamically transforming the space of the city into the site for the political organization of a crowd.

One of McKay's novels from this period provides a clue to his compositional process and his deliberate rearrangement of the cities through which he traveled. McKay

finished his second novel, *Banjo*, in Barcelona in the summer of 1928. *Banjo* takes place along the breakwater of Marseilles and in the part of town called the "Ditch," where the characters are a collection of drifters, gamblers, panhandlers, and temporary workers—a group we might now call the precariat, that section of the population excluded from social protections, from regular employment, and from social norms (Berlant 193). *Banjo*'s depiction of life at the social margins has drawn the attention of Edwards and Laura Doyle. Noting that the novel's subtitle is "a story without a plot," Edwards comments,

> the qualities of the narrative would seem geared to parallel the wandering of the characters through the bars and along the breakwater of Marseilles. But it also bespeaks a realization that—even if the book does not aim directly to imitate musical form—in *Banjo*, a black, transnational community is defined more than anything else by a certain relation to music. (190)

Edwards is surely right to argue that the characters in *Banjo* form a "global community of the dispossessed" (199). But in McKay's sonnets from the same period, what we also find is a global community of the ecstatically possessed: the crowd, the throng, the multitude, the mob, and the mass in various states of haunting, charming, dancing, singing, and blocking traffic.[58]

[58] The focus on marginal territories such as the dock and the ditch helps us to read McKay's poems as more than an exercise in modernist pastoral, in which the experience of the city prompts nostalgia for the lush countryside of Jamaica.

McKay's poems from the "Cities" sequence thus depict not only a shared vulnerability, but also a shared ecstasy that brings them together. Here is the octave from "Barcelona":

> In Barcelona town they dance the nights
> Along the streets. The folk, erecting stands
> Upon the people's pavements, come together
> From pueblo, barrio, in families,
> Lured by the lilting playing of the bands,
> Rejoicing in the balmy summer weather,
> In spreading rings they weave fine fantasies
> Like rare mosaics of many colored lights. (223)

This is McKay in his incantatory mode. As in "Barcelona," the crowds in the sonnets for Cadiz and Fez and Marrakesh bear evidence of a kind of spiritual occupation, represented in the poems as fantasy, fever, dream, dance, magic, and prayer. The speaker moves through various states of being smitten, haunted, and charmed; bells ring as he passes among mosaics, tapestries, flowers, and fountains. There is a dream-like state of inertia in the sequence, which for all its itinerancy, never really seems to get anywhere.

And perhaps this is part of the point, since these poems are not mimetic representations of the city, maps in the sense that *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway* can be maps, nor are they expressionist recreations, exactly, in the manner of Jack Yeats's paintings of Dublin or Conrad's psychological Congo. McKay draws our attention from the city's stone reality and towards its potency, its spontaneous reconstitution as a space for play,

dance, and magic. In her work on global cities, Saskia Sassen writes, "The street is a space where new forms of the social and the political can be *made*, rather than a space for enacting ritualized routines" (2011, 574). This understanding of the city street as a place for play and improvisation helps to explain why McKay begins the sonnet sequence with Andalusia instead of Eastern Europe. The Teutonic facades of Berlin, a city that comes near the end of the sequence, serve as foils for the mosaics of Spain and North Africa. The order in which McKay rearranges his travels thus tells us three different stories.

First, the progression through the sequence is chillingly prescient, as mutable forms of community and collective organization give way, by 1934, to the rigid "Frankensteins" (McKay's word) of Hitler and Stalin. Second, "Cities" tells the story of McKay's own reevaluation of his early commitments to communism. This reevaluation, it is important to note, occurs partly because of his frustration with the way in which American communism had failed to grapple with racial conflict. And third, the organization of "Cities" constructs an exemplary form of political organization, in which the collaborative efforts of marginalized individuals transform the space of the city through their creative activities.

McKay builds a citywide commons on more than economic dispossession or the resignation to social invisibility—the negative forms of community that Judith Butler has argued might follow from a sense of our shared vulnerability (29). In the sestet of "Barcelona," McKay writes,

> Kindled, it glows, the magical Sardana,
>
> And sweeps the city in a glorious blaze.

The garrison, the sailors from the ships,

The workers join and block the city's ways,

Ripe laughter ringing from intriguing lips,

Crescendoing like a wonderful hosanna. (223-4)

The crowds that fill these poems are not so much manic as "mantic," the term used to refer to the Greek account of poetic inspiration. In her work on lyric possession, Susan Stewart revives the Platonic account of *enthousiasmos*, the process by which poetry passes along a chain of magnets from the god to the poet. For Plato, this process means that the poet gives voice to knowledge that he does not in fact have, but that comes from outside of him. "The meaning of possession," Stewart argues, "does not reside simply in the idea that the poet's utterances are not *original* or *reasoned*. Rather, such utterances pass through the speaker by means of an external force. One is 'beside one's self'…" (2002, 112). The lyric, with its classical roots in possession, prophecy, and fervor, draws on much that lives beside, behind, or beyond the "I."[59] In "Barcelona," the word "Sardana" in the poem refers to the Catalan dance in which everyone holds hands in a ring. The Sardana functions as a kind of horizontal possession, replacing or supplementing Plato's vertical account of the chain leading from god through rhapsode to poet to audience.

The language of lyric possession has appeared most recently not in modern poetry criticism at all, but in ethics and political philosophy—fields of study that, in American if

[59] Similarly, Blasing has argued that lyric poetry "elude[s]" notions of the individual, and that "the communal being is audible in the materials of language, not in what a poem says" (2007, 12).

not European poetics, have generally kept their distance from the lyric. In Alain Badiou's ontology, for instance, someone is "called upon," "induced," or "seized and bewildered" by an unanticipated truth (2002, 40-45). While Badiou presents a version of universalism that takes nominal differences between individuals for granted, Butler places a notion of difference at the heart of ethics. For Butler, loss and mourning open up the possibility of a political community based on the recognition of our relationship to the Other. Describing the sense of self-loss that accompanies the process of mourning, Butler asks a series of questions: "Something takes hold of you: where does it come from? What sense does it make? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?" (21) Although Badiou's commitment to truth puts him at odds with Butler's commitment to alterity, their theories of the subject have one thing in common: an account of being "seized" or "taken hold of"—or, we could say, possessed.

McKay links the crowd not to irrationality and chaos, but, like these thinkers, to the spontaneous generation of precarious forms of artistic and political organization. If these terms seem like odd ones to apply to the strict design of the fourteen-line form, then there are other ways to consider the sonnet than through the usual analogies of imprisonment, restriction, and monumentality. Metaphors of imprisonment have never been the only kind of metaphors for the sonnet. Wordsworth might have called the sonnet a cell, but he also referred to it as a key and a trumpet and a glow-worm. These nouns make the familiar analogies between the sonnet's formal elements and its thematic concerns a little more complicated. McKay thinks of the sonnet in the same ways as he

thinks of the poetic and artistic creations of the global multitude: as a tapestry, a mosaic, a dance, and a city.

"Barcelona" provides one example of how the sonnet form expands, and even crescendos, rather than contracts, imprisons, or petrifies. These latter metaphors are, in fact, the ones McKay associates with the aesthetics of 1934 Berlin, its "ruthless Nordic style" and "massive grandeur" (229). In "Cities," each sonnet shares the same pattern of rhyme, which is neither strictly English nor Italian, but rather an invention of McKay's own: abcd bcda efg fge. Outside of the "Cities" sequence, no other sonnet that he wrote employs this scheme. The quatrain "abcd" is a particularly odd way for a sonnet to begin, since it resembles four lines of blank verse. By the time we reach line 8 of the octave, the long-delayed "a" rhyme of the stanza ("nights" / "lights") is that much more pronounced. By deferring the recognition of rhyme, each sonnet gradually lets itself be taken over or seized by the pattern, which builds fervently into the sestet. In the city, McKay suggests, the appropriate metaphor for rhyme is not the "chain" or the "fetter," but rather the "crescendoing hosanna" that ends "Barcelona's" sestet.

McKay's global city sonnets trope the rapture of the crowd through the metrical fall from blank verse into a rhyming trance. The crosscurrents of socioeconomic marginalization and lyric possession are, of course, more complicated than this simplification suggests. The modern and contemporary lyric, while it generally eschews visionary modes of prophetic seeing or communications from the gods, often retains something like an ecstatic volume, an enthusiastic loudness, a fervor for the truth of love or grief or political cause. These lyrics are not meant to be overheard, as in Mill's sense

of a secret audience, or Frye's description of the lyric as turning its back on the crowd, but rather OVER-heard, in the sense of an amplified voice, as through a megaphone or loudspeaker—or a crescendoing hosanna. Sharon Cameron suggests as much in *Lyric Time* (1979) when she writes, "Could our thoughts be pitched as the lyric's, we could shatter time with the determined voice of our musings" (208).

There is one more way in which the sonnet sequence lends itself to a special kind of vatic amplification in the context of the global city—and for this we have to look not within a particular sonnet, but between and among the sonnets as a group. Through the sharing of topos and trope, as well as rhyme scheme, McKay's distant cities are not so much distinct plot points as overlapping territories. We are not traveling between the cities, or from city to city, but rather within a shared space that comes into being through their juxtaposition, a space that has no evident geographic name or concept. Focusing on a given topos (the lyre, the fountain, the tapestry) groups certain cities together in ways that exceed geographical, political, or cultural contiguities. When we encounter a fountain or a tower, for instance, a path lights up that takes us back through others. This sonnet sequence, then, is different from either the Renaissance sequence, with its development and questioning of individual subjectivity, and the modern sequence, with its collaged and fragmented voices. The poetics of overdetermination, of excess, and of exuberance that we find in "Cities" helps to explain why McKay begins with "Barcelona": praising the Moorish and African influence on Spain allows him to emphasize, on the level of theme, the cultural permeability of the city. By shifting the metaphor for the sonnet from the "room" to the "city," McKay makes the

"monumentality" of the sonnet seem plastic and recombinative, as though the various parts of the city might be reassembled into other, as yet unimagined commons. Sonnets, like cities, might preserve their individuation even as they call back and forth to one another using the same figures and tropes. Cities, like sonnets, bear witness not only to the pressure against a restrictive form, but also to the potential for the commons to expand beyond a discrete textual or physical space.

When McKay finally returns to Harlem at the end of the "Cities" sequence, his focus remains on the creative production of the most vulnerable lives. In a series of three sonnets entitled "Harlem," the optimism of Andalusia clashes with the "heart-breaking spectacle" of America. "Harlem" finds the poet listening to music in a bar, and wondering how such music could be possible:

> And yet these are the outcasts of the earth,
> The race oppressed and scorned by mighty man.
> How can they thus consent to joy and mirth
> Who live beneath a world-eternal ban? (237)

Unlike many of the sonnets from this period, "Harlem" answers the poet with a marvelous couplet: "The gifts divine are theirs, music and laughter, / All other things, however great, come after." Far from a naïve bacchanalia or a party at the end of the world, the "gifts divine" of the lyric represent the notion of a global poetics that would include the voices of workers around the world. In 1934, when McKay assembles the sequence, the voices of the Marseilles "Ditch" are even more vulnerable than he can know: they are about to vanish entirely, when the city is destroyed by bombs during

World War II. “Cities” draws on the origins of the lyric, and of poetic making, in rhapsodic possession, and links these origins to the ecstasy of the crowd at this specific historical conjuncture. McKay’s world lyric offers a fresh understanding of the first half of the twentieth century as a period in which certain traditional modes of lyric poetry—in particular, its ancient associations with ecstatic possession—are harnessed by a democratic impulse toward a collective voice. The “Cities” sequence is what we get when the figure of the crowd and the schemes and tropes of the sonnet come together in a single, packed space—or when the lyric rhapsode, the cosmopolitan flâneur, and the Jamaican sonneteer share a last meal together in the Ditch.

IV

By way of a brief conclusion, this chapter returns to Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, where McKay grew up, where part of his house, Sunny Ville, still stands, and where I recently found myself lost on an unmarked road near Claude McKay High School. Winston “Son” Senior, who drives a taxi based in the inland town of Junction, had offered to take me around Clarendon, and as we drove out of the small fishing towns of the south coast and into the mountains, he pointed to the damage bauxite mining has done to the fields and crops. The bauxite plant in the shadow of Santa Cruz Mountain has been closed, Son explained, since 2009, leaving over two thousand full and part-time workers

unemployed.[60] Mining has so impoverished the soil that as we drove up Santa Cruz Mountain at the end of May, the fruit trees, in a part of the country that depends on the production of bananas and yams, were stunted, sometimes bare.

Richard Palmer, whom Son and I met when we asked for directions, has a house that practically fronts the Sukee River, which McKay memorialized in one of his earliest poems from the *Gleaner*. He agreed to lead us up the road to the steep driveway to McKay's house, where we found a new yellow building and the cement foundation of Sunny Ville. Next to the foundation, overgrown with the lanky white and yellow weeds called Spanish Needle, are the graves of Thomas and Hannah Ann, McKay's parents. Richard handed me a Spanish Needle and asked whether I knew the poem about it, which he began to recite from memory, cutting up the plant with his machete while he spoke:

Lovely dainty Spanish needle

With your yellow flower and white,

Dew bedecked and softly sleeping,

Do you think of me to-night? (163)

He stopped after two stanzas, embarrassed at the attention, with a self-deprecating "Oh, man, I know it too tough." "The Spanish Needle"—popular in Jamaican primary schools as a poem for children to memorize—is in a form recognizable to us from McKay's early work, the abcb tetrameter quatrain. The quatrain tropes a drama of departure and return in

[60] See http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/bauxite/ for yearly statistics that match Son's firsthand account. From 2008 to 2009, bauxite mine production in Jamaica decreased 43% from 14,000 to 8,000 (in thousand dry metric tons).

its rhyme scheme: the third line of each stanza strays from the first and second, while the fourth puts an end to the stanza's wandering. Yet the final closure of the rhyme is always at odds with the opening of the syntax into an unanswerable question, a question that might be rephrased in the following way: Where are the people, McKay asks, who gather the honey from the glades of the Muses—and how hard-pressed are they to gather it?[61] The lyric is what makes their voices heard.

[61] "For of course poets tell us that they gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the Muses, and that they bear songs to us as bees carry honey, flying like bees" (Plato 1997, 942).

Chapter Three

"Poor lyrism": James Merrill and the Lyric of Global Crisis

A third site where the world lyric emerges is the altered terrain of the Cold War period, at the beginning of the financial expansion of global capital. The first chapter of this account tracked the rise of an Irish world lyric after the Great Hunger in the place where lyric song traditionally served as a discursive site for political thinking about nationhood. In the second chapter, the Caribbean lyric of colonization explored possibilities for collective action within the local community of Kingston, Jamaica and in newly globalized cities around the world. This chapter turns to Greece and to the period of global underdevelopment and world crisis from 1964-1980. It considers the work of James Merrill, a quintessential lyric poet of the modern "I" and the scion of the very firms that would engineer the global hegemony of the United States. Merrill's poetry offers an early premonition of the processes that will ultimately make Greece the symbol, along with Portugal, Spain, and Ireland, of twenty-first century world economic crisis.

The historical context for this stage of the world lyric is the underdevelopment of Greece: the transformation of the Greek economy from a national economy into a market for US private investment and financial speculation.[62] Writing in Greece in the 1960s and 1970s, where he and David Jackson lived much of the year, Merrill refers to the lyric tradition as a "life raft" and to poetic meter as "what emergency required" (*Sandover* 91,

[62] See Krishna 50-56 for a more comprehensive account of the financialization of the world economy. For a detailed account of Greece's dependency first on Britain and then on the US, see Kofas 51-87.

4). These references are, of course, quite general: Merrill's lyric poetry and his epic, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, do not usually engage with the explicit details of global politics. Instead, their strategy is to imagine the lyric "I" as a strange "composite / Voice" (*Sandover* 266): at once the "I" who is a member of the global economic elite; the "I" who searches for solidarity with the victims of the catastrophes inflicted by humanity; and the "I" who directs questions to and receives answers from a Ouija board, a compositional process of self-bracketing that produces the lines of the epic. Far from representing a retreat into an exquisite personification of the self, Merrill's lyric "I" registers, within a poetry of perfected manners and technique, "eerie undercurrents of distress" (*Sandover* 361). Ultimately, by yoking the lyric and the epic together, Merrill offers a third way in which the world lyric can speak a collective message of survival through an individuated voice.

I

In *The Long Twentieth Century,* Giovanni Arrighi describes the mid-1960s through the early 1980s—the period in which Merrill writes both his major lyrics and his epic—as characterized by the "the resurgence of private high finance in the production and regulation of world money" (318). Arrighi analyzes a shift in the relation between the US government and corporate capital: "the time had come to abandon the New Deal tradition of confrontation with private high finance, and to seek instead by all available means the latter's assistance in regaining the upper hand in the global power struggle"

(333).[63] Merrill, in his life the heir to vast sums of global capital, is in his work sensitive to the inequality and immiseration that financial expansion brings to the lower and middle strata of countries like Greece. Unexpectedly, Merrill's poetry is one of the places in which early warnings about the effects of global development can be read.

Greece during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was one of the most important economic, political, and military battlefields on which a "global power struggle" was waged.[64] Arrighi notes that "domestic social polarizations during financial expansions

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[63] Arrighi attributes the renegotiation between the US government and private finance to "the failure of the US military-industrial apparatus to cope with the problems posed by world-wide decolonization" (331).

[64] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, political commentaries portray Greece as the "the test par excellence of future peace" (Lehrman 517). By 1950, when General Nicholas Plastiras's center coalition was replaced by Sophocles Venizelos's puppet government, Greece had become a pivot point in the containment of Communism (Poulos 246). Constantine Poulos, in a prescient analysis in *The Nation* from June 1951, notes that the contrived fear of an "extreme left" would continue to advance the interests of the Greek oligarchy: "without a Communist peril American dollars would stop pouring into Greece at a rate of roughly $300,000,000 a year. With one, the rulers of Greece can justify their repression and cover up their exploitation and corruption" (Poulos 1951, 564). An article in *Foreign Affairs* from March 1952 quotes Major General William H. Arnold, explaining that "the loss of Greece would provide the Soviets with an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea, threaten the flanks of both Turkey and Italy, expose the southern boundary of Yugoslavia, and cause further unrest in the Middle East" (Pipinelis 311). And in an analysis from the *New Republic* after the military coup of April 1967, Bernard D. Nossiter draws an extended comparison to the Vietnam War, asking if Colonel Papadopoulos is a "new Marshal Ky" and wondering whether Greece would become "a nightmare in which the now dormant Soviet-American rivalry in Europe erupts with a new and hotter intensity" (Nossiter 10).

were integral aspects of ongoing processes of concentration of capital on a world scale" (326). The roots of the current period of austerity and democratic crisis in Greece and, more broadly, in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, can be traced to the decisive form that globalization—the integration of capital, product, and labor markets—takes during this period: the combination of "US restrictive monetary policy, high real interest rates, and deregulation" (334).

From 1950, when Merrill first visited Greece, through 1964, when Merrill and David Jackson bought a house on the slopes of Mt. Lycabettos, economic growth in Greece was dramatic: in the period 1955-1963, per capita income doubled and the population in Athens grew by 35% (Clogg 146, 152). During the 1960s, Greece was second only to Japan in economic expansion (*Recent Social Trends* 35). In "Nine Lives," from Merrill's posthumous collection *A Scattering of Salts*, a character looks back on those postwar years in Greece when the population shifted from the country to the city: "We lived those first years in a 'wood near Athens' / As my grandfather liked to call Kifissa *then*-- / No loud cafés, no traffic…" (599).[66] Unprecedented American investment and the accession of Greece to the European Union in 1961 imperiled the most vulnerable sector of Greece's economy: as the economist Takis Fotopoulos demonstrates, "gross

[66] Mt. Lycabettos itself was developed extensively during this decade. Initially "deserted and unsafe," ravaged by quarrying, Mt. Lycabettos had a single building, the chapel of Haghios Georgios, constructed in 1885. By 1965, the small mountain in the east of Athens had a restaurant with terraces, a parking lot, an open air theater, a ring road from the city, and a funicular—all of which served to integrate Lycabettos, and Merrill and Jackson, into Athens proper. See Papageorgiou-Venetas, *Athens: The Ancient Heritage and the Historic Cityscape in a Modern Metropolis*.

hourly earnings of manual workers…were less than half the EEC average in the seventies" (38-64). During the same period, the Marshall Plan allowed the United States to exert tremendous influence over Greek politics.[67] By 1980, the year Merrill and Jackson left Athens and the year that *Scripts for the Pageant*, the third part of *The Changing Light at Sandover*, was published, Greece, along with Portugal, would have the highest rate of poverty in the EEC.

Merrill could not, and did not, fail to notice these massive changes—first in his prose, then in his poetry—as they transformed the Greece he knew as a frequent tourist and, later, as a long-term resident. Merrill's articles and reviews from the period question the popular narrative of Greece's rapid economic liberalization in the 50s and 60s, the "heartening story of one country where American millions have brought progress," as the *Saturday Evening Post* put it (102). In this new economic climate, Merrill wonders how the young, male, working-class Greek population will survive. Looking at the figures of policemen and laborers in paintings from the 1950s by Yannis Tsarouchis, the poet asks, "How have *they* fared, one would like to know, in that quarter century since he painted them? Did they, too, prosper when tourism and industry caused the per capita income to

[67] As Langdon Hammer shows, Merrill's poetry documents his close connection to those intimately affected by the violence of Greek politics in the 60s, including Vasíli and Mimí Vassilikos, friends exiled by the 1967 coup, and Maria Mitsotakis, the wife of Konstantinos Mitsotakis, a rival of Papandreou and future leader of the conservative party. Maria, and to a lesser extent Mimí, have prominent roles in *The Changing Light at Sandover*. Both appear in shorter lyrics as well: Maria in "Words for Maria" (235-236) from *Nights and Days* and Mimí in a sonnet from "Coda: The Higher Keys" (544). See Hammer, "Life into Art."

soar?" (*Collected Prose* 344). Merrill continues by noting a sense of doom, of "imminent replacement," that hovers over "those innocent days" of 1950, just before the collapse of the center coalition government of the following year, and well before the military coup of 1967. His comments about economic growth in Greece focus on "changes the perennial visitor must acknowledge with a pang": "life itself grown over those years more prosperous, less joyfully improvised than before" (345). Concomitant with the tint of nostalgia in these essays is a palpable anxiety, a pained uncertainty, about the future the economic boom would leave to a vast population of Greeks, who will turn out to be destined for the lowest wages or for forced emigration.

Although they do not openly denounce US policy in Greece, Merrill's articles do reveal, at minimum, an expanded sympathy and a visceral reaction to collective human vulnerability that has long been thought out of place in the mandarin heir of Proust and Stevens. Merrill's premonitions of the costs imposed by a globalized economy suggest a different side to the poet. While his prose bears evidence of a social awareness that is also an acute reflection on Greece's entrance into a changed global economy, the relationship between the lyric poetry he writes during this period and the political economy of a nascent globalization is more oblique and needs closer analysis.[68] Commentaries on

[68] M.L. Rosenthal describes the "confessional" poetry of this period as "one culmination of the Romantic and modern tendency to place the literal Self more and more at the center of the poem." In Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, Rosenthal finds a litany of "private humiliations, sufferings, and psychological problems" (26-7). While Paul Breslin's history of this period emphasizes a "return to precisely those traditional verse forms which the modernists had dismantled" (24-5), Edward Brunner shows the mainstream verse of the 1950s and early 1960s to be more generative and complex. See also Seamus Heaney's comments on *Life*

expatriate lyric poetry in the immediate postwar period track the emergence of a "fifties" poem and a "cult of poetic craftsmanship," an etiolated poetry of "paintings, social types, animals, foreign sights" (1996, 58). David Kalstone describes the "virtues of fifties poetry" as "wit, elegance, [and] formal control" and the "fifties poem" as "a certain kind of emblematic lyric in which the poem assumes an almost impersonal, objective authority" (131).[69]

Most commentators agree that Merrill's poetic craft captures the essence of this fifties poem, even as he ultimately pushes his consummate technique into an exploration of verse autobiography, what he famously calls his "chronicles of life & loss" (*Sandover* 176). Merrill's faith in aesthetic ideas of order makes his poetry amenable to theories about literature's compensatory power, its ability to substitute, for "life's bloody page," a "jeweled reprise," as Helen Vendler puts it (1988, 346). Without a doubt, individual poems by Merrill attest to the transmutation of life into art. Lines such as "what happened is becoming literature," "all things in time grow musical," and "form's what affirms" resemble a Paterian ideal of aesthetic experience, refitted to the conservative aesthetics of

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Studies from a talk in 1979: "*Life Studies*, so often vaunted as the poetry of a private world, is a public book. It profiles its figures against public reality. Its hard, intelligent lines, its tone of comprehension, its well-braced speech imply a social dimension to what it is voicing. It trusts that it has an audience. It is as courteous as it is outrageous" (1981, 648).

[69] This claim seems somewhat exaggerated: in a contemporary review of eight poetry collections from 1951, Howard Nemerov praises Merrill for avoiding "the indignant scream [that] has so nearly become the poet's stipulated tone: [Merrill] does not appear to regard it as a duty to spend all or even most of his time being angry at something" (196).

mid-50s American verse culture.[70] For his severest critics, these statements represent a dodge from politics into aestheticism and sheer technical prowess.[71]

The rest of this chapter turns from Merrill's prose to his poetry in order to argue for Merrill as the practitioner of a public and world-oriented lyric, rather than the paragon of a private, domesticated lyric mode. Just as his prose marks his fear of the changes in Greek social life, so does his poetry exhibit an awareness of the dramatic changes in the world-system in the post-war period of United States hegemony—from the economic immiseration of the Greece he loves to the threat of nuclear annihilation. These worldly transformations are registered by means of the more intimate transformations and mediations of the lyric "I" in Merrill's mature work, from his pivotal 1966 volume, *Nights and Days*, to *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1976-1982), the conclusion of which coincides with Merrill's departure from Greece. The "anxious grasping toward identity" (Schulman 113) that commentaries have identified with Merrill, and with the

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[70] The quotations are taken from "For Proust" (*Collected* 142), "The Thousand and Second Night" (185), and "McKane's Falls" (370).

[71] Vendler concludes with a chastened view of the relationship between poetry and experience: "the lasting hope is that art may transmute the disappointments of life into something more radiant and stable; the lasting bitterness is that although art may guide 'what pangs there be/ Into a bearable choreography,' it does not repair the original life-rift" (2001, 3). See also *The Music of What Happens* (345-367). Vendler's argument suggests a theory of poetic form as an attempt, albeit an unsuccessful one, to "transmute" or "repair" life. According to Langdon Hammer's subtle revision, Merrill's poetry offers "a point of view from which life, even in its most relaxed, spontaneous forms, is already art, or striving to become it" (2005, 285). Hammer provides a welcome historical context for Merrill's complex aesthetic.

poetry of the late 1950s and 1960s in general, has left us with an incomplete view of both the poet and the "'golden age' of capitalism" (Tsakalotos 215).

Looking back on his early work in an interview from 1982, Merrill explains modestly, "I didn't have very much faith in my reliability as a witness to our times, and the best I thought I could hope for would be to turn out relatively perfect formal poems" (*Collected Prose* 133). Although a handful of Merrill's poems do explicitly engage the "times"—"18 West 11th Street" is a much-cited example—Merrill privileges "manners" and "relatively perfect" craftsmanship over political or historical subject matter. Yet these "relatively perfect formal poems" use poetic devices that, in their intricacy and complexity, bear witness to the catastrophes that alarmed the traveling poet in the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, his appropriation of the sonnet, the sestina, and the canzone, as well as the genre of the comoedia—troubadour, trouvère, and stilnovist literary forms that originate out of a poetic culture of imitation and ornament—make lyric itself the changing light by which history can be seen. In order to offer a premonitory vision of a new global polity, Merrill uses tropes and schemes that ostensibly rely on forms of singularity, in the process highlighting his sense of collective vulnerability.[72]

The remainder of the chapter charts the development of a political and social lyric subject in Merrill's work, first apparent in a poem set in Athens in the mid-60s, "Days of

[72] See also David Lehman's comment that "for Merrill, the impulse to bring order out of wreckage seems ever accompanied by the desire to reverse the process, to crack the well-wrought urn; within his completed design, there persists a lingering distrust of artifice and design" (43).

1964." Later, the frequent interpolation of a lyric voice within the epic plot of *The Changing Light at Sandover* enacts a more robust and fully emergent social poetics: a "poor lyrism" in which Merrill identifies the lyric singer's "composite / Voice" (*Sandover* 265) as the voice of collective suffering.

II

The rapid liberalization of Greek markets and the burgeoning of the service economy in Athens lead quickly to the changes in labor conditions which Merrill's housekeeper, Kleo, experiences in "Days of 1964," a major poem from Merrill's fourth book, *Nights and Days* (1966). This poem develops a link between the poet's love for Kleo as a kind of household god and the global exigency that sends her out to prostitute herself for money to live, even though she is already employed by Merrill and Jackson. It stands as one of the first instances in which Merrill's lyric poetry wrestles with those changes in Greece that he had recorded in his prose. He does this in at least three ways: thematically and rhetorically, through the poem's stylistic resonances with C. P. Cavafy as a precursor poet; figurally, through the device of allegory; and schematically, through the careful deployment of rhyme.

"Days of 1964" takes place in and around Merrill and Jackson's newly purchased house on Mt. Lycabettos, but the poem's title also places it in the context of the Greek poet C.P. Cavafy's group of five poems titled "Days of…"[88] Both poets write about "the

[88] "Days of 1903," "Days of 1896," "Days of 1901," "Days of 1909, '10 and '11," and "Days of 1908" (84,

'divinity' of unconventional love" (Keeley 26). The relationship between Merrill's poem from 1966 and Cavafy's anti-colonial poems from 1909-1928 extends much farther, however. Cavafy shares with Merrill the acknowledgment of the social and economic frames around their "portraits of debauchery and transcendent love" (Howard 334). Greece serves as a unique discursive site for both Cavafy and Merrill: it offers an occasion both to celebrate homosexuality and to harbor premonitions of Greek democracy in peril.

Cavafy is a critically important precursor for Merrill, since his "Days of…" poems register the disjunction between the "unsullied" beauty of young male lovers and a "ruinous" Greek modernity. They do this not only by drawing on explicit themes of unemployment and impoverishment, but also by juxtaposing two registers of language: the "high-flown" and the "quite ordinary" (Mendelsohn xliv). References to economic and social vulnerability fill the poems from the "Days" series. "Days of 1908" begins, "That year he found himself without a job" (173); "Days of 1896" describes, in the

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139, 143, 156, 173). Keeley notes that Auden's introduction for Rae Dalven's English translation of Cavafy's poems in 1961 was responsible for Cavafy's "increasingly central standing in the minds of American poets" in the 1960s (26). Howard, Yenser, Hadas, and Keeley have written about Merrill and Cavafy. See Merrill's translation of "Days of 1908" (*Collected Poems* 803). Merrill wrote several other "Days of…" poems: "Days of 1935," "Days of 1941 and '44," "Days of 1971" and "Days of 1994." Keeley writes, "James Merrill was among the very first American poets to recognize Cavafy's genius, to comment perceptively on his work, and even on occasion to translate him. And although Merrill's own voice is generally more elaborate, stylistically playful, and technically intricate than Cavafy's, some of his very best erotic poems clearly demonstrate that they have learned from the Cavafian perspective" (Keeley 30).

restrained tone that is typical of Cavafy, "he had gradually lost what little money he had; / afterwards his position, then his reputation" (139). "Days of 1909, '10, and '11" remembers "the son of a much put-upon, impoverished sailor" who never gets a "statue or portrait" made of him: "thrown into a blacksmith's poor old shop, / he was quickly spoiled by the arduous work, / the common debauchery, so ruinous" (156).

But Cavafy's poems also inscribe the economic costs imposed upon his lovers in their code switching between styles of Greek. Daniel Mendelsohn draws attention to Cavafy's alternation between demotic Greek and katharevousa, the "high" Greek taught in schools. In order to capture the contrast between "the allure of the youths in the glittering ancient city" of Alexandria and "that of a common blacksmith's boy," Cavafy shifts "between the adjective use of the form, *perikallis*, and the noun used of the latter, *agori*: for the former is a rather high-flown katharevousa word taken directly from the Ancient Greek (which I translate by means of the rather archaic 'beauteous') while the latter is a quite ordinary noun: 'kid'" (*Collected Poems* xliv). The composite of demotic Greek and katharevousa in Cavafy's poem might be considered the stylistic equivalent of placing "a statue or portrait" of the "perfect" but impoverished youth in "a blacksmith's poor old shop."

Cavafy's sensitivity to the poverty of his lovers inscribes his poems with a public, historical, and political valence that is entwined with the lyric voice. The connection to Cavafy's own premonitory lyrics provides a missing link to the change in Merrill's poetic style in the early 1960s. A similar treatment of the demotic and the "high-flown" is prevalent throughout Merrill's "Days of 1964." "Days of 1964" and the volume of poems

it concludes, *Nights and Days* (1966), are often seen as evidence of Merrill's adoption of a more demotic style and a corresponding focus on lived experience.[89] Written during a period in Greece when the choice between demotic Greek and katharevousa was at the center of politics, "Days of 1964," like Cavafy's "Days of…" poems, captures a "ruinous" modernity visible in the plight of one of the most vulnerable members of the population.[90]

Aligning itself with its Cavafian precursors, "Days of 1964" begins with a noticeable muting of the mythic voices and stylistic fireworks featured in Merrill's earlier collections. His housekeeper Kleo, Merrill discovers after a chance encounter with her, is a prostitute, forced to go outside the expanding service industry to support her "pious mother / And wastrel son" (*Collected Poems* 220). As Jon Kofas explains, economic

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[89] Howard, in his 1966 review of *Nights and Days*, concludes that "such a poem…dramatizes the astonishing truth that this poet, the most decorative and glamour-clogged America has ever produced, has made himself, by a surrender to reality and its necessary illusions, a master of his experience of his own nature" (335). More recently, Hammer has argued that Merrill's poems from Greece show him "pushing his art close to life, moving out of the realm of symbols into daily experience, with a colloquial, seemingly casual idiom to match" (2005, 285).

[90] This turn to lived experience might also be seen as Merrill's attention, by way of Cavafy's 1928 poem, to the debate in 1964 over the kind of Greek that should be used and taught. During the eighteen months of Georgios Papandreou's premiership, from February 1964 to July 1965, reforms were enacted to modernize the school system, which had long privileged the "purist" katharevousa over demotic Greek (Clogg 157). Unfortunately, as Clogg explains, Papandreou's opposition to certain key issues of foreign policy—in particular, the union of Cyprus with Greece and the cession of some Greek territory to Turkey—prevented these reforms from being implemented.

growth in Greece during this period was driven for the most part by "the numerous sacrifices of the working class and the peasantry" and hardly at all by US private investment, which was not directed towards "domestic productive enterprises" and industrial programs to strengthen and modernize the state (166). "Days of 1964" is, of course, not an ethnographic study of the Greek poor and the changing labor conditions in Greece under a globalized economy; Merrill makes no explicit references to Kleo's economic condition beyond the revelation of her need to earn more than he pays her ("I paid her generously, I dare say" (220)). The poem's strategies are more oblique than this, and they can be located in the dynamic transformation of the speaker's relation to Kleo. The poem is a love lyric that fictionalizes the speaker telling Kleo's story to his lover in bed. Lee Oser argues that "Days of 1964" is thus a "textbook example" of a postmodern tendency in poetry to "domesticate history" and "thus to abandon its public aspect" (127). Yet the attention to allegory as a device in Merrill's poem reveals a different tendency at work, one that complicates, rather than abandons, history and the "public": a conflation of the lyric speaker—at first confused and disoriented, then near-ecstatic—and the historical subject, Kleo, forced into prostitution on the hills of Athens.

While the interpretation of allegory might be associated most readily with an ancient form of biblical exegesis, allegory has often involved taking a certain ethical and historical stance towards the world. Influential modern work on allegory builds on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who defines allegory as a rhetorical figure in which "instead of what is actually meant, something else, more tangible, is said, but in

such a way that the former is understood" (63).[91] While allegory might seem to depend on a process of substitution, by which the tangible stands in for the spiritual, Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville theorize instead that allegory has a ligative or associative effect, binding the two together as "a way of reading that insists on the contiguous over the merely substitutive" (162). Moreover, an allegorical way of reading, as Dante argues in the *Epistle to Can Grande*, might become an ethical practice, a way of teaching and training the reader in modes of perception and right action, in addition to a theory of interpretation (1969, 349). Such notions of allegory open up a new way of understanding "Days of 1964." Through the poem's rhetorical movement from a locodescriptive to an allegorical mode, the speaker and his lover learn to see themselves and Kleo as bound together in a common condition of vulnerability, illusion, and love.

The poem begins with a description of a landscape that will later return in the allegorical final stanza. The hills of Mt. Lycabettos are rendered with the prosaic detail

[91] In the *Trauerspiel*, Walter Benjamin writes that, with allegory, "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no importance" (175). Paul de Man's definition is quite different. For de Man, "whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference" (1983, 207).

and something of the "desert-dry tone" Merrill finds in Cavafy's descriptions of Alexandria[92]:

> Houses, an embassy, the hospital,
> Our neighborhood sun-cured if trembling still
> In pools of the night's rain…
> Across the street that led to the center of town
> A steep hill kept one company part way
> Or could be climbed in twenty minutes
> For some literally breathtaking views,
> Framed by umbrella pines, of city and sea.
> Underfoot, cyclamen, autumn crocus grew
> Spangled as with fine sweat among the relices
> Of good times had by all. If not Olympus,
> An out-of-earshot, year-round hillside revel. (220)

[92] In their notes to the poem, Stephen Yenser and J.D. McClatchy write that "the poem is set at the house at 44 Athinaion Efivon Street in Athens that Merrill and Jackson shared beginning in the 1960s" (*Selected Poems* 274 n72). Asked whether Proust or Cavafy is a greater influence on him, Merrill responds by choosing Proust, yet continues: "I love Cavafy. I've learned a lot from him as a poet: his desert-dry tone, his mirage-like technical effects—something one would never guess from his translators. But he hasn't shaped my way of seeing to the degree that Proust has. For one thing, Cavafy is a miniaturist; for another, he writes without metaphor. I mean it! Virtually nowhere in his work will you find metaphor or simile. He's John the Baptist eating locusts in the desert, far from any 'Jordan' of metaphor" (*Collected Prose* 155).

Merrill writes with a simplicity of syntax tailored to the walking consciousness: short prepositional phrases, limited to one or two per line, create the setting. Rhyme, though not absent, is limited to such unobtrusive off-rhymes as "hospital" and "still," "views" and "grew," "all" and "revel." This will not be the case, however, as the poem goes on and rhyme develops increasing importance as a structuring device.

The objectivity of this initial description sets the stage for the entrance of Kleo, Merrill's housekeeper, whom the speaker first describes in short, declarative sentences: "Her legs hurt. She wore brown, was fat, past fifty." The tone then veers towards affectionate satire as he continues,

> And looked like a Palmyra matron
> Copied in lard and horsehair. How she loved
> You, me, loved us all, the bird, the cat!
> I think now she *was* love. She sighed and glistened
> All day with it, or pain, or both.
> (We did not notably communicate.) (220)

Introduced as someone "who cleans for us," Kleo is identified with the allegorical figure of love itself (Yenser 114-117).[93] In the following stanza, however, Kleo troubles the distinction between love and illusion, upsetting the lovers's complacency about their own relationship while at the same time bringing them closer in sympathy to her.

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[93] Thanks to James Sitar, archive editor of the Poetry Foundation, for a scanned copy of a first edition of *Nights and Days* given by Merrill to Canadian poet and editor of Poetry magazine Daryl Hine in which Merrill emends "cleans" to "cleaned," changing the entire second stanza into the past tense.

The poem, as it continues, glimpses the possibility that Kleo's state is not an exception, but rather a common condition, however improbable that might seem at first to the speaker and his lover, who observe her with a certain affectionate, bemused distance. As told to his lover in bed, the speaker's sudden encounter with Kleo outside the house prompts a question—"was love illusion?"—that is as much about the mask she wears as about the artifice of the love poem in which she appears:

> Startled mute, we had stared—was love illusion?—
> And gone our ways. Next, I was crossing a square
> In which a moveable outdoor market's
> Vegetables, chickens, pottery kept materializing
> Through a dream-press of hagglers each at heart
> Leery lest he be taken, plucked,
> The bird, the flower of that November mildness,
> Self lost up soft clay paths, or found, foothold,
> Where the bud throbs awake
> The better to be nipped, self on its knees in mud—
> Here I stopped cold, for both our sakes;
>
> And calmer on my way home brought us fruit. (221)

This nightmarish vision of trade in an outdoor market arises from the sudden terror that love might be another word for haggling, designed to take put both buyer and seller on guard against the illusion of a fair price—or lovers on guard against the ostensible

frankness of a "traded story" in bed. Departing from the measured syntax and detached tone of the first stanza, Merrill describes the market with a cascading series of appositional phrases in which the haggler metamorphoses into a bird, a flower, a self, a bud, and, finally, back into a self "on its knees in mud." This hectic proliferation of images is accentuated by the accumulating rhymes in the final lines of the stanza: "foothold" / "cold," "bud" / "mud," "awake" / "sakes." The proximity of these rhymes also sets up a contrast with the very distant rhyme of "mute" / "fruit," the completion of which coincides with the restoration of the speaker's poised syntax: "and calmer on my way home bought us fruit."

It is not that Merrill writes explicitly about Kleo's prostitution in the larger structures of the global economy. But through the careful modulation of allegory in the poem's final stanza, Merrill imagines the lyric self-consciousness of the intimate love poem making common cause with one of the political subjects of economic globalization. Allegory is a trademark technique for Merrill, but it is here reinvigorated with the purpose of identifying the lovers's space with the space of Kleo's prostitution. In the magisterial final stanza, the poem returns for a third time to the landscape around the house—not, this time, to describe it or to use it to dramatize an action, but to superimpose it on the lovers' bedchamber. Although the plot of the poem has so far progressed linearly from crisis to resolution, the landscape of Mt. Lycabettos, when it reappears in the final stanza, accumulates interpretive possibilities, turning into a composite of description, narration, and allegory:

Where I hid my face, your touch, quick, merciful,

Blindfolded me. A god breathed from my lips.
If that was illusion, I wanted it to last long;
To dwell, for its daily pittance, with us there,
Cleaning and watering, sighing with love or pain.
I hoped it would climb when it needed to the heights
Even of degradation, as I for one
Seemed, those days, to be always climbing
Into a world of wild
Flowers, feasting, tears—or was I falling, legs
Buckling, heights, depths,
Into a pool of each night's rain?
But you were everywhere beside me, masked,
As who was not, in laughter, pain, and love. (222)

The last stanza retells the poem's narrative as the topography of the landscape it describes. In this way, Merrill brings together the framing narrative of the poem (the lyric "I" and his lover) with the story that it frames (Kleo's prostitution). Their communion, conflation, or "contiguity" is necessarily awkward, troubled, and tentative—the result of the poem's allegorical movement rather than a literal statement or proposition. Yet it is also full of exuberance and hope, signaled through the velocity of the short lines, their breathless enjambments ("wild / Flowers," "legs / Buckling"), and the prominence of disjunctive asyndeton, which serves the rhetorical purpose of holding together opposites ("feasting, tears"; "heights, depths"). At the end of the poem, illusion once again takes

the form of prostitution, climbing "to the heights / Even of degradation." Yet illusion is, finally, identified with the two lovers, who themselves are like Kleo, "masked / As who was not, in laughter, pain, and love."

A reading of "Days of 1964" would be incomplete without attention to the way the poem's final rhyme suggests a different ending to the poem, a form of love that might exist beyond illusion/prostitution. To imagine a slight change in the final three lines is to see the importance of Merrill's decision to place love outside of the final rhyme: "…Into a pool of last night's rain? / But you were everywhere beside me, masked / As who was not, in laughter, love, and pain." In the actual ending of the poem, "love" is the word excluded from the rhyme scheme ("rain" / "pain"), the word that exceeds the economy of the rhyme. Outstripping the form used to contain it, love must be as capacious as the first word, "houses," if it aspires to include laughter and pain, pity and pittance, illusion and need. Merrill tropes love as that which is external to rhyme, external to illusion, and the sign of the incompleteness of the set from which it is excluded: "laughter, pain, *and* love."

"Days of 1964" is very much concerned with the "illusions" created by such poetic devices as allegory and rhyme, as well as with the potential for a "love" that leads to the acknowledgment of Kleo, a version of Cavafy's impoverished "kid," ruined by the "common debauchery" of Greece's deliberately underdeveloped economy. In *The Changing Light*, Merrill's avatar JM reflects parenthetically on his own Cavafian lover, Strato, from "back in '64": "However seldom in my line to feel, / I must love those for whom the world is real" (51). Soon after this moment, Kleo is revealed as "Clio," the

muse of history (53). While "Days of 1964" draws the lyric "I" first into confusion, then into communion with Kleo, *The Changing Light at Sandover* provides a new figure for the lyric itself: an iterated distress call from a life raft. This figure for the lyric will come to be, through *Sandover*'s interpolation of lyric poetry in its epic narrative, the figure for a conjuncture between an individual voice, the traditional forms of poetry, and a "signal" of collective survival.

III

In a response to a question about the pronoun "we" in lyric poetry, Merrill writes, "A generation ago 'we' was *the* pronoun. It probably started with Auden—let's say it conveyed the sense of a political elite. But there was another and to me more important source—Rilke in the *Duino Elegies*. The 'we' there is an elite of sufferers" (*Collected Prose* 65). The tensions between the poetic voice, its aspirations to a universalizing "we," and the representation of collective suffering are manifest in Merrill's later work through the merging of lyric subjectivity and an altered epic form. Franco Moretti describes the "broken, unpredictable texture" of the modern epic from *Faust* to *The Waste Land* as "the allegory of a heterogeneous—yet forcibly unified—reality. The most abstract form of 'totality' imaginable in the capitalist world-system" (229). If the financialization of the global economy from the early 1970s onward heralds the greatest modern expansion in the capitalist world-system, then the epic must generate a new form of totality in order to capture a world-system entering into a prolonged period of crisis and socioeconomic

divergence.[94] Merrill's epic, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, participates in this project, and it does so in two ways: first, by interpolating lyrics into the epic structure, turning lyrics from self-contained "gems" (*Sandover* 454) into the ligatures that tie the story together and the engines that move it forward; and second, by summoning up traditional figures of the individual lyric voice only to revise these figures as composite, communal, or otherwise directed beyond the solitary singer. Once again, Merrill's global critique is not generally explicit or thematic—though *Sandover* does make frequent reference to current world-historical events, and especially to nuclear annihilation—but has to do rather with bringing the lyric into this transformed epic structure. In this dynamic, formal

[94] It may be possible to see the Ouija board itself, with its aleatoric mode of composition and its numbers standing in for names of Merrill's bats and angels, as a dramatization of neoliberalism's effects on signification. One of the hallmarks of neoliberal globalization is its economic positivism, its use of numbers and symbols to calculate human value. In an analysis of the consequences of the austerity measures imposed on Greece in 2012, Stathis Gourgouris writes, "Bankers and financiers worldwide…have established the language of numbers as the only language of truth, while at the same time their irresponsible manipulation of numbers have sent entire populations, real men, women, and children to ruin" ("Greece and the Future of the European Project"). In Berardi's account, "semio-capitalism" comes about when "indeterminacy takes the place of the fixed relation between labor-time and value, so that the whole regime of exchange falls into an aleatory system of floating values" (86). Berardi argues that under neoliberal economics, "the emancipation of money—the financial sign—from the industrial production of things" follows a semiotic course "from referential to nonreferential signification" (139). Using a Ouija board, naming his characters "741" and "40070," Merrill adopts a "language of numbers" that perhaps signals a dawning age of financial speculation, mathematic hieroglyphs, and radical uncertainty.

process, Merrill recasts the lyric as an ethical bridge between sections of epic narrative instead of a gem-like, autonomous artifact.

Beginning in the summer of 1955, and ending with their departure from Greece in 1980, Merrill and David Jackson transcribed messages from the dead through a Ouija board, sometimes at the rate of "five hundred or six hundred words an hour," which Merrill signifies with capital letters.[95] *Sandover* is divided into three parts and a coda: *The Book of Ephraim*, published in *Divine Comedies* (1976); *Mirabell: Books of Number* (1978); and *Scripts for the Pageant* (1980), with *Coda: The Higher Keys* appended in 1982. Using an overturned teacup as a pointer, and the right hand of his partner, David Jackson, to guide the cup, Merrill makes contact first with the Greek Jew Ephraim, "a favorite of TIBERIUS" (8), who reveals to JM and DJ what happens after death: the living are either reincarnated on earth, or sent climbing up a hierarchy of stages in heaven, "THE SURROUND OF THE LIVING" (59), at each step of which a sense is restored to them. The three sections of the Ouija board—the alphabet, the numbers 0-9, the words "Yes," "No," and the ampersand—provide the form for the three books of Merrill's epic. Reviews praised the first book of the trilogy, with its carefully edited transcriptions, but were more skeptical, and sometimes derisory, of the second two books, their expanding cast of characters (including the angels Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and

[95] For a section of the transcript, see David Jackson 298-305.

Emmanuel; Auden, Yeats, Pythagoras, Plato, and Stevens; and a unicorn nicknamed Uni), and especially the new orders for Merrill to write "POEMS OF SCIENCE" (109).[96]

The historical context for the poem is not directly thematized, but its implications are signaled by the merging of Merrill's lyric voice with the voices of the dead. The composition of *Sandover* extends across twenty years of US intervention and underdevelopment in Greece; its intimations of catastrophe and global destruction are paired with its creation of a gay origin myth and its playful cosmology of unicorns, bats, angels, and poetic idols. In an introduction to a reading from the poem in 1987, Merrill summarizes the plot of the books that follow *Ephraim*, in which he and Jackson first make contact with a spirit-world:

> Suddenly the voices that were talking to us were not those of amiable shades, who had at one time been human, but nonhuman voices who announced themselves either as voices of subatomic particles or the voices of fallen angels. Much confusion about that disparity in scale. Much confusion also to find oneself in a tradition one hadn't thought one had belonged to, of a divine voice, a muse that for once might not be simply a conventional name for the unconscious. Or if it

[96] For a particularly strong reaction to the "portentousness and vanity" of *Mirabell* and *Scripts*, see Donoghue. Timothy Materer summarizes the plot of *Mirabell* (2000, 96). See also Polito, *A Reader's Guide.*

> was, then the unconscious was a much larger echo chamber than one had previously supposed.[97]

Merrill's turn to epic form coincides with a shift in his sense of the poet's vocation, an amplification and transformation of his unconscious into "a much larger echo chamber than one had previously supposed." As the poem goes on, the threat of nuclear annihilation takes on particular thematic prominence: an epigraph at the beginning of *Mirabell* from Laura Fermi, the wife of Enrico Fermi, joins the epigraphs from Dante's *Paradiso* and from Proust's *Jean Santeuil*. JM and DJ stand trial for humanity's "IDEA OF DESTRUCTION" before the "shy brother" Gabriel, the angel of fire, in the "YES" "&" and "NO" sections of *Scripts for the Pageant* (438).

In its attempt to justify the ways of man to God, *The Changing Light at Sandover* revises the epic invocation of the divine muse, asserting the existence of a larger "echo chamber" of voices crowded into the "divine voice." The poem is haunted not only by the dead JM and JD summon, but also by a wild heterogeneity of source material and precursor poems. Most glaring is the fusion of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *Sandover* eludes divisions into theological, political, and psychological discourse; it troubles any easy distinctions between life writing and fiction; between narrative, lyric, and epic; and between poetry and science. In this way, Merrill's epic resembles the other long poems of the second half of the century (Berryman's *Dream Songs*, Olson's *Maximus Poems*, Walcott's *Omeros*, Williams's

[97] Thanks to the Woodberry Poetry Room of Harvard University, Merrill's reading is online at http://hcl.harvard.edu/poetryroom/listeningbooth/poets/merrill.cfm.

Paterson) and of modernism (Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror,* Pound's *Cantos*[98]). The Ouija board serves as what Merrill calls a "hedge against inflation": "I think [the board] does embarrass the sort of reader who can't bear to face the random or trivial elements that coalesce, among others, to produce an 'elevated' thought. That doesn't bother me *at all*" (*Collected Prose* 110). The absurdities of the poem, the stylized emotions, and the changes in form suggest, as Merrill says himself, the recitative/aria structure of an opera (94).[99] Less frequently noticed, however, is the book's resemblance to the prosimetric poem, such as Dante's *Vita Nuova* or Sidney's *Arcadia*, in which stretches of prose are interrupted by fixed forms. It might also remind us, not only of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but of the comoedia, or versified tale, in general.[100] Finally, while paying explicit homage to Proust, Merrill's *Bildungsgedicht* recalls the medieval form of the vita, in which an account of the poet's life would be periodically interrupted by samples of his work. These moments in *Sandover* are urged on, celebrated, and critiqued by the salon-like company of Auden, Maria Mitsotakis, and George Cotzias, a physicist friend: after a series of revelations, George asks that JM write a sonnet in response: "I SUGGEST / THE BITS

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[98] See, for instance, Merrill's reference to Pound's *Cantos*: "In a work this long,/ Madness to imagine one could do/ Without the apt ideogram or two" (474).

[99] At one point, tempo indications of "arioso" and "vivace" appear in *Scripts* (*Sandover* 317).

[100] In Raby's history of the genre, the comoedia is "a narrative, in elegiac verse, which was written in a plain, familiar style and had a happy ending" (54). The transformation of Mirabell into a peacock and the revelation that Ephraim is the archangel Michael, among other character shifts in *Sandover*, recall the disguises of Jupiter and Mercury in the *Amphitryo* (55-58).

MY BOY THAT GRAB U BE COMPRESSED / INTO THE SORT OF 'GEM' U DO SO WELL / Hm…" (454)

The pun on "gem" and "JM" (and, of course, on "Jim") is one of the poem's references to the frequent appearance of the lyric voice. Individual lyrics, in *Sandover*, are presented as though carved out of the surrounding narrative.[101] The articulation of a lyric speaker or voice, within the armature of a fixed form such as the sonnet, takes place *a posteriori* to the positioning of this speaker in the overlapping histories of the sonnet, of Ephraim and Mirabell's evolving fable, and of humanity's role in creating global ecological, political, and personal crises. For Merrill, the confessional "I" is a "literary convention like any other" (*Collected Prose* 50): both a set of practices for the poet and a "coming-together," a con-venere, of "Voices from the Other World." Merrill has previously learned from Mirabell (one of the fallen angels, who goes by the number 741 before being transformed into a peacock) that what he perceives as an individual talent is actually the "composite / Voice" (265) of tradition:

> Here I go again, a vehicle
> In this cosmic carpool. Mirabell once said
> He taps my word banks. I'd be happier
> If *I* were tapping them. Or thought I were. (599)

[101] In his introduction to *A Reader's Guide*, Robert Polito writes, "to spotlight *Sandover*'s accomplishment against the broader backdrop of English literature, perhaps only George Herbert's *The Temple* comprises so bedazzling a compendium of stanzaic and metrical forms, as Merrill magisterially spins out sonnets, villanelles, Spenserian stanzas, Rubaiyat quatrains, terza rima, Anglo Saxon alliterative meter, and a stunning, crowning canzone" (3).

Maria reminds Merrill "WHAT A MINOR / PART THE SELF PLAYS IN A WORK OF ART" and then looks back to Sidney's *Arcadia* (1593) for a list of the "GREAT GIVENS" of poetry:

> THE ROSEBRICK MANOR
>
> ALL TOPIARY FORMS & METRICAL MOAT
>
> RIPPLING UNSOUNDED! FROM ANTHOLOGIZED
>
> PERENNIALS TO HERB GARDEN OF CLICHES
>
> FROM LATIN-LABELED HYBRIDS TO THE FAWN
>
> 4 LETTER FUNGI THAT ENRICH THE LAWN,
>
> IS NOT ARCADIA TO DWELL AMONG
>
> GREENWOOD PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOTHER TONGUE
>
> ROOTSYSTEMS UNDERFOOT WHILE OVERHEAD
>
> THE SUN GOD SANG & SHADES OF MEANING SPREAD
>
> & FAR SNOWCAPPED ABSTRACTIONS GLITTERED NEAR
>
> OR FAIRLY MELTED INTO ATMOSPHERE? (262)

Maria's allusion to Sidney's work, with its alternating series of narrative episodes and lyric set-pieces, might remind us of Merrill's initial choice between writing a novel or a long poem ("Best after all to do it as a novel?" (3)) and his struggles to avoid the "exquisite / Peek-a-boo plumage of verse" in favor of "unseasoned telling" and "conventional stock figures…the kinds of being we recall from Grimm / Jung, Verdi, and the commedia dell' arte" (3-4). Maria's description also echoes, and revises, Virginia

Woolf's description of the *Arcadia's* modern reception as a walk around a ruined pastoral landscape:

> So by degrees the book floats away into the thin air of limbo. It becomes one of those half-forgotten and deserted places where the grasses grow over fallen statues and the rain drips and the marble steps are green with moss and vast weeds flourish in the flower- beds. And yet it is a beautiful garden to wander in now and then; one stumbles over lovely broken faces, and here and there a flower blooms and the nightingale sings in the lilac-tree. (49)

Woolf prophecies that "all the seeds of English fiction lie latent" in the *Arcadia*: "romance and realism, poetry and psychology," "the vast landscapes of the epic" and the "normal course of daily human life" (49). While Merrill, like Sidney and like Woolf herself, is sometimes considered to take an aristocratic position toward "daily human life," these assumptions are often based on the themes of the contradictory and ambiguous messages JM and DJ receive, rather than the complicated and heterogeneous architecture of verse in which they are arranged and presented.

The origins of Merrill's experiments with epic can be traced to his earlier lyrics. Merrill's long poems from the sixties—including "An Urban Convalescence," "A Tenancy," "The Thousand and Second Night," "Time," "The Broken Home," and "From the Cupola"— modulate frequently between voices and stanzaic forms. Emerging now and then after a lengthy conversation between characters, lyric "gems" also call to mind Dante's *rime petrosa* and *Vita Nuova.* These lyrics, by virtue of their placement within the skein of the epic, contest what Virginia Jackson calls the "lyricization" of poetry as

"intimate, intuitive, and ritualistic" (183) by introducing a world lyric that is extroverted, communal in its orientation, and frequently gossipy or chatty.

Moreover, studding the epic with lyric moments creates a kind of "genre confusion," calling into question the lyric as a mode of enunciation attached to a single speaker (Filreis 294-5). Gérard Genette notes that the kind of speech on display in the epic alternates between that of a single poetic persona and that of his characters (25). While mixing narrative and dramatic modes in an epic is common (one thinks of the long line from the *Arcadia* through *Ulysses*), *Sandover* has a near-encyclopedic ambition to include the sonnet, the villanelle, the canzone, and many nonce stanzas, as well as sustained rhyming couplets, dimeter quatrains, and sections in terza rima and in fourteen- and ten-syllable syllabic meter. *Sandover* is, therefore, a study not only in modes of enunciation, but also in the repeated transgression of these modes.[102] By the time that JM learns that his poetry comes from "a composite / Voice," *Sandover* has already begun to articulate this compound persona through the entwining of many voices, temporalities, and events—"speaking the language of singularity…to speak 'in the cause of the strange,' in the name of the strange and the alien," as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe writes in *Poetry as Experience* (59). Merrill's epic incorporates diverse modes of enunciation in order to explore the relationship between the singular and the strange, between the individuation of the lyric poem and the totality of the epic—and, exceeding this, to posit the lyric anew as a form of collectivity itself.

[102] The interpolation of the lyric within the epic creates a kind of literary "genre confusion" that has been associated with both democratic and anti-democratic politics (Filreis 294-5; Rancière 2011, 11).

A linked set of lyrics from the middle of *Sandover* helps ground the lyric in a "composite / Voice" rather than a single "I." The catastrophes brought about by global transformation appear obliquely throughout the poem, but they come into view most clearly in the scenes surrounding the narrative climax of *Sandover*: the voice of God Biology heard singing into space. At this point, three lyrics interrupt the narrative, presenting traditional figures for the solitary lyric speaker, only to hear through them the voices of a collective. Of these three poems, one is a "signal" from "the galactic radio / Tuned…to mortal wavelength in mid-phrase" (613); one is the reaction of W.H. Auden to Merrill's transcript of this signal; and the third is JM's "own" contribution, a canzone about his trip with DJ to Samos.

The first of these poems recasts the lyric poem as an inhuman signal from outer space. It arrives at the end of the "First Lessons," given to JM and DJ by the angel Michael and his brothers Emmanuel, Raphael, and Gabriel, who have replaced Ephraim and Mirabell as instructors and guides (Ephraim, as the poem comes full circle, is revealed to be Michael in disguise all along).[103] Set in a schoolroom, the lessons resemble a symposium; Plato, a recurring presence in *Sandover*, shows up to remark, "I NOTICE SOME IMPROVEMENTS ON MY CAVE." The angels, we learn, are God Biology's

[103] Summarizing the narrative arc of the lessons, Peter Sacks writes, "the series of communications is structured precisely as an ascent, a graduated course of lessons, in which the living, aided and protected by the affectionate mediations of the dead, learn increasingly about the nature and history of creation, the forces of chaos and evil, and particularly about the deathless 'V WORK' that strives for survival and for the possibility of paradise on earth" (1983, 159).

five senses bringing news of life on earth, "capsules made / Of the whole vast ongoing escalade" (351). God B, receiving sense-data from the angels, uses it to broadcast a signal into space: "TURNING OUTWARD HIS MULTIPLE ATTENTION FORTIFIED BY THE GREAT ORCHESTRA OF THE SENSES / OUR FATHER SINGS, / SINGS, ALONE, INTO THE UNIVERSE." JM and DJ propose that this signal is "life itself speaking," and the song they hear is in the form of a ten-line stanza in syllabic meter, with ten syllables per line:

> IVE BROTHERS HEAR ME BROTHERS SIGNAL ME
> ALONE IN MY NIGHT BROTHERS DO YOU WELL
> I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK BROTHERS I AND
> MINE SURVIVE BROTHERS HEAR ME SIGNAL ME
> DO YOU WELL I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK I
> ALONE IN MY NIGHT BROTHERS I AND MINE
> SURVIVE BROTHERS DO YOU WELL I ALONE
> IN MY NIGHT I HOLD IT BACK I AND MINE
> SURVIVE BROTHERS SIGNAL ME IN MY NIGHT
> I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK AND WE SURVIVE (360)

Back in *Mirabell*, JM chooses syllabic meter for the fallen angels—"A FALL FROM METRICAL GRACE," Auden quips—and a "rough / Pentameter" for the human voices. God B's song uses the syllabic meter of the angels, but limits itself to the ten-syllable count of the human line (240). The idea of poetry that God B's song suggests is that of an infinitely repeatable signal to which the poet "tunes in" by muting his own personality:

God B's song re-stages the ur-scene of poetic inspiration from Plato's *Ion*, in which the poet is driven out of his senses by a divine force.[104]

But while God B's song has qualities traditionally used to define the lyric (a solitary speaker, overheard, in a dramatic context), the poem-as-signal is distinguished by its mediation through JM, DJ, and the Ouija board. Rather than "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" (Mill 56), the poem is a "signal" of survival and collective action ("I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK") sent out from a "LIFE RAFT" called "LANGUAGE" and overheard through a process that requires the mutual attention of DJ and JM. The personification of God B as a lyric poet—the Seafarer from the Anglo-Saxon elegy, transferred into outer space—implies that a particularized lyric voice might in fact be an appropriate representational form for a period of collective exigency.

God B's song will teach JM and DJ to read the tradition of lyric poetry and of poetic designs differently: as a depersonalized, public, collective, and urgent mode of address. But this practice of lyric reading and writing is only made clear by the juxtaposition of God B's song and the one of the oldest poetic forms, the canzone. Before the canzone appears, however, the role of the lyric in a time of emergency is the subject of a response from W. H. Auden, whose poem is the second of the three poems in the group under consideration. Stunned by the "frontier austerities" of God B, Auden asks "WHO WOULD THINK THE SONG HAD HAD SUCH LYRICS?" (363) to which JM responds,

The lyrics may be changing. Dante saw

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[104] See Penelope Murray's introduction to *Plato on Poetry* (8-9).

The Rose in fullest bloom. Blake saw it sick.

You and Maria, who have seen the bleak

Unpetalled knob, must wonder: will it last

Till spring? Is it still rooted in the Sun? (363)[105]

The lyrics to God B's song of life, as transcribed by JM, are historically contingent, while the lyric mode itself is transhistorical and eternal. All of the poets JM mentions write in traditional lyric forms: Dante writes in terza rima, the canzone, and the sonnet; Blake writes in the ballad and the long prophetic lines in which Merrill's angels speak; Auden moves at ease between all of these forms. Merrill's epic, by interpolating the lyric, asks a question about the relationship between poetic style and historical circumstance, a question that continues to occupy Merrill's own work in traditional forms: after the "bleak, / Unpetalled knob" that Auden and Maria see, what form can the lyrics to the song of life possibly take? Merrill suggests here not only that the lyrics to the song might be changing, but that the lyric itself may be changing.

Auden's poem playfully extends the motif of God B's song—its lyric singer "KEEPING UP HIS NERVE ON THE LIFE RAFT"—and resituates it within the operatic context often invoked by JM in *Sandover*:

A SHIPBOARD SCENE,

TRISTAN ACT I OR LES TROYENS ACT V

HIGH IN THE RIGGING, FROM

BEHIND THE GOLD PROSCENIUM,

[105] For the Rose in Dante, see the *Paradiso*, cantos XXXI and XXXII.

ABOVE THE ACTION'S THRIVING

CITY WITH ITS WRONGED & WILFUL QUEEN,

ONE SAILOR'S CLEAR

YOUNG TENOR FILLS THE HOUSE, HOMESICK, HEARTSICK.

THE MAST NEEDS COMFORT, GALES

HAVE TATTERED THE MOONBELLIED SAILS.

MAY HIS GREEN SHORES O QUICKLY

SAFELY NOW FROM RAGING FOAM APPEAR. (365)

Auden's lines are in syllabic meter (4, 10, 6, 8, 7, and 9 syllables), but they include rhyme (abccba) and a rough iambic meter (2, 5, 3, 4, 3.5, and 4 stressed syllables, with significant rhythmical variation in each line, including the acephalic tetrameter line of 3.5 feet that is a hallmark of Auden's work). While this elaboration might seem like one more arcane complication in a poem already full of them, it actually sets in place an important narrative link and introduces a question about the relation between a poetic structure and a period of history. As a transition point between the supreme fiction of God B's life raft and the autobiographical narrative of Merrill's sea voyage to the island of Samos, Auden's poem identifies God B with another sailor: Wagner's Tristan. In the canzone that immediately follows, JM and DJ assume the position of Tristan on the life raft. Surprisingly, however, the strident repetitions of the outer space signal give way to the exquisite architecture of a canzone, the form of poetry that Dante calls "supreme"

among all poetic forms (1981, 115)—and that, presumably, cannot also be the form in which we hear the distress call of humanity in the late twentieth century.

In what discursive form might the distress call of biological life be heard—an overdetermined cry of survival that includes, at minimum, the resistance to the threat of global destruction and the exhilarating possibilities of a gay creation myth? The sequence of ornate lyric poems from God B to Auden to Merrill's canzone, the final poem considered below, ultimately suggests that the lyric has been the historical vehicle for collective suffering. The key elements of God B's song are the iteration and recombination of simple words and phrases—the "POOR LYRISM" that the angels beg JM not to "SCORN" (116). Auden and Maria, although they cannot hear the words, discern "NO MELODY BUT TONE / LEVELS & INTERVALS OF UTTERED MEANING" (362). Some of these traits, and the relationship between "song" and "signal," are highlighted in the third, and most important, poem of the central set: a canzone Merrill writes to introduce the "&" section of *Scripts* that immediately follows. By writing in syllabics, as we will see in a moment, Merrill suggests a continuity between the traits of God B's song (iteration and recombination), its themes of gay love and collective survival, and traditional lyric forms.

In the canzone "Samos," widely recognized as the centerpiece of *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the "bleak / Unpetalled knob" of modern lyric suddenly blossoms:

AND still, at sea all night, we had a sense
Of sunrise, golden oil poured upon water,
Soothing its heave, letting the sleeper sense

What inborn, amniotic homing sense
Was ferrying him—now through the dream-fire
In which (it has been felt) each human sense
Burns, now through ship's radar's cool sixth sense,
Or mere unerring starlight—to an island.
Here we were. The twins of Sea and Land,
Up and about for hours—hues, cries, scents—
Had placed at eye level a single light
Croissant: the harbor glazed with warm pink light. (369)

This canzone, first published in the *New Yorker* in 1979 as a separate poem, borrows its general pattern from both Auden's "Canzone" and Dante's "Amor, Tu Vedi Ben." Like those poems, "Samos" has five stanzas of twelve lines each; five end words (sense, water, fire, land, and light) are allocated a particular frequency per stanza (six, or half of the lines in the stanza, being the highest).[106] Although the epigraph to *Sandover* is taken from the *Paradiso*, and the metaphor of the sea-voyage appears in both canto I of the

[106] The two sections of the first six lines repeat words in the order ABA and ACA; the two sections of the last six lines repeat their end words ADD and AEE. In the scheme adopted by Dante, Auden, and Merrill, the final words of the first half and the second half are the same (in this case, AA), a device called *concatenazio* and considered by Dante to be a beautiful way of linking the two parts of the stanza together. Merrill's poem follows the general pattern that Durling and Martinez identify in Dante's canzone: "the stanza of 'Amor, tu vedi ben' has diesis and consists of two *pedes* (of three lines each), followed by two *versus* (again, of three lines each), with *concatenatio* (lines 6-7) and with two lines unmatched (*claves*) within each stanza (lines 2 and 5, the central line of each *pes*)" (144).

Purgatorio and canto II of the *Paradiso*, Merrill's "Samos" recalls Dante's shorter lyrics as well.[107] Standing in a crucial position in the narrative as a bridge between "YES" and "NO," "Samos" represents, like Dante's canzone, "the climax of the poet's effort to understand and represent his experience in the framework of the cosmos as a whole and, through the practice of art, to make the positive side of his temperament prevail" (Durling and Martinez 139).

The canzone, as one of the oldest lyric forms, is important not only for its crucial place in the plot, but also for its unexpected similarities to the most contemporary form in the poem, God B's song. The lyrics to God B's song appear to JM and DJ as a "signal" whose qualities are iteration and recombination: not "melody," but a set of tones. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines the canzone in terms that correspond to the relationship between God B's song and Merrill's lyrics: the canzone is "the completed action of one who composes words arranged in harmonious relation for a musical setting" (1981, 115). Dante goes on to describe the writing of a canzone as the binding together of "sticks" into a "bundle" (113). Form, for Dante, involves choosing a set of disparate things and bundling them together, rather than representing the experience of a poet or placing a constraint on self-expression. Dante even goes so far as to give a list of the words that

[107] Dante begins the *Purgatorio* by comparing his poetic skill to a boat: "To course across more kindly waters now/ my talent's little vessel lifts her sails,/ leaving behind herself a sea so cruel" (1995, 217). He repeats the same motif in the *Paradiso*: "O you who are within your little bark,/ eager to listen, following behind/ my ship that, singing, crosses to deep seas…" (384).

might be used most felicitously in the canzone.[108] Since four of Merrill's end words are personified in the previous section of the poem as the four angels, the "frequency" of God B's interstellar radio signal (described, by Michael, as the cumulative input of the human senses) matches up with the frequency with which the end words occur in the canzone. In this way, "Samos" rewrites the dramatic conversation between the angels in the schoolroom in "life raft" form: the canzone becomes a colloquy between the dramatis personae of Merrill's epic as the density of each end word in a stanza—or the volume of each archangelic voice—increases and decreases.

In other words, the lyrics of the distress call of humanity may be changing, but they are not changing in the direction we might expect from twentieth-century accounts of the relationship between lyric poetry and society. Lyric poetry, *Sandover* reveals, was always on the life raft, even, or especially, when this raft was made from Dante's bundled sticks. The structural similarities between God B's signal and Dante's canzone draw together into the narrative of the epic both the inhuman "signal," broadcasting a message of survival into space, and the pronominal lyric "I," associated with the "constructive triumph" of the poet over death and time (Durling and Martinez 164). The canzone and the signal together "HOLD IT BACK" (164). From its first word, "Samos" reminds us of the crucial place of "and" in Merrill's work. In the fiction of the poem, the "and" of the

[108] In the mythology of *Scripts*, water is aligned with Emmanuel and the sense of touch; fire with Gabriel and taste and smell; land with Raphael and hearing; light with Michael and vision. The fifth word is "sense," which, we have already learned, God B receives as a kind of cumulative read-out from the individual senses of the four angels. In Dante's "Amor, Tu Vedi Ben" they are lady, stone, cold, light, time and, in Auden's "Canzone," day, world, will, know, love.

Ouija board anneals the space between the positive and negative sides of the angels' temperaments ("YES & NO"). Reanimated from its status as an empty signifier on the board, it is the glue that holds sections of the narrative together ("AND still," the poem begins). By yoking the two together, Merrill recasts lyric poetry as that which speaks a collective message of survival through an individuated and historically specific voice. If, as Lacoue-Labarthe writes, "the age belongs to stammering, to stuttering," the two poles of the stammered distress call and the well-wrought lyric are never so close together as they are in Athens in 1980 (18).

The Changing Light at Sandover is many things: an elegy for Merrill's friends, a *folie à deux* with Jackson, a catalogue of nearly every English form of poetry, a cosmological epic and a theological provocation. At the very end of the poem, it turns out to be a fairy-tale spun to distract a friend, Vasili Vasilikos. Arriving at Merrill's house with news of his wife Mimí's death, Vasilikos prompts Merrill to begin the poem at the first word of *Ephraim* ("Admittedly, I err by undertaking / This in its present form" (3)):

> DJ brighteyed (but look how wrinkled) lends
> His copy of the score to our poor friend's
> Somber regard—captive like Gulliver
> Or like the mortal in an elfin court
> Pining for wife and cottage on this shore
> Beyond whose depthless dazzle he can't see.
> For *their* ears I begin: "Admittedly…" (560)

In a kind of Proustian circularity, the story ends with the recitation of the poem the fabrication of which it has just described. Understood as the script for an "elite of sufferers" of various kinds, the light verse that JM transcribes has political and ethical stakes. Merrill, like Dante in his own erring, confronts an ethical quandary the contours of which we can begin to make out in "Days of 1964": how to live when even the minimal conditions for a good life no longer obtain. If the lyric poet must be the "enemy of history," he does not perform this role by abstracting himself from history, but rather by dramatizing the relationship between individual voices and the "composite / Voice" of the epic form.

III

A final example of a world lyric that bears the impress of global transformation: a short lyric in quatrains, set in Beirut during the war in the 1980s. "Little Fallacy," the first poem from *The Inner Room* (1988), employs a special version of what Dante, in *De vulgari eloquentia*, calls the *claves*, or "key" rhyme, and what the Provençal poets call *rim'estrampa*, a rhyme that has no match within the stanza[109]:

Chamber of blossom, not a petal spilled, a

[109] See Giorgio Agamben's comments on the *claves* in *The End of the Poem.* Other poems that employ similar schemes include "Sundown and Starlight"; "Event Without Particulars"; "Dead Center"; "The Smile"; "Nightgown"; "The Hamann"; "Maisie"; "Between Us"; "Balanchine's Discotheque"; "Nine Sleep Valley"; "The Fifteenth Summer"; "Volcanic Holiday"; "body"; "Beginner's Greek"; and the sonnets in the R section of *The Book of Ephraim*.

Yesterday's Japanese cherry	b
—You and I charmed inside the glow—	c
By evening had borne fruit:	d
A whole day in Beirut	d
—According to the radio,	c
The first since January—	b
With no one killed. (493)	a

The poem begins by idealizing a moment in early spring: the first two lines, an Imagist's description of the Japanese cherry, would not be out of place in Pound's *Cathay.* But just as the poem seems on the verge of turning inward, it turns instead to the war outside. As the second stanza unfolds, the end words of each line mirror, in reverse order, the end words of the first quatrain ("spilled," "cherry," "glow," and "fruit"). The establishment of rhyme in the poem only occurs by joining spilled with killed, cherry with January, glow with radio, and fruit with Beirut—by joining images of restraint, spring, natural light, and pastoral abundance to violence, winter, mechanical sound, and the city. Moreover, "spilled" and "killed" are the only exact rhymes in the poem; "glow" and "radio" rhyme on stressed and unstressed syllables, and all three of the rhyme words in the second stanza (apart from "killed") expand in syllable count—cherry's two syllables give way to January's four syllables, for instance. Through an intricate pattern of key rhymes and the distended syntax of a single sentence, Merrill superimposes the irenic "chamber of blossom" with the Beirut of the war.

In Merrill's poem, a medieval Italian scheme becomes a device through which the trans-stanzaic is figured not only as the trans-individual but also as the transnational. Although the scheme of multiple key rhymes can be a unifying device that, as Margaret Spanos notes, "endow[s] the form with the traditional values of perfection associated with the figure of the circle," this poem associates the completion of the rhyme with the juxtaposition of apparently discrepant categories of experience (547). By deferring the rhymes, Merrill suspends each potential couplet and its associations with closure, reason, and balance. Although the syntax of the poem suggests that the harmony of the lovers in the first stanza has the power to set everything right in the second, the rhyme scheme slowly doubles back on itself, re-printing the intimacy of the lovers's private life with the exigency of their historical moment. Any sense of closure produced by the clean split between stanzas or by the rhymes is at least partially vitiated by the pairs of rhyme words themselves, which suggest that we may not be able to think about the intimacy of the lyric without also thinking of its capacity to bear witness, even around the corners that the rhyme scheme suddenly turns.

Limned with a set of unrelated particularities, end words that simply end the lines in which they appear, the first stanza of "Little Fallacy" gradually reveals itself as beholden to a greater totality. The poem enacts a political subjectivity based on the acknowledgment that the set of people and things included in the political is incomplete and contingent, equal only to our limited vision, at a particular time, of what is available to us. Merrill's poetry expands this notion of what or who a lyric might comprise. The "little fallacy" exposed by the poem, and by Merrill's experiences in Greece, is the

separation of the aesthetic from the political, the formal from the historical, the particular from the universal.

When Merrill turns to the "human scale" in "Days of 1964," *Sandover*, and "Little Fallacy" his poetry works with—rather than as—the idea of lyric as the *a priori* experience of an individuated self. Merrill's "human scale" tests the constitution of the human and the viability of human relations by looking outside them—as much to the transcendental, the theological, the material, and the everyday as to the intimations of the global forces that shoot through them. Merrill's immersion in the history of literary forms and devices becomes ever deeper as time goes on, his craftsmanship ever more urgently directed to the question of what the lyricized chamber of blossom might have to do with the life raft that is language.

The consummate craftsmanship of Merrill's global poetics during this period can be seen as critically engaged with the lyric traditions whose history it summons, the lived history that summons lyric forms, and the struggle to claim a political subjectivity for the lyric speaker. As Merrill states again and again in his prose, Greece offered him a kind of self-effacement: it was a place in which he could "disappear and reemerge as a new person" far from "the great American world of business, technology, and political machines" (80, 91).[110] Yet this "great American world" is exactly what Merrill discovers

[110] Blasing argues that Merrill's "conventional forms…work implicitly to efface the speaking subject, dispersing it in the drift of impersonal time and history. Poetic conventions such as meter, rhyme schemes, and stanza forms are timing devices that are also more than mere schemes, because they remember a past and carry with them the burden of a public history" (1995, 167).

has thrown Greece into a period of social, economic and political upheaval that continues today. Merrill's intensely wrought lyrics reflect life that, under globalization, is turning suddenly precarious—in other words, life that is characterized by the mutual vulnerability to loss, chronic instability, and expulsion from the play of social norms that Judith Butler, Paulo Virno, and Guillaume le Blanc, respectively, posit as effects of financialization and global development. Precarity is one name for the set of effects produced by neoliberal globalization in its contemporary development; the final chapter brings the world lyric into the present to ask what forms a precarious global poiesis might take.

Coda

A Global "We":

The Politics of Precarious Life in the Contemporary World Lyric

In 2012, the Tunisian poet Muhammad ibn al-Dheeb al-Ajami received a life sentence, now reduced to fifteen years, for his poem "Tunisian Jasmine. " Inspired by the revolution in Tunisia in the winter of 2010, "Tunisian Jasmine" includes the lines: "Repeat with one voice, for one fate, / We are all Tunisia, in the face of repressive elites/ We are all Tunisia, in the face of repressive elites."[111] Ajami's poem speaks in "one voice" in order to make a universalizing claim: "we are all Tunisia." Here the poet's "I" is the mouthpiece of collective injustice; the language of poetry itself is a vast repository of voices; and the poem summons the living together in solidarity by and in its words. Of course, the poem did actually defy repressive elites through the repetition of its lines in a multitude of voices. The mass political movements of 2010 and 2011 show just how significant poetry is to the study of global culture, economics, politics, religion, and society. This coda considers what the world lyric looks like when we look at poets whose lives are, in various ways, inseparable from the contemporary global situation.

Previous chapters have claimed that, to understand the lyric, we must also understand its immersion in the long history of globalization, when globalization is taken to refer to a series of changes in the world-system arcing from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twenty-first. Written under the shifting logics of globalization, the world

[111] The English text of the poem can be found at http://consortiumnews.com/2012/12/12/qatars-hypocrisy-on-freedom/.

lyric transforms the lyric "I" into different versions of a collective global subject. While earlier forms of the world lyric crowd the poetic "I" with the voices of nationalism, of anti-colonialism, and of underdevelopment, some recent lyric poets locate the embattled voice of a collective political subject within an age of precarious life. "Precarious life" and "precarity" have appeared more and more frequently as political, philosophical, and ethical terms that refer to contemporary conditions of life under specific forms of insecurity, including "the shrinkage of the social welfare state, the privatization of what had once been publicly held utilities and institutions, the increase in state, banking and corporate pension insecurity, and the ever more 'flexible' practices of contractual reciprocity between owners and works" (Berlant 192). The world lyric draws precarious life into lyric form, reinvigorating classical modes of lyric address under conditions that hardly seem propitious for the lyric poem. If neoliberal globalization forecloses the possibilities for sociality and solidarity in dramatic and historically specific ways, the world lyric aligns itself with the precarious, constructs alternative possibilities for collectivity, and harnesses the language of the singular in the service of the plural.

I

Dominant strains of political, economic, and social thought demarcate the current period of globalization as a "new historical phase," an "age of precarity" (Berlant 193). Current discussions of precarity are shaped by Paulo Virno, who describes precarity as "the chronic instability of forms of life" (87); by Pierre Bourdieu, who examines the

"absolute reign of flexibility" (97); by Judith Butler, who considers precarious life as a common ontological vulnerability on the basis of which we might found a tentative community; and by Guillaume le Blanc, who analyzes precarity as the social vulnerability created by economic and political oppression.[112] These philosophies of precarity are complemented by the sociologies of labor undertaken by Saskia Sassen and Andrew Ross, who analyze the increasing role of sweatshops, free zones, and exploited workers in the global economy. While some discourses of globalization emphasize the placelessness of the "information economy," Sassen directs attention to the precarious bodies of workers whose labor supports the global city, especially women of color and immigrants. The precarious subject of "material conditions, production sites, and place-boundedness," the subject moving through "counter-geographies of globalization" (Sassen 2005, 3), confronts contingency, difficulty, risk, and expulsion from social norms.

As a term that describes the period following the independence of former colonies, the implementation of Cold War underdevelopment, and the crisis of US

[112] Some begin this period with the oil shocks of 1973; others with the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the crisis of US legitimacy in the Middle East; and still others with the selling of oil on futures markets and the selling of French assets by Mitterrand in 1983. A few trace precarity back to the articulation of neoliberal economics in the work of Friedrich Hayek in 1936. Precarity also calls attention to the contemporary consequences of the entrance of postcolonial nations into the global economy: their inundation in debt created by the Structural Adjustment Plans of the IMF and World Bank. For a partial bibliography of the literature on precarity, see Berlant 293n1.

legitimacy as a world hegemon, precarity knits together global changes in economic relations, aesthetic perception, and the social production of collectivities. Precarity is particularly important for this study of a global poetics because it calls attention to the erosion of certain forms of sociality. As Franco Berardi argues, solidarity is hard to imagine under a regime of financial speculation and cognitive labor, because "the work process is no longer based on a community of workers living together in a factory day after day, but instead takes the form of an ever-changing recombination of time fragments connected in the global network" (118). At the same time, precarity has served as a rallying cry that draws together disparate groups into a common struggle against neoliberal globalization. As Lauren Berlant notes, movements of the precarious seek "to forge transcategorical alliances (trans-local, -national, -class, -legal, -sexual, etc.) against the fading of social democratic institutions and toward the invention of new communities of care and political belonging" (270 n2). In this sense, precarity refers not only to a general state of ontological vulnerability—Butler's notion of "precarious life"—but also to specific global political movements of the present.

The work on precarity by Berardi, Butler, Berlant, Sassen, and others is helpful because it complicates a narrative of globalization that focuses on a hypermobile capitalist elite. Their arguments can be situated in the broader context of social-scientific analyses of economic globalization undertaken by proponents and critics of neoliberal policies. The most optimistic of these analyses, such as those by David Landes, Peter Collier, P. T. Bauer, and Thomas Friedman, do not, of course, offer unqualified support for all neoliberal policies, instead admitting the complex and multifaceted process that is

globalization. In fact, some of the most popular detractors and supporters of globalization share a certain amount of skepticism about the manner in which market integration has occurred. Joseph Stiglitz, vehemently critical of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, targets the velocity and carelessness with which liberalization has occurred, rather than globalization *tout court*:

> Many…aspects of globalization have been welcomed everywhere. No one wants to see their child die, when knowledge and medicines are available somewhere else in the world. It is the more narrowly defined *economic* aspects of globalization that have been the subject of controversy, and the international institutions that have written the rules, which mandate or push things like liberalization of capital markets (the elimination of the rules and regulations in many developing countries that are designed to stabilize the flows of volatile money into and out of the country). (10)

Although Stiglitz denounces the IMF and World Bank for leaving "those affected by their decisions…almost voiceless," he argues that globalization be "reshaped," not rejected (22). Even adamant apologists for globalization, such as Martin Wolf, concede that "nobody can be satisfied with what has happened as emerging-market economics have tried to integrate into world capital markets. The gains have been questionable and the costs of crises enormous" (304). To some degree, skeptics and cheerleaders of economic globalization both recognize the costs of careless pacing, deliberate hypocrisy by certain global players, and the unthinking adoption of neoliberalism as an ideology.[113]

[113] For a concise history of the economics, politics, and culture of neoliberalism, see Centano and Cohen.

Claims that globalization worsens or ameliorates poverty and inequality have been buttressed by careful attention to the disagreements over what these terms mean and how they are measured. Studying the positions of "cautious" and "strong" globalizers, the economist Emma Aisbett identifies several methodological factors that muddle arguments made from empirical data about liberalization, growth, and poverty. She concludes that "the empirical work to date has contributed to a broad acceptance that trade and FDI are growth promoting" (67). Still, she cautions that "much work remains to show which policies can reduce the adjustment costs borne by the poor and maximize the share of the benefits they obtain from globalization" (67). Anthropologists, meanwhile, continue to look closely at the successes and failures of theoretical models of development within local communities. In his work with four tribes in southwestern Madagascar, Bram Tucker finds the "folk model" of understanding poverty to be "largely incompatible with progrowth, business, and wealth-generation models common to international development" (302). Tucker concludes that other Western models of development—ones that emphasize modes of production and the importance of local institutions—make a better fit (302). Although research across the disciplines tends to bear out the claims that neoliberal policies exacerbate inequality among countries, it also contests the idea that all Western models for global development should be rejected out of hand or that protectionist economic policies are the best solutions for emerging economies. Instead, critical global studies across a variety of disciplines call for more careful testing of empirical research and local interpretations against theories developed and applied by teams of experts at global institutions.

This coda considers a heterogeneous group of lyric poets immersed in contemporary global processes. The varieties of a precarious world lyric are necessarily different from the previous incarnations of the lyric subject, and recent poetry by Sean Bonney, Myung Mi Kim, Agha Shahid Ali, and Claudia Rankine encompasses a wide range of strategies for energizing a fragmented social body. Some, like Bonney and Rankine, are directly critical of economic precarity and neoliberalism; others, like Kim and Ali, explore vulnerability more obliquely. For all of them, the poetic imagination is one place to look for global solidarity, for a "new social ecology," and for collective agency (Berlant 193). These poets revalue the lyric "I" as the medium through which a collective takes shape, or, as Kim puts it, as a "provisional location" designed "to mobilize the notion of our responsibility to one another in social space" (111). Practitioners of the contemporary world lyric interrupt the formation of a global subject described and created by logics of privatization, expertise, and triumphalism. In so doing, their lyrics locate the "I" within alternative spaces and rhetorics of globalization that range from the production of the commons to the reinvigoration of classical lyric modes of blame, exhortation, and recognition.

II

In the last two decades, critical work in global studies across the disciplines has revisited notions of the commons in the face of precarity, scarcity, commodification, and privatization. In her Nobel Prize-winning research on common-pool resources in Japan,

Switzerland, Spain, and the Philippines, the economist Elinor Ostrom criticizes the assumption, popularized by Garrett Hardin in "The Tragedy of the Commons," that the "creation of private property rights…is an obvious solution to the problem of degradation" (60). More recently, Michel Bauwens has argued for the appearance of a "deep shift in the epistemology and ontology of our culture" (11) towards "commons-based peer production" (13)—in other words, towards cooperation and communal shareholding.

The broader cultural shift towards an epistemology and ontology of the commons is evident in two recent collections of poetry titled *The Commons* and *Commons*. Both writers—the English poet Sean Bonney and the Korean-American poet Myung Mi Kim—explicitly align themselves with the lyric tradition. For them, the language of lyric poetry creates the literary equivalent of a commons: a shared social space that subverts the hierarchies of power reproduced in other forms of discourse. Although their specific concerns are quite different, the notion of the commons developed in both shares certain qualities. Neither poet lays out a thematic program or a set of slogans for social solidarity or collective political subjectivity. A commons is illegible within the "totalizing power of language that serves the prevailing systems and demands of coherence" (Kim 110). Within this language, it is a blank space: "_____, a word that cannot be translated: it suggests, 'what belongs to the people" (109). For Kim and Bonney, the commons appears through the operations performed on and by the lyric. While Kim's poetry focuses on war, displacement, and problems of translation, Bonney's *The Commons* attacks and interrupts neoliberal languages of banking and credit.

Bonney's *The Commons* represents a strain of world lyric that hectors, blames, eviscerates, scorns, hates, and condemns.[114] Bonney's invectives, written after the world financial crisis of 2008 and during the riots in London in 2011, target global finance for its reduction of language, thought, and people to blanks and gasps:

> Meanwhile, in the fast world of banking
> They are thinking in blocks of sound
> blank ones
> reduced to little knots
> of hair & teeth
> we were speaking
> like any gasping swine. (6)

For those who think in blank "blocks of sound," the voices of the precarious are audible only as "gasping swine." To find another language for precarity, and to create a counter-discourse to that of financial capitalism, Bonney reaches into the lyric tradition. *The Commons* is a patchwork of citations, from the traditional English song "The Cuckoo Bird" to Rimbaud's "L'Orgie Parisienne"; from The Velvet Underground's "Heroin" to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; and from a Hackney Council Housing Benefit Form to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. These references are not disguised, but linked, along with YouTube clips and Bonney's own performances, on Bonney's blog, where the

[114] Other recent books of poetry that employ the lyric to explore similar concerns are Rae Armantrout's *Money Shot*, Ariana Reines's *Mercury*, Lisa Robertson's *The Men*, and Keston Sutherland's *Hot White Andy*.

poem was first published. In an author's note, Bonney explains that *The Commons* is written to subvert the official language of neoliberal globalization, which identifies the precarious subject of history as a "zombie":

> The work was originally subtitled "A Narrative / Diagram of the Class Struggle," wherein voices from contemporary uprisings blend into the Paris Commune, into October 1917, into the execution of Charles 1, and on into superstitions, fantasies of crazed fairies and supernatural bandits //// all clambering up from their hidden places in history, getting ready to storm the Cities of the Rich //// to the bourgeois eye they may look like zombies, to us they are sparrows, cuckoos, pirates & sirens //// the cracked melodies of ancient folk songs, cracking the windows of Piccadilly //// or, as a contemporary Greek proverb has it, "smashing up the present because they come from the future."[115]

Instead of "zombies" or "gasping swine," Bonney would have the resistance to globalization take the form of figures recuperated from lyric song: "sparrows, cuckoos, pirates & sirens."[116]

The "commons," then, refers to the gathered remnants of a lyric tradition, the "cracked melodies of ancient folk songs," and the silent, invisible groups of people they memorialized:

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[115] This description is taken from the home page of Openned Press, found at http://www.openned.com/print/category/sean-bonney

[116] John Bloomberg-Rissman suggests that *The Commons* might be a sonnet sequence, "although its somewhat disjunctive nature allows it to be read straight through as well" (Rev. of *The Commons*).

moan, now

on his white bones

his intolerable name.

He is the man or woman

sitting beside you,

bitter & false & snapped

inside every nation

such hawks & hounds, such ravens

o bitter statistics

the cuckoo is a pretty bird (11)

Many of these anonymous songs, such as "The Cuckoo Bird" or "The Three Ravens," predate the earliest significant period of privatization in the modern world-system, the enclosure of the commons in the late 1600s. They represent much more than "a sentimental space, purely / some kind of folk song" (17). They also provide a crucial reminder that the current period of neoliberalism is a late moment in a four-hundred year cycle of economic regulation and deregulation.[117]

But the "intolerable name" of precarious life—the global "we" of the contemporary period—cannot be explicitly summoned within the poem:

"cold / blows[118] the future

ballads of the

[117] See Arrighi 1-26.

[118] This backslash is not a line break, but rather inserted by Bonney within the line itself.

-blank-

my true love. (14)

Bonney's world lyric searches for a relation between a revolutionary poetic language and a revolutionary political subject. "The sun has been disconnected" (6), Bonney writes elsewhere: both electricity and poetic inspiration—one traditional symbol of which is the "sun"—have been cut off because of poor credit. Nor can the "windows of Piccadilly" be cracked simply by gleaning bits of lyric song and juxtaposing them, rewriting *The Waste Land* during a different moment of crisis in the modern world-system. For Bonney, there is no position outside the "prepared vocab" of neoliberalism that the poet might take:

history is those who sit

inside their prepared vocab

the comfortable ones,

the executioner, especially,

never utters an articulate sound

quietly gets on with his work (22)

Even as the poet screams "slaughter the fascist BNP" (3), much of *The Commons* is specifically about the complicity and continuity between the language of the poem and the language of power.

To sidestep this problem, Bonney documents the poem's own fraught composition, its own making and unmaking:

the 'reverie' is a

stop, oppressive line

> "is this is that"
>
> like a mystical shudder?
>
> yeh, that's hideous.
>
> anyway, false, as I was saying (9)

Bonney's hesitation to define reverie or cuckoo or sea or moon relies on a tactic of incessant interruption and self-reference. The appearance of "as I was saying," and the related phrase "ok, say that again" (3, 11, 18), is one of countless moments of self-recognition, self-criticism, and self-revision documented by the poem. Other lines remind the poet to insert material that will signal the presence of a contemporary poem: "-*archaic pop reference here*-" (3), "-*archaic credit reference here*-" (6), "*favorite epoch here*" (10), "insert hope & love" (22), "insert world of banking" (25). Holding "the voice of our political poets" (15) up to scrutiny, Bonney finds no room for a straightforward "flip discount menace" that poets might once have hoped to use against "the hounds of capital" (18). As Jacob Edmond argues, "Bonney attends to the way revolutionary writing, if too direct or smooth, can become implicated in the power structures it seeks to overcome" ("'Their Echoes Split Us'"). Bonney is the skeptical heir of traditions of poetry that connect political revolution to distortions in normative syntax and ordinary language.[119]

[119] See *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. In the US, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Barrett Watten, and Lyn Hejinian are a few of the key figures. In England, the poems of J. H. Prynne and Keston Sutherland are crucial reference points. See also Burt, "Sestina! Or the Fate of the Idea of Form" for

As *The Commons* rages, blames, and excoriates, the time-scale of precarious lives—a transnational "we" that is radically uncertain, constantly vulnerable to interruption, forced to sign weekly or even daily contracts for labor—is revalued as a poetic and political strategy for insurrection. While Bonney ridicules the Situationist directive to "just, like, détourne yourself" (10), something like a détournement, or a wrenching of words from their habitual meanings, ultimately occurs by the time the poem ends. Despite its anxieties about "discount menace," *The Commons* takes up, at moments, positions of pure antagonism—"HAIL SHIT" (26)—that occupy forms of lyric address ("hail to thee, blithe Spirit!" [Shelley 304]). In this manner, Bonney activates "music love abstraction / the twisted branches / at the centre of our lives" (28), all of which "ignite on interruption" (28). Within the incendiary lyricism of *The Commons*, a "we" emerges as those who, by virtue of their precarity, possess the imaginative capacity to seize and interrupt the categories with which they are classified and silenced: "& we, with our downturned mouths / are maidens, / our credit ratings threaded with flowers" (6). This rendering of the "we" in lyric terms, rather than in "bitter statistics," is a declaration of strength and a threat of force: "& we are bleating, / & we are fucking immense" (6).

Like Bonney's *The Commons,* Myung Mi Kim's *Commons* avoids thematic representations of a global "we," desiring instead to "activate" language's ability "to call into question, to disclose, to make common" (110). For Kim, lyric poetry has the ability to grasp the particular within a totalizing or universalizing discourse: "the lyric

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a reading of contemporary American poets as having given up on a relationship between poetic form and political formation.

undertakes the task of deciphering and embodying a 'particularizable' prosody of one's living" (111). The discourse that Kim investigates through the lyric is not specifically that of BNP and global finance, but rather a globalized English language: "What *is* English now, in the face of mass global migrations, ecological degradations, shifts and upheavals in identifications of gender and labor?...How to make plural the written and spoken…" (110). Jeannie Chiu suggests that these "attempts to recover individual and cultural histories" challenge "not only essentialist notions of ethnic and racial identity, but also the transcendent 'I' of conventional lyric poetry" (85). Kim's "commons" is the linguistic space for a "plural" English, an English that "belongs to the people" linked together by the shared experiences of global precarity.

Whereas Bonney's interruptions forge a link between the commons, precarious life, and the lyric poem, Kim's commons resides within a certain notion of translation instead. The poems cobble together disparate sources from which Kim selects a single sound, word, phrase, or sometimes a large paragraph. These sources are not given, but they include: bald, declarative statements from what would seem to be counterinsurgency manuals; single letters or diphthongs; travel narratives; Da Vinci's notebooks; definitions of fairly obscure words, such as "periplus" or "muo"; songs and lyric poems from both English and Korean traditions; and quotations from the news. In a final section of *Commons* titled "Pollen Fossil Record," she explains her procedure and its stakes in the global:

> Rehearsals of conflating Korean and English texts, for example, in the body of a 14th century *sijo* or an alliterative English poem from about the same time. Set in

> concurrent motion, these texts were 'translated' simultaneously. It is not the actual translation or even the state of translatability between the two texts that is intriguing but the possibilities for transcribing what occurs in the transversal between the two languages (and, by extension, between the two 'nations,' their mutually implicated histories of colonization, political conflicts, and so on). What is the recombinant energy created between languages (geopolitical economies, cultural representations, concepts of community)? (110)

In order to render this transversal legible, to explore "how 'English' is made and disseminated," Kim reduces her lyrics to the barest vowels, consonants, and diphthongs, those units of language that, when thrust together, create "recombinant energy."

The second section of the book, "Lamenta," stages what Kim calls a "rehearsal of listening" in which she raises the questions "Whose ears are at work? Where does the authority of romanizing reside? How might it be entered into otherwise?" (110) Like Bonney, Kim is interested in how global precarity is rendered audible. For her, a pluralized English—an English spoken by a global "we" of colonization, war, dislocation, environmental destruction—becomes apparent through a process of mishearing. The result is not nonsense, but rather the denaturalization of a single authoritative position from which sense can be made. Poem 506 of "Lamenta" generates one of Kim's "transversal" translations:[120]

[120] Each poem in this section is numbered to fit within a span that individual sections introduce (for instance, 406-424).

ap
ac

Pock

ji-wuat-dah erased

jil-eu-dah shouted

Regarded among penury

Numb pie mum pie

jip-sae-gi *ji-pah-raeng-e* : show here

Look at that noise!

Numb pie mum pie (52)

Here, the structure of the lyric poem is reduced to a set of notes and enunciations, carefully arranged on the page. The first set of letters, "ap" and "ac," sets up an initial test for the word "pock," offering different ways "pock" might be heard. Then, the slight mishearing of two words in Korean brings "erased" and "shouted" into imaginative proximity. Similar words pertaining to lack and amplitude, "penury" and "noise," are both heard as the same thing in English; the phrases "regarded among penury" and "look at that noise!" become "numb pie mum pie." 506 presents a drama of garbling and partial

legibility, exploring what happens when two phrases in Korean and two phrases in English are transliterated.

As one of Kim's "practices in transliteration," poem 506 opens a gap between "standard romanization" and "what [I] might be said to be hearing" (110). Kim's global poiesis undermines the authority of a single position from which English and Korean sounds might be turned into a romanized form and mutually understood. The notion of a commons, in this particular case, refers to the room within transliteration to mishear, or to hear multiple things at once. But the poem does more than this. As the "illegible" comes into speech, the elements of a scene scramble into view, although the details of this scene are limited to a set of verbs: to erase, to shout, to show. The "recombinant energy" generated by transliterating these verbs—the "commoning" of sounds together—is one way for the lyric to reveal a precarious global subject in the grip of exigency, first shown poor, then seen shouting.

III

Bonney and Kim preserve a space within language for a commons resistant to privatization and a "totalizing" global English. They both write a kind of hypothetical world lyric that refuses to settle into a completed shape on the page: by calling attention to the process by which the poem is composed, they transcribe the decisions, hesitations, and mistakes that generate the interruptive, recombinant energy of a language of the precarious. Other contemporary forms of a global poetics attack the discourse of mastery,

expertise, and omnipotence associated with globalization.[121] A return to the lyrics of exhortation—the classical mode of the world lyric with which this study began—occupies the work of the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali and the Jamaican-American poet Claudia Rankine. Exhortation is closely related to the trope of apostrophe, which Culler argues "makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself" (59).[122] William Waters emphasizes that the circuit of lyric address has an ethical valence, that "in a poem's touch" we might feel "an intimation of why poetry is valuable, why it matters to us, and how we might come to feel answerable to it" (2).[123] Classically, exhortation is also related to praise, one of the

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[121] See Mitchell's *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (2002).

[122] Critical studies of apostrophe associate the trope closely with lyric poetry, which, for Paul de Man, is defined as "the instance of represented voice" (qtd. in Riffaterre 107). De Man argues that apostrophe, "which posits the possibility of…reply and confers…the power of speech," sets off a chain of figuration: "voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)" (1979, 926). See also Michael Riffaterre's reply to de Man in "Prosopopeia." Influenced by the work of de Man and Riffaterre, Virginia Jackson argues against "received phenomenologies of lyric reading" (160) and for a historical reading of Dickinson's apostrophes: "the way in which Dickinson's writing often invites or assumes a reader other than its (often unavailable or out of reach) historical addressee and other than an imaginary, sympathetic eavesdropper or theatrical audience in the distant future, is difficult to characterize, or at least contemporary literary criticism has no language for it" (159-60).

[123] In her influential essay on the politics of apostrophe, Barbara Johnson contends that "the fact that apostrophe allows one to animate the inanimate, the dead, or the absent implies that whenever a being is apostrophized, it is thereby automatically animated, anthropomorphized, 'person-ified'" (34). She notes

most ancient kinds of work that the lyric does. The Song of Songs, for instance, always balances devotion with invitation: "come, my beloved, / let us go out into the fields" (105). Aristotle, in the *Rhetoric*, notes that praise can slip quickly into exhortation: "To praise a man is…akin to urging a course of action" (35). For Ali, the hortatory lyric appears as an alternative to the sovereignty of the lyric "I." Rankine, whose work concludes this brief overview of contemporary lyric, places the hortatory lyric in the service of the recognition of others, creating an ethics of the global that only comes about through the acknowledgment of global forces on a local community.

From the first poems in his career, Agha Shahid Ali is uncomfortable with having poetry directly confront political themes: an early palinode concludes, "please mutilate / my wounded poetry hands // i will not write again" (1972, 28). "History broke the back // of poetry," he writes in "After the Partition of India" (1979, 28). Ali was born in 1949 in New Delhi, two years after the partition of India. In the United States, where he lived until his death from a brain tumor in December 2001, he referred to himself as a "Kashmiri-American" and a "triple exile" (qtd. in Tageldin 236). Calling himself a "national poet" rather than a "nationalist" poet (Ghosh 318), Ali makes it clear that his form of a global poetics is not enacted through political invective, but rather through something like a performative spell: "if one writes in free verse—and one should—to subvert Western civilization, surely one should write in forms to save oneself *from* Western civilization?" (Ali 2000, 13).

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that "legal and moral discourses of abortion tend to employ the same terms as those we have been using to describe the figure of apostrophe" (34).

Ali finds this form in the ancient Arabic, Persian, and Urdu ghazal, which first emerged during the seventh century. The ghazal is among the most restrictive of poetic designs: it contains at least five discrete couplets whose second lines (after the first couplet) share both an end rhyme (*radif*) and internal rhyme (*qafia*). Each line generally has the same number of syllables, and the final couplet references the poet's name or nickname. Ali translated the Urdu ghazals of the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz; collected, and often criticized, Anglophone attempts at the ghazal; and wrote many of his own ghazals. As Ali often stresses in his comments on the ghazal, the ghazal ignores—indeed, militates against—a thematic narrative, or a unified progression that culminates in the last couplet (2000, 2-3). Instead, a single word ramifies across the entire poem, deferring a single meaning or connotation. As Malcolm Woodland describes, ghazals "do not 'add up' in the way of conventional Western lyrics" (266). Instead, the couplets hold together by virtue of "a classical exactness" that "underscores a profound cultural connectedness" (Ali 2000, 13). In this sense, the ghazal depends on a pattern of expectation and surprise, as well as on a kind of dislocation. In David Caplan's analysis, "the farther the monorhyme moves from its original phrase, the more it suggests exile's omnipresence" (55).[124] These critics follow Ali himself in their description of how the ghazal undermines Western ideologies by seeking non-Western "disunities." Taking stock of Ali's cross-cultural influences, Ramazani adds to these readings an account of

[124] Shaden Tageldin discusses Ali's "impossible nostalgia" and its effects on syntax: the "attempt to link an old 'home' that is no longer home…to a new 'home' that never feels quite like home…compels [the text] to…violently disrupt the syntax of language, identity, geography and temporality" (234).

the ghazal's other potential uses: "When ghazalified, modernist syncretism, hardly a disabling imperial influence, functions for Ali as a counterweight to tyrannies closer to 'home'—the religious and nationalist absolutisms that have ravaged Kashmir" (2009, 105). Ramazani's argument suggests that the Western modernist/nativist fusions of Ali's ghazal are not necessarily mimetic of a split identity, but rather a "split vision" (2001, 74). By their inclusion, cross-cultural references and inclusions can generate commentary on "tyrannies closer to 'home'" at the same time that the poem, through its elaborate formal mirrorings, resists unity and narrative progression.

Ali's "Tonight," from his final book, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* (2003), bristles with the poetry of others, recalling the form's classical incorporation of certain stock phrases and images. Here are the first three stanzas:

> Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell tonight?
> Whom else from rapture's road will you expel tonight?
>
> Those "Fabrics of Cashmere—" "to make Me beautiful—"
> "Trinket"—to gem—"Me to adorn—How tell"—tonight?
>
> I beg for haven: Prisons, let open your gates—
> A refugee from Belief seeks a cell tonight. (2003, 82-3)

The citations are from Laurence Hope's popular 1906 poem "Kashmiri Song" and from Emily Dickinson's poem "I am ashamed--I hide--- / What right have I---to be a Bride---" (314). The jostling religious and poetic traditions only cohere because of the repeated

final syllables, the penultimate rhymes in the second line of each couplet (on "-el"), and a certain overlapping in what Ali calls "mood" (Ali 2000, 4).

But the multiplying references in the ghazal—the poem's catholic taste includes everything from Dickinson's dashes to Job's despair to Melville's opening line from *Moby-Dick*—are not themselves sufficient marks of a global "we." The song of Kashmir, or of Ishmael, is not the same as the song of the open road. In Ali's "Tonight," there is no "certainty of others," in the Whitmanian sense, outside the world lyric itself. Whitman's capacious free verse had stretched open the lyric to contain the multitude of voices and varieties of difference in a union of states: "O friend, whoe'er you are…let us go." In Ali's ghazals, written from a condition of statelessness and homelessness, something like the opposite is at work. The lyric voice—here, the voice of the global subject of a contested Kashmir—has to emerge from the strictures of the ghazal form: there is no "we" or "us" who can be explicitly summoned or exhorted to go. Ali writes a world lyric that is more than the multiculturalism of its many references. Instead, the lyric's worldliness is a dynamic and transformative process that occurs as the poem unfolds through time.

As "Tonight" progresses, a series of paradoxes appear that begin to construct a global poetics of homelessness and "triple exile." In Ali's case, the world lyric represents a form of poetic cosmopolitanism, in the specific sense that Edward Said gives the term "cosmopolitan." In a lecture on Freud and the "non-European," Said calls the "essence of the cosmopolitan" a "troubled, disabling, destabilizing secular wound" that cannot be healed "through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion" (2004, 54). He

concludes the lecture by asking, "can so utterly indecisive and so deeply undetermined a history ever *be* written? In what language, and with what sort of vocabulary?" (55) Beginning this destabilizing process, the paradoxes in "Tonight" are metaphors for the ghazal itself. First, the ghazal is the prison that, paradoxically, provides the only freedom from belief: "I beg for haven: Prisons, let open your gates— / A refugee from Belief seeks a cell tonight" (82). Or it is a mughal ceiling, in which the image of the individual self multiples: "Mughal ceilings, let your mirrored convexities / multiply me at once under your spell tonight" (82). Perhaps most significantly, however, Ali identifies the ghazal's repeating final word with the cry of the gazelle, a pun that may double as an etymology: "The hunt is over, and I hear the Call to Prayer / fade into that of the wounded gazelle tonight" (83). Call fading into cry: many of the couplets begin with a summons and end with a sob, flickering between exhortation and pain.

Ali writes the cosmopolitan by slowly abdicating poetic authority, undermining the sovereignty of the singular voice. This strategy appears first in a particularly witty couplet: "*Lord*, cried out the idols, *Don't let us be broken*; / *Only we can convert the infidel tonight*" (82). Here the ghazal reverses the scene of iconoclasm, so that the idols—many of which were indeed broken during the violence in Kashmir—cry out for their own preservation. At the end of the poem, the cry of the wounded ghazal, or gazelle, becomes the cry of God himself. A weeping divinity concludes the poem: "And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee— / God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight" (83). Whereas the earlier couplet has idols beg for their own preservation, here the ultimate source of poetic authority and of the word—God—is reduced to a cry, the lyric

voice to a plea. Standing in for the principle of authorship, divine omnipotence merges with the lyric "call me." There is a parallel here at the level of poetic making: through the relinquishment of control over the form, the ghazal invites the poet to fill it, only to multiply the self in its lexical mirrors. By adhering strictly to the ghazal form, both the word and the poem are reduced—or exalted—to exhortation: come fill me, share me, call me Ishmael, the unwanted son who is sent away. The cry of the wounded ghazal is the poetic voice that cracks—the God, or lyric "I," that puts aside omnipotence in favor of exhortation.

This study of the world lyric concludes with a final example of poetic exhortation and plurality by the Jamaican-American poet Claudia Rankine. Instead of admiring the cosmos from a ferry to Brooklyn, as Whitman does, Rankine's "The Provenance of Beauty" takes place on a bus tour through the south Bronx. Rankine, whose 2004 collection of poems *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is subtitled "An American Lyric," explores life after 9/11 by collaging citations from other texts, images captured on television screens, anatomical drawings, clip art, and logos. This "image stream" (Nealon 152) brushes against lyric meditations on racialized violence, cancer, and Zoloft, focalized through the first-person "I."[125] Christopher Nealon notes that Rankine "makes analogies

[125] For Emma Kimberley, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* investigates the mediated nature of life in the early twenty-first century: "Rankine chooses to foreground visual and narrative frames as a comment on the fact that all representations, whether they acknowledge it or not, are framed" (782). Kevin Bell focuses on the "damaged or dead body" in Rankine's work, arguing that she "meditates on the poverty of that body's circumstances and possibilities; and further still on the inability of language to secure within its own unfolding the substance of that poverty's densities and textures" (94).

to…other media throughout *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, using them to establish a poetic method through which the uncertain value of life can be tested out" (151). He concludes that Rankine "establishes 'lyric' as a mater category meant to be intellectually powerful enough to withstand the intrusions of the image stream, even to take energy from it, even to mock it" (152).

"The Provenance of Beauty," from 2009, puts the lyric to a different purpose. In this performance piece, the audience boards a bus along with three narrators, who serve both as improvisational sightseeing guides and as mouthpieces for a script of Rankine's poetry. In an interview, Rankine explains why she chooses the Bronx:

> I grew up in the Bronx, so [the director and I] went and checked out different neighborhoods in the Bronx, and we ended up, for many reasons, in the south Bronx…I believe that where we are, how we are allowed to live, is determined by the politics of the land—the big politics and the little politics. And it varies depending on where you're located. I'm very interested in the landscape in general as the site of living, of a place created out of lives, and those lives having a kind of politics and a kind of being that is consciously and unconsciously shaped. Decisions are made that allow us to do certain things, that give us certain freedoms and "unfreedoms." ("Conversation")

Rankine's description of "the politics of the land" conjoins the local and the global, the individual history of the lyric "I" and the massive transformation of the south Bronx caused by city spending cuts in the 1970s.[126] "The Provenance of Beauty" crystallizes a

[126] For a description of the route the bus takes and a review of the production, see Galella.

present-day form of Whitman's world lyric, taking literally the exhortation "let us go." An excerpt from the script sounds very Whitmanian indeed: "If I sat next to you, spoke only to you, you would feel the warmth of my breath. As our shoulders touched you would shift, and I would know your movement as response. This is a world and we are in it" ("Provenance"). Rankine telegraphs the lyric into these lines: it is a moment of address—"spoke only to you"—that is also one of inspiration—"the warmth of my breath"—and of deixis, or the work of pointing at something—"*this* is a world." Rankine situates this epitomized moment of lyricality in the context of a group bus ride through the Bronx.

It has not always been easy to glimpse what representations of collectivity are possible under globalization. Lyric poetry, however, helps bring a global "we" into view. From Whitman's open road to Rankine's bus, the world lyric confronts transformations of subjectivity in the modern period: masses of displaced, colonized, exiled, and marginalized communities whose narratives and whose representations of their own experience are often treated as illegible, inexpert, or inaudible. The lyric's orientation toward the world is not generally a mimetic one, but something rather in the nature of an act, a performance, a desire, a song, a demand, a call-and-response. As Kim writes, lyric poetry is a kind of "thinking towards what doesn't already exist" (Keller 338). The provenance of the contemporary global "we" is the place we find ourselves when we board Rankine's bus, or when we are exhorted by the weeping divinity at the end of the ghazal. The prospective agencies modeled by this particularly hospitable kind of poetic address do not always depend on a message superimposed on the poem or explicitly

stated. What constitutes “us” in the world lyric is a shared recognition of an incipient, as-yet-to-be-determined friendship, made possible within the shared language of the poem. Even if this is a “provisional location” or a place to which we may not yet arrive, the lyric points us there, and points to us there, as if to say that this is a world, and we are in it.

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