A Form that is Many Forms:
The Stanza in Postwar Anglophone Poetry

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ABSTRACT

"A Form that is Many Forms: The Stanza in Postwar Anglophone Poetry" argues for the importance of stanzaic prosody in an era of unprecedented formal freedom, asserting that the shifts in stanzaic technique in the later twentieth century precipitate productive collisions between transhistorical poetic traditions and contemporary cultural pressures. My project follows the insights of Debra Fried and Jonathan Culler, who contend that critical neglect of the stanza hampers poetry studies generally. I propose that a combinatory model of stanzaic form—in which various verse segments such as rhyme, meter, syntax, and visual shape intersect to form multilinear patterns—more accurately tracks the turns and counterturns of twentieth-century verse experiments. This model facilitates the various investigations of my three chapters, each of which examines an individual poet's rearrangements of existing stanzaic patterns to forge new links between the forms of literary history and the concerns of contemporary audiences.

My first chapter begins in the early postwar era, as I consider how W. H. Auden's verse responds to a shifting memorial culture in the wake of the world wars, and reinterpret his directive that poetry be "memorable speech." Understanding poetic memorability as a complex "structuring of forgetfulness" involving mnemonic schemes, formal echoes, and the amnesiac structures of literary history, I argue that Auden shapes many of his stanzaic forms to tie together cultural imperatives of memory and the inevitability of forgetting. My second chapter enters the global economy of the late twentieth century, connecting the stanzaic structures of Derek Walcott's *Omeros* to the poem's imbrication in networks of touristic value and exchange. Like the signs that organize touristic gazing, the stanzas of *Omeros* cater to Anglo-American audiences in search of exotic difference and frame that difference within recognizable

conventions, yet I argue that its verse also disrupts touristic practices of formalist reading, forcing the reader to recognize that forms invoke cultural and historical obligations beyond the economic circuits of touristic desire. My third chapter explores Jorie Graham's visual prosody, arguing that her typographical stanzaic patterns rearrange the poetic text as a material body and offer a new somatic paradigm for formal poetics. I demonstrate how her work moves from the traditional free verse stanzas of poets like Williams or Plath toward schemes of extreme linear contrast, increasingly employing "coaxial" arrangements and "machine-cut" stanzas to explore the possible bodies verse may take on the page in an era of climate change and technological transformation.

Auden, Walcott, and Graham engage diverse cultural formations through the stanza, a structure both remarkably central to postwar poetry and curiously neglected by poetry scholars. In renewing attention to stanzaic prosody, my dissertation aims to ask more incisive questions about the nature of structural progression and sonic return in contemporary poems and to trace more complex genealogies of formal influence. I study the postwar stanza not only to assess historical changes in verse technique, but also to track concomitant shifts in poetry's social role, attending to the questions of memory, difference, and survival that poets and readers route through verse form. "A Form that is Many Forms" thus situates the stanza within discursive paradigms beyond the aesthetic and illuminates its response to the cultural traditions and historical conditions that shape its manifold contemporary reinventions.

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"It is fun to have fun, but you have to know how."

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No quarrels are as bitter as those of persons whose prosodic theories differ: I like to think this testifies to the interest of the subject.

- W. H. Auden

I love forms, but I do not wish to come across as some kind of rheumatic formalist.

- Agha Shahid Ali

Introduction

The Form Lurking in the Mind: Stanzaic Structure and Postwar Prosody

The middle decades of the twentieth century see an unprecedented expansion of stylistic experimentation with poetic form in Anglophone verse. No longer consistently rooted in end rhyme and meter—the patterns traditionally combined in stanzas—poetic form becomes a ground for experimentation, as poets entertain various ways of organizing the language of verse:

> America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?
> I will continue like Henry Ford my strophes are as individual as his automobiles
> more so they're all different sexes.
> America I will sell you strophes $2500 apiece $500 down on your old strophe
> (Ginsberg, *Collected Poems* 155)[1]

As Allen Ginsberg assesses the state of "America" (1956) he reflects upon the state of poetic form, and begins the final verse paragraph with a sardonic remark on his own selling of "strophes," a Greek word often used interchangeably with the Italian "stanza."[2] He satirizes the craft of poetry in traditional forms as a mass production of identical, interchangeable commodities, comparing his strophes with the mass-produced automobiles that symbolize the modern American economy. He cheekily distinguishes his work by prosodic difference—his strophes are not exact copies ("different sexes")—and treats this product differentiation as a

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[1] While MLA format mandates the double-spacing of all block quotes, including poetry, in this dissertation I will endeavor to present all substantial quotations of poems so that they appear approximately identical to their presentation in source texts, with the acknowledgement that no copy can replicate the original exactly.

[2] These terms are not equivalent: some prosodists use the former to denote longer verse paragraphs of indeterminate organization and reserve the latter for regular units. In English, the occasional preference for "staff" or "stave," and the usage of "verse" in the particular sense, have blurred the lines of the stanza with different resonances (See also Saintsbury's use of "batch"). The root words are equally a source of confusion: English usage of the Italian "stanza" draws on the senses of the Greek "strophe" and Latin "stasimum" that designate portions of choral song performed while turning or standing, especially in the tripartite structure associated with choral and Pindaric odes (in Greek, strophe, antistrophe, and epode; in English turn, counter-turn, and stand, as illustrated in Ben Jonson's Cary and Morison ode). The connection of standing to stanza echoes in the "room" of modern usage, which ultimately derives from "stantia" (vulgar Latin), the root of the Italian word for "standing or stopping place" we now use.

source of value: the sprawling strophes of "America" are worth more than older models.

Our old stanzas seem to have depreciated because the material instantiations of verse forms exist in history, aging and decaying like any other technology. Yet while stanzas come into being as historical patterns, charged with meaning by aesthetic traditions and political contexts, they are not bound by the strictures of the past. Ginsberg's strophic blocks may eschew regular stanzaic architecture, even as a wide array of patterns remain viable for other poets:

> It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,
> With every visible thing enlarged and yet
> No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,
> The immensest theatre, and pillared porch,
> The book and candle in your ambered room,
>
> Total grandeur of a total edifice,
> Chosen by an inquisitor of structures
> For himself. He stops upon this threshold,
> As if the design of all his words takes form
> And frame from thinking and is realized. (Stevens 510)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I like to find
> what's not found
> at once, but lies
>
> within something of another nature,
> in repose, distinct.
> Gull feathers of glass, hidden
>
> in white pulp: the bones of squid
> which I pull out and lay
> blade by blade on the draining board— (Levertov 13)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> We real cool. We
> Left school. We
>
> Lurk late. We
> Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon. (Brooks 60)

Stanzaic patterns sustain many different poems, as we see in the blank verse quintets at the close of Wallace Stevens's "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" (1954), the enjambed tercets beginning Denise Levertov's "Pleasures" (1959), and the unorthodox rhymed couplets of Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool" (1959), poems roughly contemporaneous with "America." These stanzas play different games, setting syntactical and linear periods against one another in recognizable (if radically dissimilar) patterns. None of these forms is a traditional mainstay, but all three depend upon readers to treat these blocks of verse as stanzas. These multilinear groupings variously employ conventional markers of stanzaic organization, suggesting that Ginsberg's caricature of the "old strophe," while broadly consonant with the looser prosodies of his generation, also elides many of the possibilities of stanzaic technique in the midcentury.

While these postwar poets seem to celebrate a new freedom from the strictures of formal tradition, their prosodic choices also entail new methods of engagement with poetic history, as they arrange the material shapes of stanzas to endure without relying on conventional patterns of echo. Ginsberg's strophes are one of many offerings in a postwar marketplace in which younger poets such as Brooks, Robert Lowell, Charles Olson, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Merrill were reshaping the legacies of modernist verse. At the same time, established poets such as Stevens, Langston Hughes, H.D., William Carlos Williams, and W. H. Auden continued to publish, and new responses to modernism were developing globally in the work of Louise Bennett, Derek Walcott, A. K. Ramanujan, and Christopher Okigbo. These emerging voices employ a variety of formal strategies to negotiate the norms of verse with modern readers and to revise the technical

strategies of their modernist predecessors. In this increasingly diverse world of Anglophone poetry, stanzaic prosody offers not only a tool for organizing the material of verse, but a currency by which writers distinguish their work and a marker by which they situate themselves in historical traditions and contemporary communities.

For many, the stanza may be just that rusty junker ironized by Ginsberg, a relic of bygone poetic eras that needs to be traded in for new forms.[3] Yet even his strophes specifically echo the prosody of Walt Whitman and locate his work in an American tradition of prophetic verse. Each stanzaic scheme differentially embodies the collision of compositional norms with the force of literary tradition, and these impacts have over time made theories of stanzaic form obsolete while obscuring the importance of strophic technique to postwar verse. I aim to remedy these critical oversights, arguing instead that the stanza plays a central role in the development of contemporary Anglophone prosody. In this project I propose a more fluid theory of stanzaic structure to address the competing prosodies of the twentieth century, emphasizing the variety of verse segments, from meter and syntax to refrain and visual grouping, that combine to form stanzas. This revitalized stanzaic theory will enable critics to read the explosive declamations of Ginsberg alongside the careful measures of Stevens as part of the same history of stanzaic technique, while also offering insight into how stanzas enable poets to negotiate the relationship between poetry and its histories both within and beyond the world of the aesthetic.

Making Room for a New Stanzaic Theory

The proliferation of stanzaic prosodies in the postwar era suggests that traditional

[3] Proponents of free verse and organic form, not to mention language and conceptual poetry, find the prospect of stanzaic design unsuited to modern lyric. See especially Olson, “Projective Verse.”

stanzaic forms have more flexibility than conventional definitions would allow. As opposed to the more arcane hollows of the prosodic wood, few readers would trip over the word "stanza," conventionally understood as a unit of lines grouped together in a repeating pattern, set apart from other stanzas by blank space, and typically marked by meter, rhyme, refrain, or other formal devices. Stanzaic forms play a crucial role in Anglophone poetry because of their structural position between the poetic whole and the linear unit as well as their importance to compositional methods across diverse eras, even after free verse becomes mainstream.[4] Yet the stanza occupies a conspicuous gap in formal poetics, because stanzaic theories have remained largely static since the early modern period.[5] For the purposes of this argument I define stanzaic forms as verse patterns that organize non-exclusive, distinctive multilinear relationships, such as rhyme schemes, linear-syntactical coincidence, or visual grouping.[6] Not all multilinear patterns work in the same way or on the same level, but they allow readers to distinguish between different groupings of verse lines without precluding the possibility of overlapping patterns. Syntax and typography are distinct compositional elements that necessarily intersect in any written poem, while rhyme, refrain, meter, or metastructural segmentation may not be involved in many contemporary lyrics. This framework allows us to consider a number of different verse

[4] Wilhelm Meyer goes even further, claiming that the stanza is the foundation of any poetic culture: "Das Dichten eines Volkes beginnt nicht mit der Zeile, sondern mit der Strophe, nicht mit Metrik, sondern mit Musik" (Meyer 51).
[5] Dante's notion of the stanza as "storehouse or receptacle" (*De Vulgari Eloquentia* II.IX) changes little in the seven centuries leading up to Fried's formulation of the stanza as a "house of possibility" (Fried 53). The stanza receives less critical attention than linear prosody or free verse, and seems to fly the flag of triviality regularly associated with formalist poetics. Many prosodists turn away from investigating the myriad varieties of stanzaic technique: for Tom Hood, "an arithmetical progression alarming to think of" (Hood 48-49); for Joseph Malof, a set of minor considerations and "auxiliary matters" (Malof vii); for Mark Harvey Liddell, an array of useless strategies analyzed in "dreary, inapposite, inadequate and ineffectual classifications and cataloguings of dry bones" (Liddell 266).
[6] Non-exclusive in that patterns can intersect or overlap; for instance, rhyme schemes can shore up the visual groupings of ottava rima, or bind separate groupings together in terza rima. Distinctive in that these patterns are marked by different means, admitting distinctions between them: rhyme and meter do not function in the same way, though both patterns are felt over the course of several lines. Stichic progression alone would not count as stanzaic structure (either in free verse or metrical verse), because the line-to-line relationship is constant, defined by the possibility of enjambment and expectation of prosodic parallel.

techniques, from typographical format to refrain structure, under the stanzaic umbrella.

In this vein the operative concept should be "stanzaic" (or "strophic") structure rather than the "stanza," which is a particular manifestation and combination of multilinear patterns. Most conventional definitions of the stanza specify a number of these patterns—rhyme and meter, syntax, visual grouping—that conclude regularly at equivalent and coincident intervals. Such definitions draw on Dante's prescriptive model of the stanza, which specifies that each subsequent stanza of a poem should take the same shape as the first. This theory describes with general accuracy the formal character of most strophic poetry in English before modernism. But after the advent of free verse, the notion that stanzas might take different shapes within the same poem becomes a compelling aesthetic possibility, and any model for a contemporary stanzaic poetics must allow for schemes that do not merely coincide over identical intervals.

The typical critical response would be to stipulate that unequal blocks of verse are simply not stanzas; perhaps "strophe" or "verse paragraph" would be more appropriate, as some prosodists suggest.[7] Yet if the only differences that mark the traditional stanza from the irregular "strophe" or "verse paragraph" are length and regularity (Krier, "Strophe" 1360), we should recognize that this distinction is one of degree rather than kind. Arrangement in multilinear units, whether by visual contiguity or rhyme, is the foundation of any stanzaic or strophic form, which may be distinguished from "stichic," or line-based, prosody. Even highly canonical forms depend upon the variation of patterned segments. Consider terza rima, which has a unit of five lines per individual rhyme sound, interlocking with two other five-line rhyme segments, cross-

[7] For Mary Kinzie the verse paragraph is not rhymed and does not have the "authority" or "coherence" of a stanza (Kinzie 269); Alfred Corn and Joseph Malof make similar claims, though latter admits the distinction between the two is not terribly clear (Malof 181), where the former Corn adds that "strophe" and "verse paragraph" might be used interchangeably for "non-uniform divisions" (Corn 78). Earlier generations of prosodists are no clearer on the distinction: Paull Baum treats "stanza" and "strophe" as interchangeable (Baum 88), while Thomas Arnold distinguishes between the two by length alone—specifically the length of a sonnet (Arnold 555).

cut by three-line visual groupings. Likewise, some forms require the use of unequal stanzaic units, from fixed repetitive schemes in the villanelle and sestina to more precise imbalances in Pindaric odes (which have always managed different strophic patterns) and sonnets (split into octaves and sestets or quatrains and couplets).[8] These traditional forms offer possibilities of overlap and disjuncture among multiple patterns, possibilities which are more readily available in the looser stanzaic schemes of modernist verse. Where T. S. Eliot mixes rhyme patterns and line lengths in the various stanzaic shapes of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," W. B. Yeats packs rhymed quatrains into longer strophic divisions marked by refrain in "Easter 1916," and H.D. marks the free verse stanza as an imagistic unit in the visual-syntactical overlap of "Sea Rose," we can benefit from understanding these poems as layerings and juxtapositions of various stanzaic structures. Treating these poems as if they are written in "verse paragraphs," an umbrella term for stanzaic units too loose for existing critical models, misses the ways that poets arrange lines for rhetorical and sonic effects. I argue instead that reading such irregular and unconventional shapes as stanzaic patterns, composed of many forms, will allow critics to re-envision the ostensibly polarized postwar landscape of "open" and "closed" prosodies as a vibrant continuum of technical strategies for arranging multilinear verse segments.

The stanza first becomes recognizable in Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*:[9] "a coherent arrangement of lines and syllables governed by a particular melody and a clearly defined organisation" (Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* II.IX). Dante sees the stanza (especially the first) as the governing body of formal organization for the entire poem, requiring poems to proceed in

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[8] In Greek choral odes, the strophe and antistrophe segments are structurally equal, but not the epode, and the heteromorphic pattern was adapted into the patterns of Anglophone odes. Sonnets are often distinguished as Italian, organized as an octave and sestet, or English (or "Shakespearean"), with three quatrains and a concluding couplet.

[9] "On Eloquence in the Vernacular" was probably composed in the early years of the poet's exile (1302-1305), though Dante's original four-book plan never came to fruition, as he stopped writing in the fourteenth chapter of book two. The second book specifically treats the structure of "cantos" (songs), or "canzone" in Sicilian.

structurally identical units—"the later stanzas of the poem should never aspire to add any new technical device, but should only dress themselves in the same garb as the first" (II.IX)—in which the formal similitude underwrites repetitions of musically suggestive phrasing ("particular melody").[10] His concomitant figure of the stanza as "a capacious storehouse or receptacle" (II.IX) likewise survives in many subsequent accounts, such that these two notions—that a poem's stanzas are schematically identical (or "isomorphic"), and that they are the containers carrying the material of the poem—structure nearly every account of stanzaic form.

We see these ideas repeated throughout the history of prosody. George Gascoigne (1575) and George Puttenham (1589), the earliest writers on stanzaic structure in English verse, spend just enough time on the "staffe" (for Puttenham, less sensible than the Italian "stanza") to insist that it terminate with the end of a sentence, reinforcing the container model.[11] Edward Bysshe (1702) mandates that stanzas should confine patterns of rhyme and syntax but makes an implicit connection between Pindaric odes and blank verse that hints at more porous boundaries (theoretical and actual) around stanzaic forms.[12] By the nineteenth century, many prosodists barely consider the stanza, because as Francis Gummere assumes in *A Handbook of Poetics for Students of English Verse* (1885), it "cannot be mistaken" due to its visual contiguity and isomorphic succession (234).[13] These baseline assumptions endure into the twentieth century,

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[10] While some designate this conception of stanzaic form as "isometric" (having equal length) or "isochronous" (taking up equal time), I refer to this theory as the "isomorphic" (having the same shape) prescription.

[11] Gascoigne's 1575 "Certayne Notes of Instruction" was published in a volume of poems (*The Posies of George Gascoigne*). Puttenham's 1589 *The Arte of English Poesie* appeared later, but became the first authoritative account of English prosody in the eyes of many later prosodists. Readings and misreadings of Puttenham—such as Sidney Lanier's notion that Puttenham "had never seen stanzas of two or three lines"—are a frequent marker of later accounts of stanzaic form (*The Science of English Verse* 239).

[12] In Bysshe's words, "Construction and Sence" (*The Art of English Poetry* 27). He discusses Pindaric odes and blank verse together in the final section of his essay (35-37).

[13] John Ruskin's 1880 manual for schools moves past stanzas on the first page, "a piece of a song enclosed or partitioned by itself" (Ruskin 1) to focus exclusively on meter. A quick rhetorical flourish in Edgar Allan Poe's 1848 *Rationale of Verse* dismisses modern stanzas as "loose" and "ineffective" compared to the "absolute unity" of earlier forms, hinting at the theoretical and practical efficacy of the container model (Poe 188). And Coventry Patmore's 1857 *Essay on English Metrical Law* describes how the isomorphic norm has led to some silly formal decisions, but

buoyed by the efforts of Jakob Schipper and George Saintsbury to catalogue the history of English prosody,[14] with little advancement in the theory and criticism of stanzaic form.

Much of the critical discourse on the stanza is limited to catalogues and genealogies of popular forms, an approach taken by prosodists from Puttenham to Saintsbury and kept alive by Paul Fussell (1965) and Ernst Haüblein (1978).[15] Yet beneath the prosodic trivia, seemingly pedantic distinctions disclose more fundamental disagreements about the function of stanzaic grouping and the nature of poetic form.[16] Puttenham adheres to isomorphic theory, but also diagrams the combinatory possibilities of rhyme and linear shape in stanzas of a given length. Despite his declaration that the eye and ear find a natural sympathy in poetic form,[17] rhyme linkage does not necessarily register in the visual field. Even centuries later, theorists of poetic form cannot definitively resolve this tension; Paul Fussell maintains that the visual dimension of stanzaic structure should "perfectly merge" with the auditory (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 128), while John Hollander and Northrop Frye stage poetry between the aural and visual, pulled

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hardly mentions the stanza again (Patmore 30). All definitions after the eighteenth century have been influenced by the rise of dictionaries. Samuel Johnson's 1756 definition (copied closely by other dictionaries such as Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*) succinctly combines the container model and isomorphic theory, "so much of a poem as contains *every* variation of measure or relation of rhyme" (Johnson 700).

[14] Schipper's 1910 *A History of English Versification* was originally published in German as *Grundriss der englischen Metrik* (1895), itself a single-volume condensation of his earlier *Englische Metrik* (1888). He defines the isomorphic prescription as a set of rules specific to modern (non-archaic) European verse, and gestures toward the container model early in the section on stanzas: "the melodic termination of the musical series has its analogue in the logical completion of the thought" (Schipper 270-271). He is concerned primarily with defining the types of rhyme organization, and insists on identical rhyme schemes in every stanza. Saintsbury's 1910 *Historical Manual of English Prosody* distills the insights of his monumental three-volume *A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*. He prefers the device of rhyme "to indicate and isolate" stanzaic units as individual containers, though he notes that irregular progression is possible in Pindaric odes (Saintsbury 33).

[15] Some novel work on the stanza has appeared in recent years, though studies such as Catherine Addison's "Little Boxes: The Effects of the Stanza on Poetic Narrative" (2003) and Nigel Fabb's *Language and Literary Structure: The Linguistic Analysis of Form in Verse and Narrative* (2002) seem to herald advances in poetic narratology and generative metrics rather than formalist poetics. For more references to recent work on stanzaic form across linguistic traditions see Aroui, "Proposals for Metrical Typology" (27-28).

[16] Haüblein gestures toward the rival conceptions of poetry operating in stanzaic forms, but discusses them mainly on the level of technical variations rather than theoretical distinctions (Haüblein 1).

[17] Puttenham: "most times your occular proportion doeth declare the nature of the audible; for if it please the eare well, the same represented by delineation to the view pleaseth the eye well, and *e conuerso;* and this is by a naturall *simpathie,* betweene the eare and the eye" (Puttenham 70).

variously by two different registers of form.[18] These are not merely questions of format, but rival accounts of what poetry is, negotiated at the level of the stanza where the competing pressures of syntactical rhythms, rhyme closure, visual arrangement, and metrical cadence are organized.

Likewise, recurrent debates over the minimum number of lines required to designate a group as a stanza, whether stanzas require rhyme, or whether they constitute metrical units are not immaterial. Puttenham insists that stanzas have at least four lines (Puttenham 54), and Edward Bysshe requires three (Bysshe 26), gesturing toward the musical foundations of lyric. But the greater portion of prosodists admits the possibility of two-line stanzas because they see the stanza as a linguistic (not musical) pattern of grouping.[19] Rhyme and meter are alternately ignored and valorized in this war of definitions. Susan Stewart argues that stanzas require rhyme and that rhyme creates stanzas ("Rhyme and Freedom" 30), while Saintsbury merely suggests that "rhymeless batching" is ineffective (Saintsbury 33), separated by a century of poets—beginning with Stein, H.D., Williams, and Stevens—who labor diligently to disprove them.[20]

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[18] Frye's account of the lyric emphasizes the contrapuntal pull of these two "poles" around poetry, toward what he variously calls "melos" and "opsis," "babble" and "doodle," "charm" and "riddle" (Frye 270-282). Hollander takes a different approach, moving along a continuum from sound to sight, and he crucially pushes back against phonocentric conceptions of poetic form by insisting that "Tradition is a matter of texts, not voices," and "all Classical tradition comes through the eye" (*Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* ix, 251).

[19] Sidney Lanier: "As the line is a group of smaller groups (or bars), so the stanza is a group of the line-groups. A stanza often called a "verse" in the common speech of the present day may be a group of two, three, or any number of lines… We are therefore practically without limitation as to the number of lines in any stanza of English verse (Lanier 239-240). Paull Baum: "The line unit is used sometimes singly and continuously, as in blank verse, and sometimes in groups usually held together by rime. These groups are called stanzas or strophes" (Baum 88). Martin Duffell: "strophes can be much simpler, and even pairs of lines meet the definition" (Duffell 10).

[20] Many accounts insist on rhyme as the constitutive element of stanzas, but with varying degrees of severity. Tom Hood's 1869 *The Rules of Rhyme* forbids the inclusion of any unrhymed line within the stanza, let alone stanzas without rhyme (Hood xii). Raymond Alden's 1909 *An Introduction to Poetry, for Students of English Literature* grants that an unrhymed stanza is "theoretically" possible and cites Collins's "Ode to Evening" and Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" as English examples (Alden 302). Schipper specifies that rhymeless stanzas in English are often indebted to classical poetry (Schipper 271). Later theories become increasingly permissive, from Derek Attridge's concession that metrical patterning can shore up formal verse without rhyme (*Poetic Rhythm* 53) and Mary Kinzie's assertion that rhyme confers additional "authority" and "coherence" (Kinzie 269) to the less equivocal affirmations by Charles Hartman and Debra Fried of unrhymed and even nonmetrical stanzas (Hartman 35, Fried 58, 62). Even more arcane divisions of the body of strophic verse by type of rhyme are endemic to the corpus of prosody before modernism. Guest and Schipper include lengthy chapters on the varieties of stanzaic rhyme.

Similarly, meter or syntactical closure can be central or irrelevant to stanzas, depending on the critic.[21] Without any firm certainty about what the stanza *is,* the question of how it *works* waits its turn.

The bareness of the cupboard in stanzaic criticism has itself become a critical talking point;[22] the only monograph on the stanza—Ernst Haüblein's *The Stanza* (1978)—notes the absence of modern stanzaic criticism but fails to address the modern stanza. Haüblein adopts "an abstract ahistoric formula" for defining the stanza (Haüblein 1) and ignores contemporary verse, focusing the two largest chapters on stanzaic unity and progression (hallmarks of the container model and the isomorphic prescription) in examples primarily drawn from the Renaissance.[23] Debra Fried gestures to the vast, unexplored reaches of the stanza as perhaps too daunting for further exploration (Fried 54),[24] but ventures closer to new territory:

> The stanzaic frame houses subpatterns not visually mapped in its lineation that help the poet realize, and make seem natural or inevitable, the strophic unit. The

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[21] Some critics suggest the stanza is not really a metrical or rhythmic structure, while others claim it as a metrical unit. For the former view see Alden (301), and Hass, (141). For the latter see Hubbell (76), Richard Andrews (97), and Malof (xii). Many maintain that stanzas should be syntactically closed as well: see Guest (562); C. E. Andrews, (139), and Winslow (33).

[22] Jonathan Culler's recent nod to the neglect of stanzas is emblematic: After a brief lament for the overemphasis on metrical prosody, he immediately resumes discussing classical meters (*Theory of the Lyric* 144).

[23] Readers of Haüblein could be forgiven for thinking all of English prosody is developed by Donne and Herbert, minus one example from Marianne Moore. The skew of his examples is perplexing when one notes how many modern poets (Pound, Eliot, Lowell, Ginsberg, Creeley, Olson, Levertov) are cited in the introductory chapter on theory. Haüblein's definition comes from the *OED*: "A group of lines of verse (usually not less than four), arranged according to a definite scheme which regulates the number of lines, the metre, and (in rhymed poetry) the sequence of rhymes; normally forming a division of a song or poem consisting of a series of such groups constructed according to the same scheme. Also, any of the particular types of structure according to which stanzas are framed." He recognizes the poverty of most writing on the stanza but adopts the same assumptions and methodologies. He laments prosodists who simply catalogue and classify forms, yet does much of the same. And when he alleges that most criticism ignores "aspects of meaning," he too skirts the domain of semiotics, ultimately claiming only "to demonstrate that stanzaic composition inevitably poses problems of meaning" (Haüblein 14-15, 116).

[24] She supposes that "we rest content with a small vocabulary because we'd need such a big one, were we to name everything the stanza can do and be" (Fried 54). Her geographic trope is particularly interesting in light of Walcott's stanzaic strategy in *Omeros,* examined at length in chapter two: "Until you visit and traverse each island, there is no predicting the climate or flora of the archipelago. Couplet niches and quatrain crannies in one stanza may flatten into discursive plains in the next" (56).

> sequence of stanzas includes some linked sub-groupings, clusters that in turn are not revealed as such except by reading, others that the typesetting signals… The relation of norms and significant deviations; the power of structural grids to stage the poem's play with chance, invention, and necessity; the shifting status of the poem's competing appeals to ear and eye; the status of the page as a site for musical or visual units; the partitioning of a long poem into overlapping zones; the portioning out of the work of the poem's syntax line by line; the poem's way of keeping or spending its bequests from past poems: all of these things come into focus with a close look at stanzas. (Fried 55)

She enumerates some of the myriad possibilities of stanzaic structure and patterning, but instead of seeing these dynamics "come into focus," we find the prosodic picture much fuzzier as we stand in awe of the stanza's complexity and malleability. The further one reads in her essay, the more one begins to wonder what, exactly, the stanza cannot be or do.

Her portrait of stanzaic possibility gestures toward exactly the kind of expansive stanzaic theory needed after modernism. Any contemporary stanzaic concept has to address a more technically permissive landscape, in which groupings of various lengths with or without rhyme and syntactical closure hold poems together (or pull them apart). Irregular patterns too have a tradition, evoking poems such as Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode and Milton's "Lycidas," but the heteromorphic stanzas of modernist prosody herald a sea change in the history of English verse.[25] In Eliot's 1915 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," we see the stanzaic shapes that

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[25] I prefer "heteromorphic" to "heterostrophic"—"a polystrophic poem composed of stanzas of differing structure" (Horváth 372)—because it suggests the interplay of various multilinear structures rather than merely denoting strophic blocks of differing shape. Paul Fussell and Barbara Herrnstein-Smith call attention to the drastic structural differences of free verse, but hew to the assumption that free verse is closer to chaos than to order, and as such offers fewer possibilities of variation and closural force, especially because of the lack of rhyme (Fussell 110, 151; Herrnstein-Smith 94). They fail to see the contrapuntal possibilities of disaggregated stanzaic structure, as do contemporary critics such as Steele, Kinzie, and Adams, who do not admit the possibilities of irregular patterns in

previously defined Anglophone lyric changed utterly:[26]

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table;
> Let us go, though certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
> And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
> Streets that follow like a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question…
> Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
> Let us go and make our visit.
>
> In the room the women come and go,
> Talking of Michelangelo.
>
> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
> Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
> Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
> Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
> And seeing that it was a soft October night,
> Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. (Eliot, *Complete Poems* 3-4)

The poem establishes loose expectations of paired rhymes and iambic rhythms. Rhymed couplets work within and against the visual organization into strophic blocks, as the interspersed short lines and unrhymed lines disrupt our expectations. The first three visual groups begin with rhymed couplets, and though that pattern does not hold throughout, the frequent use of rhyme to

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their theories of stanzaic form. Poets become increasingly involved in the prosody debates of the twentieth century, beginning with Pound's *ABC of Reading* (1934) and Eliot's "The Music of Poetry" (1942). In the next generation, Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" (1950) and Denise Levertov's "Some Notes on Organic Form" (1965) push harder against the strictures of received form, in favor of organic compositional models, along with Ginsberg, whose 1959 "Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl" strikingly describes his own practice as a linear stanza: "the long line is used as a stanza form" (Ginsberg, "Notes" 1076).

[26] Auden calls it a "bombshell" in that it immediately and powerfully alters the course of modernist formal poetics, particularly in demolishing the norms of stanzaic succession (Auden, *Complete Works* vol. III 354). Although "Prufrock" recalls a tradition of irregular odes in English that descend from the work of Pindar, from Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (1852) back to Jonson's Cary and Morison ode (1629), its tone and register suggest that Eliot is departing from the high style that characterizes typical Pindaric odes, and the often comic rhymes ("flicker" and "snicker," "meticulous" and "ridiculous") deflate the seriousness of the form.

pair lines within longer verse units recalls other poems—Dryden's Killigrew ode, Shelley's "Mont Blanc"—in which rhyme is simply one schematic layer not entirely coextensive with visual arrangement. Though "Prufrock" reveals the pentameter's dominance in turn-of-the-century verse, it also foreshadows the more variable mainstream poetry of the postwar era, with primarily iambic lines ranging from six to fourteen syllables in unpredictable sequence.

This stanzaic adjustment snowballs into fragmentary modernist epics and midcentury manifestos, precipitating new ways of thinking about poetic form, from the highly technical work of James Merrill to the unobtrusive free verse of W. S. Merwin.[27] But even poets such as Frank Bidart who do not compose conventional stanzas rely on the differential segmentation of multiple structural units:

> —I know that in *Tosca*, in the second act,
> when, humiliated, hounded by Scarpia,
> she sang *Vissi d'arte*
> —"I lived for art"—
>
> and in torment, bewilderment, at the end she asks,
> with a voice reaching
> harrowingly for the notes,
>
> "Art has *repaid* me LIKE THIS?"
>
> I felt I was watching
> autobiography—
> an art; skill;
> virtuosity
>
> miles distant from the usual soprano's
> athleticism,—
> the usual musician's dream
> of virtuosity *without* content…
> —I wonder what she feels, now,
> listening to her recordings. (Bidart 140)

[27] As David Caplan notes, this poetic world would have seemed anarchic to Eliot, because the "plurality of alternatives" available to poets makes their formal choices "nearly impossible to anticipate" (Caplan, *Questions of Possibility* 7).

"Ellen West" uses visual alignment to arrange syntax and rhythm, so that the enjambments of "reaching / harrowingly" and "watching / autobiography" stand out for their incorporation of white space into the syntactical construct. Amid these ecstatic transpositions, Bidart sneaks five-beat rhythms ("I know that in *Tosca*, in the second act," "She sang *Vissi d'arte* / —'I lived for art'—") into the poem. While one could allege this is because even ostensibly "free" verse is haunted by the "ghost" of meter,[28] the poem takes up meter as one kind of pattern in disjunction with other patterns, namely, syntax and visual arrangement. Even without a prescriptive rhyme or metrical scheme, "Ellen West" counterpoints syntax with visual and aural rhythms, building out of many forms groupings that do not immediately appear as stanzaic units. Bidart's poem slyly hints that its own "virtuosity" is "miles distant from "the usual soprano's / athleticism," suggesting that many technical possibilities lie beyond the orbit of conventional artifice.

Technical strategies and readerly expectations arguably feed into one another, but Bidart's 1977 poem is not crafted for a general audience with homogeneous tastes or a foundation in canonical verse. In the decades after high modernism poets variously embrace and resist the myriad prosodic strategies advanced by the Beats, confessional and postconfessional poets, the New York School, Black Arts poets, Black Mountain poets, Deep Image poets, and Language poets. These loose networks of affiliation include poets who adapt disparate elements of formal traditions from across the world of poetry, and differentially segmented readerships that have various levels of canonical background and contemporary awareness. This highly fractured poetry marketplace is a much more complicated environment than Ginsberg's

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[28] This notion, adopted from Eliot's "Reflections on Vers Libre," is echoed by Timothy Steele, Derek Attridge, and particularly Annie Finch, who builds a more substantial descriptive argument in *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse* (2000). Eliot's original comment is prescriptive: "the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation" (Eliot, *Selected Prose* 34). For a counterargument, see Perloff, "After Free Verse: The New Nonlinear Poetries" (*Poetry On & Off the Page*).

distinction between old and new suggests, and I propose that a new stanzaic theory will help us understand this complex ecosystem rather than segregating it into conventional and innovative camps. The various techniques and prosodic arrangements endemic to midcentury poetry evoke powerful political and cultural associations, combined with the deep traditional and historical resonances of any particular stanzaic pattern. To develop a new model of stanzaic structure, I argue, requires more than revisiting our basic assumptions about its formal components; we must also reexamine the historicity of stanzaic shapes, recognizing them as interactions of diachronic poetic traditions with synchronic cultural and aesthetic trends.

Lurking in the Mind: Stanzaic Theory and Historical Poetics

To address these fundamental changes to stanzaic prosody in mainstream verse, one has to confront readerly expectations quickly becoming anachronistic (that stanzas are structurally equivalent verse containers), while keeping one eye on the wider vistas of poetic history. The stanza is clearly involved in the history of poetry, but it furthermore signifies history in a broader sense for many critics.[29] Eliot declares the stanza to have a particularly close tie to historical linguistic norms, and poets from Olson to Ginsberg rail against the inherited shape of the stanza, but what exactly determines the entanglement of stanzaic structure (as opposed to any other aesthetic contrivance) with the past and pastness?[30] Certainly conventional stanzaic forms have

[29] Miller Williams: "The disdain for patterns is in fact a disdain for the past itself" (*Patterns of Poetry* 10). Fussell: "The poet's attitude toward fixed metrical and stanzaic forms… reflects his general orientation toward authority, hierarchy, and history; and the contemporary poet, anxious to escape from the fixed forms, is conducting his own small skirmish in the continuing romantic and democratic revolutions" (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 151).

[30] Eliot claims that stanzaic forms have quite precise historical coordinates: "But the stanza – and the more elaborate it is, the more rules to be observed in its proper execution, the more surely this happens – tends to become fixed to the idiom of the moment of its perfection. It quickly loses contact with the changing colloquial speech, being possessed by the mental outlook of a past generation" ("The Music of Poetry" 320). This view is echoed by Perloff, who adapts Jacques Roubaud's notion of the alexandrine as a "hieratic rhythmic entity": "Specific sound patterns

currency (or not) because of their proven usefulness—they are, in Fried's words, "freighted with the history of their uses" (Fried 53). But as Fried, Fussell, and others point out, each poet could equally choose to create a new form, a "nonce" stanza, which may or may not construct a memorable poem and so enter subsequent history (Fussell 127).[31] It is in this movement that the dialectic of literary history comes into focus through the stanza: history is the crucible that tests and proves the power of particular forms, just as the forms that survive are understood to constitute the history of poetics, and the currency of a particular form is an index of cultural attitudes at a particular historical moment. Critics such as Marjorie Perloff and Anthony Easthope may argue that deeply canonical forms (such as iambic pentameter) no longer possess the same vitality as aesthetic tools,[32] but the converse holds as well, in that recognizable forms accrue many complex layers of meaning over time. Popular stanzaic structures such as the ballad or sestina can be found in any poet's toolbox, because these two very old forms are intelligible to a wide community of readers, and they generate historical meanings in different ways: the former seems particularly dated, despite its continued use in popular song, and the latter strangely contemporary, even with its long history.[33]

In assessing the historical trajectories and cultural resonances of versification, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry critics fix their formalisms on meter. From Eliot's "Reflections on Vers Libre" (1917) to Charles Hartman's *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody*

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change in response to their time and culture, but the principle that sound structure controls meaning remains the same" (*Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* 215).

[31] Of course, even a nonce stanza is built from historical materials and available strategies for organizing rhyme, refrain, and enjambment. Fussell: "all fixed forms have begun as nonce forms and have managed to prevail into history because in their shapes and in the conventions of their dynamics they have implied a version of experience recognized as real or significant or comely by many succeeding generations" (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 127).

[32] For an argument against the "neutral availability" of verse forms, see Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page* (142-146), and for a discussion of pentameter's particular suitability to the poetic culture and ideological demands of earlier epochs, see Easthope (64-69).

[33] For more on the contemporary sestina see Burt, "Sestina! or, the Fate of the Idea of Form."

(1980), the erosion of linear metrics has served as the primary narrative of poetic form in the twentieth century, and Historical Poetics scholars such as Meredith Martin and Yopie Prins interested in the politics of Victorian prosody work principally on meter.[34] But as Martin highlights in the "prosody wars" of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the definitions and expectations of meter (and other verse forms) at any particular moment are not stabilized by general consensus ("Prosody Wars" 244-245). Furthermore, the line itself cannot be understood except in relation to other formal elements.[35] Contested accounts of English prosody in the fin-de-siècle may point to confusion about the essence of meter, but the overall dominance of "linear thinking"—understood both as a focus on meter and a reading of form as a proxy for chronological history—has also foreclosed a more nuanced poetics, which would encompass the various chronologies of development, networks of influence, and types of patterns manifested in prosody.[36] What if the question of history is more effectively asked through other forms?

As Ralph Franklin asks, "What happens if the form lurking in the mind is the *stanza*?"[37] His appeal to stanzaic convention is emblematic of "lyric reading" for Virginia Jackson, who observes that Franklin's editing of Emily Dickinson's poems involves prioritizing, excerpting,

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[34] As Prins, Martin, Virginia Jackson, and others working under the aegis of Historical Poetics have argued, poetic forms are bound up in histories of cultural shifts, political pressures, and reading practices. These forms cannot be studied without recognizing the linguistic and social codes mediating our experience of poetry. Any historical assessment of form will involve explication of the other discursive formations acting on and through the conventions of verse. See Martin's *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (2012), Prins's "Victorian Meters" (*The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, 2000), and the collection of essays in Jason David Hall's *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (2011). Some would consider Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (1999) an exception, as she explores the legacy of Sapphic stanzas, but Prins explicitly treats the form as a meter (see *Victorian Sappho* 64, 114, 120). Despite her interest in the "fragmentary" nature of the Sapphic corpus, her focus on the fragment/body dyad displays a tacit acceptance of the container model.

[35] James Longenbach: "Line has no identity except in relation to other elements in the poem, especially the syntax of the poem's sentences. It is not an abstract concept, and its qualities cannot be described generally or schematically. It cannot be associated reliably with the way we speak or breathe. Nor can its function be understood merely from its visual appearance on the page" (*The Art of the Poetic Line* xi).

[36] For a particularly interesting critical map of twentieth-century metrical prosody, see Alan Holder's *Rethinking Meter: A New Approach to the Verse Line* (1995).

[37] Franklin's remark is directed at Susan Howe, who questioned his editorial decisions related to line breaks in compiling the 1998 variorum edition of Emily Dickinson's complete poems. This exchange is narrated by Howe in *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (134).

and rearranging enigmatic manuscripts into individual poems and variants (*Dickinson's Misery* 37). Jackson demonstrates the problem with Franklin's assumption that a poem's coherence will appear when it is relineated within a conventional stanzaic form: namely, that this critical move eliminates the specific material circumstances of the poem's original production, effectively transforming it into a new shape made to look like other shapes already "lurking in the mind."

Jackson proposes two poems: the authorized version we find in anthologies, and the poem as originally written. She correctly points out how editing reshapes Dickinson's work, but every reader plays a role in constructing the poetic object,[38] and she is no exception:

Franklin:

A Pang is more conspicuous in Spring
In contrast with the things that sing
Not Birds entirely – but Minds –
And Winds – Minute Effulgencies –

Jackson:

A Pang is more
Conspicuous in Spring
In contrast with the
those—
things that sing,
Not Birds entirely—but
Minds—Minute Effulgen—
—cies
and winds—[39]

Jackson's excerpts attempting to preserve the lineation of Dickinson's envelope manuscripts are not categorically different from Franklin's institutionally authorized rhymed quatrains. Both critics arrange the poem according to principles "lurking in the mind"—Franklin with an ear to rhyme, Jackson with an eye to visual format—because they conceive of the poem not only in lines, but in lines that have carefully crafted relationships to one another. Their chosen formats simply express different principles of *stanzaic* organization, with Jackson's lineation, which may

[38] See Stanley Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" (*Is There a Text in This Class?*).
[39] Jackson's version (*Dickinson's Misery* 25) attempts to follow the shape of the manuscript draft. Franklin's can be found in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (573). Jackson attends to the material circumstances of poetic production, but the way she decides to print the poem may not have been legible as poetry, or would not have seemed a sensible arrangement of poetry, to many contemporaneous readers. Poetry readers of Dickinson's era would probably have expressed stronger preferences for schemes of visual organization that made sense of end-rhyme.

not have been legible for Dickinson's contemporaries, signaling an awareness of free verse. Here we see that the patterns by which the reader identifies multilinear relationships can diverge significantly and suggest different stanzas, or even different poems.

Jackson and Franklin can puzzle over "What shape is this?"—but I would argue that a combinatory model of stanzaic form allows us to ask a more productive question, "What *shapes* (plural) are colliding in this poem?" The mechanisms of stanzaic pattern offer more than a binary historicism of convention or innovation, because stanzaic forms are composites, made up of many formal building blocks that are neither wholly new nor old, that can be arranged in variously conventional and unconventional ways.[40] To study the history of the stanza, then, is to avoid committing oneself exclusively to "linear thinking." Where militant versifiers may trumpet a "break with the prosodic past" (Hartman 8), we find instead that stanzaic patterns are complicated markers of form's contemporary and historical connections with readers and cultural attitudes, composed mosaically of surprising confluences and disjunctures.[41]

In reading stanzaic form both within and against historical and cultural coordinates, I stand alongside the critical convergence of the last two decades often discussed as "New Formalism."[42] Fredric Bogel rightly describes this scholarly trend as plural "New Formalisms,"

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[40] Hartman: "there are no wholly new things but only new combinations and uses of old things" (*Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* 8).

[41] Often the stanza is taken to signify and solicit attitudes about order, as Robert Hass declares, "The stanza is a proposition of order" ("Prosody: A New Footing" 141). But see also J. Paul Hunter on this assumption with regard to the eighteenth-century couplet ("Formalism and History: Binarism and the Anglophone Couplet").

[42] This umbrella covers scholars reframing the theoretical questions around form (Ellen Rooney, Caroline Levine) as well as critics focusing on method and practice within narrower disciplinary formations (Susan Stewart, David Caplan, Angela Leighton). Yopie Prins, Virginia Jackson, and other proponents of Historical Poetics and New Lyric Studies can count themselves card-carrying members of the New Formalist union alongside their most outspoken critics, from Jonathan Culler to Stephanie Burt. The label causes additional confusion, as David Caplan notes, because of the eponymous movement of a decade earlier in creative writing circles ("What Was New Formalism?" 17). The "New Formalism" of composing in traditional rhyme and meter is usually regarded as reactionary, whereas New Formalist practices that inflect close reading strategies with the insights of poststructuralism and historicism are often considered methodological advances. For more on the genealogy, development, and variety of New Formalist theory and criticism see Wolfson (*Reading for Form* 3-12), Marjorie Levinson ("What is New Formalism?"), Bogel (*New Formalist Criticism* 1-10), and Attridge *(Moving Words* 17-23).

noting that many working under this label share no unifying theory or methodology (Bogel 16, 183-185). So instead of borrowing conceptual postulates from New Formalism, I derive energy and direction from it to read "for" form,[43] insisting along with Susan Wolfson that "To treat form as an aesthetic autonomy or to treat form as a determinate cultural formation is to tell a limited story, to render a limited history. The play of form in cultures of reading is nothing if not mobile, variable, unpredictable" (Wolfson 24). As Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian argue, the impulse to pin down the term "form" may itself be a large stumbling block for formalist analysis (Kramnick and Nersessian 38),[44] and in this project I similarly avoid making exhaustive or exclusive claims about form. I pause at John Hollander's question—"Is one's form, as it were, one's silhouette or one's skeleton?" (*Melodious Guile* 5)—because I maintain that literary forms (especially poetic forms like the stanza) can be both surface patterns and internal structures, in whatever shape they call attention to themselves over and above the putative "content" of texts.[45] I treat form as both Denis Donoghue's "distinguishing characteristic of art" (Donoghue 121) and Caroline Levine's generalizable "arrangement of elements" (Levine 3), with equal capacity to fashion and fracture relationships between aesthetic objects and the world of referents.[46]

Taking these various interventions into account, I treat poetic forms (stanzas in

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[43] I likewise aim to push back against both the "triumphant antiformalism" Herbert Tucker decries in literary studies (Tucker 86) and the broader "attenuation of form" identified by Ellen Rooney (Rooney 28-32).

[44] Kramnick and Nersessian advocate a concept of form as "inquiry-relative," claiming that there is no reason to mandate a consistent use of the term across or even within disciplines, and that literary study depends on a certain set of terms (such as "form," "prosody," "stanza") which both define the phenomena they seek to explain and determine what counts as explanation. Ultimately the theoretical divisions they treat under the labels of "revisionist" and "reductionist" formalism hold on to form as structure or pattern in some sense (38). Angela Leighton similarly highlights the infinite contestability of "form" in her account of the term's evolution in aesthetic discourse from Schiller and the Romantics to Henri Focillon and Suzanne Langer among the modernists (Leighton 1-19).

[45] As phrased by John Shoptaw: "Insofar as a unit of meaning calls attention to itself and either delays or disrupts the argument or movement or progressive development of a text, it establishes itself as a measure of construction" (Shoptaw 212). See also Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction."

[46] Levine in particular discusses aesthetic form as continuous with social and cultural forms (*Forms* 4-5). While I do study the ways by which aesthetic forms intersect with their social contexts, I typically use "form" in a less expansive sense to maintain a focus on the stanza as an aesthetic form that can have broader cultural resonances.

particular) as patterns or structures that organize verse without involving the referential function of language. This definition depends on a recognition of poetry as distinguished *by* poetic forms, which can be identified by the arrangement of verse into units of various kind and duration, what Rachel Blau DuPlessis labels "segments" ("Manifests" 51).[47] Her segmentive theory resonates with approaches to formal poetics advanced by Charles Bernstein and John Shoptaw, who similarly define poetic form in terms of the various levels of measure that combine and intersect to produce or resist the operations of meaning-making in poems.[48] It is no accident that these more modular frameworks emerge in the later twentieth century, far down the modernist path of structural disaggregation. Their versions of "form" run counter to the organicist theories occupying the critical imagination from Romanticism through the heyday of New Criticism, and allow us to analyze refrains alongside visual grouping and syntax, to incorporate all the segments used to fashion stanzas throughout the history of Anglophone poetry.

While some segmentive patterns mark poems as the products of distinct eras, many of the core elements of stanzaic organization—visual grouping, rhyme, refrain, meter, syntactical boundary—both durable and malleable over time. In Frank Bidart's words, "We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them we change them and are changed" (Bidart 273). We turn to Bidart again, but with a different historical foil:

I LONG to talke with some old lovers ghost,
Who dyed before the god of Love was borne:
I cannot thinke that hee, who then lov'd most,
Sunke so low, as to love one which did scorne.

Inside whatever muck makes words in
lines leap into being is the intimation of

Like the invisible seasons

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[47] DuPlessis: "Poetry is the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines and whose meanings are created by occurring in bounded units… These segmented units can be organized into the larger page-shapes of fixed stanza, or into other page-space thought units with their termini of various kinds. In short, all the meanings poetry makes are constructed by segmented units of a variety of sizes. The specific force of any individual poem occurs in the intricate interplay among the "scales" (of size or kind of unit) or comes in "chords" of these multiple possibilities for creating segments" (DuPlessis 51).

[48] For Bernstein, scale, number, line length, syllable order, word length, phrase length, measure as punctuation, or punctuation as metrics ("Thought's Measure" 75). For Shoptaw, the units are character, word, phrase, line, sentence, section (Shoptaw 212).

But since this god produc'd a destinie,
And that vice-nature, custome, lets it be;
I must love her, that loves not mee.

Sure, they which made him god, meant not so much,
Nor he, in his young, godhead practis'd it.
But when an even flame two hearts did touch,
His office was indulgently to fit

Actives to passives. Correspondencie
Only his subject was; It cannot bee
Love, till I love her, that loves mee.

But every moderne god will now extend
His vast prerogative, as far as Jove.
To rage, to lust, to write to, to commend,
All is the purlewe of the God of Love.

Oh were wee wak'ned by this Tyrannie
To ungod this child againe, it could not bee
I should love her, who loves not mee.

Process, inside chaos you follow the thread
of just one phrase instinct with cycle, archaic

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Promise that you will see at last the buried
snake that swallows its own tail

Like the invisible seasons

You believe not in words but in words in
lines, which disdaining the right margin

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Inside time make the snake made out of
time pulse without cease electric in space

Like the invisible seasons

Though the body is its
genesis, a poem is the vision of a process

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Refrain structures and subordinate stanzas organize both John Donne's "Love's Deity" (Donne 65) and Bidart's "Winter Spring Summer Fall" (Bidart 445-446). I have added an extra line of spacing to Donne's seven-line stanzas to align them with Bidart's six-line cycles to highlight structures "lurking in the mind" of both poems.[49] Both initiate multistage stanzaic progressions to play refrain structure against visual patterns: Donne's septets have triplets tacked on to abab quatrains, but the triplets connect to one another via refrain and use the same rhyme sound; Bidart's spacing and italicized double refrains fracture a kind of dual-voiced sestet into four visual chunks. Their stanzas depend on and disrupt the same stanzaic conventions—visual contiguity, refrain, linear-syntactical counterpoint, thematic segmentation—for distinct

[49] I have also adjusted the left-hand indentation of Donne's poem, which is conventionally indented in the second, fourth, and seventh lines of each stanza to highlight rhymes and metrical difference. Both quotations are excerpted.

readerships with vastly different preferences and expectations. By analyzing the combinatory and segmentive nature of these stanzaic compositions, we can address their technical similarities without collapsing their significant differences, attending to the distinct historical resonances of rhyme for Donne's contemporaries and the peculiarity of refrain for Bidart's readership.[50]

The core tenet of a historical poetics framework—that we cannot separate the practice of reading a poem from the histories and theories of reading that mediate our ideas about poetry (Prins, "What is Historical Poetics?" 14)—establishes a prohibitive norm, but does little to suggest a methodology. Such an approach thus risks reducing the concept of form to a historical wall obstructing the reader (as with Jackson's thesis about lyric reading)[51] rather than the walls that construct the poem to make it accessible. Indeed, I argue that it is at this juncture that the stanza becomes particularly important, because its possibilities of coincident and contrapuntal arrangement suggest how verse form may have rather complicated relationships with political and cultural history, both tied to particular contexts and built to travel and transform beyond those contexts. Stanzaic patterns challenge our sense of the historical link between readerly expectations and compositional norms, because stanzaic reading practices—expectations of and preferences for harmony, disjuncture, repetition, and cyclicality—seem to change far less than stanzaic forms do. A genealogy of stanzaic reading results in a kind of historical echo chamber, with isomorphic theories persisting even in the work of recent critics (such as Timothy Steele), who follow the patterns of expectation and expectations of pattern established by Dante.[52]

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[50] Donne's poem relies on our understanding of more complicated stanzaic forms constructed as composites, as well as the influence of troubadour song on Renaissance English poetry. Bidart's poem clearly caters to readers who expect to be reading postwar-era free verse, and its refrain lines consequently come as a shock.

[51] Jackson theorizes "lyric reading" as an elision of the particular generic and social histories involved in and surrounding the production of poetic texts, blaming the normalization of the Romantic lyric and the decontextualizing practices of New Critical analysis for this shift (Jackson 7, 92-117). See Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* for a strong rebuttal (especially pages 83-85) and an expansive case for lyric as a transhistorical category.

[52] Note the consistent appeal to isomorphic prescription in definitions separated by centuries: Dante, c. 1305: "The object in which the whole art of the *canzone* was enshrined should be called a stanza, that is, a capacious storehouse

So stanzaic reading—expectations related to the visual and auditory conventions of multilinear organization—has remained relatively steady, but compositional methods and preferences shift continuously. Ballads fall in and out of style from Middle English to Claude McKay; sonnets are in a continuous state of transformation from Thomas Wyatt through John Milton, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Adrienne Rich; and rhyme, the paradigmatic marker of Anglophone stanzaic structure, is alternately demonized, then championed, and maligned again.[53] Despite its enduring hold on the readerly mind, Isomorphism has never been a satisfactory one-size-fits-all theory. Stanzas are composites of many forms, and while critics acknowledge the multiple patterns within stanzaic units,[54] they fail to see this multiplicity as fundamental to the stanza's complex relationship with history and tradition.

New Styles of Architecture

I propose a "combinatory-segmentive" model of stanzaic form, emphasizing the ways in which poets and readers construct stanzas out of various poetic segments in connection with

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or receptacle for the art in its entirety. For just as the *canzone* is the lap of the whole of its subject-matter, so the stanza enlaps its whole technique; and the later stanzas of the poem should never aspire to add any new technical device, but should only dress themselves in the same garb as the first" (*De Vulgari Eloquentia* II.IX); Samuel Johnson, 1755: "A number of lines regularly adjusted to each other; so much of a poem as contains every variation of measure or relation of rhyme. Stanza is originally a room of a house, and came to signify a subdivision of a poem" (Johnson 700). Steele, 1999: "A stanza may be defined as a group of lines arranged in a pattern that specifies the number of lines in the group, their meter, and the sequence of their rhymes. Customarily, this pattern is established at the beginning of a poem and repeats thereafter for as long as the poem continues. The stanzas are, in other words, structurally identical" (Steele 201); Terry Eagleton, 2003: "Stanza: a verse of a poem, composed in a particular metrical and rhyming form which is then repeated in the other verses" (Eagleton 168).

[53] Milton, 1674: "rime being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre" (Milton 210); Emerson, 1839: "Rhyme which builds out into Chaos & Old night a splendid architecture to bridge the impassable, & call aloud on all the children of morning that the Creation is recommencing" (Emerson, *Journals* 227); Olson, 1950: "rime & regular cadence… have merely lived on in print after the oral necessities were ended" (Olson 1059).

[54] For instance, Fussell argues that every form (rhyme, stanza, visual grouping) undergirds meter, so despite his awareness of the multiple shapes involved in stanzas, his stanzaic prosody is ultimately linear and limited (5, 110).

conventional patterns of expectation, to replace both the isomorphic prescription and the container model. The paucity of recent scholarship on stanzaic forms is a result of these conceptual roadblocks, which allow us to see that the stanza lies at the intersection of more fundamental conflicts organizing the analysis of literature, with form in a mediate position between the content of texts and wider cultural contexts. A renewed attention to stanzaic forms can clarify a number of critical aporias in poetry studies, such as debates over the historicity of forms and the relationship between form and content. Postmodern theories of art tend to downplay or deny the separation of aesthetic objects from their contexts,[55] but poetic forms are positioned to slide between the world of art and the world beyond the text, markers that remind us constantly of the power of literary language to destabilize existing cultural formations.[56]

Consequently, rethinking our approaches to the stanza could reorient the critical landscape in formal poetics. A combinatory model warps the container, producing a more faithful representation of poetic form's workings—both straining against and rearranging the limits of the poem—while also de-emphasizing the distinctness of "content" from formal structures. A broader conception of stanzaic form ultimately depends upon the contrapuntal arrangement of segmentive patterns: rhymes, meters, visual patterns, syntax, and other metastructures with different periods. This segmentive model allows us to push back against traditional conceptions of stanzaic units, which require each formal vessel to be an *exclusive* and *interchangeable* shape; containers cannot overlap, or they would not truly contain. Two shipping containers of different shape with interpenetrating boundaries would be more like a work of art

[55] Heavily emphasized in New Historicist criticism; best exemplified by Jameson: "Always historicize!" (17).
[56] This line of argument in favor of the aesthetic's separation from and potential to disrupt cultural norms has been advanced by Isobel Armstrong (*The Radical Aesthetic,* 2000), Theodor Adorno ("Lyric Poetry and Society," 1957), Julia Kristeva (*Revolution in Poetic Language,* 1984), and Culler (*Theory of the Lyric,* 2015).

than utilitarian containers, and so too with stanzas.[57] To expect stanzas to uniformly contain or insulate is to lose sight of the many structures that conceal, unbalance, intersect with, or undermine other arrangements—such as visual groupings at odds with rhyme schemes and syntactical periods that operate as catalysts: they energize, rather than delimit.

To demonstrate the possibilities of a revitalized stanzaic poetics, I would like to test this model on a few poems that both solicit and frustrate stanzaic reading. James Merrill's "Self-Portrait in a Tyvek™ Windbreaker" (1992) appears conventional at first glance, its eight-line groups demarcated by white space, measured by meter, and bound by rhyme. But the poem only hints at the possibility of exact repetition, instead arranging rhymes in various sequences:

> The windbreaker is white with a world map.
> DuPont contributed the seeming-frail,
> Unrippable stuff first used for Priority Mail.
> Weightless as shores reflected in deep water,
> The countries are violet, orange, yellow, green;
> Names of the principal towns and rivers, black.
> A zipper's hiss, and the Atlantic Ocean closes
> Over my blood-red T-shirt from the Gap.
>
> I found it in one of those vaguely imbecile
> Emporia catering to the collective unconscious
> Of our time and place. This one featured crystals,
> Cassettes of whalesong and rain-forest whistles,
> Barometers, herbal cosmetics, pillows like puffins,
> Recycled notebooks, mechanized lucite coffins
> For sapphire waves that crest, break, and recede,
> As they presumably do in nature still. (Merrill 669)

In loose five-beat lines often ending with a punctuated stop, Merrill uses rhyme closure in conjunction with the eight-line visual unit, which is also usually marked by a syntactical stop. But in these octaves the first and eighth lines turn out to be the *only* consistent rhyme pair. Inside this rhyme envelope Merrill uses couplets, alternating rhymes, pararhymes, and non-rhymes to

[57] Stephanie Burt has argued for a peculiar resonance between actual shipping containers and poetic forms, though interestingly does not specify stanzas as a key part of her investigation. See Burt, "Shipping Containers" (2017).

rearrange each octave in succession. This variation of rhyme pattern *is* the stanzaic pattern.

The most important thing to note about these variations on an eight-line rhyme envelope is the strain on the auditory imagination.[58] The rhymes that bookend each visual group are too distant to chime effectively, and we cannot form definite expectations of the constantly shifting inset rhymes. So rhyme patterns improvise while the rhythmic forces hold a steady bassline. As the eighteen stanzaic groups of Merrill's poem seems to point out, principally with examples from fashion and music, the point of aesthetics is "modulation":

> Well, back before animal species began to become
> Extinct, a dictator named Mussolini banned
> The street-singers of Naples. One smart kid
> Learned their repertoire by heart, and hid.
> Emerging after the war with his guitar,
> He alone bearing the old songs of the land
> Into the nuclear age sang with a charm,
> A perfect naturalness that thawed the numb
>
> Survivors and reinspired the Underground.
> From love to grief to gaiety his art
> Modulates effortlessly, like a young man's heart,
> Tonic to dominant – the frets so few
> And change so strummed into the life of things
> That Nature's lamps burn brighter when he sings
> Nanetta's fickleness, or chocolate,
> Snow on a flower, the moon, the seasons' round. (669-670)

These stanzas similarly bear old techniques into an uncertain future on effortless modulations. One stanza may rhyme all its lines in an intricate scheme, with only one adjacent pair (hid / kid), while the next stanza returns to couplets and leaves some lines unrhymed (few / chocolate). The poet's cheeky riff on "perfect naturalness" and "change so strummed into the life of things" recalls organicist formalisms,[59] but he ultimately affirms that any aesthetic scheme is artificial:

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[58] As opposed to Saintsbury's claim that stanzaic schemes are only to be judged by the "test" of the ear (*Historical Manual of English Prosody* 34).

[59] This is a direct quote from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (Wordsworth 67). Interestingly, the quoted phrase comes from a line broken between two strophic paragraphs in Wordsworth's blank verse poem.

> Don’t ask, Roberto. Sing our final air:
>
> Love, grief, etc. **** for good reason.
> Now only ******* STOP signs
> Meanwhile ***** if you or I've ex-
> ceeded our [?] *** more than time was needed
> To fit a text airless and ** as Tyvek
> With breathing spaces and between the lines
> Days brilliantly recurring, as once *we* did,
> To keep the blue wave dancing in its prison. (673)

The final stanza presents the reader with a gaping hole of text—perhaps the fragmentary corpus of what songs remain, perhaps an iconic evocation of the titular windbreaker—and turns the pattern of variations on end. Where stanzaic blocks and loose meter had undergirded the poem’s rhyme matrix, Merrill disrupts the solidity of linear rhythms and the visual appearance of the poem while interweaving rhyme sounds “With breathing spaces and between the lines,” shaping the ultimate stanza to be completely different from the poem it concludes.[60]

But the postwar era also gives rise to strategies not so wedded to technical contrivance. Sylvia Plath’s “Ariel” (1960) is more typical of midcentury free verse, segmented in three-line groups that do not consistently correspond to rhyme, meter, or syntax:

> Stasis in darkness.
> Then the substanceless blue
> Pour of tor and distances.
>
> God’s lioness,
> How one we grow,
> Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow
>
> Splits and passes, sister to
> The brown arc
> Of the neck I cannot catch, (Plath 239)

[60] Absent the expectation of musical accompaniment, the value of succession lies principally in the possibilities of schematic break. As Barbara Herrnstein-Smith notes, variations in terminal stanzas are perhaps the most compelling technical possibility in nonmusical stanzaic verse (*Poetic Closure* 59). Karl Shapiro and Robert Beum’s *A Prosody Handbook* (1965) and Chard Powers Smith’s *Pattern and Variation in Poetry* (1923) similarly treat stanzas as structures that make possible additional kinds of schematic variation.

One might be tempted to claim that this is merely typographical arrangement,[61] but as we have seen with Dickinson's verse, visual configurations are themselves meaningful patterns. Plath's three-line units evince no clear meter, but contain a surprising amount of irregular rhyming. We intermittently hear echoes at line endings—darkness / lioness, grow / furrow, blue / to—that can be slant, apocopated, or internal. Rhymes cross stanzaic gaps, fall in the middle of lines, or resonate with multiple other rhyme words, as Plath uses the three-line frame consistently to disorganize our sonic expectations.

Despite the seeming arbitrariness of the visual form, the stanzas of "Ariel" create semiotic effects and networks of association through appearance alone. The three-line units suggest a carefully crafted imbalance, and even a forward momentum, juxtaposing various linear and syntactical periods against visual regularity. Plath's pattern leaves open the possibility of transitioning to regular rhyme or meter, and these typographical units evoke other poems in similar schemes. Tercets without any definite rhyme scheme recall the work of Wallace Stevens, and the short, irregular lines evoke the earlier poems of H.D.,[62] as Plath locates her practice within a canon of modernist verse experiments, though she plays quite deftly with rhyme:

> Hauls me through air—
> Thighs, hair;
> Flakes from my heels.
>
> White
> Godiva, I unpeel—
> Dead hands, dead stringencies.

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[61] As alleged by Philip K. Jason, who reads this poem as emblematic of the "deceit" in using visual arrangement to suggest stanzaic form without other types of stanzaic pattern, dismissing these "anti-stanzas" as false (742). Jason's relatively contemporary argument would of course equally apply to the stanzas of poems like Stevens's "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," which could simply be relineated without stanzaic gaps.

[62] Regarding Stevens, one thinks especially of "The Snow Man" and "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," along with later long poems such as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "The Auroras of Autumn," and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." With reference to H.D., one sees the similarity of short lines in tight groupings also found in "Helen," "Oread," or "Sea Rose," though H.D.'s stanzaic units are often bound by syntactical closure, not a numerical line limit. For an interestingly contemporary parallel, see H.D.'s 1961 *Helen in Egypt,* also written in unrhymed tercets.

> And now I
> Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
> The child's cry
>
> Melts in the wall.
> And I
> Am the arrow,
>
> The dew that flies
> Suicidal, at one with the drive
> Into the red
>
> Eye, the cauldron of morning. (239-240)

In an echo of the poem's beginning, Plath begins to weave rhymes in and out of these irregular lines (air / hair, heels / unpeel, stringencies / seas, I / cry). Lines correspond loosely to phrasal segments or images, and enjambments occur enough to make the pattern indeterminate, such that the final tercet's three successive enjambments spill over into an envoi line. Just as the poem works this tercet to a new looseness, without any syntactical or rhyme closures to shore up the linear unit, it ends. Plath uses the strong enjambment and early pause to rein in the pace of the accelerating poem, while deceptively positioning this break in the pattern as the moment of synthesis and closure. And even as the final line abrogates the visual stanzaic pattern, it evokes terza rima, which typically closes its rhyme lattice with a one-line envoi. The linear-phrasal counterpoint makes Plath's stanzaic groups exceptionally malleable, even as rhyme riffs and tight visual groupings suggest strong resonance with traditional forms.

If we take one step further back in time, Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues" (1925) bears some of the hallmarks of modernist prosody—no predictable meter or rhyme scheme, strophic blocks of variable length—although it also quite clearly manipulates blues phrasing:

> Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
> Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
> I heard a Negro play.
> Down on Lenox Avenue the other night

> By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
> He did a lazy sway. . .
> He did a lazy sway. . .
> To the tune o' those Weary Blues. (Hughes 50)

Hughes's poem begins with a twenty-two-line unit, but the visual pattern has less influence than the rhymes and syntactical repetitions, which arrange three-line groups reminiscent of twelve-bar (AAB) blues progressions,[63] while at the same time borrowing a loose pentameter from literary verse for the longer couplets. He riffs on the three-line motif while also building subordinate stanzaic units that combine and intersect. The initial lines rhyme AABCCBBD, clearly arranging rhyme pairs to reconfigure our expectations of blues patterns, as when line six acts as a hinge between completing an initial sestet and beginning another AAB progression right at the moment of rhyme closure. Hughes's insistent rhymes, coupled with a low incidence of enjambment, allow the musical cadences to stand out against the otherwise unobtrusive stanzaic units.

He brings the poem to a turning point by incorporating two stanzas from what is ostensibly another lyric and making the poem's only visual stanzaic break:

> In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
> I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
> "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
> Ain't got nobody but ma self.
> I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
> And put ma troubles on the shelf."
>
> Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
> He played a few chords then he sang some more—
> "I got the Weary Blues
> And I can't be satisfied.
> Got the Weary Blues
> And can't be satisfied—
> I ain't happy no mo'
> And I wish that I had died." (50)

[63] These progressions are often described by the shorthand "AAB." This notation highlights the conventional structural or thematic parallel between the first and second lines (which are frequently similar and occasionally identical), and does not necessarily reflect rhyme. A typical twelve-bar blues includes three lines of lyrics, each sung over a four-bar phrase. This basic lyric structure (AAB or AA'B) organizes most standard blues progressions.

The two inset stanzas quoted here, an ABAB quatrain and an ABABCB sestet, both offer textual rearrangements of the three-line musical progression. In the sestet Hughes breaks each sung verse line in half, disguising a rhymed triplet (satisfied / satisfied / died), and in the quatrain the first two lines match in syntactical structure while the longer third line is split in the middle and rhymes with the second. His poem modulates between the irregular but measured verse of Eliot and the insistent rhythms of the blues, while arranging the incorporated song within larger strophic groupings. Rather than organizing the poem into cleanly contained visual units, Hughes strings together smaller batches of rhymed lines into macrostructural strophes that feel both improvisatory and meticulous. His use of rhymed couplets and blues progressions demonstrates the possibilities of combination and juxtaposition in heteromorphic stanzaic progression, presaging the various arrangements of the next hundred years of Anglophone stanzaic verse.

Merrill, Plath, and Hughes do not treat the stanza as a shape of limitations and prescription; variations, manipulations, and rearrangements of stanzaic structure are instead crucial to their poetries. Although these types of schematic experimentation and prosodic counterpoint slip through the cracks of prosodic treatises, they continue to sustain lyric practice in the postwar era, and we need a renewed stanzaic theory to recognize and analyze them. As we excavate poems historically or transhistorically, reading them in context or in isolation, treating them as silent texts or musical speech, we find the stanza "lurking" behind critical and theoretical discourses on poetic form. The "room" in which we find ourselves, the stanza, remains vital to Anglophone verse, and a reimagined stanzaic prosody will not only broaden our analytical horizons, but could prove integral to advancing conversations in contemporary formal poetics.

The Shape of What Follows

While I will continue to analyze poems through the framework of formal segmentation and combination outlined here, I trust that the previous examples demonstrate the importance of a renewed stanzaic prosody. The chapters that follow engage the poetries of W. H. Auden, Derek Walcott, and Jorie Graham, pursuing an understanding of stanzaic form within the cultural upheavals of the postwar era. I have chosen primarily to examine three poets because the methodology of cataloguing examples of historical stanzaic practice has yielded negligible advancement in stanzaic theory, and because I believe a greater case for stanzaic poetics can be made through extensive treatment of individual writers' technical innovations.[64] I have picked these poets in particular for their careful attention to craft and the formal traditions of poetry, but also because their various historical moments and cultural backgrounds will allow us to construct a broadly viable picture of prosody in mainstream Anglophone verse. I explore stanzaic techniques of various sorts—an array of combinatory strategies used by Auden, a complex and multifaceted form created by Walcott for an epic poem, and the development of one particular segmentive pattern (visual scheme) in Graham's work—to demonstrate not only that the possibilities of stanzaic form change throughout the twentieth century, but also that these poets' distinctive reconfigurations of traditional stanzaic schemes both evoke and respond to broader cultural transformations. For these poets, stanzaic patterns refract and reframe questions about

[64] In some respects, the "best" books on stanzaic prosody of the last forty years are not "about" the stanza at all but about particular authors: Stephen Cushman's *William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure* (1985) focuses on Williams's unique prosody, thereby advancing a particular theory of free verse as a useful benchmark for other postwar poetry. Dennis Taylor's *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody* (1988) explores the most formally innovative poet of the generation preceding the high modernists, with a helpful appendix of forms included. Helen Vendler's *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (2007) is an impressive volume of focused formal attention organized in chapters on particular forms, such as ottava rima or trimeter. Another approach focuses on the resonance of certain forms: see Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (1999), David Caplan's *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form* (2004), and Stephanie Burt, *The Art of the Sonnet* (2010).

the modern world—about how people remember, how they consume difference, and how they attempt to transcend the limitations of their physical bodies—that can neither be answered fully within the compass of prosody, nor be exported entirely to the domain of culture.

My first chapter begins in the early postwar era, exploring the stanza's connection to memory in the poetry of W. H. Auden. I consider how his verse responds to a shifting memorial culture and anxieties about commemoration in the wake of the world wars, and reinterprets his own declaration that poetry be "memorable speech." Understanding poetic memorability as a multifaceted "structuring of forgetfulness" involving mnemonic schemes, formal echoes, and the amnesiac structures of literary history, I argue that Auden shapes many of his stanzaic forms to tie together cultural imperatives of memory and the inevitability of forgetting. Although many of his technical strategies undermine poetry's traditional mnemonic tools, his work also encodes stanzas with the memory of other poems. For Auden this systemic memory, inscribed within the shifting stanzas of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" or the muted alcaics of "Epistle to a Godson," offers a form of memorability not predicated on sociopolitical impact. He worries about the political danger of a "resonant lie" that outlives (via form) its historically specific meanings or is "modified in the guts of the living," even as he recognizes the inevitable oblivions of literary history. In meditations on poetic commemoration and cultural memory, Auden's enigmatic prosody both enables and complicates his pursuit of memorable speech, marking the stanza as a site where histories can be reconfigured and contested over the ground of memory.

My second chapter enters the global economy of the late twentieth century, connecting the stanzaic structures of Derek Walcott's *Omeros* to the poem's imbrication in networks of touristic value and exchange. Walcott presents his stanzas, adapted from Dantean and Homeric forms, as representative of Caribbean geography, colonial history, and canonical influence. While

marking and marketing his rhythms and rhymes as Caribbean seascapes, he meditates on his role in enabling readers' poetic tourism and filtering his native St. Lucia through European forms. This figurative invitation to tourist-readers to visit the poem's desirable stanzaic locales is compounded by the formal hybridity of Walcott's verse, which sets visual tercets echoing Dante in counterpoint to quatrain rhyme schemes suggestive of calypso song. Like the signs that organize touristic gazing, the stanzas of *Omeros* cater to Anglo-American audiences in search of exotic difference and frame that difference within recognizable conventions. Yet while the poem treats the history encoded within stanzas as a destination primarily available to privileged readers, I argue that its verse also disrupts the touristic practices of formalist reading. Walcott's stanzas, resonating with echoes of Caribbean history and European traditions, force the reader to recognize that forms invoke cultural and historical obligations beyond the economic circuits of touristic desire that draw readers to the poem.

My third chapter explores Jorie Graham's visual stanzaic prosody, reading her typographical experimentation in light of her concern with poetic embodiment. Approaching her poems as "voice too full of space," I argue that her stanzaic structures question the ways in which bodies can be bodied and voices can be voiced in poetry at the end of history, materially encoding anxieties about existential threats such as climate change and artificial intelligence in the space of the page. Graham develops distinctly visual stanzaic structures, manipulating our sense of poetic form as both "silhouette" and "skeleton" (Hollander, *Melodious Guile* 5) to reframe somatic theories of poetic form within the confines of the text. I demonstrate how she moves from traditional free verse stanzas that resemble the work of poets like Williams or Plath toward schemes of extreme linear contrast, increasingly exploring "coaxial" arrangements and "machine-cut" stanzas to destabilize the link between physical body and material text. By

transforming the visual text into a somatic field, Graham's poems fictively extend and replicate the body while questioning the durability of both bodies and texts in the shadow of climate catastrophe and the advent of artificial intelligences.

The final "stanza" (if you will) of each chapter attempts to extend and refract the argument of the entire chapter through the work of other poets. These brief glimpses of other writers will, I hope, illustrate that many poets in the postwar era route their thematic concerns and aesthetic experiments through stanzaic patterns. They make an important point which is central to the project: I am not merely arguing for the importance of a revised and revitalized stanzaic prosody to the analysis of a handful of poets, nor am I primarily invested in charting the extensive edifices of memory, tourism, and embodiment that Auden, Walcott, and Graham build around and in their stanzaic forms. By formulating a combinatory-segmentive model of stanzaic prosody, I aim to demonstrate both that the stanza is a vital node in the technical developments of the postwar era, and that stanzaic poetry after the advent of free verse allows unique insight into how poetic forms develop at the intersections of transhistorical aesthetic traditions and contemporary cultural pressures.

Chapter One

Stanzaic Form and Poetic Memorability in W. H. Auden

"For poetry makes nothing happen." Out of the vast corpus of twentieth-century Anglophone verse, this is perhaps the phrase we most remember, proving the line's oft-forgotten ending correct: "For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives" (Auden, *Collected Poems* 248).[65] The part we forget, that "it survives," is the only repeated phrase in the second section of Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (1939), yet somehow carries less memorable weight than the more famous dictum. We forget "it survives," yet we remember the poem, and it survives. Amid the slant rhymed ten-line stanza, this striking repetition—an identical trisyllabic end rhyme—should stick out in our memories, but as the poem makes clear, poetry is in equal measure a vehicle for memory and a site of amnesia. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" continues a tradition of poetic commemoration in a sequence of various stanza forms while also raising questions about how poetic form relates to memorability. In its shifts from strophic free verse to slant-rhymed hexameters to heptasyllabic rhymed couplets, Auden's elegy demonstrates the pliability of form in the service of memory. As these stanzas commemorate the dead poet and even recall Yeats's verse, we see how poetry may indeed be "modified in the guts of the living" (*CP* 247), reframed and altered at the same time as it is formally commemorated.

Auden articulates his craft in the language of memory throughout his career, from his 1935 assertion that the "best definition" of poetry is "memorable speech" (*EA* 327) to his 1955 prayer in "Homage to Clio," "teach us our recollections" (*CP* 613). And yet his verse also pushes

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[65] Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to a number of Auden's collected volumes by shorthand: *CP* for the *Collected Poems* (1976), *EA* for *The English Auden* (1977), and the format *P3* designating a particular volume of the *Collected Prose* from the *Complete Works of W. H. Auden.*

back against the workings of memory. Harvey Gross argues that despite Auden's mastery of versification, he utterly lacks "resonance," dismissing the poet's later prosody as "mannerism" and technical "carelessness" (Gross 249, 259-260). Literally the ability to sound repeatedly (from the Latin "resonantia," meaning "echo"), "resonance" evokes the repetitive sonic structures of verse form while also suggesting the broader social significance necessary to preserve a poem in cultural memory. Recognizing that stanzaic forms organize poems' capacities for memorable language, Auden indeed experiments with increasingly loose stanzaic schemes in his middle and later verse to explore how poetry survives in cultural memory or takes on historical force. He continually returns to the problem of memory in poetic form both because he sees how his own verse is remembered in the public sphere—as one of the few postwar poets whose poems quickly become curricular mainstays (and even fodder for a Lyndon Johnson campaign ad)[66]—and because he sees the rhetorical danger of resonance in the rise of authoritarian dictators. Auden responds to Gross in "Ode to Terminus" (1968), "abhorred in the Heav'ns are all / self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an / audience, utter some resonant lie" (*CP* 811), indicting poetic "resonance" for its capacity to preserve dishonest or harmful rhetoric, after decades spent studying the shadowy border between remembering and forgetting in poetic form.

In crafting elaborate stanzaic designs that eschew conventional rhyme and accentual-syllabic meter—unorthodox rhyme schemes, heteromorphic stanzaic sequences, syllabic quatrains modeled on Horatian ode forms—Auden invests a lot of time in verse that seems unlikely to stand the test of time, but his capacious notion of memorability allows for an element

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[66] The very year Gross's critique was published (1964), the Johnson campaign echoed a line from "September 1, 1939" in the famous "Daisy" television spot. Auden excludes "September 1, 1939" from his collected works, likely because of hearing stanza eight's final line ("We must love one another or die") appropriated in Johnson's political ad. (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 478). "Daisy" only aired once before the campaign pulled it, but was widely replayed on news broadcasts. For more see Robert Mann, *Daisy Petals and Mushroom Clouds: LBJ, Barry Goldwater, and the Ad that Changed American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

of forgetting in the operation of memory. He uses traditional poetic forms to recall, but also to overwrite, previous iterations of those forms, and his poetry frequently addresses itself to the task of commemorating, though often in practice commemoration discloses the threat of amnesia. For Auden, poetry's long tradition of continuously reshaping itself depends on formal operations of recall and forgetting, and his experimentation with a wide variety of stanzaic structures offers us a way to think about memorability through the disjunctures and continuities of verse form.

This chapter explores Auden's stanzaic poetics by framing his verse as an index of the postwar era's concerns about the modes and practices of cultural memory. While much scholarship on the crisis of memory in the postwar era politicizes the objects and ideologies of memory, I focus on the ways Auden's verse forms embrace and disrupt poetry's combined function as a medium and a system of memory. I ground my analysis in a number of stanzaic techniques—unorthodox rhyme schemes, heteromorphic sequences, syllabic quatrains—that he uses to destabilize our sense of poetic memorability. As he crafts forms that warp the echoes of rhyme, transform in sequence, and unmake the traditional mnemonic quatrain, Auden's formal experimentation broadens our understanding of poetic memorability amid the shifting cultural imperatives around memorialization in the postwar era. His work encourages the reader to reevaluate the role of stanzaic patterns in organizing the mnestic resources of verse and in balancing the pressures of history against the tropological possibilities of form.

Stanzaic Memorability

In his 1935 introduction to *The Poet's Tongue* Auden declares, "Of the many definitions of poetry, the simplest is still the best: 'memorable speech'… and the stimulus is the audible

spoken word and cadence" (*EA* 327). This memorability inheres in the sonic elements of verse, yet four years later, he has developed stanzas that are extremely difficult to hear, challenging standard formal models of poetic memorability in "In Memory of Sigmund Freud" (1939):

> When there are so many we shall have to mourn,
> when grief has been made so public, and exposed
> to the critique of a whole epoch
> the frailty of our conscience and anguish,
>
> of whom shall we speak? For every day they die
> among us, those who were doing us some good,
> who knew it was never enough but
> hoped to improve a little by living. (*CP* 273)

Memorable speech this may be, but certainly not because of conventional forms. The syllabic stanzas lay prosy language across numerical periods that are difficult to hear in English. Despite frequent iambic rhythms, the stanzas never settle into accentual-syllabic patterns, and without rhymes or consistent phrasal periods, the stanza becomes an icon of unevenness and a fretwork for hectic syntax, breaking discrepant rhythms with frequent enjambments. Why write in stanzas, typically understood as combinations of rhyme and meter, if only to distort the mnemonic and organizational affordances of those forms? Where did this sort of poem come from?

Auden develops a new kind of "memorable speech" principally through experiments with less mnemonically effective stanzas, following the advances of modernist prosody. He starts writing just as *The Waste Land* (1922) reshapes the poetic landscape,[67] while the conventional patterns of Anglophone verse cede their cultural currency to more innovative techniques. He pinpoints the beginning of this shift in Eliot's "Prufrock" (1915), which solves "the prosodic problem of how to escape from the iambic convention" and "the organisation problem of how to escape from stanzaic succession" (*P3* 354). "Prufrock" makes possible new kinds of prosody—

[67] For more on the encounter that seems to have initiated his poetic vocation, see Davenport-Hines 40-42.

its stanzas vary in internal dynamics and structural function, coordinating lines of different lengths and rhythms—and these emergent possibilities enable poets like William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore to deconstruct the mnemonic architecture of stanzaic form:

> By the road to the contagious hospital
> under the surge of the blue
> mottled clouds driven from the
> northeast — a cold wind. Beyond, the
> waste of broad, muddy fields
> brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen (Williams, *Collected Poems* 183)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> wade
> through black jade.
> Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
> adjusting the ash-heaps;
> opening and shutting itself like (Moore, *Complete Poems* 32)

These formal units—strophic free verse and rhymed syllabics—suggest that stanzaic structures are no longer under the same pressure to construct memorable speech in conventional ways. Jettisoning rhyme or meter (or even both), the disaggregated stanza that survives into the postwar era leaves behind the most mnemonically effective tools of English verse.

Mnemonic efficacy may be only one part of poetic memorability, but for Auden and many of his contemporaries aesthetic form serves as a bellwether of social change,[68] and the emblematic prosodies of modernist verse—prose poetry, syllabics, free verse—typify an era in which the value of memory is renegotiated more broadly. Just as these verse techniques seem to court amnesia, with the fading of conventional rhymes and meters leading to a diminishment in the mnemonic force of English verse and a departure from its formal traditions, modern political

[68] Auden: "Plato said that when the modes of music change the walls of the city are shaken. It might be truer to say, perhaps, that a change in the modes gives warning of a shaking of the walls in the near future. The social strains which break out in political action are first experienced by artists as a feeling that the current modes of expression are no longer capable of dealing with their real concerns" (*P3* 513).

formations such as the nation-state similarly rely upon a fictive and selective remembering that borders collective amnesia.[69] But these aesthetic and political upheavals are also inextricable from acts of remembrance. The modernist notion of tradition is acquired by "making it new,"[70] and twentieth-century nationalism required the institutional dissemination of imagined national mythologies that engendered wars, fascism, and even a new regime of commemoration (for the Holocaust) that supplanted memorial nationalism. After the mnemonic cataclysm of World War I, which destroyed lives and stories on an unprecedented scale and ushered in an era of nationalist commemoration, Auden's generation faced the prospect of another war, and greater political pressure on artists.[71] The specter of millions more dead further raised the cultural stakes of remembering and the profile of public art, even as many saw how the previous war, despite the material changes it had caused in their lives,[72] was already being forgotten.

Auden's poems draw out this tension between remembrance and oblivion that animates the public forms and discourses of memorability in the mid-twentieth century. The specter of amnesia hung over communal acts of memory in the interwar and postwar eras, as modern memorial culture (especially monuments) paradoxically placed complex histories in public architectures that simultaneously allowed for those histories to be communicated and ignored (Connerton 29).[73] Along with many of his contemporaries, Auden became fascinated with the

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[69] For more on the nation-state as a form of forgetting, see Connerton 48-50 and Anderson 187ff. (esp. 204-206).
[70] Especially as described by Pound and Eliot, whose "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) offers the best formulation of this concept.
[71] World War I raised the stakes of memory, both demanding it in the commemoration of the war dead, and destroying it, as families, lineages, and stories were erased on an unprecedented scale (Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* 342). Remembering the war did not mix easily with high art; aesthetically innovative modernists left the documentation and recollection of war to less avant-garde writers, perpetuating a split between high literary technique and the less obtrusive representational modes of memoir (Fussell 340).
[72] Auden's life in 1910s-20s England was surrounded by markers of the war, from early pub closing hours and the fashion of wristwatches to cigarette smoking, garden allotments, and playing the national anthem in theaters, social practices that persisted long after Versailles (Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* 342).
[73] Specifically monuments to the "Unknown Soldier," satirized in "The Unknown Citizen" (*CP* 252).

proliferation of memorial forms like the cenotaph, seemingly one of the chief symbols of the twentieth century, that commemorates but also explicitly erases the particulars of its object, arguably memorializing amnesia itself.[74] Remembering seemed to involve forgetting, and a growing chorus of thinkers, following Freud's theories of psychological repression, began to theorize the need to forget as a constitutive feature of memory: "the capacity to remember is also the capacity to elide or distort, and in other cases… may mean the capacity simply to forget" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 153-54).[75] So too twentieth-century theorists of poetry began to celebrate the connections of poetry and forgetting as much as highlight the mnestic functions of verse; modern poetry could still demand to be learned by heart, but it could also "commemorate amnesia" (Derrida, "Che cos'è la poesia?" 289).[76]

Amid these currents of forgetting, Auden rearranges traditional stanzaic patterns (like the syllabic quatrains of the Freud elegy) to address the demands of modern memory without distancing his work from the poetry of the past.[77] While the stanza seems out of place in the era of free verse, it also emblematizes poetic form as a whole and organizes the mechanisms of

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[74] On this interest, see Davenport-Hines 109; Auden, *A Certain World* 382.

[75] See also Young, *The Texture of Memory*; Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Nora, "The Era of Commemoration"; Augé, *Oblivion*; Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*; and Bernard-Donals, *Forgetful Memory*.

[76] The theoretical relationship between poetry and memory in the broader Western literary tradition goes back to Cicero's portrayal of the Greek poet Simonides as the father of mnemotechnics (*De Oratore II*). The etymology of "stanza" recalls Simonides's legendary "memory palace," in which the locational schema (the "room") functions as mnemonic aid. On poetry's generally mnestic function see also Fussell, *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form* (172); Meschonnic, *Critique du Rythme* (108-109); Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (1-2). Conversely, Martin Heidegger celebrates poetry as "the saying of the unconcealedness [aletheia] of what is," unable to talk about poetry without invoking amnesia, riffing on the Greek ἀλήθεια for truth, meaning the things not cast into Lethe to be forgotten (Heidegger 74); Giorgio Agamben similarly articulates poetry as a "reverse embrace of memory and forgetting" (Agamben 45), and even in Auden's day, poets like T. E Hulme were already proposing that the mnemonic permanence of regular rhyme and meter was less appealing than the impermanence of more visual forms (Hulme 264-270).

[77] Auden appreciates stanzaic organization perhaps more than any other element of poetic form, as seen in his many reviews and essays on poets such as Hardy (*P2* 48, *P3* 678), Byron (*P5* 192-193), Moore (*P2* 235), Larkin (*P4* 300). He traces larger stanzaic structural movement in English lyric back to Renaissance poetry, approvingly quoting Theodore Spencer's description in "The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney" of how Italian stanzaic poetics encouraged a broader kind of "movement and counterpoint" that gradually became part of the English tradition (*P5* 351).

versification, typically combining schemes of rhyme, meter, visual grouping, and syntactical period it. Stanzaic memorability certainly hinges upon schemes of rhyme and meter, but its mnestic functions go beyond prosodic organization. Stanzaic patterns do not merely hold content but shape how verse can engage the memory and signal poetry's intrinsically mnestic dimension: "stanzas can figure ghostly remains of departed voices… part of the charm of stanzas is that they are rooms haunted by cultural specters of forms that predate the printed page" (Fried 55). Auden configures these "rooms" to facilitate memory in various ways, employing stanzaic forms to organize content for recall, allude to other poems, continue the self-perpetuating system of poetic tradition in form, and trope the workings of memory in formal repetition.

Yet while critics understand forms like stanzas as aids in the project of poetic memory, poetry's capacity to stick in our memories may also reshape or compromise its ability to preserve information for recall: "Rhythm, repetition, and rhyme work to create formulations that are in some way striking, often with an opacity that gives them an existence independent of a message, makes them stick in the memory" (Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* 305).[78] These "sticky" forms can equally facilitate misremembering, as Isobel Armstrong illustrates, if one recalls only portions of stanzas or passages, leaving the mind to fill in gaps with words that fit the cadence (Armstrong, "Meter and Meaning" 26-27). To commemorate an event in lyric stanzas (such as the outset of World War II in "September 1, 1939") also risks eclipsing the occasion and reshaping history according to the dictates of form, threatening to replace memory with pure repetition or make the monumental into the momentary (North 127, 153). Visual pattern in particular seems to guard

[78] Stanzaic verse appears only somewhat effective as a medium of memory. Nigel Fabb finds that mnemonic structures correlate with cognitive limits, such that the key units of verse fit into "working memory," or about fifteen English words, allowing for the average couplet but not longer stanzas (Fabb, *What is Poetry?* 19, 58-59). Still, as Fussell makes clear, the quatrain seems to be the most memorable form in English, as four-line groups of alternating rhyme often make up hymns, nursery rhymes, and popular songs, which account for most of the poetry a typical English speaker can remember (Fussell, *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form* 133).

the poem against amnesia, yet the written stanza's iconic self-reference also reminds us that the text ostensibly renders memory obsolete. Every stanzaic pattern that echoes beyond the chime of its rhymes, recalling a history of poems that have created our readerly expectations, also lies like a grave marker over the hundreds of unremembered poems that facilitated the development of that particular shape. In the Yeats elegy's third section, the tetrameter from "Under Ben Bulben" survives even after Auden employs a different pattern of visual grouping, partially masking the formal trace as he both exposes and contests the threat of amnesia. Thus the inscriptional outline of stanzaic shapes takes on an epitaphic significance that marks the oblivion of poetic history,[79] and the stanza's relation to memory might best be understood by Henry Rousso's description of postwar French memorial culture as the "structuring of forgetfulness" (*The Vichy Syndrome* 4), because even in the poems we remember, an element of forgetting inheres in the act of recall.

Auden addresses these mnestic entanglements in the forms of his poetry, constructing a model of "memorable speech" that goes beyond the question of whether a verse segment can be recalled.[80] This memorability serves as a mode for thinking through the history-marking and history-making capabilities of verse, because it concerns not only aesthetic preferences and expectations, but also the resonance of poetry in the political realm. Auden worries about the power poetry has in public discourse to control how and what we remember or forget, from the Yeats elegy, "modified in the guts of the living" (*CP* 247) to the "resonant lie" of "Terminus"

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[79] Auden learned this from his poetic idol Hardy. For more about epitaphic form, see Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody*, 173-177; Hollander, *Vision and Resonance* 249-51. This sense of inscriptional or epitaphic stanzaic shapes takes on a greater urgency with Jorie Graham's visual prosody, discussed in chapter three.

[80] This capaciousness for other meanings animates Auden's prosody. Beyond the historical or ideological significance of individual forms, his stanzas combine remembering with forgetting as feats of prosodic performance and ritual acts. He fetishizes "the graceful architecture of [Walter de la Mare's] stanzas," but also treats verse form as an allegory of the design of the universe (*P4* 397, 404). Every moment Auden's poetry engages modern memorial culture, it equally follows in the poetic footsteps of technical masters like Hardy and Byron, as he seeks to enter the realm of memorable verse and perhaps to impress the small community of scholars and aficionados who would appreciate such a performance.

(*CP* 811). His wariness of poetic resonance leads him to reconfigure and temper it, because poetry's power to enchant and embed itself in our memories resembles the authoritarian rhetoric of the late 1930s.[81] He recognizes that the memorability of traditional verse form has become suspect, worrying that poems might now seem mere "spells to befuddle the crowd" ("We Too Had Known Golden Hours," *CP* 622). Auden grows apprehensive about poetry's similarities to the crowd-befuddling oratory of authoritarian regimes from firsthand experience, famously repudiating his own poems "Spain" and "September 1, 1939" because he felt that both articulate reprehensible beliefs, and saw how their memorability only enhanced their popular appeal (as the Johnson campaign ad proved). Form's mnemonic efficacy and resistance to paraphrase allow it to survive but also to be repurposed or transformed in a new historical moment, with new political associations, to be modified in the memories of the living.

Balancing his wariness about the political efficacy of resonant lies with his faith in the transformational power of poetic language,[82] Auden adapts conventional stanzaic patterns for an era of mnestic transformation, appealing both to our ability to remember and our need to forget. Beginning in the late 1930s, his poems explore the complex dynamics of modern memory against the backdrop of geopolitical conflict, from the buildup to World War II to the nuclear

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[81] He often circumvents conventional models of poetic beauty, discarding sensuous language and sonorous cadences, often allied with the aesthetics of fascism. Virgil Nemoianu argues that both fascist and communist regimes opposed formalist aesthetics in the mid-century, so one could read Auden's adherence to strict forms as a principled commitment in opposition to totalitarianisms of the right and left, but form's abstraction also paves the way for mis-remembering and misrecognition (Nemoianu 53-54). Auden: "Verse, owing to its greater mnemonic power, is the superior medium to prose for didactic instruction… the form of the verse can parallel and reinforce the steps of the logic. Indeed, contrary to what most people who have inherited the romantic conception of poetry believe, the danger of argument in verse is that it will make the ideas too clear and distinct" (*P3* 128). While he sees political analogies in poetic form, like the dialectic of "freedom and order" he distills in syllabic stanzas (*P3* 649), he often compares poetic form to totalitarian order: "A society which really was like a poem and embodied all the esthetic values of beauty, order, economy, subordination of detail to the whole effect, would be a nightmare of horror, based on selective breeding, extermination of the physically or mentally unfit, absolute obedience to its Director, and a large slave class kept out of sight in cellars" (*P2* 348).

[82] Despite his aversion to resonance, Auden insists that limits encourage experimentation, that tradition confers and substantiates meaning, and that working in a particular form enables the poet to produce much subtler structural and thematic variations (*P3* 328).

arms race of the Cold War, as he becomes increasingly averse to the dangers of resonance in the political sphere. Taking stanzaic structures as forms that embed and organize forgetfulness within the larger memory systems of poetic traditions and canons, we can trace the connections between stanzaic prosody and memorability in terms beyond simple mnemonics. Auden's pursuit of "memorable" verse demonstrates that even amid the formal echoes of earlier poems, stanzaic structures involve forgetting, as we track the organizational schemes of his compositions to the "obscure nooks" of various formal segments within the "labyrinthine economies" of his poems ("The Horatians," *CP* 772-773). His experiments reveal how stanzaic form becomes a site of tension between the demands of memory and the inevitability of forgetting, teasing apart the links of lyric tradition as threads of memorability in verse structure.

Halcyon Structures: Rhyme's Rearrangements

As both the clearest element of traditional Anglophone stanzas and an antiquated pattern in the era of free verse, rhyme offers Auden generative opportunities for adapting stanzaic patterns to the demands of modern memory. He treats rhyme as ornamental rather than fundamental to verse form (*P1* 19), but also links it to time, writing in "Their Lonely Betters" (1950) about the linguistic gap between humans and other living things:

> Not one of them was capable of lying,
> There was not one which knew that it was dying
> Or could have with a rhythm or a rhyme
> Assumed responsibility for time. (*CP* 583)

A cheeky rhyme ties "rhyme" with the human potential to "assume responsibility for time," and while light verse seemingly trivializes this chiming, the link between "lying" and "rhyme," both enabled by the creative affordances of human language, should give us pause. Rhyme is part of

poetry's world of artifice, and can suggest (as here) an aesthetic coherence to otherwise suspect ideas. The notion that humans can by means of verse form "assume responsibility for time" is fanciful at best—the poet is no less a prisoner of time than the robins and flowers he discusses, and poetry has no authority over time beyond the fictive powers poets imaginatively accord it—and unsettlingly true at worst. Rhyme's capacity to enchant, to create coherence, and to endure can carry poems into the future with a potent resonance, one Auden variously embraces and questions in unorthodox rhyme schemes that disguise their connections to the poetry of the past, while also attending to the mnestic rearrangements of the present.

Rhyme's complicated relationship with memory emerges from the variety of its uses, which have been enumerated by an array of critics.[83] It plays a crucial role in what Sharon Cameron calls "the circularity of the lyric cry against time" (Cameron 250), literally re-calling previous verse sounds while addressing poetry's need to "get itself remembered" (Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* 180). The varieties of rhyme have been enumerated by many critics, most helpfully in Hollander's anatomy of the "mnemonic," "schematic," "musical," and "semantic" functions of rhyme (*Vision and Resonance* 121).[84] Rhyme's semantic dimension is the most tenuous and has puzzled critics for the past century,[85] opposite its suggestive link to pure music (121), and this pair begins to give shape to rhyme as a site of amnesia, where verse entwines the mechanics of meaning with the senselessness of sound. The combination of mnemonic and schematic focalizes

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[83] See especially Paul Hunter, "Seven Reasons for Rhyme"; Hugh Kenner, "Rhyme: An Unfinished Monograph"; Hollander, "Rhyme and the True Calling of Words" (*Vision and Resonance*); and W. K. Wimsatt, "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason" (*The Verbal Icon*).

[84] Hunter's "Seven Reasons for Rhyme" gives variations of these categories, beginning with mnemonic function, with some additional roles that are functionally hazier (Hunter 174 ff.).

[85] That Hollander takes the mnemonic and schematic to be more "primitive" highlights a widespread anxiety about modernity in lyric form. In "Lyric and Modernity" Paul de Man charts various strains of thought on the historical temporality of lyric, sketching one theory of lyric as "the very antithesis of modernity," drawing on criticism from Vico, Rousseau, Herder, Valery, and Proust, and a converse position that claims lyric as the essential genre of modernity, following Yeats, M. H. Abrams, Hugo Friedrich, and Marcel Raymond (*Blindness and Insight* 168).

this dynamic, if we can see how rhymed stanzaic organization will make portions of a poem relatively memorable (line endings) compared to other segments. So while rhyme seems to defy time and cement poetry in the memory,[86] it also embodies the loss of the lyric moment into the temporally extended act of reading by selectively cuing both anticipation and recall in the reader. Rhyme marks poems as sites where memory is engaged and contested, since any stanzaic unit longer than the rhymed couplet requires us to remember differentially, prioritizing sounds we expect to endure.[87] This demand creates a powerful tension in short lyrics, where seemingly simple echoes equally vex and stimulate our capacities and desires to remember.

Auden disconnects the standard model of rhyme—arranged at line endings at regular intervals—from some of his stanzaic compositions to explore this tension along two fronts, treating rhyme as a method for engaging with the material of poetic history as well as a device for achieving (or refusing) resonance. By forgoing some of the more obviously mnemonic advantages of regular rhymed structure, his poems often take on the work of remembering (and forgetting) other poems allusively in verse form. In "September 1, 1939" he repurposes the trimeter of Yeats's "Easter 1916" but trades the alternating quatrain rhyme scheme for irregular eleven-line stanzas, producing a complicated poem that still appeals to our memories but emphasizes concluding lines by rhymed closure rather than refrain. And yet this enigmatic form also gives birth to his most politically resonant line, "We must love one another or die" (*EA* 246), which Auden comes to see as an oversimplified and false statement of the problem facing Europe in the guise of fascism. He excludes the poem, possibly his most famous, from later

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[86] As Culler discusses, rhyme allows the reader to remember specific words, which is key to "remembering" poetry in more holistic ways (138). Reginald Gibbons's "On Rhyme" (2006) and George Szirtes's "Formal Wear: Notes on Rhyme, Meter, Stanza & Pattern" (2006) argue for rhyme's mnemonic importance, and work on memorability outside of literary studies has begun to stress the importance of rhyme sounds for linguistic recall, such as James B. Worthen and R. Reed Hunt's recent *Mnemonology* (2011), which examines the role of rhyme mnemonics in traditional adages, nursery rhymes, and songs from the disciplinary standpoint of psychology (74-76).

[87] See Fabb, *What is Poetry?* (58-59).

collections because its rhetorical power echoes the cadences of authoritarian oratory, writing in 1967, "If by memorability, you mean a poem like "Sept. 1st, 1939," I pray to God that I shall never be memorable again" (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 478).[88]

"September 1, 1939" marks the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany, but also recalls Yeats's "Easter 1916," another poem that similarly attempts to explain the significance of armed conflict, monumentalizing a historical occasion precisely by eliding many of its particular details.[89] Auden's rhyme scheme distances his poem from Yeats's, with less predictable patterns in each stanzaic group tracing the poem's paradoxical construction of remembering and forgetting its formal precedent. Auden has less faith in poetry's ability to shape meanings from crisis; though the eleven-line stanzas pay metrical homage, the tension of his rhymes against the iambic trimeter suggests a much more uneasy polity of sound:

> I sit in one of the dives
> On Fifty-Second Street
> Uncertain and afraid
> As the clever hopes expire
> Of a low dishonest decade:
> Waves of anger and fear
> Circulate over the bright
> And darkened lands of the earth.
> Obsessing our private lives;
> The unmentionable odour of death
> Offends the September night. (*EA* 245)

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[88] Auden dropped the eighth stanza because of its final line ("We must love one another or die") for the poem's publication in the 1945 *Collected Poetry*, but amended that line for *The New Pocket Anthology of American Verse* (1955). In the 1960s he chose to exclude the entire poem from his collected works, likely as a result of hearing that line appropriated in a political ad for the Lyndon Johnson presidential campaign (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 478). Anthony Hecht declares the verse "nothing less than memorable," and "a literary monument" (Hecht 152); Mendelson calls the offending line a "resonant affirmation" (*Early Auden* 326); Stephanie Burt later describes it as a "plausible, memorable interpretation of recent history" (""September 1, 1939" Revisited: Or, Poetry, Politics, and the Idea of the Public" 535). That line, perhaps Auden's best-known, offers the limit case for poetic memorability, suppressed by its author but surviving in public discourse from World War II to after 9/11.

[89] Marian Sugano argues that the move to commemorate by omitting specific details of an event is a convention of occasional verse (Sugano 11).

The poem sets up no expectation for a consistent scheme, as the first four lines pass without rhyming, making the fifth a moment of surprise. Each of the nine stanzaic units orders its rhymes differently, though the terminal line always completes a rhyme, creating a much looser schematic compared to the large aggregate strophes of rhymed quatrains in "Easter 1916." Auden's initial stanza only has three true rhymes, and five lines without a clear pair, though the poem's cleverness comes out in slant rhyming, as we hear hints of sonic similarity emerge. As we hear "expire" shift into a sequence of "fear," "earth," and then "death," the rhymes generate an air of sonic uncertainty, and we have no reason to expect any particular sound will return or endure.

In the irregular rhyme periods and frequency of slant rhymes Auden opens up a transformative aesthetic. By cross-cutting his stanzaic blocks with unorthodox rhyme schemes, he enables the "disappearance and elusiveness" that Simon Jarvis finds to be the most captivating feature of rhyme, in a potentially unfixed and "fugitive" operation of verse mechanics ("Why Rhyme Pleases" 443-446). Auden's rhymes can be missed or forgotten, then reappear in a surprising flash (as when "lives" picks up the sound of "dives" eight lines later). This "fugitive" sense of rhyme deepens Cameron's notion of the agon between lyric and time by suggesting rhyme might as clearly mark how time flies (*tempus fugit*) in our reading—after all, end rhyme cannot occur before you have already read two lines—while also shoring up the lyric bulwark against time's progress. These irregular rhymes can feel as incidental as the titular date, but they allow Auden's stanzas the flexibility to create a sense of immediacy, with each stanza changing the pattern of the last, as well as historical resonance, when each elusive rhyme has to justify its existence amid the din of war and the echoes of Yeats's masterpiece.[90] When the third stanza

[90] Burt describes the poem's tensile formal movement as "stanzas recapitulating history and embodying public uncertainties" (Burt 537), gauging the balance between the poem's attempt to explain contemporary politics as a logical historical outcome and its idiosyncratic structural gestures.

concludes with a more obvious rhyme, "The habit-forming pain, / Mismanagement and grief: / We must suffer them all again" (*EA* 245), we realize that the poem's historical determinism sounds hollow because it bears little resemblance to the unpredictable verse, which often relies on rhyme sounds stretched out and recalled after many lines as the stanzas unfold.

The poem repeatedly breaks from its "habit-forming," and we see in the fifth stanza what the musical and architectural (both riffing on the stanzaic) structures of our lives have obscured:

> Faces along the bar
> Cling to their average day:
> The lights must never go out,
> The music must always play,
> All the conventions conspire
> To make this fort assume
> The furniture of home;
> Lest we should see where we are,
> Lost in a haunted wood,
> Children afraid of the night
> Who have never been happy or good. (*EA* 246)

The poem's indictment of "convention" extends to its form. This long strophe conceals the occasional inclusion of smaller structures (calling back to the inset quatrains of Yeats's poem),[91] here songlike quatrains reminiscent of ballad-derived forms that both begin and end the longer strophic unit, the first completed by the assertion that "The music must always play." Rhyme's musicality serves as a marker of the commonplace, yet this sonic familiarity stands out as a manifest falsehood in the face of war, preventing the audience from recognizing that "Out of the mirror they stare, / Imperialism's face / and the international wrong" (*EA* 245). As we reach the striking thematic volta, "Lest we should see where we are," the rhyme from line one is completed, and it seems the poet will break through the veil of convention that prevents his

[91] "Easter 1916" is composed in cross-rhymed three-stress accentual quatrains (often suggesting iambic trimeter) grouped together in larger strophic blocks of 16, 24, 16, and 24 lines; as Vendler notes, their lengths allude to the rebellion's date: April 24th, 1916 (*Our Secret Discipline* 25).

audience (himself included) from seeing themselves implicated in the war in Europe, even as he uses another inset quatrain to wrap up the strophic unit, continuing to alter the poem's music..

The stanzaic form never fully stabilizes, and the final two stanzas[92] offer a clear contrast in rhyme strategies. Stanza eight consolidates its sonic force around a single sound:

> All *I* have is a voice
> To undo the folded *lie*,
> The romantic *lie* in the brain
> Of the sensual man-in-the-street
> And the *lie* of Authority
> Whose buildings grope the *sky*:
> There is no such thing as the State
> And no one exists alone;
> Hunger allows no choice
> To the citizen or the police;
> We must love one another or *die*. (*EA* 246) [93]

The poem folds its "lies" into internal rhymes, and this concerted effort to repeat the long 'i' sound at the beginning of the stanza pays off at the conclusion. The final line creates a powerful sonic contrast, as the stanza comes back to the 'i' sound at last, set off by a sonorous string of low vowel sounds. For the first time Auden closes a stanza with a third rhyme, such that the strikingly compressed ultimatum, "We must love one another or die," comes at a moment of coincident closure, where rhyme, syntax, and visual shape all punctuate the poem's most memorable line. And he positions the line at the end of the penultimate strophic unit, just where "Easter 1916" *omits* its powerful refrain ("A terrible beauty is born"), as if in answer to the more equivocal political force of Yeats's poem. We remember Auden's climactic line over its rhyme partners because its position concentrates the stanza's mnemonic force, even as most of the verse

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[92] The penultimate stanza was originally framed by two additional stanzas cut during the revision process, and in the typescript's eighth stanza the poet wrote of poetic vocation as a kind of communally-oriented recollection: "What can I do but recall / What everyone knows in his heart, / One Law applies to us all" (*Early Auden* 327).

[93] Emphases mine. On Auden's somewhat perplexing punctuation in this stanza, see Hecht 166.

fades from our memories. Yet the reader has to wonder whether this memorable dictum is not equally a "folded lie," a resonant call to action packaged nicely for recall regardless of its truth.

The final stanza also introduces a new wrinkle in the poem's rhyme pattern, carrying "lies" and the long 'i' over the stanzaic break (rhyming die/lies) to link these isolated units:

Defenceless under the night	A	
Our world in stupor lies;	B	
Yet, dotted everywhere,	C	
Ironic points of light	A	
Flash out wherever the Just	D	
Exchange their messages:	E	
May I, composed like them	F	
Of Eros and of dust,	D	
Beleaguered by the same	G	
Negation and despair,	C	
Show an affirming flame.	G	(*EA* 247)

The final stanza connects us to the previous stanza with the obvious reprise of "lies," and knits its other rhymes into a more cohesive scheme in subordinate multilinear groupings (completed in lines four, eight, and eleven), and in the pararhymes linking "lies" with "messages" and "them" with "same" and "flame." With one rhyme pair (everywhere/despair) hiding among smaller stanzaic units rounded off by rhyme, the conclusion marries a more regular repetition with one fugitive and easy-to-forget rhyme that reminds us these sounds are "dotted everywhere." This balance of sound at the conclusion is not nearly as memorable as the penultimate stanza's striking ultimatum, as Auden steps back from the kind of monumental resonance that Yeats creates via refrain. The seeming randomness of rhyme variation takes away the rhythms of expectation and fulfillment that typically characterize rhymed stanzas, but also places intense emphasis on each stanza's final line, where the reader can firmly expect and anticipate rhymed closure. Thus Auden manages a delicate formal exchange with "Easter 1916," recalling the

earlier poem's meter and strophic paragraphs while modifying the function of rhyme and dropping the refrain structure, masking the formal homage.

Auden's formal dialogue with "Easter 1916" charges his rhymes with the sounds of poetic history. Despite the explicitly political subject matter, in his enigmatic treatment of Yeats the problems of literary commemoration take center stage, a turn replicated in "At the Grave of Henry James" (1941). The poem reads as a prayer about literary memory and geopolitical crisis, and the stanzaic pattern recalls the epitaphic forms of Hardy's graveyard poems:

> The snow, less intransigeant than their marble,
> Has left the defence of whiteness to these tombs;
> For all the pools at my feet
> Accommodate blue, now, and echo such clouds as occur
> To the sky, and whatever bird or mourner the passing
> Moment remarks they repeat.
>
> While the rocks, named after singular spaces
> Within which images wandered once that caused
> All to tremble and offend,
> Stand here in an innocent stillness, each marking the spot
> Where one more series of errors lost its uniqueness
> And novelty came to an end. (Auden, *Horizon* 379)[94]

The description of graves maps suggestively onto the stanzaic form, which uses only one rhyme to mark the kind of stable closure and finality that arrests the each unit's rhythmic "uniqueness." These prosy sestets are quite deliberate with rhyme, reminiscent of Hardy's conventional alignment of rhymed lines and frequent use of short lines to close stanzas.[95] The longer lines are cadenced by the falling endings of lines one and five, and the rising endings of two and four, a

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[94] Auden treated this stanzaic form as a modular unit in his revisions, cutting the poem from twenty-eight stanzas in the initial *Horizon* publication to twenty-four in the 1945 *Collected Poems* and finally ten for the 1966 *Collected Poems* (Fuller 397). These citations refer to the original published version.

[95] Auden formally evokes poems such as "I Said to Love," "The Dame of Athelhall," and "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?" Hardy often closes rhymed stanzas longer than quatrains with short final lines. Tombs manifest the problems of memorial culture by connecting visual prosody to the inscriptions on tangible monuments.

terminal stress scheme[96] of the sort he uses frequently in syllabic poems such as the Freud elegy. This technique takes the shape of a rhyme scheme but without echo, serving as a showcase for the poet's virtuosity and ability to manage discrepant patterns within the stanzaic unit. Balancing the stress scheme with the simple rhyme, Auden practices memory as a construction of formal markers, placed as carefully as the marble gravestones.

The poet calls the operation of memory as recall into question. "What living occasion can / Be just to the absent?" he asks, contemplating "the small taciturn stone that is the only witness" to James's grave and this moment of address (379). Thinking about James, versifying like Hardy, the speaker turns from meditating on graves to aesthetic form while dismissing the war as "An army's primitive tidings," a mere curiosity:

> War has no ambiguities
> Like a marriage; the result
> Required of its *affaire fatale* is simple and sad,
> The physical removal of all human objects
> That conceal the Difficult.
>
> Then remember me that I may remember
> The test we have to learn to shudder for is not
> An historical event,
> That neither the low democracy of a nightmare nor
> An army's primitive tidings may deceive me
> About our predicament.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Let this orchard point to its stable arrangement
> Of accomplished bones as a proof that our lives
> Conceal a pattern which shows
> A tendency to execute formative movements, to have
> Definite experiences in their execution,
> To rejoice in knowing it grows. (381).

[96] I use this term throughout the chapter to refer to a method of organization that depends on line endings just like a traditional rhyme scheme, but instead of phonemic repetition, the pattern comprises the order of terminal accents in a given stanza. In this poem the stanzaic groups have unstressed terminal syllables in lines one and five, and stressed syllables concluding the other lines. This kind of scheme will become critical later on in this chapter to the discussion of Auden's "jagged" quatrains.

In an easy pastiche of James's style Auden trivializes the war and its casualties, suggesting that the "historical event" comprising the "physical removal of all human objects" is not worth the same memorial dedication as the author's tomb. And when his concern finally shifts from past to future, the resonant rhyme of "grows" gestures toward aesthetic patterns as living entities continuing to appeal to our memories, a "stable arrangement" rather than the "simple and sad" result of the war, despite the fact that his nominal subject is still a graveyard. The "formative movements" of the consistent rhyme and stress patterns shaping these stanzas endure as monuments to Auden's literary predecessors: the elegy literally memorializes James and riffs on his prose style, even as Hardy's unremarked presence in the form is powerfully evoked. Yet these currents of literary homage also participate in a larger act of forgetting, as the poet uses the "stable arrangement / Of accomplished bones" to memorialize a particular writer and celebrate abstract aesthetic patterns, eliding the horrific arrangement of bodies effected by the war.

At this juncture he considers the future of his own work and how he will be remembered through it, and prays for his art's freedom from a number of stylistic pressures:

> Preserve me, Master, from its vague incitement,
> Yours be the disciplinary image that holds
> Me back from agreeable wrong,
> And the clutch of the eddying muddle, lest Proportion shed
> The alpine chill of her shrugging editorial shoulder
> On my loose impromptu song.
>
> Suggest; so I may segregate my disorder
> Into districts of prospective value: approve;
> Lightly, lightly then may I dance
> Over the frontier of the obvious and fumble no more
> In the old limp pocket of the minor exhibition,
> Nor riot with irrelevance. (382)

Now subsuming political boundaries ("districts" and "frontier") into a world of aesthetics, Auden turns toward his work's "prospective value" and prays that the novelist's ghost guard against

"agreeable wrong." In hoping to have a place in literary history he elevates technique over politics. The danger he sees in poems such as "Spain" and "September 1, 1939" is not yet the "resonant lie" he condemns in "Ode to Terminus," but rather that he might be remembered as a merely political poet of the "minor exhibition," destined to "riot with irrelevance." In this light he introduces an even more complex rhyme device, a light touch that could push the poem over the "frontier of the obvious." Apocopated rhymes[97] link lines of different terminal rhythms, so that this "loose impromptu song" now has a complex web of linear connections tying the stanzas together: perfect rhymes connect lines three and six, trochaic cadences lines one and five, iambic cadences lines two and four, and now rhymes (holds/shoulder and disorder/more) link the first and second longer couplets within the sestet. Auden downplays the compositional subtleties of this "loose impromptu song," but also reminds us that the base structure (closed stanzas, bisected by rhyme) traces back to song forms predicated on regular units that are both mnemonically effective and structurally interchangeable, somehow both memorable and forgettable.

This emphasis on the musical dimension of rhyme pervades Auden's later light verse, because stanzaic patterns suggestive of song form seem to hold out the promise of transcending history and cementing his reputation, if his poetry could move closer to the world of pure aesthetic form rather than getting stuck in the "eddying muddle" of politics. Yet the specter of art in the political realm never departs, as even the title of "Music is International" (1947) suggests.[98] In celebrating music as a kind of universal language, Auden uses the "melodious booing and hooing" (*CP* 340) of apocopated rhymed couplets to add a levity to his poem's

[97] A type of imperfect rhyme in which a penultimate syllable rhymes with an ultima, both usually stressed.
[98] Monroe Spears and Anthony Hecht point out that the interest in sonic "echoes" and memorial stillness in "At the Grave of Henry James" survives in this meditation on the ethics of art in the postwar era (Spears 188, Hecht 353).

soundscape and approximate the status of music. But he recognizes that even the ostensible abstraction of musical form may still take on historical force with the right (wrong) resonance:

> Probably yes. We are easy to trap,
> Being Adam's children, as thirsty
> For mere illusion still as when the first
> Comfortable heresy crooned to
> The proud flesh founded on the self-made wound,
> And what we find rousing or touching
> Tells us little and confuses us much.
> As Shaw says: "Music is the brandy
> Of the damned." It was from the good old grand
> Composers the progressive kind of
> Tyrant learned how to melt the legal mind
> With a visceral a-ha (340)

The danger of the aesthetic here is a thirst for "mere illusion," and if rhyme pushes poetry toward the condition of music, Auden's apocopated rhymes attempt to entertain while hedging against the potential of making his speech memorable. To avoid becoming one of those "good old grand / Composers" or a poet who "Tells us little and confuses us much," he embraces comic rhymes and frequent enjambments, to prevent his couplets from flirting too closely with resonance.

Yet the poem still holds out some hope of social utility in the memorability of aesthetic form. Read at a public Phi Beta Kappa ceremony at Columbia University in 1947, "Music is International" gestures toward a disordered world with a vague notion of music's political potential deriving from its antique forms: "the song which seems to absorb all this. / For these halcyon structures are useful" (341). Just as at James's grave, Auden finds a prospective value in these "halcyon structures," the forms that recall earlier eras, because of an uncertain present:

> We may someday need very much to
> Remember when we were happy; one such
> Future would be the exile's ending
> With no graves to visit, no socks to mend,
> Another, to be short of breath yet
> Staying on to oblige, postponing death.
> Listen! Even the dinner waltz in

> Its formal way is a voice that assaults
> International wrong, so quickly,
> Completely delivering to the sick,
> Sad, soiled prosopon of our aging
> Present the perdition of all her rage. (341)

If rhyme has a purpose beyond organizing our reading, it addresses our need to remember in an age that demands new mnestic strategies, whether one's life is "the exile's ending / With no graves to visit," or just "postponing death." This vision of music (and by extension, rhymed poetry) that can aid or reshape memory after the war's traumas ultimately depends on aesthetic technique. The halcyon structures of rhymed stanzas—echoing older forms and simpler times—have their own "formal way" and "voice" to confront "International wrong," as Auden directly recalls the third and eighth stanzas of "September 1, 1939," attempting to revise a poem he had already begun to dislike. He replaces "All I have is a voice" (*EA* 246) with "the dinner waltz in / Its formal way is a voice," placing more hope in the patterns of music than those of verse.

In repurposing the words of his earlier poem, Auden attempts to rewrite his own work, deliberately countering his own "memorable speech." While much of Auden's poetry exhibits rhyme organization, he uses irregular schemes to twist stanzaic architecture into indeterminate soundscapes that both call attention to and challenge the traditional identification of musical form with rhymed stanzaic units. Rhyme becomes a vehicle for exploring the difficulties of poetic memorability, recalling and concealing the traces of earlier formal precedents. Yet Auden recognizes that his stanzaic experiments can still achieve social and political resonance both despite and because of his attempts to craft purely formal arrangements. By modifying rhyme schemes to undermine readerly expectations and disrupt rhyme's power over memory, he finds that looser patterns can reorganize "ending" as a chance to "mend," rather than simply repeat or recall, even as he attempts to envision, revise, and even overwrite the memory of his own work.

"Our past is a chaos of graves": Transformational Memory in Stanzaic Sequence

Where Auden uses unorthodox rhyme schemes to disrupt our expectations of form and mark the poem as a monumental structure that entails remembering as much as forgetting, he develops even more jarring discontinuities in his stanzaic sequences by shifting prosodic patterns between sections. Taking a cue from some of Yeats's masterpieces,[99] Auden writes a number of sequences that adopt new stanzaic shapes for every section,[100] opening a gap for temporal disconnection and even re-creation. His continuous remaking of these poems takes on a ritual quality, allowing him to reframe the "lifeless and boring" repetitions of modernity—the timed industrial workday and the notion of memory as perfect recall—as renewing and even sacramental.[101] At this ritual juncture we find the notion of forgiveness as amnesty (not-remembering), making the linguistic repetition an act of transformation, and a refusal to treat memory as an imposition of the past. With these shifts Auden can both repurpose the materials

[99] Poems such as "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," "The Tower," and "Vacillation."

[100] Including the long poems *For the Time Being* and *The Sea and the Mirror*, as well as some of his major lyric works, from "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" and "Memorial for the City" to "Bucolics" and "Horae Canonicae." This sequential creativity mirrors the larger interests of his era, in which, as M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall put it, the "modern poetic sequence" becomes the prestige genre of Anglophone poetry (Rosenthal and Gall 3). They define the form as "a group of mainly lyric poems and passages, rarely uniform in pattern, which tend to interact as an organic whole" (9).

[101] Auden: "in a machine age all repetition is associated with the lifeless and the boring, with road drills and time-clock punching, all formal restrictions with bureaucratic regulations" (*P3* 552). The evolution of his notion of memory appears in his early prose, from a journal entry that asserts "Recollection is nothing" to an increasing use of words like restore, remember, or recover; "Auden had understood repetition—in nature, history, and poetry—as the romantics and modernists understood it, as a mortifying compulsion, a doom to which everyone was condemned… Repetition now became the ground of memory" (Mendelson, *EA* 50, 92, 172). Auden prefers to think of memory as re-creation rather than exact recollection (*P3* 580), modeling his concept of remembrance on the Eucharist, in which Christ's sacrifice is not simply recalled, but participated in presently by communicants. Verbal utterance instantiates this connection, as the priest repeats Christ's words, "Do this in *remembrance* of me" (Luke 22:19, emphasis mine). The Greek word for remembrance is "anamnesis" (ἀνάμνησις); as an Anglican, Auden's sense of the sacrament involves an element of "real presence," rather than the more recollection-based models of other Protestant denominations. He uses the Eucharist as an interpretive heuristic in a review of David Jones's *Anathemata*, describing how the rite helps us to understand how a text read/spoken over and over again calls past language and events into the present (*P3* 412).

of literary history, as different stanzaic shapes recall various epochs and cultures of versification,[102] and frame poetic making as an amnesic practice, enabling him to remake and rearrange the broken world of modernity.

Auden's most famous stanzaic sequence, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," takes up poetry's memorability as a link between art's amnesic limitations and modes of survival. The first section's unequal lines and irregular stanzas privilege syntactical coherence over rhyme or meter, using loosely accentual verse to commemorate a poet who never used such forms:

> Far from his illness
> The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,
> The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;
> By mourning tongues
> The death of the poet was kept from his poems. (*CP* 247)

Auden's six strophic blocks operate as virtual sentence diagrams. Each visual period coincides with a complete sentence, and only five lines begin with a part of speech other than conjunction, pronoun, or article, as if each word-brick is laid in perfect order on top of the last. This structure leaves no room for confusion, but offers just as little for resonance. This poetry has been transmuted, ("The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living" *CP* 247) because the "mourning tongues" have a complicated relationship to poetic memory. Recalling Yeats by reciting his poetry is an act of remembrance that both marks and overwrites his death ("kept from his poems"), as the poetic community repurposes his voice.

The elegy embraces this kind of transformative survival both in its forms and in its commemoration of Yeats's work. The second section changes form entirely, introducing rhyme and longer metered lines to more closely approximate the technique of the poet it memorializes:

> You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:

[102] Vendler argues that stanzaic shifts in Yeats's poetry indicate temporal and spatial rearrangement (*Our Secret Discipline* 30), a paradigm that maps suggestively onto Auden's tendency to jump around between verse forms of different traditions.

> The parish of rich women, physical decay,
> Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
> Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its making where executives
> Would never want to tamper, flows on south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth. (248)

The iambic rhythm is insistent, generating five- to six-beat lines that contrast sharply with section one's freer verse, and slant rhymes set off the exact rhyme of lines five and nine, "happen: it survives" / "die in; it survives." This rhyme yokes poetry's imperative to remember and its capacities for forgetting, as the famous phrase "survives" in the minds of readers as a suggestion that poetry has no measurable effects, while the forgettable line-ending phrase insists on poetry's permanence. Framing Yeats's work as a product of his native land's violence and turmoil ("Ireland hurt you into poetry") could read equally as an assertion of poetry's tether to social memory or its drive to forget the political. If for Auden poetry survives "in the valley of its making," this mode of memorability crucially opposes the "executives" and other figures of authority who would prefer not to venture into the intricacies of verse form. By no accident is this section remembered by a dictum that asserts poetry does not pose any threat; the unobtrusive hexameter and muted slant rhymes shift focus away from line-endings and allow us to forget poetry's potential while its survival is quietly reasserted.

The elegy's third section takes a more direct approach to crafting memorable verse with consistent, rhymed tetrameter couplets. In shifting to a more traditional stanzaic shape, Auden commemorates not just Yeats but specifically "Under Ben Bulben," which marks out the location for the Irish poet's grave and even prospectively writes his epitaph. Auden borrows the poem's

meter and couplet rhymes, such that Yeats "lives on, indeed, within the guts of this very stanza" (Ramazani, *The Poetry of Mourning* 188)[103]:

> Earth, receive an honoured guest:
> William Yeats is laid to rest.
> Let the Irish vessel lie
> Emptied of its poetry. (*CP* 248)

We read three perfect lines and internalize this meter just before the poem changes the pattern in line four, which is "Emptied of its poetry" as we impose a stress on "of" and mis-rhyme "lie."[104] Because of the consistent metrical grid we continue to promote words to metrical stress,[105] and while this pattern has some irregularities, the more rigid structure offers Auden a higher degree of mnemonic efficacy.[106] Rhymes repeat every seven syllables, with each end-rhyme sound occurring exactly twice and not returning. Except when "Lie" rhymes "Poetry," and Auden has to retry the long 'i' vowel sound in stanza three because he cannot make "lie" sound right.

The poem's failure to repeat (to rhyme perfectly) causes a need to repeat (to reattempt the same rhyme), as if the recurrences of this stanzaic structure focalize larger problems of repeating in modern Europe's "nightmare of the dark" (248). The poet's "unconstraining voice" (248) frees the heptasyllabic tetrameter lines to exhibit different accentual patterns at the poem's close:

> Follow, poet, follow right
> To the bottom of the night,
> With your unconstraining voice
> Still persuade us to rejoice;
>
> With the farming of a verse

---

[103] One could hear this poem as acephalic iambic tetrameter or classify it as heptasyllabic tetrameter, but the underlying four-beat pattern remains consistent. "Under Ben Bulben" also uses couplet rhymes consistently, but the visual stanza forms vary in length, occasionally falling out of sync with the sonic pattern. The poem ostensibly concludes with the poet's own epitaph: "Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!" (Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats* 328).

[104] In a sense, "lie" and "poetry" could still be said to rhyme because of their similar vowel sounds, but every other rhyme in the third section is a true rhyme with terminal vowels and subsequent consonants matching perfectly.

[105] I use Charles Hartman's term ("promoted stress") for our tendency to read stresses on relatively short monosyllables when metrically convenient (Hartman 26).

[106] Joseph Brodsky sees the verse as "common sense disguised as nursery-rhyme couplets" (Brodsky 364).

Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise. (248)

The concluding injunction to "Teach the free man how to praise" seems to demand memorable speech of the poet, if his verse is to be of any social use. These final stanzas find a prosodic equilibrium, frequently promoting prepositions to metrical stress, making the regular tetrameter more flexible. The balance of irregular lines against metrically consistent ones suggests that we really can "praise" freely within forms of order, but by commemorating Yeats with the meter of the poet's self-elegy, Auden's poem has also turned Yeats into an abstract figure for poetry. "Under Ben Bulben" wants poetry to transform the "unremembering hearts and heads" (Yeats 327) of modern Ireland for political gain, but "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" spins centripetally, drawing attention to its own formal transformations.

The elegy discusses art under compulsion, but three very different sections suggest how the bound spaces of form can modulate and allow for new shapes of memorability. First we are adrift in strophic free verse arranged for syntactical coherence, then dropped into slant-rhymed lines that often suggest iambic hexameter, then confined to rhymed couplets in a regular metrical pattern. We could read this as a move backward in poetic history,[107] but it makes more sense to understand Auden's borrowing from different eras and traditions as an attempt to bring multiple forms (and voices) to bear on the project of poetic memory. The restrictive pressures of the poet's chosen stanzaic patterns increase in proportion to the poem's transformation of the deceased: the title promises memory, yet the elegy only names Yeats once to transform him into

[107] As Richard Bradford does, claiming the sections model prosodic history in reverse (*Silence and Sound* 197).

"the Irish vessel," now "Emptied of its poetry." This poetic emptying dramatizes the conflict between the memorability of verse form and the cultural function of poetry, balancing the unrhymed, unmetered verse and the nameless poet of the first section with the firm cadence, rhyme scheme, and apotheosized "Poet" of the last. Poetry ultimately seems to forget Yeats, but in the rhymed tetrameter of "Under Ben Bulben."

The sequence offers Auden a modular structure that calls attention to the occasion of poetic making and remaking, especially as he discusses the inevitability that his work too will be "modified" in the memories of its readers. While many of his stanzaic sequences commemorate significant persons or events, they employ various stanzas to participate in ritual and historical practices of re-making, adapting syllabic forms that derive from non-Anglophone prosodies to celebrate by recalling and performing acts of poetic making that also involve forgetting. Seen in conjunction with his Christian belief, these sequences of transformation offer opportunities for resurrection, in which each section manifests another chance to clear the formal slate and re-create the poem.[108] Auden explicitly conjoins this kind of poetic composition to Christian sacrament in his "Anthem for St. Cecilia's Day" (1940), praying amidst the changing verse forms, "Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange" (*CP* 282).[109] In writing these poems of stanzaic

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[108] These resurrections of antique forms relate closely to Auden's understanding of Christianity: not simply a return to life, but a transformative re-making. Notes from one of Auden's lectures, taken by the poet Howard Griffin, flesh out this idea further: Auden considered the symphony orchestra as a symbolic mode of immortality, with "the aesthetic whole" carrying "the intention of the artist" into the present, similar to the "idea of resurrection as understood by Western Christians" (Fuller 288).

[109] Intended for his friend Benjamin Britten (born on St. Cecilia's day) to set to music. Britten's choral composition, *Hymn to St. Cecilia,* was finished and first performed (on radio) in 1942. The poem's three sections cycle through song-derived forms while also pointing back to St. Cecilia's Day odes by Dryden and Pope. The three sections are structured as follows: 1) internally rhymed accentual abcb quatrains, with medial caesurae marked by internal rhymes; 2) dimeter quatrains with apocopated rhymes; 3) long pentameter stanzas with subordinate rhyme patterns. Dryden's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" (1687) and Pope's "Ode for Music on St. Cecilia's Day" (written 1708, revised 1730) both have seven stanzas of varying lengths, meters, and rhyme schemes, though Dryden's also includes a final "Chorus" like the italicized lines near the end of Auden's poem. The nod to traditional odes for the patron saint of musicians reminds us of the musical possibilities of stanzaic forms, as well as the connection of music and verse in Christian liturgy.

rearrangement, he uses both prosody and Christian ritual to underwrite his commemorative poetics, cycling through a number of stanzaic shapes to multiply the formal possibilities for memorable verse and the links to various verse traditions within the sequence. And even as the amnesiac quality of these formal and ritual reinventions risks replacing the historical present with an atemporal Christian community, Auden points to the value of amnestic thinking in the postwar era.

"Memorial for the City" (1949) tries to imagine the "Just City" by relying on art's power over memory as it "composes / A meaningless moment into an eternal fact" (592). Section one's unmetered strophes with disorienting internal rhymes promise a loose stanzaic logic, attempting to portray a world ruined by war, where "The crow on the crematorium chimney / And the camera roving the battle / "Record a space where time has no place" (592). The verse recalls some of Auden's earlier work with rhyme and irregular line lengths ("Musée des Beaux Arts") as well as similarly irregular strophes from poems such as "Prufrock." The final stanza sustains a pattern of end rhyme, as the poet attempts to make sense of the century's "chaos of graves":

> The steady eyes of the crow and the camera's candid eye
> See as honestly as they know how, but they lie.
> The crime of life is not time. Even now, in this night
> Among the ruins of the Post-Vergilian City
> Where our past is a chaos of graves and the barbed-wire stretches ahead
> Into our future till it is lost to sight,
> Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead
> We know without knowing there is reason for what we bear,
> That our hurt is not a desertion, that we are to pity
> Neither ourselves nor our city;
> Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare,
> We are not to despair. (592)

The final strophe needs to assign meaning to this ruined landscape, to find some value in the practice of commemoration, but this hope is an aesthetic fabrication, just as the end-rhymes bring a level of strophic order that the internal rhymes could not. The poem imagines the coherence of

the "Post-Vergilian City," Auden's version of Christian Rome, in place of the thousands of cities destroyed in World War II, pointing to a world in ruin while also overwriting it.

The second and third sections attempt to stabilize the poem's memorialization with a densely allusive account of Christian and European history.[110] In the second, Auden uses seven-line syllabic stanzas and internal rhymes to condemn "thundering verse" in favor of "measured sound," refusing verse's strongest mnemonic affordances. The poem undertakes a survey of European history from the later days of the Roman Empire to the present, as "history marched to the drums of a clear idea" (594):

> Saints tamed, poets acclaimed the raging herod of the will;
> The groundling wept as on a secular stage
> The grand and the bad went to ruin in thundering verse;
> Sundered by reason and treason the City
> Found invisible ground for concord in measured sound,
> While wood and stone learned the shameless
> Games of man, to flatter, to show off, be pompous, to romp. (593)

This passage attempts to "measure" sound more precisely, swapping loose accentual verse for syllabic prosody (and a statelier visual pattern) as the changes form an "invisible ground for concord" against the memorable possibilities of "thundering verse." Internal rhymes take the emphasis away from line endings, and longer lines muddle the rhythm, heeding the anapestic third line's self-directed warning about the rhetorical power of verse form. Auden's suspicion of "thundering verse" from poets who "acclaimed the raging herod of the will"— tying the cadences of verse to the Nazis' appropriation of Nietzsche—leads him to experiment with the idiosyncrasies of internal rhyme placement and syllabic variation. Instead of resonance he opts

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[110] Auden's long lines and internal rhymes give a nod to Charles Williams, a poet better known for his novels and other writings (Fuller 418). Williams was a key factor in Auden's conversion to Christianity and introduced him to Kierkegaard (Williams helped Oxford University Press publish the first major English editions of Kierkegaard), and his 1939 account of church history, *The Descent of the Dove*, was Auden's gateway to other theological writings (Kirsch 23). See Fuller 417-421 for a more detailed breakdown of Auden's historical sources.

for mutability and surprise, conceptualizing this city as a place for unexpected rhymes and "double meanings": "The facts and acts of the City bore a double meaning: / Limbs became hymns; embraces expressed in jest / A more permanent tie" (593). The proliferation of internal rhymes calls attention to the playfulness of poetic form ("limbs" into "hymns"), pushing back against the danger the speaker associates with an authoritarian aesthetic, even as his highly stylized historical narrative also risks marching history along to "the drums of a clear idea."

As the history lesson enters the present, the poet transforms the stanzaic structure again while the city falls into oblivion: "The humour, the cuisine, the rites, the taste, / The pattern of the City, are erased" (594). The third section unites the first's rhymed couplet closures with the second's isomorphic scheme, creating a form that looks like an inverted, rhymed sapphic rounded off by a pentameter couplet, a strange shape that feels as "patched up" as the hotel:

> Across the square,
> Between the burnt-out Law Courts and Police Headquarters,
> Past the Cathedral far too damaged to repair,
> Around the Grand Hotel patched up to hold reporters,
> Near huts of some Emergency Committee,
> The barbed wire runs through the abolished City. (594)

Despite the formal recombination, the imagined city becomes a ruin of hardly memorable verse, as the poet surveys the wreckage with an indifferent eye. The dismissive reference to "some Emergency Committee" (coupled with the feminine rhyme) injects a jarring amount of levity, which takes on the pallor of callousness amid the wreckage of Europe. Despite the abstraction of the idealized "city," this section is clearly a picture of the recent past: Auden worked with the US Strategic Bombing Survey after the war (Fuller 420) and had seen this obliterated city many times across Germany. The poem's elision of the details of that destruction reads as an intentional forgetting. Amid the amnesia of this war-torn modernity, where the "pattern of the City" has been erased as much by the poet as by the bombers, the final stanza insists "ruins are

not the end" (595), so the form shifts again. But section four's couplets adapted from Welsh riddles are rife with enigmatic references to literary history (Fuller 420), as Auden once more turns away from the postwar ruin. Escaping the wounds of historical memory is a tempting prospect, made possible by the disjunctive and recombinatory possibilities of the sequence.

Yet he recognizes the danger of the amnesic drift in this formal pattern. To actualize a more transcendent poetic memorability, he undergirds stanzaic shapes with the rituals of Christian remembrance, subordinating poetic artifice to a cycle of daily prayers recalling Christ's death and resurrection in "Horae Canonicae" (1954).[111] Of the sequence's seven sections, four use similar syllabic schemes ("Prime," "Terce," "Nones," "Compline") to create a formal pattern of disappearance and return.[112] "Prime" begins the sequence with the speaker waking up in alternating syllabic lines with sporadic rhymes:

> Disenfranchised, widowed and orphaned
> By an historical mistake:
> Recalled from the shades to be a seeing being,
> From absence to be on display,
> Without a name or history I wake
> Between my body and the day. (*CP* 627)

The first sixteen-line strophe coincides with the first complete sentence, as the speaker emerges without memory from sleep. The "business of waking up" loads theological significance onto the forms of "Horae Canonicae," as the sequence looks to "return to memory and identity" (*P3* 648-

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[111] This sequence has received significantly more attention than much of Auden's later work, but the stanzaic shifts are treated as a minor concern. Most critics offer some version of Mendelson's thematic verdict, that the poem integrates "linear history," constructed around the human experience of sin and guilt in time, with "cyclical nature," exemplified by the daily cycle of hours and corresponding prayers (*Later Auden* 313).

[112] The others vary widely: "Sext" is three subsections of unrhymed couplets, "Vespers" is strophically organized prose, and "Lauds" adapts a complicated medieval Spanish form (the *cossante*) involving tercets and refrain lines. Mendelson notes that the syllabics become looser as the sequence goes on (*Later Auden* 347, 355), but this approach devalues the sequence's cyclical design, which expands the limits of stanzaic form by initiating a series of strophic transformations patterned on daily prayers.

649) in the departures and returns of syllabic form through sections two, four, and six.[113] Memory instantiates the possibilities of formal transition—as stanzaic shapes are recalled, repurposed, reconstituted, or rearranged, our recognition of difference is predicated on remembering form—but the shifts between sections hold out the prospect of amnesty, a form of not-remembering given special power in Christian forgiveness.

Auden's sequence uses these syllabic returns to build a complicated narrative around the crucifixion, which he takes to embody the ultimate act of memory and forgetting as every sin in human history is somehow both accounted for and forgiven. In this light the returns of poetry appear trivial: when the fourth section ("Nones") reprises section one's syllabic couplets in sixteen-line strophes, this formal recurrence appears to be little more than a random happening, "revealed to a child in some chance rhyme / Like *will* and *kill*" (634). But the rhyme is more than chance; at this moment (the ninth hour), Christ's death has just taken place offstage while the pithy rhyme comes to the fore, and the speaker struggles to recall his participation in the act of murder. As the fourth section closes, the speaker looks ahead to sleep (a return to the poem's opening), seemingly set on his next fall into oblivion, but the poem instead traces his dream:

> to a room,
> Lit by one weak bulb, where our Double sits
> Writing and does not look up.
>
> That, while we are thus away, our own wronged flesh
> May work undisturbed, restoring
> The order we try to destroy, the rhythm
> We spoil out of spite (636)

[113] Auden: "the experience of waking up is something that has always interested me—the problem of return to consciousness and the return of memory and identity, the whole relation of the ego and self… Then there is a general theological problem which interests me and has for some time: to what extent we have any kind of recollection or imagination or intuition of what life was like before the Fall" (*P3* 648-649). Edward Callan sees the rhyming technique in "Prime" as a device that highlights "the paradoxical co-presence of chance (natural) and choice (historical)" (Callan 233)

Auden's dream vision of the "Double" makes writing a regenerative act, certainly not on par with the absolute balancing of the crucifixion, but poiesis holds out the promise of restoring some ultimate order. More important than the sequence's actual formal shifts is the opportunity to begin again, where each new section makes possible amnesty rather than mere amnesia, a restoration only hinted at in the workings of prosody.

Thus the formal circuits of the poem allow us to read renewal even where the speaker cannot escape his own amnesia. When in "Compline" he still cannot recall the crucifixion—"I cannot remember / A thing between noon and three" (640),[114]—the return to syllabic couplets and longer strophes hints at a greater wholeness in "the rhythm / Past measure or comprehending" (641). Memory's limit is echoed by the consistent formal circuitry, and as the sixth section closes, the poet prays that we may "join the dance / As it moves in perichoresis, / Turns about the abiding tree" (641), turning stanzaic form into Christian allegory. "Perichoresis," literally "rotation," refers to the relationship among the Trinity,[115] an apt analogy for the final section's refrain, "*In solitude, for company"* (641). Auden attempts to manifest this movement in the "Turns" and "dance" of verse form, echoing the roots of the "strophe" in choral dance. The closing "Lauds" comprises only seven tercets, and almost every line appears multiple times, because Auden not only ends each stanza with a refrain, but also reuses all but two lines (lines four and seventeen) over the course of the poem, recalling the medieval Spanish cossante.[116] The poem's images (birdsong, the cock's crow, the mass bell, and the mill wheel) pointedly suggest

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[114] A reference to the crucifixion; the synoptic gospels specify that Jesus hung on the cross from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, or from noon until three (Matt. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44). The speaker's three claims that he cannot remember are perhaps a reference to Peter's three denials of Christ.

[115] "Verse" of course means "turning" (from Latin *vertere*), and "perichoresis" (Greek περιχώρησις, **"**rotation") is more often eclipsed by the Latin "circumincession" to describe the Trinitarian relationship. Auden picked this up from Charles Williams's discussion of "co-inherence," and also uses it in Simeon's meditation in *For the Time Being* (Kirsch 160).

[116] He based this form on a thirteenth-century poem (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 358) and copied the original rhyme scheme into a notebook; the model poem used only five different lines to build seven stanzas (Fuller 462).

the cyclical attributes of its form as well as a return to morning and the sequence's beginning.[117] The refrain moves the poem in "perichoresis," as the dancing figures (the "chorus," speaking the italicized text, as well as the poem's images) shape themselves into a regular songlike form, accentual tetrameter rhymed couplets that circle over and over again back to the refrain line.

This three-in-one stanza flirts with a transcendent unity that could collapse memory into eternity, but the sequence does not recreate some prelapsarian order—as Lucy McDiarmid notes, it verges on forgetting everything that has gone before (McDiarmid 153). Section seven's drastically different form eschews the syllabic patterning crucial to the sequence's development, but the underpinning structure of daily ritual also promises that out of repeated formal disjunctures will come new beginnings. The formal returns of "Horae Canonicae" reflect how Auden uses versification to complicate poetic memorability beyond mnemonic techniques and memorable speech. Just as the refrains of "Lauds" "praise repetition and renewal" (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 358), his sequences reinvent stanzaic forms to commemorate a series of new beginnings, transforming the process of memorializing into an aesthetic process in which the poem must continually be reshaped. The fictive restoration of order in stanzaic forms, whether with recurring syllabic strophes or repetitive refrains, binds our experience of the poem to communal forms like music and prayer, positioning the reader alongside transhistorical mnestic communities, both poetic and Christian. Even when this form of amnestic commemoration threatens to elide the particular histories and memorials of the postwar world, Auden's stanzaic modulations gesture toward the possibilities of beginning anew, refusing to cultivate a more directly political resonance or to be bound by the sounds of the past.

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[117] "Lauds" is a morning prayer and so concludes Auden's sequence with a full circle. He omits Matins, the seventh prayer of the eight in the daily cycle, from "Horae Canonicae," since often the two were said together at night.

Labyrinthine Economies: Jagged Quatrains and the Rhythms of Forgetting

Even as Auden embraces prosodic transformation as a way to push back against the pressure or compulsion to remember the past, he also embraces archaic forms that call back to older poetic traditions while also reshaping the mnemonic profile of Anglophone quatrains. In his later verse he uses syllabic quatrain forms that seem deliberately to avoid the mnemonic resources of regular rhyme and meter, and while these quatrains do not signify forgetfulness, the refusal of traditional mnemonic affordances speaks to cultures of memory that incorporate the mechanisms of forgetting. These "jagged" quatrains,[118] their outlines cut like memorial inscriptions on the page, become markers of modernity's amnesia, negating conventional mnemonic affordances alongside a shift in cultural preferences and readerly expectations of poetic form even as they also point back to the classical ode forms that gave rise to them. This thread of forgetting in the fabric of memory is not an accident or byproduct of Auden's quest for "memorable speech," but a constitutive feature of his later verse that resists conventional resonance, as well as a central preoccupation of postwar mnestic culture.

The quatrain is ubiquitous because of its mnemonic efficacy, but many of its historically popular and mnemonically effective uses have fallen out of modern literary verse: "Most of the actual poems that ordinary people remember (and recite) are written in quatrains, as are most common mnemonic verses, nursery rhymes, rhymed saws and proverbs and admonitions, hymns, and popular songs" (Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 133).[119] Its typical shapes of

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[118] I am borrowing this term from Mendelson (who uses it pejoratively) to describe the variously indented left-hand linear alignments of the stanza (*Later Auden* 25).

[119] Derek Attridge also studies the quatrain's popularity, arguing that a four-stress "dolnik" quatrain underlies a great portion of western verse even beyond the borders of Anglophone poetry. He borrows the term from Russian, meaning the four-line by four-stress rhymed quatrain form that lends itself very naturally to music, found across linguistic divides and diverse eras; hymns and ballads are characteristic examples (see *Moving Words* 147-187).

alternating rhymes or parallel couplets structure nursery rhymes and folkloric mnemonics designed to preserve knowledge for future generations, but a quatrain stripped of its mnemonic elements—regular rhyme and meter, syntactic cohesion and closure—might directly court amnesia.[120] Yet even these quatrains hold out the hope of memorable speech, as Auden suggests in "The Dark Years" (1940, originally the "Epilogue" to *The Double Man*):

> and death is probable. Nevertheless,
> whatever the situation and the blame,
> let the lips make formal contrition
> for whatever is going to happen,
>
> time remembered bear witness to time required,
> the positive and negative ways through time
> embrace and encourage each other
> in a brief moment of intersection (*CP* 284)

Auden renovates the alcaic (a form popular with Greek and Roman lyric poets) with a syllabic scheme (11-11-9-10), both repurposing and disguising a highly traditional form as he explores "the positive and negative ways through time." Though he does not enjamb stanzas, the lack of normative rhyme and metrical schemes makes the stanzaic unit indeterminate in this act of "formal contrition." What does he achieve in these groupings that seem only stanzas to the eye?

While these syllabic quatrains have little resonance in English, Auden finds them an ideal scheme for working out the pressures of memory and forgetting in his later verse. These adaptations of Horatian forms combine the contemporary (Marianne Moore, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Bridges were also experimenting with syllabic prosody) with the ancient, jettisoning rhyme and accentualism while keeping the stanza as a marker of form's memory. Auden attempts to work against the "static and logical" effect of conventional linear organization, finding an aesthetic balance between "freedom and order" in syllabic prosody (*P3* 649), which

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[120] Cicero reports that Themistocles allegedly claimed he would rather have a system for forgetting than Simonides's locational technique of memory (*De Oratore* 2.74.299).

allows him to offset numerical linear periods and uneven alignment with terminal stress patterns and frequent enjambment.[121] The indentations indicate internal differences in line length and sketch an epitaphic shape on the page, as the poet generates within one stanzaic unit the possibilities of rearrangement he relies on in his stanzaic sequences. By using terminal stress schemes Auden makes individual line-rhythms less uniform, harder to predict and recall, and the long, enjambed sentences that string these quatrains together only occasionally achieve resonance in momentary turns of phrase. On top of these structural asymmetries, he selectively modifies rhythms, stress schemes, and syllabic counts to undermine our expectations and shape this stanza into a framework for prosodic variation, divesting the quatrain of its mnemonic force and turning his own conception of memorable speech on its head.

These stanzas allow him to practice poetic making as an act of remembrance while outlining the shadow of amnesia behind poetic memorability, as we first see clearly in "In Memory of Sigmund Freud." Auden begins the poem by thinking about memory in wartime, acknowledging the difficulty of composing an elegy in such a climate:[122]

> When there are so many we shall have to mourn,
> when grief has been made so public, and exposed
> to the critique of a whole epoch
> the frailty of our conscience and anguish,
>
> of whom shall we speak? For every day they die
> among us, those who were doing us some good,
> who knew it was never enough but
> hoped to improve a little by living. (*CP* 273)

As he marks the project of mourning as a pressing problem for contemporary poetry in the face of global conflict, he organizes these stanzas around a rhythmic volta and terminal stress scheme.

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[121] Auden: "For a long time now, I've been interested in the possibilities of syllabic metre as one way of achieving a balance between freedom and order" (*P3* 649).

[122] Auden had read Freud extensively, including essays like "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" (1914) and "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) that focus on the relationship between repetition and remembering.

Two loose pentameter lines begin each stanza, but the jagged quatrains do not suggest blank verse; as the poem repeatedly lulls us into a rhythmic back-and-forth, we find that shifts in linear indentation correspond to internal segmentations, creating a medial volta in each stanza.[123] The first and second lines end on stressed syllables, and the third and fourth on unstressed syllables, creating sub-units within the coincident syllabic grid and visual period. Each stanza shifts from rising to falling rhythms, caught in a cycle of modifying and returning to iambic cadences.[124]

This formal circuitry allows the stanza both to evoke and to resist the memories of form. Auden gestures to a genealogy of poets from Alcaeus to Tennyson who worked in such a shape while also casting his own scheme as a modernist experiment,[125] in which each stanza finds a precise imbalance between two lines of (almost) blank verse and visual misalignment. He knits form into trope around the workings of memory, cleverly violating the syllabic pattern a handful of times while connecting Freud's work with the recitation of poetry:

> They are still alive, but in a world he changed
> simply by looking back with no false regrets;
> all he did was to remember
> like the old and be honest like children.
>
> He wasn't clever at all; he merely told

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[123] Hollander reads this similarly, asserting that "the visual music controls even the turning on and off of occasional strains of the audible" (*Vision and Resonance* 276).

[124] In the eleven-syllable lines that begin the poem's first two stanzas, anapestic substitutions reinforce the iambic rhythm carrying us to the end of the line. In fact, an overwhelming majority (forty-eight of fifty-six) of the lines that compose the first half of every stanza scan as iambic pentameter with two or fewer substitutions, making the first half of every stanza essentially one prosodic scheme, where the second half of each stanza works differently.

[125] These alcaics trace back through accentual and quantitative experiments by Tennyson and Hölderlin to Horace's adaptation of the Lesbian alcaic. For more see Rosanna Warren's account tracing how this form moved from Alcaeus to Auden ("Alcaics in Exile" 111-115); she identifies the important distinctions between Horace's alcaics and those of his predecessors, but omits to mention the importance of Hölderlin's experiments with accentual-syllabic adaptations of the alcaic, which more closely resemble Auden's technique than the quantitative ventures of Tennyson. She argues that every practitioner of the alcaic has attempted to revise while also recalling the form in practice, and that Auden's alcaics "defy the consoling recurrences of English lyric. Yet the ghost of Alcaeus still haunts it, and one way to read this poem of disenchantment and reenchantment, of fracture and union, is to measure the ways in which it both invites in and resists the lyric ghost of its ancestor" (115). But this assessment also needs some qualification, because her note that the poem "sidesteps an iambic tune" (115) fails to acknowledge the consistency with which the poem returns to iambic rhythms in prosodic counterpoint. Mendelson too reads Auden's syllabics as a formal strategy to "signify shared common meanings" without suggesting "a nostalgic longing for a coherent past" ("The European Auden" 57).

the unhappy Present to recite the Past
like a poetry lesson till sooner
or later it faltered at the line where

long ago the accusations had begun (274)

Reminding us of form's mnemonic function while tweaking the syllabic scheme, the poet drops an octosyllabic line, "all he did was to remember," and a decasyllabic line connecting Freudian remembering to poetry, "recite the Past / like a poetry lesson till sooner / or later it faltered at the line." Poetry here allows a kind of mnemonic excavation, where forgotten or repressed memories can be revived through form, yet we also see the stanzaic pattern "falter" (the third lines should have nine syllables) with this figurative recitation tying memory to the site of form's breakdown.

This minimal tinkering with the stanzaic pattern is more than formal hide-and-seek. Rhythmic variation connects to formal memorability, and glimpses of accentual verse tempt us to ask why the poem could not have been rearranged into a more recognizable form.[126] Freud's work, here reframed as a project of revealing hidden or repressed patterns, gives Auden a platform for advancing a broader unsettlement of established paradigms in his prosody:

No wonder the ancient cultures of conceit
in his technique of unsettlement foresaw
the fall of princes, the collapse of
their lucrative patterns of frustration (274)

The "lucrative patterns of frustration," whether political or aesthetic, stand at risk under a Freudian project of unmasking, as Auden tropes his own "technique of unsettlement" that continues to complicate our reading. Each stanza adjusts our expectations of these alcaics, which only recall traditional quatrains in their visual shape, and this capacity for structural variation

[126] Indeed, the 11/11/9/10 stanza almost begs us to misunderstand it as loose iambic pentameter, having only one syllable more than a perfect iambic pentameter quatrain would, and often needing only a stressed ultima in lines three and four to scan as regular pentameter (one could even consider those lines pentameter catalectic).

discloses deeper tensions involved in the poem's memorialization of Freud, because (as Freud would point out) the repetitions of form may obviate the possibilities of memory.

The elegy transmutes the deceased, "no more a person," into "a whole climate of opinion" (275), echoing the emptied vessel of the Yeats elegy. And Freud's work of unsettlement is memorialized as part of poetic tradition—"Of course they called on God, but he went his way / down among the lost people like Dante" (274)—allowing Auden to mourn him as a fellow poet:

> One rational voice is dumb. Over his grave
> the household of Impulse mourns one dearly loved:
> sad is Eros, builder of cities,
> and weeping anarchic Aphrodite. (276)

The stanza's "technique of unsettlement" continues, as the quatrain shifts into falling accentual rhythm at the medial volta, but here two loosely rhymed couplets (grave/loved, cities/Aphrodite) close out the poem, with just a hint that the syllabic quatrain might still leave room for traditional patterns of memorable speech. The final tableau of deities mourning commemorates Freud in the fashion of pastoral elegy (reminiscent of "Lycidas" and "Adonais"), incorporating him into a poetic tradition that turns from mourning the collective ("so many we shall have to mourn") to the individual. Aware of the greater cultural pressures on poetic memory, Auden offers an elegy for a fellow poet, another thinker committed to the "technique of unsettlement," and he fashions his preoccupation with generalized history into a concern with memory and the individual through the conduit of mourning. Yet the elegy also elides the renowned psychoanalyst and turns away from the masses of war dead, with no hint that this "important Jew who died in exile" (*CP* 273) was at all caught up in the war, when Freud's books were a prime target of Nazi censors and he himself fled Nazi-controlled Austria. The poem exposes the amnestic underside of memory, as Auden transforms and abstracts his subject in a stanza that both recalls and refuses the shared meanings of recognizable forms.

As the intertwined imperative to remember and need to forget become key principles in Auden's later poems, he continues to adjust his adapted Horatian ode forms (usually alcaics) to highlight the disjunction between the mnemonic technologies of form and the memories encoded in form.[127] Horace's *Odes* exhibit the precise mnestic balance Auden seeks in his own verse: the already-archaic Greek meters become complicated vehicles of literary preservation, repurposing the poetry of the past while slowly overwriting the tradition they continue. The ode's generic allegiance to memory includes preserving these already antiquated forms (Taylor 188),[128] but as the stanzas of the Freud elegy suggest, the very act of preservation involves choices (such as how to adapt quantitative prosody) that require a kind of forgetting. Auden twists the generic imperative to commemorate by exposing the tenuous hold of poetry over memory and tracing the negative outline of literary history, shaping syllabic forms that survive by a kind of disappearance or "silence," their prosodic schemes becoming harder to hear and identify.[129] In reworking his stanzas' rhythmic dynamics and syllabic counts with minute variations, and enjambing the majority of his lines to prevent the development of memorable chunks from linear rhythms, the poet further distances his craft from resonance and regularity.

Auden explicitly recalls his traditional debts in "The Horatians" (1968), imagining himself in a line of poets who take modest approaches to their art—"Your tastes run to / small

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[127] Auden's jagged quatrains are syllabic adaptations of distinct classical quantitative forms used by Horace: Sapphics, Alcaics, Asclepiadics, and Elegiacs. The "ode" denotes a ceremonious or occasional poem exhibiting complex formal structure, traditionally designated Pindaric or Horatian. Pindaric odes exhibit a tripartite structure (strophe, epistrophe, epode) corresponding to the movements of choral dancers as they turn and face different parts of the audience, and often employ strikingly vivid imagery and formal disorder. These public theatrical texts differ from the more regular and meditative Horatian ode, a more tranquil form (often in regular quatrains) written for private reading rather than public performance (Fogle and Fry 971).

[128] Studies of the modern ode take a more nuanced look at poetic memorability, as in Ann Keniston's assertion that the ode engages "the reality of absence, forgetting, and disappearance… through a wholly textual mode of presence enabled and circumscribed by memory" (Keniston 74).

[129] Both Steedman (*Poetry for Historians*, 73) and Gottlieb ("Auden in History," 186) note the syllabic design as a formal trope on history's "silence."

dinner-parties, small rooms, / and the tone of voice that suits them" (*CP* 772)—while tinkering with the shape of his quatrains' "small rooms." He twists the insignificance of poetic form into a political act, as the "labyrinthine economies" of his asclepiadic (12-12-7-8) stanzas prove impenetrable to the workings of "Authority":

> Then, in all
> labyrinthine economies
>
> there are obscure nooks into which Authority
> never pokes a suspicious nose, *embusqué* havens
> for natural bachelors
> and political idiots[130] (*CP* 772-773)

The apparent refuge from politics and history in aesthetic forms paradoxically enables a politics, as the asclepiadics demonstrate how prosody can escape the notice of hermeneutic and political authority: form survives because it is forgettable. This stanza stealthily breaks the poem's syllabic pattern, creating an "obscure nook" barely recognizable as a formal deviation. The only 13-syllable line in the poem, "never pokes a suspicious nose, *embusqué* havens," perfectly describes its own secret prosodic chamber, although the addition of one syllable in one line seems an irrelevant act.

Yet here technical choices take on a new resonance, not in terms of sonic persistence but consistent with Auden's rearrangement of poetic memorability. His preference for the elision of vowels only separated by 'h' means that he likely intends the line to be consistent with the syllabic pattern, but even the moment of formal impasse—does this line cohere with the overall stanzaic scheme?—is destined for the oblivion that awaits every obscure prosodic "nook."[131] The use of quantitative rules to count syllabic lines marks the idiosyncrasy of Auden's formal game.

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[130] A rare usage, recalling the original Greek word meaning private citizen (ἰδιώτης).
[131] On Auden's preference for strong elision see *P3* 660.

He is likely playing alone: any such inconsistency will probably escape the reader's notice, and "The Horatians" affirms this kind of poetic practice because it makes "no memorable impact":

> Some of you have written poems, usually
> short ones, and some kept diaries, seldom published
> till after your deaths, but most
> make no memorable impact (*CP* 773)

The poem laughs at its power to fade away in prosy lines, a curious virtue for "memorable speech," while its intriguing stanzas attempt to create "obscure nooks" in form that will somehow survive by being forgotten. The first line falls tantalizingly short of twelve syllables, as Auden pushes the word "short" over an enjambment just to play with the form. By leaving a syllable (or two, eliding "usually") out of the line, he makes just a bit of space on the page, one of those obscure nooks in which we might see tiny pockets of resistance to interpretation and resonance, where Auden celebrates short poems and a narrow scope of impact for poetry.

He constructs a literary genealogy out of being forgettable, treating the forms and rhetoric of indirection as an inheritance. But while noting Horace's technical "polish," Auden alludes to two of his predecessor's poems that have messier relationships with historical memory:

> You thought well of your Odes, Flaccus, and believed they
> would live, but knew, and have taught your descendants to
> say with you, "As makers go,
> compared with Pindar or any
>
> of the great foudroyant masters who don't ever
> amend, we are, for all our polish, of little
> stature, and, as human lives,
> compared with authentic martyrs
>
> like Regulus, of no account. (*CP* 773)

Echoing Horace's tribute to Pindar (*Odes* 4.2), Auden adds his voice to the line of "descendants" who have learned to distinguish their poetry by self-effacement, a tradition predicated not on resonance but on quiet survival, even as the allusion suggests the memorable power of earlier

poems.[132] More curious is the reference to *Odes* 3.5, a deeply ambivalent poem in which Augustus is celebrated as a god for military conquests and Regulus gives a rousing political speech that precipitates his own death, the deaths of all his soldiers, and a continuation of military hostilities with Carthage. Both Regulus's exhortation and the poem's praise of Augustus (even if equivocal) are exactly the kind of "memorable speech" that Auden came to distrust, resonating politically in the service of Roman imperialism. So in a minimal act of historical renegotiation, he balances these allusions with a different form, writing asclepiads in response to poems written in sapphics and alcaics. This ambivalent poem thus becomes another link in a complex chain of poetic recollection, as Auden ventriloquizes Horace to downplay his own technique while refusing direct prosodic repetition, but also treats Regulus as an "authentic martyr," potentially sanitizing the kind of political rhetoric he regretted in "Spain." He uses this ironic reference to balance the commemoration of poets who "make no memorable impact" against the problem of Horace's memorability. The choice between reading Regulus as a figure of Rome's glorious spirit or its hideous bloodthirst is left open for the reader, but filtering this episode through Horace clarifies how the project of literary history is compromised by amnesia and violence whether the poetry of the past is formally recalled or rewritten.[133]

"The Horatians" suggests the possibilities and dangers of form, which can preserve misleading or harmful versions of history under the authority of literary tradition, even as versification seems to offer a space for resistance to the dictates of political history. Auden abstracts this problem in "Ode to Terminus" (1968), which tries to avoid the sonic imperium of "resonance" by offering stanzas to the god of formal boundaries:

> Venus and Mars are powers too natural
> to temper our outlandish extravagance:

[132] *Odes* 4.2 figures Pindar's style as a cascading river, later identifying Horace's poetry with the labor of the bee.
[133] On Auden's response to *Odes* 3.5 see Mendelson, *Later Auden* (489).

> You alone, Terminus the Mentor,
> can teach us how to alter our gestures.
>
> God of walls, doors and reticence, nemesis
> Overtakes the sacrilegious technocrat,
> but blessed is the City which thanks You
> for giving us games and grammar and metres. (*CP* 810-811)

With disruptive rhythmic deviations Auden celebrates form as the "walls" and "doors" of his stanzas, the "reticence" of his non-accentual prosody, and the "games and grammar and metres" of his intricate poems. Almost every line suggests a different rhythmic paradigm, from iambic ("Overtakes the sacrilegious technocrat") or trochaic ("You alone, Terminus the Mentor") to amphibrachic ("but blessed is the City which thanks You / for giving us games and grammar and metres"). Against the variable periods of phrase and syntax, each enjambment promises another shift, as poetry's patron saint links stanzaic "rooms" with the "reticence" of linear gaps. Yet Auden recognizes the danger of verse as pure technique, practiced by the "sacrilegious technocrat," and the poem concludes with a paradoxically resounding critique of resonance: "abhorred in the Heav'ns are all / self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an / audience, utter some resonant lie" (811). The last stanza tweaks the stress scheme, placing a stressed ultima in the final line to abrogate the loose prosodic contract and end with a bang. The only stanza that ends with a stressed syllable ends the poem, achieving its greatest resonance while making the tiniest adjustment to the pattern of terminal stresses to demonstrate the power of memorable sound.

The end of "Terminus" offers a resonant self-accusation, echoing the rhythmic cadence and rhyme of the infamous line from "September 1, 1939"—"We must love one another or die" (*EA* 246)—a marker of just how much Auden's struggle with formal memorability becomes a consideration of his own place in literary history. As he observes in "Epistle to a Godson"

(1969), the role of memory (likewise poetry) has changed, so he struggles to craft memorable speech when remembered cultural knowledge has lost its value:

> In yester times it
> was different: the old could still be helpful
>
> when they could nicely envisage the future
> as a named and settled landscape their children
> would make the same sense of as they did,
> laughing and weeping at the same stories. (*CP* 832)

Every line ends with falling rhythms. Auden eliminates the approximate blank verse from the first half of his quatrains, as if setting maxims in firm iambics no longer possesses broad appeal for the inhabitants of his godson's world. His bleak vision of poetry's future, "the Muses scuttering, / smelly, from eutrophied Helicon," is eclipsed only by his flat dismissal of his own work, "valued, / in current prices, at three-dollars-fifty" (833). This warning of poetry's decline ends with Auden wryly looking ahead to his own transmutation from person to corpus, when he will be, like Freud, "no more a person / now but a whole climate of opinion" (275). His volume on the bookstore shelf similarly becomes another monument to poetry's absence and the amnesia of literary history.[134]

Faced with poetry's oblivion and his own, he concludes that if there is a place for verse in the postmodern world, it must be well crafted:

> Nor shoddily made: to give a stunning
>
> display of concinnity and elegance
> is the least we can do, and its dominant
> mood should be that of a Carnival.
> Let us hymn the small but journal wonders
>
> of nature and families, and then finish
> on a serio-comic note with legends

[134] For more on amnesia as the central mechanism of literary history, see Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (*Distant Reading* 63-90). Moretti conservatively estimates the "survival" rate of literature as less than one percent: "the majority of books disappear forever" (65).

of ultimate eucatastrophe,
regeneration beyond the waters. (*CP* 833)

He again embraces polished verse on a small scale, as in "The Horatians," but there is no tradition here, as Auden turns poetry entirely away from historical or political engagement. The poem achieves its "concinnity" and "elegance" (good antidotes for "resonance") in muted prosodic cadences, and the lack of terminal stress scheme allows this stanzaic pattern to flex more freely in each line. While he completely subverts conventional stanzaic patterning, Auden hints that poems might yet address some cultural need purely by their meticulous arrangements.

Holding onto a faint hope that his poetry may endure, Auden maps out the limitations of technique and tradition, versification and cultural memory, as he crafts variations on the jagged quatrain to offer a kind of harmonious display, rather than memorable speech, to the reader. His later jagged quatrains embody the contradictions of poetic memorability: he foregrounds both the problems and the potential of formal resonance in poems that become increasingly self-critical, as he meditates on how (or whether) his own work will be read in a postwar world that places little value on poetry, tradition, or remembered cultural wisdom. Auden's syllabic quatrains demonstrate the entanglement of amnesia and recall at the heart of poetry's "memorable speech," as he recreates and modifies stanzaic patterns to be forgettable and forgotten, built to destabilize the value of poetic resonance and challenge the project of poetic memory.

Imperishable Empire: The Afterlives of Stanzaic Form

Auden famously omitted two political poems of the late 1930s—"September 1, 1939" and "Spain"—from his collected works because he felt that both exhibited deceptive and even repulsive rhetoric. He tried to consign these poems to the dustbin of literary history, yet both

survive in their enigmatic stanzaic forms, curiously forgotten and reconstructed while being recalled in far different political contexts.

Days after the 9/11 attacks, NPR's Scott Simon read excerpts of "September 1, 1939" to a grieving nation,[135] because it "seemed to prove that poetry, and the powers poetry represents, might (still) speak both to and for a broad group of readers, offering them a plausible, memorable interpretation of recent history" (Burt, "September 1, 1939 Revisited" 535). But Simon did not initially read the entire poem; only excerpts seemed relevant, so he omitted stanzas two through four, which articulate the poem's perfunctory moral, "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return," and bring the reader face-to-face with "Imperialism's face / And the international wrong" in the mirror (*EA* 245). The poem's eleven-line stanzas, closed by syntax and rhyme scheme, allow for easy excerpting, conversely allowing the rereading to exclude some of its more uncomfortable (in context) sections. This kind of memory involves a significant forgetting, as the stanza becomes the site for reshaping the poem's message, so that a selective amnesia helps the grieving collective subject to avoid the cognitive dissonance of confronting its own role in occasioning this national trauma.[136]

While this act of communal remembering depends on an element of forgetting, "Spain," which has not enjoyed as long an afterlife in public discourse, has been forgotten in a way that makes its remembrance even more curious. Auden particularly hated that he had written "the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder" ("Spain" 793),[137] but that phrase,

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[135] Readers keyed on how "The unmentionable odor of death / Offends the September night" (*EA* 245) at the beginning, and the poem ties skyscrapers, imperialism, and international wrong together in an eerily prescient lyric.
[136] However, as patriotic outrage later gave way to antiwar cynicism, the poem's self-accusing lines would be used as a way to view U.S. intervention in the Middle East. Ridley Scott's spy thriller *Body of Lies* (2008) uses the end of stanza two ("I and the public know / What all schoolchildren learn, / Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return") in its opening sequence.
[137] In *The English Auden* the line reads "the fact of murder," reflecting Auden's later emendation, so this citation of the original comes from *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Vol. I.* He omitted "Spain"

"necessary murder," is the only explicit allusion that remains in Daljit Nagra's 2011 "A Black History of the English-Speaking Peoples." Nagra remembers what Auden wanted forgotten, and in this antagonistic act of poetic remembrance, the stanzaic form returns as well:

> The crowd, too, seem a hotchpotch from the pacts
> and sects of our ebb and flow. My forbears played
> their part for the Empire's quid
> pro quo by assisting the rule and divide of their ilk.
>
> Did such relations bear me to this stage?
> Especially with Macaulay in mind, who claimed the passing
> of the imperial sceptre would highlight
> *the imperishable empire of our arts…*
>
> So does the red of Macaulay's map run through
> my blood? Am I a noble scruff who hopes a proud
> academy might canonise
> his poems for their faith in canonical allusions? (Nagra 51)

Nagra riffs on race in the Anglophone canon, spinning allusions to Shakespeare and Conrad into a vision of contemporary England's racial politics. While the poem all but hides its connection to "Spain," the stanzaic borrowing reframes Auden's "necessary murder" within a long imperial tradition of rationalizing the suffering of racial others. The stanza is just a trace of Auden's poem, but the ironic treatment of "faith in canonical allusions" within a directly allusive form outlines Nagra's key question: as a non-white writer, will he be remembered as part of British literature's "imperishable empire," and if so, how will remembering him by his allusions—i.e., gestures toward others' poems—not equally erase him? What seems a passing reference to Paul Robeson, who gave particularly famous performances as the lead in Shakespeare's *Othello,* actually mirrors the repurposing of Auden's form, placing these artists' racial differences in stark contrast with their formal connections. Nagra suggests that the paradigms of literary

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from his collected works because he felt that it would be recalled for one line that "infected" the whole poem with an "incurable dishonesty" (*P5* 79).

memorability are skewed by race in ways that form forgets, but his poem also opens the door to further uses of stanzaic forms to revisit the political narratives of race that lie unremembered and unarticulated throughout British literary history.

Nagra's version of the jagged quatrain takes Auden to task for that bit of memorable speech and reconfigures poetic memorability around race by appealing to literary memory at the stanzaic level. This usage demonstrates how the stanza can serve as far more than a marker of lyric timelessness or a static aid to memory. Auden's prosody allows us to see how these forgotten shapes can organize language differently in the era of memory, as the progress of history continually places new demands on cultural modes of remembrance. His stanzas continue (by remembering) traditions of strophic poetry that do not vanish after the explosions of modernist formal poetics, with a new sense of how form engages the memory and depends on our capacities to forget. Auden's concern with the rhetorical efficacy of form leads him to stanzaic strategies that manipulate or even discourage our attempts to remember, but his poetry commemorates above all the survival of poetic forms as structures latent with further possibilities for memorable speech.

Chapter Two

Formalist Tourism and the Stanza in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

To conclude his 1992 Nobel lecture, St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott paints an interesting self-portrait: "a boy opened an exercise book and, within the discipline of its margins, framed stanzas that might contain the light of the hills on an island blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance" (Walcott, *What the Twilight Say*s 84). His use of "stanzas" signals a peculiar link between poetic form and the representation of the Caribbean. Walcott imagines the stanza as a verse container with representational or potentially mimetic capacities, but this tableau conceals the cultural and historical resonances of the forms the poet uses to position himself within the literary establishment and to court a wide readership. The tercets of his 1990 epic *Omeros,* adapted from Homeric and Dantean forms, effectively carried Walcott to the Nobel stage, also carrying his "island blest by obscurity" to the attention of a global audience: "Here on the raft of this dais, there is the sound of the applauding surf: our landscape, our history recognized" (77).

The poet's claim for historical recognition is intriguing: while his stanzas do suggestively recall histories of imperial violence in St. Lucia as they filter our experience of the Caribbean through European verse forms, he also wants to treat verse as a natural element of the Caribbean landscape—"when I see cabbage palms moving their fronds at sunrise, I think they are reciting Perse" (78);[138] "they inhabit a geography whose rhythm, like their music, is limited to two stresses: hot and wet, sun and rain, light and shadow, day and night, the limitations of an incomplete metre" (72). By imagining St. Lucia in the language of poetic form, Walcott pushes

[138] Born Alexis Leger (1887-1975) in Guadeloupe, Saint-John Perse was the pen name of a French diplomat who became well-known in the literary world after the publication (in French) of his *Anabase* in 1924, which was translated by T. S. Eliot into English in 1930. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1960.

back against the mechanisms of literary history and invests his native landscape with an aesthetic value that contrasts with touristic portrayals, even as his work, like that of "local troubadours," also depends on an international audience: "This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves... at sunset, local troubadours in straw hats and floral shirts beating Yellow Bird and Banana Boat Song to death. There is a territory wider than this—wider than the limits made by a map of an island—which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers" (81-82). As he stands before the Swedish Academy, his position in that wider territory depends on readers that prize his verse for its Caribbean rhythms and canonical shapes, both exemplified by the hybrid stanzas in which "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea" (*Omeros* 320).[139]

Omeros is thematically and formally circumscribed by a Caribbean tourist economy. Walcott's forms evoke European traditions and local geography, reminding us that our methods of reading comprise hermeneutic choices of combination and selection not dissimilar from touristic sightseeing. The various histories and traditions embodied in the stanzas of *Omeros* enable our travel to this fictive Caribbean, but these symbolic economies extend beyond the boundaries of the text, to real economic inequalities left in the wake of British colonial rule in St. Lucia. The poem's hybrid stanzas, derived from Homer and Dante, mediate these aesthetic and historical relationships between the poem's author, contexts, and audiences, while courting an international market of tourist-readers familiar with canonical Anglophone verse forms. Literary scholarship typically casts tourism, which I treat as a complex set of practices and norms around leisure travel, typified by sightseeing,[140] as a villain, valorizing authors who resist it and denigrating those who capitulate to dominant thematic and formal paradigms to sell their work.

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[139] When referring to the text of *Omeros*, I cite quotations parenthetically by page number, and discuss cantos as designated by Roman numerals in the text ("Chapter LXIV, Canto I"), with occasional use of shorthand in notes (64.1).

[140] I have adapted this definition from John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011).

But analyzing poems' touristic dynamics through the lens of stanzaic form can usefully complicate this critical trend: stanzas are established conventions of exchange between writers and readers, but they also employ a different kind of currency in the polyvalent signs of traditions and expectations that define poetic communities.

In this chapter I read *Omeros* for the ways it both solicits and thwarts touristic modes of reading, arguing that Walcott's stanzaic techniques frame poetic form as a touristic encounter, transforming the material of prosody into a set of choices for travelers in verse. His combinatory use of a loose meter, rhyme schemes suggestive of song forms, and visual tercets demonstrates the complex ways in which stanzaic patterns undergird real and symbolic economies as currencies of exchange by which poets and readers negotiate the value of various cultures and traditions in verse. After a brief overview of the poem's engagement with tourism and its formal structure, I explore how its prosody serves as a ground for troping oceanic rhythms and as a shape embodying the fraught legacies of European literary history. The dodecasyllabic rhymed tercets mark, construct, and organize our experience of the text, from the structural apprehension of stanzaic form as "site" and "sight" to the staging of craft as performance. Ultimately I argue that *Omeros* pushes the reader to recognize how poetic reading practices, by selectively engaging the histories and economies flowing through verse form, are founded upon touristic assumptions of value, and Walcott turns to "ancestral rhyme" to conceptualize a prosody that places obligations on the reader beyond the histories of European versification. The chapter closes with a brief look at poems by Louise Bennett and Agha Shahid Ali to outline other ways of redirecting poetic tourism through stanzaic forms.

Touristic Reading and the Stanzas of *Omeros*

Walcott's concerns with the economics of tourism and the craft of poetry dovetail throughout the epic, as when the poet-narrator[141] imagines advice from his father, also a poet:

> Measure the days you have left. Do just that labour
> which marries your heart to your right hand: simplify
> your life to one emblem, a sail leaving harbor
>
> and a sail coming in. All corruption will cry
> to be taken aboard. Fame is that white liner
> at the end of your street, a city to itself,
>
> taller than the Fire Station, and much finer,
> with its brass-ringed portholes, mounting shelf after shelf,
> than anything Castries could ever hope to build. (*Omeros* 72)

Walcott sees the comparison of a sailboat with the massive ocean linear as a set of choices for how to pursue his "craft."[142] He recognizes the temptations of the massive, beautiful liner, an emblem of the global tourist industry that signals the wealth, power, and fame within reach for a poet willing to break the bonds of locality for profit. *Omeros* bears far more resemblance to the ocean liner than the modest sailboat completing its local cycle of going out and back in. This ambitious epic, written in English rather than St. Lucia's local patois and composed in a stanzaic pattern that adapts two highly canonical European verse forms (Homeric hexameter and Dantean terza rima), directly courts a global audience. Walcott sells his verse (and especially his versification) to outsiders, much like the magnificent cruise ship, whose passengers come from elsewhere to consume the Caribbean.

The poem's stanzaic form is the key link in this exchange, both because its design appeals to foreign audiences with a knowledge of western canonical forms and because the

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[141] I often refer to this figure as the "poet-narrator" because the poem clearly foregrounds this autobiographical link.
[142] For more on Walcott's figurative use of "craft," see Omaar Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry* (33-38).

stanza is conceived of as the poetic locus, the "room" where we find the poem's contents. As we read through this imaginative space, we rely on stanzaic structures as markers to locate ourselves and textual details within the poem. For instance, in the previous excerpt the third stanza contains the only line without a caesura, and we find the fame metaphor in stanza two. This locational model of stanzas as the "rooms" of the poem, the "turns" of its tours,[143] maps the text as a set of distributed locations that hold content and allows for navigation around that system. Walcott's narrator even imagines the text in geographic terms: "I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text; / her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking / basins of a globe in which one half fits the next" (319). The figure of text-as-globe reminds us how far we travel in reading *Omeros*,[144] a journey that becomes particularly difficult due to the poem's staggering length and formal complexity: over twenty-five hundred irregularly rhymed tercets, each with unique relationships to its adjacent stanzas, nearby sections, and larger trends, manifesting different combinations of rhyme, meter, and syntax at particular locations in the larger canto, chapter, and book segments of the epic. We traverse the text by way of these stanzas; though tourism and the stanza may not be obvious partners, if we see stanzaic forms as conventional shapes that situate readers in histories of literary and cultural exchange and exemplify the reflexivity of poetic discourse, they are crucial to the practices and economies of touristic reading.

Scholars have recently turned their attention toward the touristic norms around literary texts. Some follow Graham Huggan and Mimi Sheller in critiquing these modes of cultural consumption, while others such as Sarah Brouillette, Anthony Carrigan, and Jahan Ramazani

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143 Both "verse" (Latin vertere) and "strophe" (Greek στρεφω), often used in lieu of the word "stanza," are derived from verbs for turning.

144 The poem moves among various locations in St. Lucia, Africa, North America, and Europe.

situate reading amid various networks of valuation and exchange.[145] This latter type of reading entails a more nuanced, reflexive poetics that implicates both authors and readers in the touristic systems and discourses that make up the world of literature, but even these analyses tend to misconstrue the significance of forms like the stanza.[146] Some maintain that verse works *against* the economics of tourism. Carrigan and Natalie Melas read the form of *Omeros* as a force of particularity against tourism's de-localizing influence,[147] but both miss how the poem's stanzas also solicit the modes of consumption they ostensibly resist. Forms develop as conventions: rhymes and stanzas resemble other rhymes and stanzas, only legible insofar as they are not too particular, like generic images of beaches. Others undervalue the role of form. Omaar Hena argues that Walcott appeals throughout *Omeros* to "*poetic* forms of value" to challenge the global economy's commodity logic (Hena 27), but says little about his use of *poetic forms* to do so. Likewise, Brouillette can read Walcott's "The Fortunate Traveller" and conclude, "the poem's content critiques its own form" (40), as if form has nothing to say in return.

Yet forms say a lot about our poetic tourism. If poetry is a country we only occasionally visit, verse structures are the cultural markers that orient (and alienate) us both within individual poems and the larger systems of poetic traditions. This is especially true of the stanza, which has long been understood by a container model or locational logic that allows readers to imagine it in

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[145] Huggan: "tourism contributes to the sameness of a world whose differences it needs to make its profits. Tourism thus requires the other that it repeatedly destroys" (Huggan 178); Sheller: "the same old myths of the Caribbean resort are resold ad nauseam today. With the development of the package holiday and the cruise ship industry it became increasingly easy for tourists to get to the Caribbean and experience its charms in a pre-packaged, easily-digestible form" (Sheller 68). Brouillette expands Huggan's "strategic exoticism" to include more self-conscious aesthetic reflections by writers like Walcott (Brouillette 26-43). Carrigan examines how Walcott employs and contests touristic strategies of representation for positive ends (Carrigan 41-45). Ramazani explores how poetry encourages readers to rethink their locatedness in networks of travel "without either pretending to be exempt from tourism or passively submitting to its consumerist proclivities" ("Poetry and Tourism in a Global Age" 475).

[146] Ramazani comes closest to making the connection between stanzas and travel in *Omeros*: "the rhymes of his zigzagging terza rima stitch sonic patterns that traverse much of the world's surface" (*A Transnational Poetics* 55).

[147] Melas argues that the epic opposes "the flatness of commodified space" (Melas 152, 158), and Carrigan that it targets the homogenization of global tourism (Carrigan 55).

terms of space and travel: Theresa Krier asserts that stanzas guide readers "through a sojourn" in their lines and intervals (Krier 1358); Stephen Adams posits a stanzaic "flow," a "river channel" that directs the poem's course (Adams 71); and Ramazani argues that "the logic of *stanza* as geographic room" allows us to conceive of poetic travel and its limitations, because "the traveling reader never fully inhabits any of these spaces, but is brought up short by the formal framing and various rapid transitions. By sound, structure, and self-reflexivity, poems enunciate and play on the construction of, and the movement through, multiple worlds" (*A Transnational Poetics* 54, 55). Such geographical approaches prove compelling with *Omeros*, whose length and complexity make traditional formal analysis unfeasible. Reading the stanzaic fabric under a geographic paradigm allows the poetic tourist to entertain prosodic schemes as sights to see, abstracting the complex histories of formal intersection embodied in versification into optional itineraries. Yet the epic's irregularly rhymed dodecasyllabic tercets blend a range of formal patterns—Homeric hexameter, Dantean terza rima, Miltonic blank verse, Trinidadian calypso—that span languages, eras, genres, and media, all of which exert a pull over the verse.

The poem's frequent evocation of versification as geography marks the text as a space for travel and leisure, even when shadowed by the legacies of imperial economic exploitation. Walcott's stanzas suggest a fluidity and interchangeability that resemble the brochure seascapes of St. Lucia and elsewhere, populated with tourists and seductive rhythms:

> what they envied most in them
> was the calypso part, the Caribbean lilt
> still in the shells of their ears, like the surf's rhythm,
>
> until too much happiness was shadowed with guilt
> like any Eden, and they sighed at the sign:
> HEWANNORRA (Iounalao), the gold sea
>
> flat as a credit-card, extending its line
> to a beach that now looked just like everywhere else,

> Greece or Hawaii. Now the goddamn souvenir
>
> felt absurd, excessive. The painted gourds, the shells.
> Their own faces as brown as gourds. Mine felt as strange
> as those at the counter feeling their bodies change. (*Omeros* 228-229)

Rhymes abound but not predictably, as Walcott twists linear and syntactical periods around variable rhythms. He toys with "the surf's rhythm" and "extending its line," troping poetic form in describing the sea while meditating on the Caribbean tourist economy. The poet connects the translocal character of touristic representation to the economic logic that undergirds tourism development through a pun on "line" that, located at a line break, splits credit into multiple "lines," suggestive of stanzaic forms (that extend multiple verse lines) as media of poetic travel. Walcott's use of the credit card simile to describe the sea juxtaposes the seeming naturalness of poetic form in the "surf's rhythm" with lines of credit that evoke the uneven distribution of financial capital and histories of economic exploitation in tourist destinations like St. Lucia. The stanzas of *Omeros,* as shapes crafted to enable educated metropolitan audiences versed in canonical European forms to visit and consume the Caribbean, link the traditional associations of literary history to the discursive violence of colonial rule. Tourist-readers come in search of "the calypso part, the Caribbean lilt" in the verse, which allows Euro-American audiences to take prosody as a representational form but also forces us to revisit the role of the reader in constructing the modalities of poetic travel and to understand why formalist reading is bound to touristic modes of seeing.

To broaden our understanding of stanzaic forms we have to understand the structural connections between reading poetry and tourism, which comprise both economic and semiotic exchanges. John Urry and Dean MacCannell conceive of tourism as a leisure activity only

possible for some, built upon a wider economy that relies on the labor of others.[148] The reader of poetry similarly engages in a leisure activity, partially obscuring the economic logics of profitability and value that underpin poetic production. But of course these activities have costs, whether the exorbitant price tags of all-inclusive resort vacations or the sticker price of Walcott's *Omeros* (not to mention the luxury of time for vacationing or reading poetry, which require considerable education and cultural capital as well). Crucially, both are governed by conventions of reading and interpretation—"Gazing at particular sights is conditioned by personal experiences and memories and framed by rules and styles… Such 'frames' are critical resources, techniques, cultural lenses that potentially enable tourists to see the physical forms and material spaces before their eyes as 'interesting, good or beautiful'" (Urry 2). The last sentence could equally speak to poetic form, as readers depend on "critical resources, techniques, and cultural lenses" to understand versification and foreign countries alike.[149]

Consequently, reading poetry is often on some level an act of tourism, but important semiotic differences obtain in these parallel activities. In sightseeing as in poetry, tourists need markers to identify and frame the sight, transforming location into destination: "empty sites become sights through the attachment of markers" (Culler, *Framing the Sign* 165). Yet stanzas play multiple roles in this system of sight-marking. They are markers of poems as well as the "sites" where poetry is located, and, I would argue, poetic "sights" as well: what the reader anticipates, seeks, and apprehends as the poem.[150] This more complicated signposting in stanzaic

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[148] Urry: "Tourism is a leisure activity which presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organised work" (Urry 4); MacCannell: "It is only by making a fetish of the work of others… that modern workers, on vacation, can apprehend work as part of a meaningful totality" (MacCannell 6).

[149] The gaze operating in poetry (like tourism) is "mutual" (Maoz 222) in that the poem emerges in a reciprocal exchange of writing and reading.

[150] Of course many other markers direct us to and frame poems as poems even within the text, most obviously titles, but also tables of contents and introductions. These could all be construed as "on-site" markers in MacCannell's terms, and the possible "off-site markers" are nearly endless.

form is mirrored by a more complex self-reflexivity. As Jonathan Culler argues, the tourist typically construes everyday practices as reflexive cultural signs, "everything as a sign of itself, an instance of a typical cultural practice" (155). The patterns of poetic form are also self-referential (Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* 55), but the reflexivity of stanzas interrupts our reading, complicating our consumption of the poetic text. Thus poetic form can encourage a more self-aware tourism with its "less transparent access to other cultural worlds" (53), pushing readers to rethink their situatedness in networks of travel "without either pretending to be exempt from tourism or passively submitting to its consumerist proclivities" (Ramazani, "Poetry and Tourism in a Global Age" 475).[151]

Poetry's imbrication with and distinctness from other touristic practices allows it a peculiar vantage for commentary on tourism, and the fact that there are distinct kinds of tourism, some more pernicious than others, gives *Omeros* a vital urgency. Walcott's hesitant, self-aware verse representation of St. Lucia distances itself from the development schemes of multinational corporations, and in poetry he sees possibilities for resistance alongside dangers of complicity.[152] Describing his opposition to the Jalousie resort plans, Walcott decries the lack of "ancestral" feeling that allowed corporate investment to transform the island's majestic Pitons into a resort that serves and profits outsiders (Walcott, "The Argument of the Outboard Motor" 129). The economic value of increased employment shrinks, in the poet's estimation, beside the land's intrinsic value, and the irresponsible decision of local officials to sell land to Hilton breaks

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[151] The integration of commodity forms and cultural forms is crucial to tourism in modern societies (MacCannell 21), making the stanza instrumental to "the commodifying processes" of "generalised cultural differences" (Huggan 10).

[152] Of course, separating one's own self-awareness from the ignorant tourism of others is a quintessentially touristic move. As MacCannell and Culler note, the key dynamic of most writing on tourism (such as Paul Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars,* 1980) is a distinctive binary, derived from the basic opposition valorizing romanticized, fulfilling "travel" over empty, bourgeois "tourism."

political and ancestral obligations. These officials appear in the poem's Dantean hell, the "Pool of Speculation" that traps local politicians who "saw the land as views / for hotels" and "rented the sea" (*Omeros* 289-290), as well as the poets:

> In one pit were the poets. Selfish phantoms with eyes
> who wrote with them only, saw only surfaces
> in nature and men, and smiled at their similes,
>
> condemned in their pit to weep at their own pages.
> And that was where I had come from. Pride in my craft. (293)

These poets are defined by their commodification of the Caribbean, and the poet nearly falls into this pit of "Speculation" as well, accusing himself, "You tried to render / their lives as you could, but that is never enough" (294), with a pun that links the craft of poetic representation (*rendering* as *making*) to the tourist economy (services *rendered*).

There may be no way out of tourism, but the poet's self-questioning and insistence on obligation give us a model for interrogating our roles in constructing and consuming cultural representations: "Had they waited for me // to develop my craft?" (227-228). Walcott's stanza break charges his puns with significance: Have other St. Lucians "waited" (perhaps tables) so he can "develop" (like multinational corporations) his "craft" (both as "skill" and "vessel"), the verse techniques that will carry him to global acclaim and economic security? This passage suggests a vast gulf between other St. Lucians and the poet, who cultivates versified commodities to sell his ingenuity to a global audience. Yet his awareness of the economies linking his work to his fellow St. Lucians awakens feelings of obligation, which he signals to the reader by troping on poetic form. He develops his "craft" not speculatively but in terms of mutuality, using versification to implicate readers (and himself) in the tourist networks around his work; as Charles Pollard argues, Walcott makes form a site where we all become tied by

mutual obligation: “Indeed, the formal aspects of poetry, rather than obscuring the communal ideal… become the means by which the communal obligation was met” (Pollard 163-164).

In attending to these economies that surround and undergird the stanzas of *Omeros,* I argue, the poem’s stanzaic prosody and engagement with tourism prove mutually illuminating. Walcott’s overlapping and intersecting verse forms suggest new ways of understanding the semiotic economies of touristic reading, while the poem’s engagement with tourism encourages us to see its stanzas as more than simply isolated locations for verse. The stanza performs essential touristic functions—serving as the site of cultural encounter, marking poems’ relationships to various traditions, becoming a showcase for artistic talent—yet it also becomes central to Walcott’s larger project to find value beyond the commodified representations of tourist brochures. The complex stanzaic prosody of *Omeros* invites our formalist attention and simultaneously pushes back against our touristic impulses, drawing us into more nuanced understandings of the histories and economies that structure global Anglophone literature.

“Break from the Classic Pattern”: Historical Prosodies, Tourist Stanzas

Omeros relies on its canonical precedents, read and studied by Caribbean students because of centuries of European colonialism, to underwrite its prosody, but at the same time Walcott wants to find ways to reconfigure the poem’s relationship to history. The stanza accordingly becomes the level at which this tension between traditional verse forms and the possibilities of prosodic technique precipitates a collision, as the poet attempts to make the stanza embody both the force of literary tradition and a radically new form of Caribbean design. While the poet cannot entirely avoid being ventriloquized by poetic tradition (Meschonnic 595),

Walcott's attempts to conceal or divert the energies of conventional forms signal an important kind of prosodic choice, as he seeks to change the terms by which poetic form relates to its contexts. He develops a counternarrative of his formal practice that indulges in a prosodic fiction, namely, that the lines and stanzas of his poem represent or even imitate the seascapes of the Caribbean. Walcott's move to cast his stanzas as a feature of Caribbean geography does not free his formal practice from the dictates of history, but the emphasis on locality becomes a kind of advertising campaign directed at the poem's readers. Walcott understands that the sea, with all its historical content—slave bodies, sunk commodities, shipwrecks—cannot simply become a blank slate, but the poem's repeated returns to the Caribbean Sea as an ahistorical analogue for its prosody shape *Omeros* around the symbolic economies of Caribbean tourism. By repackaging local content—the beaches, waves, and ocean views of St. Lucia—within the poem's verse structure, Walcott marks the poem as a commodity for metropolitan audiences.[153]

Walcott has often remarked on his distaste for a formulaic approach to versification,[154] but a brief overview of the poem's formal characteristics will help us to see how its stanzas are a key aspect of its engagement with tourism. *Omeros* is close to eight thousand lines long, divided into sixty-four "chapters" across seven "books," and each chapter has three cantos containing anywhere from three to thirty-three stanzas.[155] With the exception of one canto (33.3), the entire

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[153] *Omeros* was written primarily for Euro-American audiences, who enter its world as cultural outsiders, most obviously when the poem slips into Francophone creole, the language of the street in Walcott's native St. Lucia. This dynamic (foreign form / local content) has been explored more generally by Franco Moretti: "the encounter of western forms and local reality did indeed produce everywhere a structural compromise" (*Distant Reading* 54). Moretti's model derives from novelistic fiction (citing "foreign plot," "local characters," and "local narrative voice," 57), and has been a controversial mainstay of recent criticism, countered by Ramazani's more supple model relating foreign and local along the axes of form and content (Ramazani, "Form" 114-129).

[154] Best exemplified in a 1999 interview: "Well, I've never known or cared to study the difference between a spondee and a dactyl, honestly. I hated to scan, I hated the formula of scansion, and the names of the scansion. I had a very hostile attitude to remembering the names of each of these modes of scansion" (Walcott, "Just a Fisherman" 1).

[155] The poem labels its internal divisions as "chapters" and "books," and I use the term "canto" to refer to the smallest subdivisions of the poem, which are only marked in the text by the presence of a roman numeral. I use the

poem is in irregularly rhymed tercets. Walcott always refers to the stanzaic form as a hybrid—"Roughly hexametrical with a terza rima form. It's like a combination of a Homeric line and a Dantesque design" (Walcott, White interview 174)—though the interlocking rhymes of his tercets rarely mimic the progression of terza rima. Often the rhymes alternate in quatrain patterns that frustrate and energize the three-line visual groupings, playing two segmentive periods of different lengths against one another, though Walcott never allows any particular pattern to develop too long before a mismatched line disrupts the scheme.[156] These rhymes can take many shapes, from eye-rhyme and anagrammatic rhymes to rollicking trisyllabic echoes of Byron, and the poet often mutes the effect of rhyme with enjambment, as over half of the poem's stanzas (not including canto endings) have no terminal punctuation.[157] Where a quatrain form (evoked by the rhyme patterns) would suggest closer alignment with syntactical closure and sonic balance, the shorter tercets interrupt our reading with more line breaks and prevent rhyme closure from becoming too frequent. In terms of meter *Omeros* is more complex; despite the poet's many assertions that the poem is in hexameter, the linear unit rarely develops consistent iambic rhythms or six-beat patterns that would audibly imitate Homeric cadences. It would be more

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term "tercet" inclusively, referring generally to three-line stanzas, rather than to distinguish three line stanzas with at least two rhyme sounds from triplets (three-line stanza with only one rhyme sound).

[156] In addition to the high degree of local variation, there are a number of broader trends distinguishing sections of the poem. Books Four and Seven contain the most experiments with initial and terminal rhyme schemes; the later books more frequently carry rhymes over canto boundaries; quatrain rhyme progressions tend to occur at the beginning of most cantos (as if we are reading true terza rima), but the endings vary widely; cantos become somewhat shorter on average in the middle of the epic, and first cantos are usually the longest in each chapter; stanzas are enjambed more frequently in the last two books of the poem, and there are a number of sections written exclusively in rhymed triplets. These looser patterns are harder to read in terms of their formal significance, because the locational understanding of stanzaic form dovetails with (touristic) close reading methodologies in a fetishization of the small, isolable unit.

[157] Including the poem's 192 terminal stanzas, the number jumps over fifty percent, but Walcott never runs syntax over a canto boundary.

accurate to call the poem's meter dodecasyllabic, because its lines fall in twelve syllables more consistently than they conform to any other pattern.[158]

These stanzas evince a variety of other formal influences, from Miltonic blank verse and Whitmanian oracular strophes to calypso song forms, that shape the poem into a plane of contact between disparate cultures. Our reading necessarily involves travel among a host of different formal traditions that situate the poem within historical and geographical networks from the ancient Mediterranean to the contemporary Americas.[159] Different eras and modalities of circulation gave birth to these forms,[160] from the nascent empire-building of Greek city-states to the international dissemination of radio broadcast: "smoke leaves no signature on its page of sand. / 'Yesterday, all my troubles seem so far away'" (*Omeros* 33). Walcott uses smoke to figure the shapes of literary tradition, balanced against a Beatles reference, reminding us that the poem emerges from a meta-tradition that includes both oral verse cultures and popular song.[161] The forms of *Omeros* are "from" Greece, Italy, England, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Africa, and the United States, developing through, around, and between the links between places and cultures. In

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[158] From a brief survey of the first and final lines in every canto, I would guess that between two-thirds and four-fifths of the poem is dodecasyllabic. Of the 192 cantos, forty-four have first lines with more or fewer than twelve syllables, and forty-four also have terminal lines with more or fewer than twelve (22.9%). Walcott sheds the dodecasyllabic norm for extended periods during the middle books, which correspond to the journey section of the poem (beginning noticeably in 25.1, the beginning of Book Three).

[159] Thinking of literature in geographic terms inevitably brings up theories of world literature. Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti have written extensively on the geography of texts and traditions, but their formulations of textual relationships mostly see the individual text/author as a node in a larger system. Moretti's *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (1996) frames the "world text" with boundaries beyond the nation-state, but within a form-content dichotomy that ultimately privileges the workings of ideology and social desire over form (*Modern Epic* 50-55). My reading of Walcott more closely resembles Eric Hayot's notion of "literary worlds," more concerned with the formal arrangements by which the text constructs its relationships to literary tradition as both intratextual and intertextual, which he designates as the "diegetic" and the "extradiegetic" (Hayot 45).

[160] The Homeric epics emerged from myths of travel, conquest and return, and the oral culture that gave birth to them was united by form (dactylic hexameter), which anchored composition and performance. Dante's epic was informed by the complicated and highly stylized forms of troubadour and canzonieri verse. More popular song forms like rock and calypso, united by paired rhymes and syntactical contiguity, traverse cultural and geographic boundaries in the same way, both stemming from African diasporic poetic traditions.

[161] Smoke and shadow are often used to suggest a vague relationship or parallel with empire and tradition, as when the narrator explicitly confronts the poem's Homeric allusions in 54.2: "Why make the smoke a door?" (271). The "no signature" hints at Homer, whose authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is largely a historical convention.

attending to the poem's stanzaic prosody, we are also conceiving its situatedness amid the cultural geographies, political histories, and literary traditions that made Walcott's hybridization of these forms possible.

Walcott's stanzas do not exactly resemble their traditional formal precedents. He shapes the poem more for fluidity than fixity, attempting to construct a prosodic structure from historical materials that somehow circumvents history. As the poet-narrator imagines the "Battle of the Saintes,"[162] the naval encounter that decided the linguistic fate of St. Lucia, and by extension, the language of the poem we are reading, the verse plays variations on Dante while troping its own workings as a "break from the classic pattern." This battle is often cited for a novel development in naval tactics. Admiral George Rodney is controversially credited with pioneering the maneuver of "breaking the line," a fitting subtext for an epic poem's featured naval battle.[163] But presented with this golden opportunity for a prosodic pun or trope, Walcott elects to use an even more suggestive locution, "the classic pattern":

> In the channel with three islets christened "Les Saintes,"
> in a mild sunrise the ninth ship of the French line
> flashed fire at *The Marlborough,* but swift pennants
>
> from Rodney's flagship resignalled his set design
> to break from the classic pattern. *The Marlborough*
> declined engagement and veered from the cannonade;
>
> reading the pennants, she crossed the enemy's trough,

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[162] Taking place off Dominica in April 1782 while Britain and France were still at war following the American Revolution (the Treaty of Paris was not signed until 1783), the battle tipped the balance of power in the Caribbean in favor of the British, who avenged the French naval victory that enabled the 1781 Yorktown blockade.

[163] Some dispute whether Rodney was actually the first to perform or order the maneuver, and historians are divided on whether this tactic was planned or impromptu. "Breaking the line" refers to a maneuver performed while two opposed groups of engaged ships are traveling in opposite directions along parallel lines, and a ship from one line turns to sail through the enemy's line on a perpendicular trajectory, in this case aided by a change in wind direction. As the easterly winds began to shift and blow to the north, the French ships were slowed, and Rodney broke from traditional strategy to sail through the French line, resulting in a decisive British victory. As other British ships followed suit, they captured or destroyed many of the French ships, including the Comte de Grasse's flagship *Ville de Paris*, a subtle connection to the Homeric source material. For more on the Caribbean context of Rodney's victory see Gibson, *Empire's Crossroads* (particularly 138-144).

her sister frigates joining the furrow she made.
You have seen pelicans veer over pink water

of an April bay. So, stem-to-stern, Rodney's force
in a bracing gust followed *The Marlborough;* but, since
the wind grew too light, both fleets were tacking off-course

and closing in at three or four knots from the wind's
changing sides; so close that all their cannoneers could
read the other's arc of ignition, hear the shout

before the recoil, and see the splintering wood,
then close-fire muskets, like cicadas in drought,
or stones that crack from a fisherman's beach-fire. (*Omeros* 84)

While the verse hardly mimics the exquisite unfolding of terza rima, the poet carefully lays rhymes in pairs such that no stanzaic unit is isolated from the overall rhyme scheme, and uses frequent enjambments to keep the poem moving. Even in the throes of naval warfare, Walcott tacks imaginatively toward the language of reading, as this "Battle of the Saintes" turns into a contest of interpretation: sailors "reading the pennants" before they "read the other's arc of ignition," as the admiral "resignalled his set design / to break from the classic pattern."

Walcott's recasting of this European battle over St. Lucia in terms of signals and patterns suggestively maps onto the epic's stanzaic scheme. Where the "classic pattern" suggests the pristinely regular and audible prosodies of Homer and Dante, Walcott's patterns are more tenuous. The poem is not in terza rima—third rhymes are occasional rather than the norm—but the interlocking rhymes played against the visual stanzaic shape preserve some of the linkage and momentum found in Dante. Frequent variations in rhyme scheme require readers to negotiate between the sonic and visual aspects of stanza form, but here even the rhymes are visual (after all, this is a contest of reading). Walcott uses "reading the pennants" to recall the macaronic rhyme from the first stanza (Saintes / pennants), which visually primes us for the eye rhyme of "trough" with "Marlborough." These rhymes have to be *read,* not heard. As does the meter; the

dodecasyllabic lines can suggest anywhere from four to eight stresses, but the verse's occasionally casual tone and fluctuating stress patterns conceal a striking attention to detail. Walcott too has a "set design," and he avoids using rhyme and meter in ways that would tie his prosody too closely to his formal predecessors, substantiating the notion that he can break with historical convention as boldly as any naval tactician.

While Walcott's quarrel with history has been charted thoroughly by other critics,[164] my investigation of the epic's stanzaic prosody is concerned less with the character and function of history in his poetry and more with the ways in which his versification becomes a ground for reconfiguring his poetry's relationship to history. In this way his project echoes Auden's exploration of the nuanced relationship between memory and forgetting in the mechanics of form. Walcott articulates an amnesiac or ahistorical approach to Caribbean art in "The Muse of History" (1974): "The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. The great poets of the New World, from Whitman to Neruda, reject this sense of history. Their vision of man in the New World is Adamic" (*Twilight* 3). Walcott dichotomizes the possibilities of New World poetics as Adamic or historical, celebrating the former as an aesthetic that does not permit history any determining power or creative potential. More remarkably, he stresses this kind of practice as a

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[164] For more extensive treatments of Walcott and history, see Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*; Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry*; and Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry.* For more topical analyses of the historical engagement in his work, see Melas, "Forgettable Vacations and Metaphor in Ruins: Walcott's *Omeros*"; Ramazani, "The Wound of Postcolonial History: Derek Walcott's *Omeros*" (*The Hybrid Muse*); Ted Williams, "Truth and Representation: The Confrontation of History and Mythology in *Omeros*"; and Emily Greenwood, "Still Going On": Temporal Adverbs and the View of the Past in Walcott's Poetry."

choice made by poets like Whitman or Neruda, to "refuse" and "reject" a certain sense of history, treating history as another discursive option that might equally be explored or ignored.[165]

If history has no imperative force, then literary tradition has no hold on contemporary poetics. Instead of foregrounding the historical origins of its prosody, *Omeros* invites the reader to think of its formal elements in terms of fluidity and the ocean, because the sea and the waves seem to embody everything from the cyclical movements of poetic form to the amnesia of Caribbean history. For Walcott, the physical geography of the ocean connects directly to his epic's wave-inspired prosody: "The length of the line relates to the length of the horizon, and this is a marine poem so it's always got a horizon… it's that sense of traveling, of the waves coming towards you, or a long view of the sea" (Bourne 3).[166] The poet-narrator repeatedly encourages this fiction, inviting us to understand the poem as oceanic music:[167] "Only in you [Homer], across centuries / of the sea's parchment atlas, can I catch the noise / of the surf lines wandering" (*Omeros* 13); "when a wave rhymes with one's grave" (159); "Then I made myself hear the water's / language around the rocks in its clear-running lines" (177); "the cloud-eyed singer / whose hand plucked the sea's wires" (203); I could still hear its white lines in the far-off foam" (294). From the invocation on, Walcott builds this overarching analogy, that the poem's music is like the sea, from a conglomerate of suggestive figures, the "lines," "shapes," "rhymes," "rhythms," or "patterns" that pervade the text and almost convince us that the epic is about the

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[165] Even the move to conflate the poem's prosody and the sea has its resonance in this alternative historical tradition, following Whitman's use of the same comparison. For more on Whitman's oceanic poetics, see Jeffrey Yang, "Apologia for the Sea."

[166] The horizon figures prominently in *Omeros* as a metaphor for the outer boundary of the narrator's location (as well as its appearance as a "line"), but that subjectively determined sense of place is also shot through with the presence of other locales, as when the poet links his craft to Caribbean history and geography: "My throat was scarred // from a horizon that linked me to others" (*Omeros* 191).

[167] I use "fiction" in the sense developed by Stephen Cushman in *Fictions of Form in American Poetry* (1993). He argues that obsessive reflection on form—"American poets occupy themselves with formal issues, and with spinning out these bothersome fictions of form meditating on these issues" (188)—can be a method for situating poetry within extrapoetic discourses.

fluidity of poetic language. Stanzas break over syntax, pulling us back contrapuntally through rhyme and surging forward through enjambment, and the poem's prosody (as well as its playfully canny narrator) depends upon our recognition of this complicated momentum as *deliberately* wavelike. This fiction makes the poet's formal fluctuations legible to tourist-readers, because the stanzas of *Omeros* can be drawn together under a master-trope that transmutes intricate formal dynamics into a more comprehensible figure.

The stanzaic dynamics clinch this fiction for Walcott. The poem's interlocking rhyme scheme often proceeds in an ABAB quatrain pattern, one of the its most consistent formal elements, that works against the tercet form in an endless, fluid back-and-forth:[168]

> All the thunderous myths of that ocean were blown
> up with the spray that dragged from the lacy bulwarks
> of Cap's bracing headland. The sea had never known
>
> any of them, nor had the illiterate rocks,
> nor the circling frigates, nor even the white mesh
> that knitted the Golden Fleece. The ocean had
>
> no memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh,
> or whose sword severed whose head in the *Iliad*.
> It was an epic where every line was erased
>
> yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf
> in that blind violence with which one crest replaced
> another with a trench and that heart-heaving sough
>
> begun in Guinea to fountain exhaustion here,
> however one read it, not as our defeat or
> our victory; it drenched every survivor
>
> with blessing. It never altered its metre
> to suit the age, a wide page without metaphors.
> Our last resort as much as yours, Omeros. (295-6)

[168] I have added lines to demarcate the rhyme groups. Despite Walcott's claims for the "Dantesque design," the epic's most consistent progression suggests rhymed quatrains. Well over half (119/192) of the poem's cantos begin with a stanza that appears to initiate a terza rima progression, only to change in the second stanza, which in Dante would rhyme bcb. Many cantos then proceed as if in quatrains (aba bcd cde fef) with only occasional interruptions, such that every four stanzas can mark a double circuit, with three quatrains effectively pieced out into four tercets.

The alternating rhymes, often suspended across the visual stanzaic gap, allow for a counterpoint like the caesura-enjambment intersections of blank verse. The opposing verse segments are subsumed within an overall stanzaic regularity that allows the oceanic fiction, "It never altered its metre," to resonate even with localized variations like the suggestive half-rhymes that conclude this excerpt.[169] The inevitability of change makes change part of the pattern, and the fluctuating relationships between metrical, rhyming, syntactical, and visual segments allow us to conceive of the stanzaic scheme as a fluid, imaginative geography.[170] The ocean functions as the perfect poem, neither immutably fixed ("an epic where every line was erased // yet freshly written") nor beholden to comparison ("a wide page without metaphors"), Walcott's enigmatic figures offering possibilities of organic, elemental poetry beyond artifice. This Caribbean covers our eyes with lines and meters, suggesting that we are "reading" the ocean, exposed as tourists by our desire to experience the seascape and by the hermeneutic mediation of our gaze.

Walcott turns to the sea as a "last resort" to conceptualize an ideal poetics, "freshly written in sheets of exploding surf," underwritten by elemental forces without being subjected to the ossification of literary history. But this turn discloses the ubiquitous presence of literary-historical echoes in his poem; even when the Homeric parallels have been set aside to focus entirely on the direct representation of his island, the dodecasyllabic lines and rhymed tercets organize the poem within systems of thought derived from the European canon. And while the sea "never altered its metre / to suit the age," Walcott's epic certainly has adapted to the demands

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[169] For instance, the epic contains occasional sequences of true terza rima, and the middle books have longer lines with more flexible rhythms. Book Three's shift to more flexible line lengths and idiosyncratic rhythms links Walcott's verse technique to the poem's geographical movement, using suggestively Afro-Caribbean forms just as Achille travels to explore his diasporic roots (Callahan 29-30).

[170] As Debra Fried says of stanzas, "Until you visit and traverse each island, there is no predicting the climate or flora of the archipelago" (Fried 56).

of its era. He balances alternating rhymes suggestive of popular song forms like calypso with a relatively unobtrusive (but consistent) metrical scheme and a high rate of enjambment that reflect dominant reading preferences in the age of free verse. The stanzas of *Omeros* involve a far more complicated interplay of history and technique than the oceanic analogy allows, but this figurative parallel both makes the poem's versification more legible and offers an alternative way to read the outlines of literary history, aligning the verse with nature and against the mechanisms of cultural imperialism.

The oceanic fiction addresses the basic need, common to critics and tourists, to assign meaning to the unfamiliar, in this case the formal elements of Walcott's poem.[171] Many read the poem's prosody through this analogy, most clearly articulated by José María Pérez-Fernández: "Walcott's intention was to build up his poem on a stanza form that recalled, both rhythmically and from the perspective of literary, critical tradition, the recurring movement of the waves" (Pérez-Fernández 72).[172] Some position the poem's watery motions against the economics of tourism, as when Natalie Melas argues that its form substantiates the existence of particular people in a particular place against the de-localizing influence of tourism, opposing "the flatness

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171 This need results in reading stanzaic forms tropologically: "the poem's sturdily instrumental latticework may flash into self-regarding significance—may become a meaningful trope or metaphor rather than a scheme or surface design" (Fried 59); "It is possible to think of scheme not as a mold of form into which meaning is poured, but rather as a sort of crucible in which trope is cooked and which then is itself consumed in the cooking" (Hollander, *Melodious Guile* 6); "the prosody of the poem is itself operating as a metaphor" (Callahan 49).

172 This reading was first articulated by Brad Leithauser, who wryly suggests Walcott "captured the music of the sea" (Leithauser 94). Knox calls them "fluent tercets" (Knox 3), Robert Hamner says the verse "flows over and through" the tercets (Hamner 5). Emily Greenwood asserts that "Throughout *Omeros* Walcott sustains the consubstantiation of sea and poem: the sea is inscribed and envisaged as a text, and Walcott's art is given substance and reality through its association with sea (the real empire, and the real history)" (Greenwood 133). Laura Cahill-Booth offers a particularly lively rendering: "the rhythms Walcott achieves through a flexible rhyme scheme and fluctuating line lengths are consistent with the rhythmic inconsistencies of the sea. The movement of the sea is the driving force of the poem. Water flows in a circular pattern; it is constant, ongoing, with no beginning or end. Waves swell in the open ocean or break in shallow water at the shore at varying speeds and intensities. Wave motion is periodic and variable; it is repetitive through a fixed period of time, but that time can be brief. In the rhythms of the sea, Walcott finds a form to animate the environmental, embodied and literary intertexts of his geomythographical prose poem. He loosely interprets Homer's hexameter and Dante's terza rima, but ultimately subordinates these technical elements to the fluctuating, yet persistent rhythms he finds in the sea" (Cahill-Booth 356-357).

of commodified space" (Melas 152-158). Anthony Carrigan similarly reads the form as a force of particularity against the homogenization of global tourism (Carrigan 55), but both critics miss how the poem's forms, which depend on and cater to foreign audiences, also reproduce the touristic consumption they supposedly resist. To insist on the particularity of its versification as a counter to global tourism, one would have to ignore that its publication by Farrar, Straus & Giroux positioned *Omeros* to ascend to the top of the global Anglophone literary market,[173] and that all verse forms develop from conventional models. Reading practices that take the poem's formal elements to evoke the Caribbean reinscribe the poem within economies of tourism by transposing prosody's value as a critical commodity onto poetry's cultural value.

The attempt to figure poetic form as the ocean is not equivalent to foreign resort developers exploiting the St. Lucian seascape for profit, but the imitative fiction (including critics who endorse it) and tourist brochures both invoke the same symbolic economy, in which European forms are used to develop Caribbean resources in exchange for Euro-American money. Walcott's wish to "break from the classic pattern"—which I take to signify both the specific ways he abrogates the prosodic strategies he ostensibly adopts (especially those of Homer and Dante) and a more general aversion to reproducing the formal paradigms of the past—does not quite herald a new Adamic poetics. His most intriguing choice, to craft verse that aspires to the status of nature, allows us to imagine a poem whose elemental force and natural beauty is not determined by history, but this vision cannot fully be realized. Walcott's enabling fiction stresses

[173] Walcott's primary publisher following his move to the United States, beginning with *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981). Widely considered the most prestigious poetry publisher in the United States, FSG is also the American publisher of Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney, two of Walcott's closest friends and fellow Nobel laureates.

that the poem, and especially its versification, is coextensive with the Caribbean Sea, laying the foundation for our reading of *Omeros* as poetic tourism.[174]

"The Same, the Same": Stanzaic Markers and Formal Reflexivity

This fiction of natural beauty, intertwined with the poem's stanzaic prosody, becomes both an effective marketing strategy and a compelling poetic "sight," even while the ultimately canonical underlying forms are necessary anchors for Anglo-American readers. The break from tradition is itself a conventional aesthetic strategy, one equally chosen by Dante, Milton, and Whitman before their prosodic rebellions aged into hallmarks of tradition and came to shape the landscape of modern poetry. Moreover, once readers (following Walcott) entertain the notion that the poem's prosody can be viewed as in some way ahistorical or natural, reading runs the risk of reproducing the epistemic violence of imperialism by failing to acknowledge the European discursive forms through which the Caribbean is being constructed and consumed by outsiders. So when Walcott casts the poem's prosody as a force of nature, unbound by the strictures of history, he also continually recalls his verse's canonical foundations, exposing the role of poetic form (and the tenor of our reading practices) in mediating our experience of the text. Both of these formal moves dress the poem up for a global audience: the poem presents its stanzaic patterns as representational shapes to transport the reader to the Caribbean, while Walcott routinely refers to Homeric and Dantean precedents to explain his epic's form to Anglo-American readers. And both require stanzas to work as self-signifying structures, pointing back at their own workings as the locus of touristic interest and the medium of travel.

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[174] Anthony Carrigan sees this as the key payoff of *Omeros*, "Walcott's ultimate assertion that… the 'muse' of poetry continues to play a vital role in representing its contemporary touristed landscapes" (Carrigan 45).

The poem relentlessly interrogates its own methods for representing St. Lucia. Near the end, Walcott recalls the Battle of the Saintes while staging a conceptual struggle with Plunkett the historian over their opposite strategies for reading the character Helen. The poet-narrator embraces an organic, natural mode of reading versus the historian's reliance on tradition and comparison, as, "like enemy ships of the line, / we crossed on a parallel" (*Omeros* 270). Despite the former's claims that he speaks "in the native speech / of its shallows," and "despised any design / that kept to a chart, that calculated the winds. / My inspiration was impulse" (270), Walcott acknowledges the power that European literature exercises over the poem, figuring his traditional reading as fertilizer, mediator, and echo:

> All that Greek manure under the green bananas,
> under the indigo hills, the rain-rutted road,
> the galvanized village, the myth of rustic manners,
>
> glazed by the transparent page of what I had read.
> What I had read and rewritten till literature
> was guilty as History. When would the sails drop
>
> from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War
> in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?
> When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse
>
> shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,
> the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros";
> when would I enter that light beyond metaphor? (271)

The quatrain rhymes overlap with syntactical closures, and we expect the twelfth line to bring both patterns full-circle, but the fourth stanza asks "When would it stop" and alters the pattern, adding a true third rhyme (drop / shop / stop). The twelfth line, arguably the most important in the entire epic, attempts to envision an original poetics, divested of figurative parallels and literary history, just as the rhyme scheme breaks and we land with a thud on the decisive

question, with metaphor picking up a faint resonance of "War" in the seventh line.[175] The admission that his representation of St. Lucia is "glazed by the transparent page of what I had read" prompts a consideration of how literature takes on historical force. Readers interpret *Omeros* through that traditional glass, the poem framed as an exhibit in the hall of canonical verse epics, and Walcott's guilt stems from the recognition that this same literature played a role in the imperial domination of St. Lucia.[176] His embrace of European formal traditions limits the possibility of constructing a poem beyond the influence of history, but he also folds the poem's layers of formal artifice into a densely reflexive stanzaic shape.

Walcott's primarily Euro-American audience encounters the poem through its stanzas, which are not just the locations of cultural contact, but also icons of their own complex status as Caribbean hybrids and canonical shapes. We read to see the transposition of classical epic into Caribbean locales, the sight of the canon on vacation. With stanzaic structures that signal Caribbeanness in their calypso-suggestive rhyme schemes and canonicity in their Dantean patterns, *Omeros* can be read as the extension of imperial forms or the resistance of indigenous rhythms. But when we take stanzas to mark the poem's traditional affiliations, we are faced with circuits of hermeneutic artifice and self-reference.[177] Stanzaic forms remind us that we are looking at a poem as distinct from other linguistic media, typifying the patterns that we understand as poetry. Stanzas mark the poem and in some ways they *are* the poem (which in other structural combinations would be another poem), becoming "signs of themselves" in the

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[175] Clearly echoing Dante's final invocation "O luce etterna" (*Paradiso* 33.124) and possibly a second-level allusion to St. Lucia. This ironic nod to the end of the *Commedia* both grounds us in the formal parallel and suggests the difficulty of transcending analogical or metaphorical modes of thinking. The formal play of quatrain and tercets also hints at Dante's final simile, the attempt to square the circle and find a harmony of shape and movement.

[176] In particular the *Iliad*. St. Lucia was known as the "Helen of the West Indies" by the European imperial powers fighting for control of it, and this usage survives today: for instance, see Guy Ellis's *St. Lucia: Helen of the West Indies*, a book of travel photography last reissued in 2006.

[177] For more on the stanza as self-referential see Fried (58) and Hollander (*Vision and Resonance* 247).

semiotic register of the poetic tourist.[178] Walcott's frequent tropes on poetic form encourage us to read his prosody for these reflexive sonic textures, as his versification raises questions around the stanza's modalities of representation as a way of engaging the tourist-reader.[179]

Omeros often foregrounds the hybridity of its stanzas, encouraging us to read these individual units as collisions of canonical with creole poetics. The poem opens with a touristic encounter centered on wounds,[180] as Philoctete describes for tourists how the fishermen cut down trees for canoes (wounding nature), and for extra cash, also shows them a wound on his leg. Much of the epic is similarly devoted to exploring the woundedness of its characters and environments, with the poet's linguistic wound the most compelling of all:

> Like Philoctete's wound, this language carries its cure,
> its radiant affliction; reluctantly now,
> like Achille's, my craft slips the chain of its anchor,
>
> moored to its cross as I leave it, its nodding prow
> lettered as simply, ribbed in our native timber,
> riding these last worried lines; its rhythm agrees
>
> that all it forgot a swift made it remember
> since that green sunrise of axes and laurel-trees,
> till the sunset chars it, slowly, to an ember. (323)

Insisting that the poem's language can be both the wound of history and its cure, the poet stages his stanzaic technique as a uniquely tortured product—the "it" of his literal and figurative "craft" is suggestively afflicted, enslaved, crucified, and charred—and recalls the epic's first scene as a kind of linguistic trauma, in which the laurel trees (suggestive of poetic achievement) were cut

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[178] This connection of self-reference with the "sight" of the poem takes on a different resonance in the following chapter, where I explore Jorie Graham's visual stanzaic schemes as self-signaling patterns of poetic embodiment.
[179] Brouillette: "Like the business of tourism, any postcoloniality industry depends upon the very marketability of self-consciousness about the production and consumption of what circulates within it… The literary gestures that attend this hesitation are at the foundation of Walcott's considerable critical success" (Brouillette 7, 43).
[180] This scene takes the place of a traditional epic invocation, making tourism an initiating concern of the entire poem (Melas 153). Ramazani details the complicated discourse around the poem's "wound" (*The Hybrid Muse* 49-71).

down to construct this supposedly simple craft. He feigns difficulty with written language—"lettered as simply," and "riding these last worried lines" even while managing a complex stanzaic form.[181] Walcott attempts to align himself with an oral poetics of the street, but his practiced craft and the poem's canonical structures more clearly embody the linguistic effects of European colonization, the "radiant affliction" making his prosody possible. He likens the verse to Philoctete's wound, described as a "crusted, agonized O: the scream / of centuries" (246), tying the poem's stanzaic form to long histories of domination. The apostrophic, invocatory "O" also reads as the scream of the dispossessed, as if all poetic conventions trace back to the poet's colonial education and the British domination (political and cultural) of his native St. Lucia.

Whether despite or because of the links between the Homeric-Dantean stanzas and the spread of the western canon through colonial education systems, this same self-conscious, "simply-lettered" form is the poem's most tangible asset that enables its success in the international literary marketplace.[182] Walcott's previous volumes and awards already marked his work as a valuable literary commodity for readers and critics,[183] but the formal design of *Omeros* elicits even greater interest for its attempt to adapt some of the canon's most unassailably central authors within a contemporary Caribbean context. While always citing hexameter and terza rima in interviews, Walcott's characterization of his canonical predecessors as "All that Greek manure under the green bananas," clarifies that these formal traditions have a specific economic value, figuratively fertilizing his work. The poem's stanzaic form, aesthetically coded as exotic,

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[181] The passage refers to Achille's earlier misspelling of his boat's name, *In God We Troust* (*Omeros* 8).
[182] Sarah Brouillette describes Walcott's poetics as reliant on "an audience educated in modernist poetics but also interested in the Caribbean as novel literary material" (Brouillette 26), and Omaar Hena observes that "Walcott deliberately positions his particular brand of Caribbean poetics for global canonization" (Hena 52)
[183] Already the recipient of the Order of the British Empire (1972), a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (1981), and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (1988), with at least eleven volumes of poetry to his name, Walcott's literary reputation was secure even before the publication of *Omeros*.

becomes commodified for its culturally distinct "fruit" growing out of the poet's traditional learning,[184] with broad appeal in its recognizable adaptations of traditional forms.

Yet Walcott's stanzaic form is also praised as an emblem of the poem's Caribbeanness. It "creolizes the Homeric line and the Dantean stanza to convey a unique Caribbean rhythm, an irregular beat that is most often heard in the popular music of jazz, calypso, or reggae" (Pollard 167), and evinces "the homemade texture of creole traditions" (Breslin 245). This homemade texture can be glimpsed most clearly in the quatrain rhyme structures and variable linear rhythms that play against the scrupulously regular visual tercets:

> Hunched on their oars, they smile; "This is we Calypso,
> Captain, who treat we like swine, you ain't seeing shore.
> Let this sun burn you black and blister your lips so
>
> it hurt them to give orders, fuck you and your war."
> The mattock rests, idle. No oar lifts a finger.
> Blisters flower on palms. The bewildered trireme
>
> is turning the wrong way, like the cloud-eyed singer
> whose hand plucked the sea's wires, back towards the dream
> of Helen, back to that island where their hunched spine
>
> bristled and they foraged the middens of Circe,
> when her long white arm poured out the enchanting wine
> and they bucked in cool sheets. "Cap'n, boy? Beg mercy
>
> o' that breeze for a change, because sometimes your heart
> is as hard as that mast, you dream of Ithaca,
> you pray to your gods. May they be as far apart
>
> from your wandering as ours in Africa. (*Omeros* 202-203)

Counting out the rhymes makes envisioning these tercets as the locations of our travel difficult, because there are multiple levels of stanzaic form being played against one another. Our poetic

[184] Graham Huggan explains the commodification of cultural difference through the "exotic": "a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them" (Huggan 13). For more on strategic exoticism see Huggan (32-33, 40-50) and Brouillette (26-43).

travel is complicated by the shapes of multiple traditions, here in the rhymed echoes of Ithaca and Africa that suggest parallel but competing rhythmic influences. The syllabic pattern allows for fluid linear rhythms, from loose iambic beats like "you pray to your gods. May they be as far apart" to the syncopation of "it hurt them to give orders, fuck you and your war." Combined with the grouping of rhymes in fours (typical of song forms), this "calypso" scheme authenticates Walcott's adaptated terza rima as distinctly Caribbean.[185] This passage's rhymes in alternating quatrains remain consistent, though the voice shifts from sailors to the narrator, making "This is we Calypso" a collective statement of the epic's voices, including the Homeric figure Seven Seas, whose "Greek calypso" (286) cements the creolization of Walcott's canon.

Highlighting the connection with calypso validates the poem as a Caribbean product, but of course it is not real calypso, because Walcott's tercets keep the prosody firmly in the world of written verse. The structural play of rhymed quatrains against visual tercets makes his "calypso" a unique cultural product, while the technical dynamics also complicate our ability to consume the poem as tourist-readers. The iconic function of stanzas—that these tercets mark themselves as creole and canonical—reminds us that forms are developed over time as conventions of exchange between writers and readers. Therefore the process of site creation and marking in poetic form depends on other poems and readers (especially critics) to establish the poem's value as a tourist site/sight. Critics highlight the formal workings of *Omeros* as a sight to see: "a dazzling play of rhyme, half rhyme, and assonance" (Knox 3); "matchless variety and inventiveness" (Leithauser 93); "a revelation, numinous and perfectly formed" (Baker). The

[185] See Donald Hill's *Calypso Callaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad* for more on the medium's function as social and political commentary, as well as an appendix of lyrics evincing the conventionality of four-line groupings in calypso music. Calypso's frequent use of ternary rhythms also mirrors Walcott's dependence on trisyllabic feet throughout the epic; for more on the prosodic connection see Callahan 53-54.

language around form is not just laudatory, but a discourse of marking and marketing that mystifies these stanzas, canonizing Walcott for his technical virtuosity.[186]

If we see these stanzas as tourists see the Caribbean, looking at form as poetry's iconic, allusive, self-signifying apparatus, we place value on the poem's internal formal consistency, typified by the stanza's sameness and interchangeability. As Huggan observes, the aspects of interchangeability and sameness surrounding the reading and analysis of postcolonial texts are the key to the construction of their "talismanic" status (Huggan 10-19). Tourism depends on the equivalence of cultural forms' individual manifestations, making stanzas and canto structures (that package sequences of tercets as isolable lyrics) ideal shapes for commodifying verse. One could excerpt a canto or two, as both the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* do, to study a piece of Walcott's poem in place of the whole; our role as tourist-readers allows us to choose our beach, our island, our stanza(s), because they are all essentially the same. If the stanzaic forms of *Omeros* are *desirable* products (associated with canonical prestige and exoticized Caribbeanness), *familiar* products (shaped like traditional precedents), and *undifferentiated* products (expected to look the same), the poem's status as commodity depends on our treatment of these stanzas as isolable and interchangeable, utterly devoid of any distinctive quality.

But Walcott foregrounds this structural equivalence as an interpretive dilemma, challenging us to re-examine our expectations of stanzaic forms. The poem dissects its own sameness in the transition between Books Two and Three, as the sea-swift pulls Achille across the Atlantic, and he recognizes a familiar aesthetic in an ancestral African dance:

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[186] Many assert that the poem is simply "in" terza rima or hexameter, citing a canonical form (hexameter, terza rima) as the locus of interest. As MacCannell and Culler point out, the process of establishing markers that testify to a sight's authenticity is itself culturally constructed and its aims are artificial, so when we read critics formally mis-characterizing *Omeros*, those markers serve just as effectively to mark the poem's forms as important sights.

> On the day of his feast they wore the same plantain trash
> like Philoctete at Christmas. A bannered mitre
> of bamboo was placed on his head, a calabash
>
> mask, and skirts that made him both woman and fighter.
> That was how they danced at home, to fifes and tambours,
> the same berries round their necks and the small mirrors
>
> flashing from their stuffed breasts. One of the warriors
> mounted on stilts walked like lightning over the thatch
> of the peaked village. Achille saw the same dances
>
> that the mitred warriors did with their bamboo stick
> as they scuttered around him, lifting, dipping their lances
> like diving rods turning the earth to music,
>
> the same chac-chac and ra-ra, the drumming the same,
> and the chant of the seed-eyed prophet to the same
> response from the blurred ankles. The same, the same.

Chapter XXVII

I

> He could hear the same echoes made by their stone axes
> in the heights over the tied sticks of the settlement,
> and the echoes were prediction and memory, the crossing X's
>
> of the sidewise strokes, but here in their element
> the trees and the spirits that they uttered were
> rooted, and Achille looked at the map in his hand (*Omeros* 143-144)

Overwhelmed by the impression of aesthetic sameness, Achille reimagines the historical links between his ancestral culture and Caribbean culture broken by the transatlantic slave trade, from the sounds of maracas (chac-chac) and drumming to the dancing ankles. The identical triple rhyme of "same," a word that appears five times in this stanza after three previous iterations, marks the stanza (after a thousand tercets) as a location for articulating and challenging sameness. Walcott carries "same" over the chapter boundary, leveraging Achille's impression of

sameness to reconstruct an aesthetic tradition free of European influence, but also to alert us to the reader's role in creating and homogenizing cultural differences via interpretation.

These stanzas foreground Achille's (and the reader's) ability to distinguish difference, destabilizing the interpretive equivalences, both intertextual and intratextual, that we construct around Walcott's forms. When he hears axes make "the same echoes," Achille both structurally recalls and historically foresees (he has traveled into the distant past) the beginning of the epic, when the laurier-cannelle trees are felled for canoes. His assertion that "the echoes were prediction and memory" suggests that the rhymes calling and responding across stanza breaks form part of a prosodic continuum, both within and beyond the text. And yet in these echoing stanzas we can just distinguish the prosodic difference of the epic's middle books, where the transition to more variable line lengths makes rhyme periods more flexible and the linear stress patterns less predictable.[187] But without a consistent accentual meter, we can only confirm this shift by counting syllables, so that our attention to versification effectively produces this formal difference: the first stanza of Chapter XXVII ends with a *seventeen*-syllable line, much longer than the dodecasyllabic norm, but the stanzas do not seem radically altered. Do we "hear the same echoes" of the epic's formal precedents and its earlier formal shapes?

Achille's reading of ancestral African culture as related to and distinct from the Caribbean mirrors the tourist-reader's collision with expectations of sameness from the poem's stanzaic patterns, which are continuously transforming and distancing themselves from their formal precedents. The identical triplet rhyme of "the same" not only tropes the poem's form and punctuates a chapter, but connects a narrative sequence extending *over* the chapter boundary. Reading form as a self-referential sign, we miss the other ways Walcott manipulates stanzaic

[187] Walcott sheds the dodecasyllabic norm for extended periods during the middle books, which correspond to the journey section of the poem (beginning noticeably in 25.1, the beginning of Book Three).

structure throughout *Omeros,* using stanzas as more than iterable, undifferentiated vehicles of poetic language. To this end we might ask how the stanza brings readers into networks of obligation, and what reading form can teach us about the broader workings of touristic economies.

Ancestral Rhyme and Forms of Obligation

Walcott's stanzas manifest the tourist's desire for sameness, for that formal iconicity that makes each stanza look like "everywhere else," but they only have the potential to conform to readers' expectations because they also play a role in shaping those expectations. Stanzas are not just vehicles of travel or markers of tradition; they facilitate the exchange between writer and reader, organizing our attention to rhetoric and narrative with technical shifts. By establishing the visual tercets and quatrain rhymes, Walcott opens up possibilities of deviation and surprise in pattern (especially rhyme scheme) that showcase the virtuosity of his technique and reconfigure readers' expectations of his stanzas, creating a key interpretive difficulty: if we focus on moments of formal intrigue, that attention invests patterns of sonic interest with greater poetic value, treating certain stanzas as more worthwhile sights of poetic artistry. Thus any reading that searches for formal breaks and surprises as conduits of meaning can become a kind of formalist sightseeing and a reification of tourism within the text.

The most obvious such moment is Chapter XXXIII, Canto III, when *Omeros* finally "breaks" its form, troping the stanzas as rooms echoing throughout a house:

> House of umbrage, house of fear,
> house of multiplying air
>
> House of memories that grow

like shadows out of Allan Poe

House where marriages go bust,
house of telephone and lust

House of caves, behind whose door
a wave is crouching with its roar

House of toothbrush, house of sin,
of branches scratching, "Let me in!"

House whose rooms echo with rain,
of wrinkled clouds with Onan's stain (173)

The rhymed tetrameter couplets are jarring after over a thousand tercets.[188] By no accident does Walcott modify the stanzaic shape, associated with "rooms," just as he imaginatively journeys back into an empty house, suggestive of poetry's formal traditions.[189] By transforming the stanza, Walcott calls attention to the poem's versification as more than just a reflexive marker of the text's status as poetry, making the stanzas of *Omeros* a site where formal traditions are not only recalled, but actively reshaped by the poet. The key to this passage lies in the reference to Onan, who was killed by God for refusing to father a child by his deceased brother's wife.[190] The allusion can read as self-congratulation, pointing out how Walcott constructs his own traditions

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[188] As we explore *Omeros* more deeply, we find an abundance of other couplets: the middles of many cantos offer closural moments with rhymed couplets that delineate important verse segments. These couplets exist in parallel with the endings of numerous cantos within the text and conventional usage in canonical verse narratives, fracturing cantos into smaller segments. Thirty-eight of the epic's cantos conclude with rhymed couplets. This technique appears in works as diverse as *Don Juan* and *Hamlet,* in which rhymed couplets close off regular stanzas or longer prosodic segments. Byron's ottava rima (rhymed abababcc) uses the couplet often for pithy commentary in between narrative segments, and Shakespeare often uses rhymed couplets to punctuate scenes of mostly blank verse. Walcott often uses this technique to frame significant passages, such as Warwick's benediction at the end of Book One (13.3), Plunkett's recognition of his erotic obsession with Helen (18.2), the narrator's self-interrogation about his art's exploitation (45.2), the scene with Omeros rising from the waves (56.1), and Seven Seas's lecture on traveling (58.1).

[189] For the biographical context see Hamner 89-91. The etymological connection (echoing "rooms") and placement suggest a specifically literary space, as does the placement, around the epic's halfway point, a nod to *Inferno,* which opens, "Half way along the road we have to go" in C. H. Sisson's translation ("Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" in the original; Dante 46). The exact location in Canto 33.3 (the ninety-ninth canto) reinforces the connection to Dante's hundred cantos of terza rima, signaling a formal break from its predecessor.

[190] Onan was the second son of Judah; his story in Genesis 38 is a key text for Jewish and Christian theologians writing on the ethics of sex and contraception, but in Walcott's case it makes more sense to read the reference figuratively as a literary genealogy ("shadows out of Allan Poe") that runs through him.

and mythologies around his poem, but the core of the intertext is obligation. Onan's refusal to continue his elder brother's line makes the question of tradition in Walcott's epic not the one suggested by Eliot—"Can the new work enter the tradition?"—but a refraction—"Does literary tradition place obligations on the current poem?"[191] Once again the prosody of *Omeros* offers a choice: to define formal traditions in terms of inheritance and obligation, or to understand the game of form as aesthetically masturbatory, an indulgent method of self-promotion in the literary marketplace.

Either view profoundly affects how we assess the poem's forms as mechanisms of poetic tourism. The former returns us to Walcott's quarrel with history, because the European literary tradition is not equally inherited by all, a reminder that slavery and colonization erased the possibility of inheritance for many:

> our only inheritance that elemental noise
> of the windward, unbroken breakers, Ithaca's
> or Africa's, all joining the ocean's voice,
>
> because this is the Atlantic now, this great design
> of the triangular trade. Achille saw the ghost
> of his father's face shoot up at the end of the line. (130)

As the poem imaginatively reverses the course of history, sending Achille back to Africa, Walcott articulates how the ocean embodies the only history possible for West Indian writers, because the transatlantic slave trade permanently displaced millions of people for whom there can be no inheritance other than the geography of the Caribbean. Thus even an oceanic reading

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[191] Eliot: "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity" (Eliot, *Selected Prose* 38). The turn toward obligation resonates with the major conflict of Walcott's poetic career, articulated in "A Far Cry from Africa": "how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love? / Betray them both, or give back what they give?" (*The Poetry of Derek Walcott* 28).

of the poem's prosody as an embrace of "that elemental noise" becomes a historical reading, tying the machinations of verse form to "this great design / of the triangular trade."[192] Under the logic of "this great design," the use of traditional forms entails an obligation to remember the histories of economic exploitation that propped up European imperialism and its foundational cultural myths. The latter, perhaps more obvious, reading would lead us to a cynical view of stanzaic form and formalist reading as a narrow economy in which poetic performers profit off aesthetic techniques which are then also studied for profit by critics. By this paradigm Walcott becomes another one of the "local troubadours" (*Twilight* 81) performing for tourists to make a living, and the obligations of form only extend as far as the circuits of economic exchange that reward his technical prowess.

To hold on to the possibilities of "communal obligation" that Pollard finds in verse form, we need to see how the stanza involves communal bonds that bring readers into networks of obligation, instead of simply resembling the workings of tourist economies. Even in the narrowest lens, formal conventions are seen as a contract between writer and reader,[193] so in stanzas we expect to find consistent markers of our relationship to the text. We determine the stanzaic shapes of *Omeros* according to conventional expectations, and one of the core expectations of strophic organization is predictability, but Walcott complicates our ability to form specific expectations of stanzaic relationships. When patterns begin to vary, and the contract changes, our expectations lead us to try to preserve the contract as an act of reciprocity, treating the poem's stanzaic shifts as significant to uphold our formal obligations (and those of the poet in writing). The stanzas remain dodecasyllabic rhymed tercets, but at any given juncture

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[192] Design here almost certainly hints at the currents of stanzaic form, with the numerological suggestion of overlap between the triangular trade and Walcott's tercets.

[193] For an encapsulation of this theory, see Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 15.

we have little sense of what patterns of rhythm and rhyme will govern the next stanza based on the current one. So we approach these stanzas expecting to be surprised, attending to Walcott's technique as a performance that enables us to reaffirm the obligations that undergird poetic form.

The poem's unexpected designs both alert us to our status as tourist-readers and draw us in with the magnetism of virtuosity, most often in Walcott's creative use of rhyme schemes. Rhyme typifies traditional stanzas and can be used to signify overall poetic form (as when rappers refer to their "rhymes"); it is both a thing we find in poems and a happening we cause by reading poems, like the sites/sights of tourism, supposedly found at textual locations while also dependent on conventional marking and framing to enable readers to see as well as hear it. Many critics question rhyme's semantic function,[194] painting its effects as distracting or merely ornamental, as when Leithauser praises the variety of rhyme in *Omeros*, though puzzles over why Walcott changes or interrupts schemes at various junctures (Leithauser 93). A wide array of distorting rhyme strategies in *Omeros* demands greater attention and inventiveness from the reader, but these forms press us with the importance of obligation: if our interest in technique does not transcend formal sightseeing, we are interpretively confined by our tourism, even as the stanzaic forms we read open out into wider historical and geographical networks.

Technical complexity offers the poem's strongest enticement to touristic reading. Even as Walcott attempts to frame formal traditions as inheritances defined by obligation, he dazzles the reader with forays into terza rima:

> O Thou, my Zero, is an impossible prayer,
> utter extinction is still a doubtful conceit.
> Though we pray to nothing, nothing cannot be there.
>
> Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet
> and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,

[194] For more on critics anatomizing the varieties of rhyme function, see my discussion of Auden's various uses of rhyme in the previous chapter.

one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme.

Because Rhyme remains the parentheses of palms
shielding a candle's tongue, it is the language's
desire to enclose the loved world in its arms;

or heft a coal-basket; only by its stages
like those groaning women will you achieve that height
whose wooden planks in couplets lift your pages

higher than those hills of infernal anthracite.
There, like ants or angels, they see their native town,
unknown, raw, insignificant. They walk, you write;

keep to that narrow causeway without looking down,
climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat
of those used to climbing roads; your own work owes them

because the couplet of those multiplying feet
made your first rhymes. (75)

A delightfully obvious rhymed couplet (using, of all possible words, "rhyme") separates the first part of the canto, with rhymes in abab quatrains, from the latter half in terza rima, which only appears a handful of times in the epic as the verse equivalent of a guitar solo. Walcott weaves his complex scheme despite (i.e., because of) the difficulty of sustaining triple rhymes in English, displaying his technical virtuosity to entertain formalist readers. The play on "rhyme" enacts a powerful sonic transition, as the couplet bifurcates this canto, half playing visual tercets against auditory quatrains and half using terza rima to align these formal dimensions. We look for a sequence of tercets, but end up with a cornucopia (couplets, terza rima, quatrains, metastanzaic segments) of stanzaic patterns, torn between the sense that they are simply techniques to impress and the notion that forms have implications and value beyond touristic approbation.

Here is the crucible of formalist reading: Walcott's verse dazzles while he discusses the nature of communal obligation in poetry, both attracting and diverting our attention. The

appropriation of women's labor for poetic trope has come under fire from some critics,[195] but Walcott explicitly links versification to a debt: "your own work owes them // because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhymes." Rhyme's inherited quality ("ancestral rhyme") and implication in economies of unequal labor and cultural exchange impress upon the poet his obligation to represent his native St. Lucia with a non-speculative aesthetic, for purposes beyond selling to tourist-readers. Walcott uses his hybrid forms to reach a wide readership, playing upon rhyme and syntactic patterns to surprise his readers while inflecting his stanzaic performance with the determination to link poetic craft to other kinds of work, attempting to shed light on histories of economic inequality. Pollard understands the obligation of form in this way, as a representational imperative—"It is an obligation that [Walcott] believes he can best fulfill by perfecting his craft to expand the capacity of language to represent experience" (Pollard 163)—but this type of reading stalls over the artificial and performative elements of prosody, the impressive dexterity with which the poet weaves these women's work into his verse.

So even though Walcott attempts to place the poem's forms under obligation to readers, intertexts, and even St. Lucia, techniques of versification are bound up in an economy of craft. Stanzaic structures can be a mark of reciprocity, perhaps a way to meet some "communal obligation," but the turns of verse can also turn obligation inside out. The more obvious reading of the Onan episode, that the poet's prosodic "craft" and "schemes" (taken negatively) are masturbatory practices, takes us to the zero-degree of touristic pandering, if Walcott's willingness to develop, display, and sell his technical virtuosity becomes a thoroughly self-interested pursuit. The stanza's self-signaling can become self-indulgence, and ever more intricate formal structures can accordingly divert our attention toward aesthetic minutiae and the

[195] For a rebuttal of the appropriation charge, see Breslin 259-260.

erotics of performance. Form thus masks the text's structural entanglement with tourism, if we attend to the poem's shifting shapes for their mercurial qualities, as in the rhyme-riff that runs through the climactic encounter with Seven Seas/Omeros. A coconut shell or marble bust drifts toward the beach, and the narrator fixates on its formal indeterminacy:

> They kept shifting shapes, or the shapes metamorphosed
> in the worried water; no sooner was the head
> of the blind plaster-bust clear than its brow was crossed
>
> by a mantling cloud and its visage reappeared
> with ebony hardness, skull and beard like cotton,
> its nose like a wedge; no sooner I saw the one
>
> than the other changed and the first was forgotten
> as the sand forgets a shadow in widening sun,
> their bleached almond seeds their only thing in common.
>
> So one changed from marble with a dripping chiton
> in the early morning on that harp-wired sand
> to a foam-headed fisherman in his white, torn
>
> undershirt, but both of them had the look of men
> whose skins are preserved in salt, whose accents were born
> from guttural shoal, whose vision was wide as rain (*Omeros* 280)

The passage details a trick of the light as clouds obscure the sun, as the coconut intermittently becomes a marble bust of Homer, and the stanzas too keep "shifting shapes" as we study them. The rhymes do not quite follow a quatrain scheme, getting tangled up in strings of assonance over the course of eleven straight lines ending with an 'n' sound. In a broad sense all of these line-endings rhyme, with even the feminine endings riffing on an original rhyme, as "cotton" is echoed by "forgotten," "common," and "chiton."

Why do eleven similar line-endings matter? They outline the trap of self-indulgence in formal reading. Even if one identifies significant variations in pattern, the disproportionate attention paid to segments that appear more interesting (an enabling convention of close reading)

exposes even the academic critic as a tourist-reader who prizes disruptive moments of virtuosic performance. Here, Walcott's rhyme-riff ties the improvisational framework of Homeric prosody to forms like calypso (or even rap), in which poets modulate, extend, and reinvent rhyme schemes on the fly.[196] These freestyle pyrotechnics capture our attention, demonstrating the poet's ability to bend the sonic patterns of his composition, but the recognition of formally engaging sights/sites threatens to foreclose more nuanced and circumspect readings. Walcott's creative use of rhyme schemes fulfills our expectations of stanzaic prosody, offering an indulgent display of craft that invites and encourages our attention to versification as a mode of tourism. But one can always find these formal markers that allow us to turn textual locations into sites/sights for interpretation. We must remain simultaneously aware of the relational networks surrounding poetic forms to avoid fetishizing prosodic technique as a commodity. Our formal attention needs to expand beyond seeing stanzaic patterns as vehicles of travel or configurations of literary history, just as our formal obligations must ultimately lead beyond the compass of poetic form.

Much like Auden, Walcott turns his analytical eye against his own craft. He worries that his work profits off the disenfranchisement of his fellow St. Lucians, contributing to the tourist economies that treat the local population as a labor market for serving Euro-American travelers:

> I watched the afternoon sea. Didn't I want the poor
> to stay in the same light so that I could transfix
> them in amber, the afterglow of an empire,
>
> preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks
> to that blue bus-stop? Didn't I prefer a road
> from which tracks climbed into the thickening syntax

[196] This sequence reads as a momentary superposition of Homeric linear prosody on top of Dantean stanzaic prosody. Walcott uses this improvised rhyme device throughout the epic, where an initial rhyme or rhyme pair is then reiterated and modified. See similar patterns in Chapter XIX (99-100), Chapter XXIV (128), Chapter XLVI (234).

> of colonial travellers, the measured prose I read
> as a schoolboy? That cove, with its brown shallows
> there, Praslin? That heron? Had they waited for me
>
> to develop my craft? Why hallow the pretence
> of preserving what they left, the hypocrisy
> of loving them from hotels, a biscuit-tin fence
>
> smothered in love-vines, scenes to which I was attached
> as blindly as Plunkett with his remorseful research?
> Art is History's nostalgia, it prefers a thatched
>
> Roof to a concrete factory, and the huge church
> Above a bleached village. (227)

In one of the epic's most revealing passages, the poet-narrator observes his native island from the back seat of a taxi while meditating on his art. He directly implicates his craft in the economic exploitation of his native St. Lucia, becoming one of the disinterested metropolitan tourists who see the island as a quaint and picturesque vacation spot ("loving them from hotels") while also expending his artistic labor in preserving a romanticized version of St. Lucia through the shapes of stanzaic form as they fossilize into amber pieces of literary history. Recognizing that his work depends on representing St. Lucian poverty for his own profit—"Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?" (228)—Walcott accuses himself of the tourist's (and the colonizer's) indifference, stating his preferences for "the afterglow of an empire" and "the thickening syntax // of colonial travelers, the measured prose I read / as a schoolboy." His claim that "Art is History's nostalgia" sounds flippant, but he takes poetry seriously as a historical force for its power to recreate and reframe the histories and economies binding him and his fellow St. Lucians to their island. Walcott offers a paradise of thickening syntax and fluid stanzas to the poetic tourist, but also foregrounds his reliance on international readerships and the realities of postcolonial economies.

The stanzaic forms of *Omeros* implicate us in the workings of Caribbean tourism, within economies of valuation and exchange that resemble those of the resort brochure. While the

poem's many stanzaic structures crucially complicate our travel and challenge our expectations, their formal self-indulgence can also read as aesthetically masturbatory and even politically quietist. No matter how we approach the text's forms—accepting Walcott's oceanic fiction, charting their cultural histories, identifying their structural functions, reading technique as virtuosity—we end up facing our own tourism, questioning if the obligations of reading extend beyond the space of the text. This stanzaic prosody reorients our attention to form, and though we have not become any less tourists in the poem's space, our poetic tourism can become more circumspect through the understanding that our reading involves numerous historical, geographical, and intertextual relationships constructed and mediated by form. Though the "rooms" of his stanzas are artificial structures of negotiation between readers and traditions, Walcott's elaborate versification poses important questions—whether form functions as an analogue for nature or an outgrowth of history, whether form is self-indulgent or places obligations on poet and reader—that force readers to choose how they will understand the history-making and history-marking capacities of verse. The formalist tourist may visit the stanzas of *Omeros* as echoes of canonical shapes and emblems of literary tradition, but the poem's reconfiguration of prosody around structural parallels with travel also turns the obligations of poetic form outward, toward other forms of obligation.

Postcolonial Tourism and the Obligations of Form

Once we come to recognize this formalist tourism, what then? In any poem we may find ourselves estranged by complex formal patterning and an unfamiliar cultural context. *Omeros* just happens to stage an extended travel narrative in the cradle of American corporate tourism

development, while almost singlehandedly establishing Walcott (with the Nobel) as the preeminent poet of the Anglophone Caribbean and a mainstay of anthologies, syllabi, and postcolonial criticism. Since our poetic tourism could be considered a contextual phenomenon, what changes when we encounter stanzaic forms in less global habitats, in lyrics written by less famous poets, that do not engage tourism as a central thematic concern?

For postcolonial poets, read by global audiences for their cultural particularities, versification carries enormous implications. Too often technique, like the stanza, is read solely in terms of a singular tradition or model, but as Stephanie Burt argues, "Though the form of a poem implies a historical trajectory (a line of similar poems), and therefore a set of people who can recognize them, form can help poets write for more than one set" (Burt, "Postcolonial Poetry and Form" 139). Burt's treatment of postcolonial form in terms of multiple reading communities lays out the connections between formal technique and social obligations that can eclipse the tourism of formalist reading, if we consider how poets can "write for more than one set" to envision alternate histories and wider obligations. Where Walcott's uses of form remain responsive to his fellow St. Lucians and the Caribbean's heavily touristed landscapes, I want to consider two other postcolonial poets who have been read under the touristic norms that obtain in formalist criticism, Louise Bennett and Agha Shahid Ali, whose stanzaic techniques offer different prosodic choices to the traveling reader.

Bennett's lively dialect verse is anthologized and taught for its formal hybridity, especially the collisions of performance with text and local poetics with English tradition that appear within her ballad stanzas. A popular reading holds that her poetry is partially obscured by the conventions of print format, prizing oral performance as the authentic expression of her verse, so her stanzas organize the tension between Jamaican speech rhythms and imperially

authorized ballad meters.[197] Critics duly refract these workings of form, as proxies for tradition and culture, into directly political statements. Kamau Brathwaite asserts that her verse operates within the shadow of the imperial pentameter, which it attempts to "transform" (Brathwaite 30), and Ben Etherington elaborates how her rhymes give force to her cultural politics (Etherington 31). By turning her dialect ballads into political representations of Jamaica, readers hold Bennett to a poetics of cultural tourism, focusing on the expressive tensions of her formal practice: "Bennett's technique embodies that force of creative spirit required to take on the challenge of writing a dramatic monologue in Jamaican Creole in ballad form in the 1940s" (Etherington 20). But this approach fails to see that Bennett's stanzas create multiple ways to trace the historical outlines of canonical forms. In a number of poems—"Dry-Foot Bwoy," "Colonization in Reverse," "Jamaica Oman"—she uses exact repetition of the terminal rhymes in the first and final stanzas to close the poem in a kind of sonic loop.

In "Colonization in Reverse" Bennett repeats the first stanza's rhyme in the final stanza, creating a parallel that recalls (and helps us to recall)[198] the poem's thematic center:

> Wat a joyful news, miss Mattie;
> Ah feel like me heart gwine burs—
> Jamaica people colonizin
> Englan in reverse.
>
> By de hundred, by de tousan
> From country and from town,
> By de ship-load, by de plane load
> Jamaica is Englan boun.
>
> . . . . . .

[197] "There is a conspicuous tension - a struggle, even - between the emphatic metre and the rhythms of Jamaican speech" (Morris 47); "She uses her voice like a musical instrument: breaking lines, resolving stresses, playing infinitely with shades of sound while operating within the confines of metric strictness, and establishing a tension between metre and rhythm, like a good blues or calypso singer" (Rohlehr 82). For a more nuanced reading of Bennett's formal hybridity, see Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (111-114).

[198] The mnemonic patterns that structure traditional lyric stanzas suggest another way to see poetic form in terms of obligation: poets are supposed to create memorable verse, which readers in turn must remember. For more on the problem of memorability in verse form, see chapter 1.

> Wat a devilment a Englan!
> Dem face war an brave de worse;
> But ah wonderin how dem gwine stan
> Colonizin in reverse. (Bennett 173-174)

The parallel goes beyond rhyme's echo; both stanzas begin with a striking trochaic cadence and use enjambment only once, to set up the climactic line. The poem's power hinges on repeating its central idea, cleverly reconfiguring England's situation as an imperial center and suggesting that the traveling capabilities of poetic form have a circuitous bent. In an effort to "turn history upside dung" (130), Bennett fashions her poem like a boomerang, as both rhyme scheme and demographics come back around with a striking force. She uses this stanzaic scheme to imagine historical patterns as equally iterable, cyclical, and reversible, making the ballad form do the work of tourism in reverse. Rather than Anglicizing Jamaica in a traditional form, her dialect verse makes the English form Jamaican, pushing the reader to understand her prosody as a move of anticolonial displacement. The suggestion that many of these reverse colonists will be financially reliant on the British social safety net—specifically unemployment, or "de dole," (174)—clarifies that the reversals of poetic form can speak to obligations extending beyond the text. Where once British economic growth depended on exploiting the resources of its colonies, Bennett's poem uses the ballad to imagine a turnabout, predicating the livelihood of Jamaican migrants on the economic resources of England. By transforming "De seat of de Empire" (174), whether the literal setting of England or the unassailable Englishness of the ballad form, the poet offers an alternative destination for the poetic tourist, who rides her stanzaic patterns both into and back out of history to catch the rhythms of colonial reversal.

If stanzaic forms can offer the poetic tourist an array of interpretive options and communal affiliations as a window into history, the poet can still foreclose certain readings to

preserve the shapes of poetic tradition. Agha Shahid Ali has often been read for his formal negotiation between Urdu and Anglophone poetics, usually in his English ghazals. Critics typically describe the ghazal's conventions in a guided tour by explaining the *radif* (a repeated word that concludes each couplet) and the *qafia* (the rhyme preceding the *radif*), or suggest that Ali's forms enable our travel to Kashmir as a tourist attraction (Burt, "Agha Shahid Ali, World Literature, and the Representation of Kashmir" 106). His ghazals are legible as destinations, even as the form is acknowledged to have a long and complicated history that he continues by strict fidelity to its rules.[199] Introducing his book of English ghazals, Ali complains that American poets get the form wrong (Ali, *Ravishing DisUnities* 1), so he champions its conventions, embracing an obligation to tradition against the current of politicized debates over poetic form:

> by following the form of the ghazal, the writer could find herself tantalizingly liberated, surprising herself with unusual discoveries by being stringent with herself as she goes from one theme to another in couplet after couplet. Form has been associated (remember the recent free verse vs. formalism debate)—and quite wrongly, really—with what holds truth back, especially political truth. But as Faiz said, there is nothing good or bad in any poetic form but the poet makes it so. And he used this very strict form to express an impassioned left-wing politics. (12)

Ali's concern for the ghazal's formal integrity is not quietist. He sees the ghazal as a set of enabling possibilities that he will not abandon for the sake of contemporary politics, refusing to homogenize the form or make it accessible to Euro-American readers. His choice of patterns

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[199] "In such poetry, the intricacies of form interweave to construct an embodiment in midair, creating a temporary region of braided stabilities. Ali would eventually employ poetic form as harbor, as house, holding evocations of the past in its patterns. The ghazal is a shaped terrain through which such masters as Begum Akhtar and Faiz Ahmed Faiz have traveled" (Newman 76). Region and harbor, house and terrain—Ali's ghazals are taken to represent and to create (like Walcott's verse) a hybrid space. For more on the suggestively geographic valences of refrain in Ali's ghazals, wee Woodland 253.

upsets all the expectations we bring to contemporary poetry: by embracing tradition as an obligation to rhyme, refrain, and the standalone couplet, Ali frustrates readers with difference and surprises us into a recognition that not all forms of liberation are liberated forms.

Instead of simply enabling formalist tourism, the ghazal's pattern of standalone couplets (linked only via refrain) lends Ali disjunctive opportunities to fracture the illusion of cultural consumption, and his refrain evokes the already-transnational history of the form in "in Arabic":

> When Lorca died, they left the balconies open and saw:
> On the sea his *qasidas* stitched seamless in Arabic.
>
> Ah, bisexual Heaven: wide-eyed houris and immortal youths!
> To your each desire they say *Yes! O Yes!* in Arabic.
>
> For that excess of sibilance, the last Apocalypse,
> so pressing those three forms of S in Arabic.
>
> I too, O Amichai, saw everything, just like you did–
> In Death. In Hebrew. And (please let me stress) in Arabic.
>
> They ask me to tell them what *Shahid* means: Listen, listen:
> It means "The Beloved" in Persian, "witness" in Arabic.
>
> (Ali, *The Veiled Suite* 372-373)

Ali plays levity against gravity to stunning effect. He envisions a heaven that validates bisexual identity while irreverently twisting the language joke set up by the refrain, using English to exclaim "*Yes! O Yes!* in Arabic." In adjacent couplets he juxtaposes assonance and a clever rhyme on the letter 'S'—eleven 's' sounds, an "excess of sibilance"—with an apostrophe to Yehuda Amichai, as he enjoins the Israeli poet to stand with him as witness to the sectarian violence that plagues the Middle East. Ali's refrain continuously reminds us that our experience of the poem is translated, an ironized approximation of an encounter with cultural difference. By the end of the poem (in English), the couplet form has created independent links to Spanish, Hebrew, and Persian; we have not traveled through thousand-year circuits of transnational poetic

exchange, but Ali reminds us that the ghazal has. It is far too complex to be taken home as a souvenir or seen as a sight, because its formal contours preserve histories of literary borrowing and cultural contact, and the poet's precise observation of the form's traditional obligations leads to an explosive and radical vision of the interconnectedness of these disparate places and epochs.

Bennett and Ali do not spend nearly as much time as Walcott exploring the economic and political resonances of tourism, but tourism still factors into our understanding of their forms. When Malcolm Woodland says that Ali's couplets are migrants from a poetic land, "where the laws of refrain hold sway" (Woodland 249), or Ben Etherington declares that Bennett's rhymes "provide a fixed point of destination" (Etherington 31), we see the wide appeal of a geographical stanzaic model, in which these forms are locations of cultural contact and spatial significance, but our touristic modes of reading entail other expectations of stanzaic forms. We read these shapes—modified terza rima, dialect ballads, English ghazals—as signifiers of cultural hybridity while also attending to the various formal traditions and technical effects engaged by each. The ways that we travel in stanzaic forms go far beyond the "imaginative enactment of geographic displacement" (Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* 52), as Walcott, Bennett, and Ali work in particular stanzaic schemes not only to evoke other traditions and cultures, but also to reorient the historical resonances of those traditions in verse technique. While reading poetry—especially postcolonial poetry—can become a kind of formalist tourism as we selectively fixate on particular passages and hermeneutic models as both the "sites" and "sights" of the text, the stanzaic structures of *Omeros* remind us of the traces of obligation passed down in poetic forms that extend beyond the boundaries of the text and the tourist's vision of literary history.

Chapter Three

Bodies Changed to Different Forms: Jorie Graham's Visual Prosody

Listening to Jorie Graham read "Overheard in the Herd," one might understandably fail to notice the poem's stanzaic form. Her reading, released online to accompany the poem's appearance in the January 2019 issue of *Poetry*, leaves us to imagine the printed text—perhaps an avalanche of cryptic, short lines, perhaps a prose poem, but surely not quatrains. And yet:

> been there while it lasted. Hear us: it lasted. Even here off the bus its lastingness
> keeps blossoming & spooling onward. Yes *it's a game it's always just a game*. The wind is
> hissing this all afternoon. But even it, raspy and weakening, plunders this space that it
> might find some emptiness. *From mind*. Lean in & you'll hear plenitude. Listen it's trying
>
> to make a void again. In which to hear itself. It's too alone. Everything wants em-
> bodiment. But there's this noise now it's replacing everything. This humming of agreement
> fast-track skipped-step information yes yes yes yes lost hope lost will—dear dis-
> embodiment, here is an old wind, watch it orchestrate event, I raise my hand to find[200]
>
> (Graham, "Overheard in the Herd")

Graham stretches unrhymed quatrains far beyond the normal limits of auditory attention, pushing the boundaries of prosodic efficacy to the edge of the page. Instead we find a prose poem with added spaces every four lines, or a free verse poem that lost most of its line breaks, in which we can "hear plenitude" or "find emptiness." The form signals a suspension between "noise" and "void," "em- / bodiment" and "dis- / embodiment," as Graham uses the figure of wind to critique Romantic conceptions of poetic voice. Her blustery stanzas incorporate heteroglot utterances and fragmentary syntax, with little resemblance to a poem such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" that lines the wind up in meticulous terza rima sonnets, *except* in terms of visual format. These blocks defy our desire for cohesive units or consistent rhythms, so why does Graham arrange her

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[200] The recording was released online to accompany the poem's publication. I have reproduced the text as it appears on the Poetry Foundation's website. Because this chapter centers on the analysis of visual shape, at times I will forego the conventional formatting of block quotes in order to approximate the appearance of Graham's texts.

verse in four-line segments?

The answer seems to be that "Everything wants em- / bodiment," and these stanzaic units give the poem a tangible shape on the page. The wind reappears in "Scarcely There," published in the same issue, to clarify the stakes of constructing the poetic corpus. The epigraph ("*[For J.A.]*") signals an elegy for John Ashbery, many of whose poems also take on long-lined, unrhymed quatrains, but Graham's quatrains create a visual energy beyond allusion.[201] The stanzaic pattern incorporates the space of the page into variations on the four-line unit:

> After the wind just stops you still hear
> the wind's wild *almost*, its approach and retreat, and how it kept
> circling as-if-trying, as if about-to-be, an almost-speech,
> loud and full of syntax casting about for
>
> life, form, limit, fate. To be bodied. To strut. To have
> meaning. How easily we wear ourselves
> as if it is nothing to have
> origin, whirl, outcome, end and still be.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> After the wind stops you hear fact. You hear fact's plan. It is huge.
> The tree does not escape. Things are finished forces.
> You hear a name-call from far off, tossed, dropped. Someone gives up.
> Light rips *here* from *there*. Where birdcalls cease, you hear the under-
>
> neath. *Try living again* day's long pitched syllable-ooze
> hums after the high winds stop & your final footprint lifts off & no matter
> how clean
> you want it to be
> nothing is ever going to be gone enough. Oh. Oak, show us up.
> Indecipherable green sound us. Stilled leaf-chatter quiver up (Graham, "Scarcely There")

The initial swirl of wind doubles as a description of the poem's form—"circling as-if-trying, as if about-to-be, an almost-speech, / loud and full of syntax casting about for // life, form, limit,

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[201] Ashbery used unrhymed quatrains frequently throughout his career, most notably in *Shadow Train* (1981), an entire volume of sixteen-line poems arranged in four quatrains each. "Scarcely There" also contains an allusion to Wallace Stevens's "The Death of a Soldier": Graham's repetition of "After the wind stops" echoes the earlier poem's repetition of "When the wind stops" (Stevens 97).

fate"—as the stanzas strive "To be bodied" on the page. The poem casts about for "form" and "limit" without much success: even the organization into quatrains breaks down, with isolated lines, interpolated chunks, and a terminal couplet setting off the four-line units as merely one potential format. Meditating on the artificiality of poetic bodies and the mortality of human ones, Graham stirs the "almost-speech" of the text into a whirl of words, a tangible body that foregrounds and destabilizes the stanzaic norm, dramatizing its struggle into form.

These stanzaic patterns are primarily visual, but visual shape is often relegated to a peripheral role in theories of poetic form. Scholars typically privilege the sonic elements of poems because of the historical priority of oral cultures and the somatic force of aural effects, but the flood of unrhymed, nonmetrical verse in the postwar era requires a total reevaluation of visual prosody, as typographical arrangement becomes the dominant mode of stanzaic segmentation. Here Graham's work is instructive, because she occupies a central position in late twentieth century mainstream verse but nevertheless persistently pursues new formal techniques, particularly in the visual field. Pushing back against primarily oral somatic theories, she treats the poetic text as a space for both effacing and extending the body, and even a material entity in its own right. Instead of transcendent lyric voice, Graham's poems offer "voice too full of space" (Graham, *fast* 46), conspicuously mediated by typographical arrangement. She develops a multitude of stanzaic techniques for realizing the possibilities of visual segmentation and combination on the page. From an early penchant for traditional-looking stanzas to experiments with extreme linear contrast, massive strophic blocks, and radical alignments, she pushes the boundaries of poetic typography, creating stanzaic patterns for the age of climate change and digital media while meditating on the text as a formal body.

This chapter proposes that Graham's stanzaic schemes enable and exemplify a more

capacious kind of visual prosody, with resonances beyond emphatic or iconic formatting, by tying typographical shape to the formal work of verse without assuming its subordination to auditory structure. This prosody modifies conventional somatic approaches to poetic form by insisting on a composite poetic corpus. Each poem is made up of various shapes arranged and related in space, which implicate, extend, and deconstruct the authorial voice on the page, creating the material body encountered by the reader. The chapter begins by theorizing how visual prosody and somatic theories of poetry may be linked through the stanza. It then charts Graham's development of various stanzaic schemes over the course of her career, linking her visual experiments to the entanglement of lyric voice with the human body. I examine at length how the forms of her later verse, particularly in *Sea Change* (2008) and *fast* (2017), freight her poetry with the manifestations and consequences of the body, enabling and complicating her explorations of environmental and mechanistic poetics. Graham's stanzaic patterns outline new possibilities for visual segmentation without the stabilizing force of auditory measures, sketching the limitations of human language and embodiment against the backdrop of environmental catastrophe and the advent of artificial intelligences. Her visual strategies force readers to attend to typographical shapes as material indications of the poetic body, and challenge our phonocentric assumptions about lyric prosody.

The Song that Falls Upon the Listener's Eye: Visual Prosody and the Poetic Corpus

In Graham's poetry we find elements of verbal design that cannot register in spoken recitation. Therefore visual shape, instead of playing a merely ornamental role, manifests itself as a substantial part of her poetry's music, what she might call "The song that falls upon the

listener's eye" (*From the New World* 221).[202] This paradoxical rendering of auditory phenomena through the visual organ locates us in the realm of written poetry, in which typographical layout arranges ostensibly musical segments. But since many of Graham's stanzas do not employ the conventional auditory markers of song form—rhyme, meter, refrain—this "song" is best understood as the trace of traditional lyric preserved in the visual format of stanzas.

Since Hugh Kenner labeled William Carlos Williams's red wheelbarrow "stanzas to see" (*A Homemade World* 58), scholars have gradually come to study the effects of visual scheme in contemporary versification.[203] And as we saw in the introduction, poets such as Sylvia Plath ("Ariel"), Denise Levertov ("Pleasures"), and Frank Bidart ("Ellen West") build the advances of Williams and other free verse proponents into the dominant model of versification in the later twentieth century. Yet despite the growing incidence of visual methods in midcentury verse, typographical shape is still consigned to a subordinate role in most critical accounts of formal poetics. Traditional foot-based prosodies have lived on alongside and even within the more experimental poetries of the twentieth century, and most scholars continue to accord formal primacy to structures of sound, retaining "phonocentric" models of poetic form (Bradford, *The Look of It* 40). But as I have argued, poetic forms, and stanzaic schemes in particular, are composite structures not built of any one pattern but instead constructed through the repeating intersections of various elements. And stanzaic units are manifested most obviously through repeated elements of visual structure, typically blocks of adjacent lines demarcated by white

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[202] Unless otherwise specified, citations of Graham's work come from this collected volume.

[203] The scholars, of course, trail the poets themselves: examples of technopaignia, or shaped verse, date back to antiquity, and modernist poets from Guillaume Apollinaire to William Carlos Williams helped to lay the groundwork for open field composition. In fact, citation of the Greek technopaignia (with reproductions) has become a tradition of formal poetics in its own right, from Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) to Hollander's *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (1975). Shaped poetry has a long tradition in English, dating back at least to the work of George Herbert in poems such as "The Altar" and "Easter Wings" (both printed posthumously in *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, 1633).

space. A renewed stanzaic prosody must attend to visual shape more precisely in order to account for the patterns most prevalent in contemporary verse, in which schemes of linear grouping and alignment orchestrate and cross-cut other multilinear relationships.[204]

My emphasis on the visual dimension of stanzas runs counter to the broad base of phonocentric thought in formal poetics. For the many prosodists who still insist that sound is poetry's primary mode, stanzaic format scores the text for performance, placing rhyme sounds at line endings or indicating the phrasal boundaries for voicing lines, shoring up primarily sonic meanings.[205] The oft-invoked analogy of the musical "score" leads thinkers such as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith to go so far as to say that poems are not texts but linguistic structures which may or may not be transcribed (*On the Margins of Discourse* 3). If the text is not a poem, it follows, visual elements are not only subordinate to sonic ones, but they may not count as formal elements at all. Even poets like Williams and Olson, who depend on visual prosody, attempt in their critical writing to maintain this hierarchy of sound over sight by reference to music or breath.[206] In this vein typographical patterning, in particular the shape of stanzas, has been

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[204] At times I will refer to "visual prosody" in discussing Graham's work or prosodic scholarship—even though many critics would likely deny that visual formatting can constitute prosody—because the typographical layout plays a significant role in constructing the reader's experience of the poem. In this regard I hew to Charles Hartman's definition of prosody: "The prosody of a poem is the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience" (Hartman 13).

[205] Harvey Gross gives perhaps the best articulation of this position: "Prosody is an aural symbolism, a significant arrangement of acoustical phenomena. But since poetry has been written, and more importantly, *printed*, visual qualities have contributed to prosodical arrangement. Line endings, stanzaic shape, the general appearance of the poem on the page—all contribute to rhythmic effect. These visual elements, however, are, and *should* be secondary" (Gross 23, see also his chapter on "Imagism and Visual Prosody"). Herrnstein-Smith also affirms the primacy of the auditory by invoking a common analogy to musical score: "The fact that a poem may have spatial extension—that its text is situated on a page, framed by a margin, and arranged typographically in a certain way—may, of course, affect the reader's sense of its structure. But in general it is more accurate and more revealing to regard the text of a poem as analogous to the score of a piece of music" (*Poetic Closure* 9). She regards visual design with mere curiosity, treating it as a "marginal source of formal possibilities and expressive effects" (265), with a perhaps unwitting pun on "marginal." Most critics would subscribe to Fussell's assertion that the perfect reading will involve a "merging," that is, will render typographical phenomena audible (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 128). Yet as Charles Hartman recognizes, every written poem is organized spatially, and prosody has to be communicated via "marks on a page" (Hartman 13).

[206] Williams explicitly links his concept of "measure" with "musical pace" (*Selected Letters* 325-326). Olson ties his "projective" concept of verse to the "breath," despite the compositional emphasis on the visual field (Olson 1056).

accorded limited force. Some regard stanzaic shapes as distinctive formal elements with a tangible semiotic dimension, from Fussell's demand that the number of stanzas and the intervening spacing mean something (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* 155) to Levertov's description of the stanzaic unit in nonmetrical verse as a "unit of awareness" ("Some Notes on Organic Form" 1083).[207] Yet as Richard Bradford notes, these models share an assumption about visual layout's instrumentality to the structure of stanzas:[208] because "spacing operates as a secondary system of punctuation which must defer to the dominance of a temporal syntactic structure" (Bradford 40), typography cannot constitute prosody, and sight must defer to sound in the readerly imagination.

If typographical arrangement cannot be understood as a formal device on the level of rhyme or meter, most contemporary stanzas (and entire poems) can be considered little more than deformations of prose.[209] But visual segmentation takes on the primary role in organizing nonmetrical, unrhymed verse. In these cases we can see that lineation, grouping, and alignment are not signals pointing us to other patterns; they are patterns in their own right, and can form a productive counterpoint with sonic and syntactical schemes while also taking on expressive, allusive, or iconic significance. The final two stanzas of Graham's "What the End is For" are

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[207] Many other critics offer similarly instrumental readings of stanzaic shape: Veronica Forrest-Thomson treats visual stanzaic arrangement as simply a set of conventions in reference to Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (Forrest-Thomson 70); Northrop Frye argues that in encountering Marianne Moore's stanzas the reader "translates the visual structural pattern to the ear" (Frye 278); Jonathan Culler argues that stanzaic format creates advance expectations of potential structure (Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* 252); and Derek Attridge outlines a more specific case, where the unbroken block of free verse text in a John Ashbery poem signals a dialogue with the rhythms of speech, rather than the visual breaking into stanzas which suggests a relationship to song (Attridge, *Moving Words* 118).

[208] He specifically comments on critical writing by Forrest-Thompson, Culler, and Stanley Fish, all of whom visually rearrange "non-poetic" texts in something like a free-verse stanza: "These critics share a single assumption about the nature and function of visual form. It is not in itself a formal device, like rhyme or metre, rather it is an instrument for focusing our attention upon patterns within a pre-existing structure, usually prose" (Bradford 40).

[209] In fact, Marjorie Perloff has made precisely this argument many times, beginning in "The Linear Fallacy" (1981), picking passages from various poets of the post-language generation and questioning the rationale behind their prosodic organization in free verse lines. See also Jacques Roubaud, "Prelude: Poetry and Orality" (2009).

shaped by no obvious rhyme or metrical scheme, yet the visual form alone creates expectations of musical measure in the alternate lineation evocative of ballads and other song forms:

> you refused. Until I
>
> couldn't rise out of the patience either any longer
>
> to make us
>
> take possession.
>
> Until we were what we must have wanted to be:
>
> shapes the shapelessness was taking back.
>
> Why should I lean out?
>
> Why should I move?
>
> When the Maenads tear Orpheus limb from limb,
>
> they throw his head
>
> out into the river.
>
> Unbodied it sings
>
> all the way downstream, all the way to the single ocean,
>
> head floating in current downriver singing,
>
> until the sound of the cataracts grows,
>
> until the sound of the open ocean grows and the voice. (Graham 75)

Some lines coincide with phrasal periods and diagram syntactical parallels, some isolate bits and pieces of language ("to make us") to suspend the sense across enjambments, and others set off much shorter or longer adjacent lines by contrast. Graham's language flows through a stanzaic grid of alternating indentations suggestive of more elaborate forms (such as the apocopated rhymes of Auden's visually similar "Music is International"), in a peculiar typographical drama of "shapes the shapelessness was taking back." The lines range from a couple syllables to loose five-beat verse, irrespective of the alternating alignment, as the visual units balance the currents of shape and shapelessness while carrying the Orphic head out to sea.

It is crucial that the body appears—and disappears—enigmatically in concert with the figure of song. The unbodied singing, reminiscent of Shelley's "Poet hidden / In the light of thought" (Shelley 305) and Keats's "viewless wings of Poesy" (Keats 458), foregrounds a conventional lyric tension, as transcendent, immaterial song strains to escape the confines of the body.[210] Graham offers two portraits of poets disintegrating under this pressure: the literal disarticulation of Orpheus, and the figurative dissolution of the speaker. Her "shapes the shapelessness was taking back" read as two bodies in a domestic portrait, but also as the poem's stanzas, the only "shapes" its readers see. Their bodies are both vehicles enabling poetry and containers holding it back,[211] and Graham uses this tableau to direct anxieties about the poetic body toward the shapes of her stanzas, whose alternate indentations evoke the song forms and stability associated with traditional lyric. This is no accident; as Heather Dubrow argues, for practitioners and theorists of poetry since the Renaissance the stanza has stood for, and lent a dimension of, materiality and stability to the written lyric, especially in its visual appearance (Dubrow 166-167).[212] And in an era divested of regular rhymes and meters, visual layout takes on an even greater capacity to signify physical solidity or mutability (Nyberg 102). Graham's stanzas embrace and challenge this symbolic complex on the ground of the body, drawing on the synergies described by Lennart Nyberg between the corporeal associations of poetic form and the

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[210] A fully developed visual prosody can push back against the Romantic move toward transcending the physical limitations of poetry. Jerome McGann argues, discussing the poetry of William Morris, that "The textual move is the opposite of transcendental because we are not borne away with these pages, we are borne down by them. The work forces us to attend to its immediate and iconic condition, as if the words were images or objects in themselves" (*Black Riders* 75). For more on the limitations of the transcendent model, see Annie Finch, *The Body of Poetry* (25-28), and Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (75).

[211] Orpheus's corpse stands in for poetic production and reception, albeit in an extreme form of reading-as-dismemberment, just as poets such as Wordsworth ("The Tables Turned") and Dickinson ("Split the lark—and you'll find the music") have memorably associated the critical impulse with mutilation.

[212] Particularly in poems that make iconic or figurative use of architecture, from the etymological trope ("room") to poems typographically arranged to resemble pillars. For more see Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus* (166 ff).

visual body of text that shapes the interaction between poet and reader (Nyberg 102-104).[213]

The language of the body permeates the study of poetic form. From Oliver Wendell Holmes's "The Physiology of Versification" (1875) to Amittai Aviram's *Telling Rhythm* (1994), scores of prosodic treatises have distinguished poetry by its seemingly corporeal pulse,[214] and Harvey Gross offers a particularly evocative rendering: "Prosody transmits the intricacy of the life of feeling—an organism where systems of bone, blood, muscle, and nerve often work on different frequencies, cross rhythmically" (Gross 14). This convergence of corporeal thinking outlines what I will broadly describe as a "somatic" poetics, but the precise relationship between form and the body remains indeterminate; as Hollander asks, "is one's form, as it were, one's silhouette or one's skeleton?" (*Melodious Guile* 5). Most scholars choose the latter, focusing their energies on internal structure rather than apparent shape. Somatic theories point to heartbeat, breath, and footfall as physiological bases for versification, uniting the movements of the body with the pulses of verse. And even after appeals to the regularity of bodily rhythms lose force in an era of irregular verse, free verse is imagined corporeally. Charles Olson famously separates breath-based from foot-based verse in a portrait of poetic form: "the HEAD, by way of

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[213] For Helen Vendler, this bodily relationship involves the replication of the organic body in the textual body of words (*The Breaking of Style* 91), where other critics such as Jonathan Kramnick and Jonathan Skinner treat the poetic body as a prosthetic technology enabling different possibilities of thought and existence (See Kramnick, *Paper Minds*, and Skinner, "Visceral Ecopoetics in Charles Olson and Michael McClure").

[214] From Holmes's treatment of versification as a natural consequence of respiratory and circulatory rhythms (Holmes 316) to Robert Hillyer's cosmological pronouncement that "we are metrical creatures in a metrical universe" (Hillyer 9), scores of critics have associated verse form with the human body. For many the somatic character of verse plays an important role in its social dimension: Susan Stewart elucidates the body's role as the basis for reading and understanding poetry's rhythms and music in an intersubjective frame (*Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* 12). Amittai Aviram sees the rhythmic quality of poetic language as essential and a rebuke to constructionist theories: "The metrical rhythms of poetry, moreover, are what appeal to the body in its fundamental existence, prior to or outside the ideologies that construct the body within any social code" (Aviram 35). Mutlu Konuk Blasing reaches the opposite conclusion from a similar beginning, asserting instead that rhythm and the body are linked under social codes: "the rhythmic body *is* the "socially constructed body"; rhythmization *is* socialization, and it secures meaning" (Blasing 58). Other critics come to link versification to the body in readings of individual poets, such as Virginia Jackson on Dickinson (Jackson 134, 176-178) and Raphael Lyne on Shakespeare's narrative verse (Lyne 103).

the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE" (Olson 1056). This distinction nevertheless assumes a reading model predicated on a fundamental orality that obscures the materiality of the lyric text (Nyberg 106), and while the printed lyric may suggest a repression of somatic rhythms (Nielsen 129), the typographical patterns that survive the decline of rhymes and meters also preserve the poetic text as a substantial, material body.[215]

The textual silhouette becomes an even more distinctive element of poems in the postwar era, and although this typographical "body" could be found in any kind of text, the differential arrangement and grouping of lines in poems make stanzaic format an especially noticeable part of the poetic corpus.[216] Were we to continue Olson's blason, surely "The body, by way of the eye, to the stanza" would come next. Visual stanzaic units may not represent the body, nor refer to bodies beyond the textual corpus, but poetic typography creates and carries powerful bodily associations[217]—as Scott Knickerbocker points out, the visual effects of stanzaic shape may be as potent as aural phenomena in enacting the immediacy and sensuousness of embodied human

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[215] The large-scale changes in prosody and technique may even be said to produce the body differently in verse: as Haun Saussy argues, "what will count as a body is an effect of the representational or discursive means available to incarnate it. The body operative in our discourse is whatever we have the ability to speak, chart, compute, or perform—walk, dance, shimmy—into being. And for this reason the characteristics of this body are apt to change every time a new imaginative or representational technique emerges" (Saussy 114). Nielsen draws on conceptions of language and the body advanced by theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Drew Leder, who point to the withdrawals of the physical and linguistic body in the process of signification. For more see Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), and Leder, *The Absent Body* (1990).

[216] Stanzaic forms conventionally appeal to the eye, at least since the seventeenth century, when typographers took care to preserve a certain stanzaic "look" even in poems without emblematic forms (Hollander, *Vision and Resonance* 269). This "look" becomes increasingly important because, as Bartholomew Brinkman argues, the conventions of printing that came to define the modernist poem were focused on isolating the text in white space as if a visual art object (Brinkman 39). As Fried and Dubrow point out, stanzaic patterns are often self-signaling (Fried 59) or even "metastanzaic" (Dubrow 175). Nyberg gives a brief overview of the corporeal language associated with reading in general: "A text can *embody* a feeling or *incorporate* an element, which can be *disemboweled;* a text can be *devoured* or *digested* or read *voraciously;* it can also be *indigestible* or *unpalatable.* Furthermore, several bodies of texts, emanating from the same source, can be said to constitute a *corpus*" (Nyberg 101).

[217] Jan Tschichold argues in *Asymmetric Typography* that conventions of symmetrical printing are undergirded by conceptions of the symmetrical human body as an aesthetic ideal (Tschichold 20). Allen Grossman treats each textual reproduction of the same poem as a different body to account for differences of pagination, layout, and medium (Grossman 257). Huisman convincingly demonstrates that visual arrangement gives rise to the semiotics of breath (Huisman 64), inverting what Cushman terms the "physiological fallacy," the proposition that bodily rhythms determine formal structure (*William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure* 80).

experience (Knickerbocker 17). Rosemary Huisman notes how linear length and arrangement are read in terms of authorial breath and physical presence, outlining a typographical "semiotic of the body" by which readers find the shapes of the body on the page (Huisman 33). She argues that the visual stanza is a key building block in this bodily poetics (64),[218] and under an expanded concept of stanzaic form, all typographical elements that contribute to constructing and organizing a poem's multilinear relationships are part of its stanzaic structure. For Graham the "song that falls upon the listener's eye" relies on graphic and spatial patterns not only to evoke cycles of stanzaic repetition but also to implicate the body in the workings of visual form.

While visual organization is only one element of stanzaic structure, it serves as the foundational design of stanzaic patterns in printed verse. Poetry is read in lines, but readers parse the visual field in near-simultaneity, encountering conventions of spatial grouping that imply temporal sequence (Huisman 71). Stanzaic segments direct and organize this readerly experience by framing elements of text, linking, integrating, or dissociating words and phrasal units.[219] Eleanor Berry even proposes the "sight-stanza" as a distinct form: "groups of equal numbers of lines where the line- and group-boundaries bear no regular relationship to grammatical or narrative structure or to a meter or rhyme scheme" ("Williams' Development of a New Prosodic Form" 21).[220] However, her insistence on isomorphic succession makes this model blind to the

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[218] Both Huisman (80) and Nyberg (117) point to the distance of linear alignment from page margin, and the possibilities of multiple alignments, as key features of the visual text. Meschonnic (304-305), Perloff (*Poetry On and Off the Page* 145), and Grossman (251) all additionally affirm the semiotic potential of blank space.

[219] Stephen Cushman argues that typography serves to "frame" the words, lines, and stanzas of the poem, stripping language of its conventional associations and defamiliarizing it within the visual field (*William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure* 60). Eleanor Berry, in contrast, enumerates a long list of effects produced through visual arrangement, which she groups under the headings of "unifying" and "disintegrative" functions ("Visual Form in Free Verse" 107-108). In moving toward a graphical conception of the stanza, we are looking for a number of the same features that shape traditional stanzaic form: 1) a recurrent structural principle operating above the level of the individual line 2) the relationship between syntax and stanza boundary—how stanza beginnings and endings shape the language of the poem 3) the associative dimension of the stanza shape—if it looks like other poems or suggests pictorial representation, and 4) the incidence and degree of variation in shape between stanzas.

[220] Berry's analysis draws on the work of William Carlos Williams, particularly his triadic stanzas. Many excellent analyses of visual prosody have emerged in criticism of Williams (see also Kenner, Cushman, and Perloff).

many possibilities of variation in number and arrangement. For this reason Jorie Graham's poetry is instructive, because her visual prosodies are based on variation.[221] Drawing both on the free verse tradition built by H.D. and Williams, and an avant-garde tradition stretching from Olson through language poetry, Graham fashions stanzaic patterns from the combinations of linear-syntactical counterpoint with spatial arrangement. Her visual prosody marries lyric tradition with field composition to strike dramatic balances between regularity and discontinuity, establishing a new paradigm for stanzaic prosody in contemporary nonmetrical verse.

Graham designs her stanzaic patterns to foreground the possibilities of (a)symmetry and (ir)regularity, marking the absence of the body with schematic artifice even while fabricating a textual body of words. The alternating alignments and suggestive "gaps" of "Noli Me Tangere" suspend "the body of who we are / to have been" in white space between the stanzaic units:

> and the tree-shaped gap the tree inhabits,
> and the tree-shaped gap the tree
> invents. Siren,
> reader,
> it is here, only here,
> in this gap
>
> between us,
> that the body of who we are
> to have been
> emerges (Graham, *From the New World* 84)

[221] Under a disaggregated stanzaic model, contrapuntal arrangements can be treated as substantial patterns rather than aberrations, and visual prosody involves typographical patterns that construct, suggest, or frustrate the relationships between and among linear units. This model might equally describe a strictly repeated pattern of indentation as in Williams's "variable foot" or an equally recurrent scheme that produces units of different shape, such as the accretionary stanzas of Elizabeth Bishop's "Visits to St. Elizabeth's" or the contrapuntal lineation of refrain lines with couplets in Frank Bidart's "Winter Spring Summer Fall." If stanzaic structure consists of recurring, differential arrangements of linear groupings, the degree of regularity in these patterns is a crucial prosodic element.

The “gap” created by the stanzaic enjambment is both a break in the chain of syntax and a visual disjuncture. Like the tree-shaped gap the stanzaic break is both a physical fact (there is space between strophic units) and a contingent artifice (these white spaces are only gaps because of their implication in stanzaic progression). These stanzas shape, and take shape in, the exchange between author and reader, addressed as “Siren” to suggest a collaborative singing, although the poem they create is not song but “body.” The text is the gap between these bodies, as well as the body in which they come together, an arrangement of indentations, blanks, line groupings, and alignments that determine the possibilities and the limitations of poetic utterance.

Graham uses linear combinations and alignments to stage this somatic dilemma, voicing the disembodied song of traditional lyric through the visual corpus of the text. She works with a dual sense of “form” as body and versification, troping the limits of the poetic medium as paradoxically capable of physical connection, as she suggests in “Noli Me Tangere,” “if all you have to touch her with / is form” (Graham 85). Her early experiments with stanzas of roughly equal length often turn on extreme juxtapositions of short and long lines alternately indented. These arrangements function as both proxies for, and prosthetic extensions of, the lyric body, and become the basis for much more extensive transformations of stanzaic layout. In later volumes (particularly her 2008 *Sea Change* and 2017 *fast*) Graham progressively rearranges the poetic corpus to evoke the precarity of physical existence in the twenty-first century, redrawing the contours of stanzaic form with dramatic misalignments and brutalist blocks. Within the borders of the text she pushes the boundaries of visual technique, constructing a more capacious stanzaic prosody while demonstrating how poetry’s material dimensions might speak to the dissolution of the body in the face of environmental threat and artificial intelligence.

A Line Brought Round, All the Way Round

Graham's work displays a rare level of formal restlessness. She foregrounds the technical variety of her verse in a continuous drama of shape and shape-shifting on the page and makes prosodic experimentation a centerpiece of her poetics. Where prosodists like Hollander celebrate Emerson's elaboration of the "metre-making argument" of genuine poetry (Emerson, "The Poet" 263), she prefers to write in "argument-making meter" (Graham, "The Art of Poetry" 83), crafting forms that generate their own internal logics. For Graham these poetic architectures depend principally on visual arrangement.[222] Her earlier volumes—especially *Erosion* (1983) and *The End of Beauty* (1987)[223]—establish a clear paradigm of schematic experimentation, as she breaks isomorphic molds and arranges the page as a formal body. This development of visual measure allows Graham to evoke a physical presence in the typographical dimension of her verse, foregrounding her shaping agency on the surface of her asymmetrical stanzas.

While critics have noted the prosodic differences among her many published volumes, few have traced Graham's visual experiments in "argument-making meter."[224] The poet's keenest readers have seen but not fleshed out the skeleton of her formal poetics. Helen Vendler discusses

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[222] In an interview Graham explains to Thomas Gardner how she spends the majority of her time in revision, repeatedly typing, regularizing, and re-lineating the stanzas of her poems (Graham, "The Art of Poetry" 82-83).

[223] While my quotations of Graham's work still primarily come from *From the New World*, for the duration of this section, in discussing individual poems I will also refer to the standalone volumes in which they were published. These twelve books pursue distinctive formal strategies and mark significant shifts in the poet's creative approach: *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987), *Region of Unlikeness* (1991), *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000), *Never* (2002), *Overlord* (2005), *Sea Change* (2008), *Place* (2012), *fast* (2017).

[224] Helen Vendler acknowledges the importance of typography to her work but only as one among many techniques: "she has steadfastly refused to repeat herself technically, and has explored in successive volumes an extraordinary number of figurative and stylistic means—in typography, in syntax, in figuration, in voice" (Vendler, "A Powerful, Strong Torrent"). Joanna Klink has asserted that Graham's project in all her books is to bring the body and mind into the proper relationship or balance (Klink 156). Brian Henry has sketched a compelling portrait of her outride lines and debt to Hopkins, and his ultimate recourse to the phonocentric, somatic language of "muscular music based largely on iambs and spondees" tempers the force of his claims about her stylistic innovation (Henry 286, 289).

the various stages of Graham's technical development as distinct "bodies," but focuses too much on linear length when the "antiphonal" stanzaic alignments of poems from *Erosion* to *Materialism* are an equally striking development (*The Breaking of Style* 71-74).[225] Brian Henry and Matthew Ritger take the opposite position, privileging schematic variation over linear transformation, but read her mercurial stanzaic patterns as elements of a generally anti-mimetic poetics (Henry, "Exquisite Disjunctions, Exquisite Arrangements"; Ritger, "The Charges"). Yet Graham's stylistic shifts constitute a concerted effort at redefining prosodic measure in terms of corporeal artifice. She writes about her "devices" (visual arrangement in lines and stanzas) as "the method by which one touches the world, the means by which one can be touched oneself… what for me felt like a new nakedness—as if the underpinnings were visible on the surface" (Wright 44-45).[226] She highlights form as a capacity for physical touch, alternately concealing and exposing the body with prosodic technique. The change in voice and change in body are understood as physical alterations, and the linear length, indentation, and stark enjambments she highlights combine to form increasingly complex patterns over the course of her career.

Just as Graham digs into the corporeal dimensions of poetic form, she often thinks about the material world, and the body in particular, in formal patterns or shapes. At the conclusion of "Imperialism" (*The End of Beauty*) an adolescent Graham observes thousands of people bathing in the Ganges and begins to see her mother's body as yet another form rather than the habitus of a person. After picturing the far shore as "a line drawn simply to finish // the river, to make that motion *seem a river*" she visualizes her mother the same way:

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[225] Vendler's claim that her short lines facilitate "erosion" and long lines "dissolution" paints too tidy a picture of Graham's prosody (*The Breaking of Style* 77). She comes close to grasping the scope of Graham's formal poetics when she argues that the "gaze" rather than "breath" becomes the measure of her verse, but she generalizes from the isolated and numbered lines of *The End of Beauty* instead of the bulk of Graham's verse in which segments of various visual shape and length are recombined and broken down (82).

[226] Her comments, part of a letter written to Charles Wright, make specific reference to "San Sepolcro" (*Erosion*).

—first near the surface then underwater—
And as for her body ("no longer relevant")
it became nothing to me after that, or something less,
because I saw what it was, her body, you see—a line
brought round, all the way round, reader, a plot, a
shape, one of the finished things, one of the

beauties (hear it click shut?) a thing

completely narrowed down to love—all arms, all arms extended in the
pulsing sticky heat, fan on, overhead on, all
arms no face at all dear god, all arms— (*The Dream of the Unified Field* 94)

The body, composed of "a line / brought round," invites prosodic comparisons across that well-placed enjambment. Graham's poem mostly comprises six-line groups with a few isolated lines, gesturing toward the many ways that line can be "brought round" to fashion a new shape: with or without full stops, with various severities of enjambment, broken at any point on the page, continued in a line set flush left or indented, with or without a stanzaic gap afterward. The poem seems to break right in the middle of a final stanza, attempting to keep the forms of "finished things" at bay, even as the text testifies to the finality of its own formal arrangements.[227]

The gradual uncoupling of her stanzas from normative alignments constitutes the main line of Graham's prosodic development. After a first book marked by loose free verse in flush-left alignments,[228] she dramatically alters the shapes of her stanzas, using short lines indented

[227] For Catherine Karagueuzian, in these lines "poetry itself constitutes a shape like a body" (Karagueuzian 93).
[228] Her early poems in irregularly enjambed, nonmetrical, unrhymed verse are not "free verse" in a strict sense. Graham typically groups lines into stanzas even in poems without elements of traditional stanzaic structure. She cultivates a number of key effects with her unrhymed, nonmetrical, heteromorphic stanzas: 1) the signification of technique in a pattern of numerical regularity without the confines of regular rhyme and meter; 2) the interplay of visual line and syntax, with lines and phrases of various lengths, resulting in irregular patterns of enjambment and suggestive cadences; and 3) a consistency of voice, signaled by the persistent left-hand alignment of line beginnings.

alternately to subvert the force of the left-hand alignment graphically associated with the authorial voice (Huisman 64), while focusing her poetics on the visual (especially masterworks of painting) in *Erosion*. Bonnie Costello sees Graham's fixation on art pushing her toward visual form as a strategy for shaping and transcending the limits of the body (Costello 13), building on the book's many descriptions of painted works with visual compositions of her own. In nonmetrical but roughly isomorphic stanzas, Graham uses antiphonal alignment and frequent enjambment to create an illusion of embodiment in poems such as "At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body." The poem alludes to a fresco of the dead returning to bodily form[229] and offers a bracing portrait of the body's demands and the artist's vision:

> In his studio
> Luca Signorelli
> in the name of God
> and Science
> and the believable
> broke into the body
>
> studying arrival.
> But the wall
> Of the flesh
> opens endlessly,
> its vanishing point so deep
> and receding
>
> we have yet to find it,
> to have it

All three of these attributes characterize *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), the poet's entire first volume, whose lyrical forays suggest a search for forms and ways of forming, but shaped by the conventions of free verse.

[229] The painting is part of a group of frescoes in the Chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio in the Orvieto cathedral.

stop us. So he cut
    deeper,
graduating slowly
    from the symbolic

to the beautiful. (Graham 54)

Each line break ("So he cut / deeper") feels like a new cut into the body of the poem, as Graham delays the moment of formal closure such that the pattern "opens endlessly." The consistent enjambment of stanzaic units draws the reader deeper into the poem, with the visually interchangeable units suggesting the succession of bodies Signorelli dissects.

Signorelli's climactic dismemberment of his own son's corpse,[230] "with beauty and care / and technique," serves as a paradigmatic image for Graham's corporeal poetics, as the continued troping on the enjambed "cut" transforms the poem into an ars poetica:

to the beautiful. How far
    is true?
When one son
    died violently,
he had the body brought to him
    and laid it

on the drawing-table,
    and stood
at a certain distance
    awaiting the best
possible light, the best depth
    of day,

[230] This story is apocryphal and appears in Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (271).

then with beauty and care
    and technique
and judgment, cut into
    shadow, cut
into bone and sinew and every
    pocket

in which the cold light
    pooled.
It took him days,
    that deep
caress, cutting,
    unfastening,

until his mind
    could climb into
the open flesh and
    mend itself. (54-55)

Graham's clever use of enjambment continues to suggest the line breaks as cuts to the body—"cut into / shadow, cut / into bone and sinew"—making the act of reading a careful anatomy (literally "cutting up") of the visual text. The final stanza's short stop (it is the only visual grouping of fewer than six lines) snaps the poem shut just as Signorelli figuratively climbs into his son's corpse, the visual pattern broken at last. The painter's transformation of his own son into a material work of art facilitates the reader's entry into the poem, but the taking on of these alternate bodies in works of art falls short of the resurrection depicted in the titular painting. Graham takes equal care in arranging these tight stanzaic shapes, with their ceaseless cuts over enjambments back and forth in antiphonal linear alignments, crafting a poetic body that might also "open endlessly."

Graham relies on these variations of alignment and enjambment throughout the volume to stretch what appears to be a regular stanza into a flexible shape. The alternating indentations indicate nothing about meter or rhyme scheme,[231] yet this structure is not an instance of Berry's "sight-stanza." Graham's visual progressions are not isomorphic, and these shapes visually echo ballads and other traditional forms indented to mark rhyme and metrical segments. She uses the counterpoint of frequent enjambment and short lines to create or evoke movement,[232] most obviously in "I Watched a Snake" (*Erosion*). The animal slithering through the grass is summarily eclipsed by the sinuous movement of the verse:

> This must be perfect progress where
> movement appears
> to be a vanishing, a mending
> of the visible
>
> by the invisible—just as we
> stitch the earth,
> it seems to me, each time
> we die, going
> back under, coming back up. . . .
> It is the simplest
>
> stitch, this going where we must,
> leaving a not

[231] Indentation traditionally serves to mark linear segments of different rhyme sounds or metrical lengths, as in the conventional lineation of ballad stanzas. For instance, Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" uses similar indentation to indicate rhymes and line length: shorter, rhymed lines are consistently indented, giving the stanzaic form a coherent visual quality. Assessing the stanza visually, we interpret the rhyme and metrical scheme even before uttering the corresponding sounds. This kind of typographical alignment based on rhymes or metrical periods has been employed in the layout of Anglophone verse since even before the advent of printing (Huisman 15-17).

[232] This is very different from Berry's assertion that the triadic stanza in Williams is a "mimetic image of descent" (Berry, "Visual Form in Free Verse" 95), because Graham chooses clearly privileges the non-representational elements of poetic language, preferring enactment to mimesis (Henry 284).

unpretty pattern by default. But going
    out of hunger
for small things—flies, words—going
    because one's body

goes. (Graham 34-35)

Where the poet ostensibly watches a snake, we find ourselves watching the language snake down the page, and even moving along with it, "going / out of hunger / for small things—flies, words." The "not / unpretty pattern" winds its way along, and Graham tropes the snake's movement as the "stitch" in the text, where motion and stillness seem to feed back into one another. The likening of poet to snake (most directly in the juxtaposition of "flies, words") calls our attention to the material character of poetic language, where enjambments repeatedly break the poem's verbal "going" (enjambed three times) into a corporeal movement. The visual shape of the poem becomes a fertile ground for troping the body, as Graham repeatedly turns to physical language in tandem with these narrow-lined sestets.

Instead of tuning her visual technique to the music of her poems, Graham treats the typographical field as a set of experimental possibilities for exploring new forms of artifice.[233] She allows her antiphonal stanzas a greater range of variation, developing patterns that depart from the left-hand margin. She begins using "outride" lines, adapting a concept from the prosody of Gerard Manley Hopkins to her visual technique of subscribing a word or short phrase far to the right under the current line, as if "hanging" on to the end of the line graphically.[234] These

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[233] As she reveals in an interview with Thomas Gardner, many of her formal devices are designed to arrest the attention of a silent reader, especially one who may be about to put the book down (Gardner 232).

[234] These short lines, read by critics such as Helen Vendler (*The Breaking of Style* 79) and Brian Henry (Henry 284) according to Gerard Manley Hopkins's notion of the rhythmic "outride," are a critical part of Graham's later poetry. Vendler links it primarily to a somatic poetics, where the breath-based free verse line is forced in excess to run onto another line. Henry distinguishes Graham's version of the outride from visual strategies employed by William Carlos Williams and Charles Wright. Hopkins used particular symbols to annotate his own versification, with half-

short lines, tacked on below a long line and aligned far to the right, manifest as separate in the visual field, allowing her antiphonal stanzas to incorporate entirely new arrangements. These outrides can visually subdivide stanzaic units, such that the apparent breaks between line-groups create the illusion of more stanzas (with blank lines before and after) than are technically present. She uses this effect in "Invention of the Other" (*Materialism*) to draw an almost musical train of thought back and forth across the page:

> Knowledge, a long licking across the surface of
> matter . . . And the body, the gravity from whence this whole thing
> rose—(*the body!* she thought, as if she had forgotten it)—the body
> itself
> the offspring of this long thin waiting laying itself down as
> an act of
> looking—And all of it (the heels of the music's having ended, the
> end of the music, the end of the music's
>
> ending) now changes rung upon a listening that still
> listened, is listening, as the last note carries the air in it and is
> carried by
> that air, dusty, in which the light, and the molecules of watching, and
> the motes of
> listening, are changes rung, but upon what—adamant—quick—
> upon
> what? (*Materialism* 132)

Graham's language continually turns back upon itself, both typographically and syntactically. The poem reaches out for some material substance on which to hang its thoughts, dissolving the

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loops to illustrate the rhythmic ties. His explanation of his prosodic designs, which first appeared as preface to the 1918 edition of his poems, outlines the formal concept: "*hangers* or *outrides,* that is one, two, or three slack syllables added to a foot and not counting in the nominal scanning. They are so called because they seem to hang below the line or ride forward or backward from it in another dimension than the line itself" (Hopkins 10).

body into “the offspring of this long thin waiting laying itself down as / an act of / looking,” as it measures out that act of looking. It is difficult to recognize, through the cascades of visual arrangement, that these are ostensibly two eight-line stanzas, because the outride lines and drastic differences in linear length give the impression of a poem still in process. The unfolding of phrase and thought down the page is energized by the aschematic typography, which paradoxically manages both to signal the artifice of the poem’s arrangements and to suggest the organic development of its logic. By unmooring her stanzaic pattern from the left margin, Graham invites the reader to see “the body / itself” implicated in the material turns of verse on the page, while reinventing her prosody around asymmetrical arrangement.

As more schemes of (dis)organization become imaginable within her poems, Graham constructs increasingly enigmatic stanzaic forms that draw attention to her poems’ material presence on the page. Graham replaces the antiphonal alignments with the variably indented outrides, composing in a form that no longer appears strophic but still organizes multilinear units with visual cues, tracking the movement of mind and matter (often water) across the page. In “Evolution” (*Never*) she repurposes the left-hand margin as a baseline to which the poem periodically returns, as it oscillates between the graphic anchor of authorial voice and another force or voice that turns the lines variously “back and forth”:

> Also everything in sunlight trying to become bodied by something
>
> else,
>
> the whole retreating ocean laying
> microscopic and also slightly larger fiercely-lit
> kelp in streaks of action—
> long sentences with branchlike off-widths indicating
>
> acceleration back and forth
>
> and left-off, phrases of gigantic backing-off

from a previously

held shore,

rivulets of sand left visible in raised inscription (Graham 231)

Her description of the beach "trying to become bodied" takes on a linguistic figure—the kelp and sand arranged as "sentences," "phrases," and "inscription"—as the poem attempts both to make matter into a text and conversely to give the poem a body, organized visually not only to evoke but also to create movement on the page. Graham's visual prosody acquires its potency from these crosscurrents at the center of her poetics, the text bodying forth the material world and the world transforming into a text. In developing her technique from antiphonal sextets to strophic blocks broken variously by movable outrides, she draws attention to the material contours of stanzaic patterns, to the juxtapositions of linear length, alignment, grouping, and enjambment that fabricate the poetic corpus.

Coaxial Stanzas and Lyric Indrifting

As Graham devotes her visual prosody to manifesting the poem's material body, she often meditates on the prospect of her poems surviving her. As she writes in "Dawn Day One" (*Never*), the text is a means for the eventually-deceased poet, who somehow survives on the page, to communicate with a future reader: "Then there are / these: me: you: you *there.* I'm actually staring up at / you, you know, right here, right from the pool of this page" (241). Her enigmatic typographical patterns ultimately construct a corpus capable of outliving the poet's physical body. In this way Graham uses visual prosody to step into lyric's generic agon with time and

death,[235] but her technical strategies become particularly fraught amid increasingly dire warnings about the speed of anthropogenic climate change. Against this backdrop she initiates a massive prosodic realignment in the appropriately titled *Sea Change* (2008). With the possibilities of lyric immortality vitiated by the prospect (or the inevitability) of human extinction, Graham fashions extravagant misalignments and eschews breaks between multilinear groupings, transforming the stanza into a messy expanse that nonetheless measures time by returning to the left margin. Where previously her various alignments offered a fluid visual prosody, the poems of *Sea Change* explode the format of conventional verse, in "coaxial"[236] schemes that dissolve the fiction of a single speaker and obviate somatic readings.

The specific impetus for the volume's formal shift is climate catastrophe. That poetry seems both complicit in climate change, and destined to end because of it, leads Graham to meditate on the end of human language—"Moon, who will write // the final poem?" (11)[237]—and

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[235] Sharon Cameron's *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979) describes the dialectic between time and immortality in Dickinson's poetry as emblematic of the core tension in all lyric poetry (Cameron 1-3, 23). Her emphasis on lyric as a genre of transcending or surviving the body is echoed by Allen Grossman: "The features of the poem which are instrumental toward its immortalizing function are those which distinguish it from other forms of words, its prosody (for example, meter and line)… Prosodic utterance insofar as it is "numerous" is an imitation of time. Incorporating time, it triumphs over time" (*The Sighted Singer* 213, 240). Susan Stewart approaches lyric in similar fashion, "the cultural, or form-giving, work of poetry is to counter the oblivion of darkness… the poet undertakes the task of recognition in time—the unending tragic Orphic task of drawing the figure of the other—the figure of the beloved who reciprocally can recognize one's own figure—out of the darkness. To make something where and when before there was nothing. The poet's tragedy lies in the fading of the referent in time, in the impermanence of whatever is grasped. The poet's recompense is the production of a form that enters into the transforming life of language" (*Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* 1-2).

[236] In the sense that the visual pattern has two parallel axes: the flush-left alignment and the medial alignment. Taken from a 2008 interview with *Poetry* magazine, in which Graham alludes to a reader's use of the term "coaxial" to describe her recent formal technique (Graham, "Q & A").

[237] She pursues similar ideas throughout the volume: "we / should beget nothing" (*Sea Change* 7), "the last word // heard" (14), "heaven conserve us is the song, & lakes full of leaping / fish, & ages that shall not end" (33), "the last word you said" (46), "there are sounds the planet will always make, even // if there is no one to hear them" (56). Claire Colebrook theorizes this kind of reading in a world without bodies: "We imagine a viewing or reading in the absence of viewers or readers… these experiments strive to image a world as image (as referential) but not referential for any body. These images cannot be sustained, and are unsustainable; they—like the thought of extinction itself—will always be for us, and are always co-opted by the narrative lures they fragment. They nevertheless indicate an era or epoch that has begun to sense, if not have a sense of, a world without bodies." (Colebrook 28).

to imagine language produced by nonhuman bodies. The title poem consists of a sprawling litany of thoughts in response to an impossibly strong wind, which begins to merge with the lyric voice to create a hybrid utterance:

somewhere the thought won't outlast
the minute, here it is now, carrying its North
Atlantic windfall, hissing Consider
the body of the ocean which rises every instant into
me, & its
ancient e-
vaporation, & how it delivers itself
to me, how the world is our law, this indrifting of us
into us, a chorusing in us of elements, & how the
intermingling of us lacks in-
telligence, makes
reverberation, syllables untranscribable, inclingings (Graham 266)

In "syllables untranscribable" Graham gestures toward the limits of language, where wind and poet dance through pronoun combinations in their "chorusing." This polyvocal approach cues a seismic shift in versification. One left-aligned line is followed by a group of lines that begin in the center of the page, relentlessly enjambed,[238] allowing for an almost unutterable final sentence that constitutes more than two-thirds of the poem. The left-aligned lines suggest a minimally cyclical pattern, but without any visual breaks, rhyme closures, or coincident linear-syntactical periods, Graham's visual scheme refuses the stability of conventional stanzaic structure, even outlining the ghostly presence of the normative stanza in the space between flush-left lines.

This form has roots in Graham's earlier work, but the more extreme pattern enables a new voice, a "chorusing" or "intermingling" in suggestively polyvocal alignments, the poet's words

[238] Of the poem's eighty-six lines, only seven end with punctuated stops.

indistinguishable from the storm's. We drift between speakers human and nonhuman, singular and plural, as "Sea Change" considers the permanence of poetry amid environmental upheaval:

> so that I, speaking in this wind today, out loud in it, to no one, am suddenly
> aware
> of having written my poems, I feel it in
> my useless
> hands, palms in my lap, & in my listening, & also the memory of a season *at its*
> *full,* into which is spattered like a
> silly cry this in-
> cessant leaf-glittering (267)

Talking aloud "to no one," the speaker becomes aware of her written poems as texts, fixating on the fallen leaves (and the leaves of the book) as a spatial arrangement of voice, "spattered like a / silly cry." By the end the gale has taken over the speaking, its "huge breaths passing to and fro" as it hurls its energies against the poet with expansive syntax and mercurial alignments, using form to generate a kinetic force.[239] The stanzaic shapes seem to coalesce and disintegrate as the voices of speaker and storm, and the consistent return to the left margin creates a pattern that can be understood and anticipated but not perfectly predicted, a form for the age of climate change.

This coaxial form is, in many ways, the substance of *Sea Change.* Every poem in the volume adopts the same strophic pattern, beginning with a longer line from the left margin, followed by one or more shorter lines beginning from the center of the page, with no blank line distinguishing a boundary between strophic units. This scheme destabilizes the fiction of a single lyric speaker with patterns of alignment that suggest multiple voices alongside one another on the page, yet it seems also to include voices that cannot speak. The gaps between the left-aligned

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[239] The wind in particular appears throughout the book to remind us of the too-easy conflation of poetic making and natural inspiration. "Sea Change" literalizes the Romantic fiction of the Aeolian harp, with the wind actively participating in the creation of the poem. Aeolian harps were extremely popular during the Romantic era and appear in poems by Coleridge ("The Eolian Harp") and Percy Shelley (Ode to the West Wind").

lines create a succession of stanzaic negatives where we would expect to find conventionally aligned stanzas. This asymmetrical prosody rearranges the poetic corpus into something contingent and tenuous on the page, pushing back against the conventions of centered or "axial" typography that Jan Tschichold traces to idealized conceptions of the human frame (Tschichold 20). Graham's co-axial typography instead disarticulates the body, forcing the reader to reckon with the fragility of the human in stanzas unmoored from symmetrical convention.

The coaxial pattern allows her to destabilize the embodied voice of conventional lyric and to confront the crisis of terminal ecology. In "Embodies" she uses the form to push time along at a startling pace while meditating on how the body is anchored to the natural world:

> hops, then stilling—very still—breathing into this oxygen which also pockets my
> looking hard, just
> that, takes it in, also my
> thinking which I try to seal off,
> my humanity, I was not a mistake is what my humanity thinks, I cannot
> go somewhere
> else than this body, the afterwards of each of these instants is just
> another instant, breathe, breathe,
> my cells reach out, I multiply on the face of
> the earth, on the
> mud—I can see my prints on the sweet bluish mud (Graham 268)

Two important continuities are being enacted by the form. The unbroken succession of strophic units creates multiple temporal registers in which one feels "the afterwards of each of these instants" accumulating toward (and beyond) climate catastrophe. The central axis and lack of stanzaic gaps complicate the reader's sense of where formal units begin, as the poem compresses

the present moment until it disappears into a current of moments coursing toward catastrophe.[240] Along with the exigencies of this temporal flow, the body appears to bleed into the world around it on a microscopic level, as the cognitive mechanisms of looking and thinking are enabled by and consubstantial with the surrounding oxygen. For Graham "this body" is not a strictly bounded unit associated exclusively with a particular speaker, but a shape that connects to the material world in surprising ways, with the "prints" in the mud suggesting both prosodic feet and the printed text. She emphasizes the continuity of form with the physical world, the minute movements of lungs, eyes, and vocal chords as the body interacts with the text—in Matthew Griffiths's formulation, they are "provocatively rather than evocatively sensory" (Griffiths 217). Seemingly arrangements of the poet's thought, these stanzaic patterns are more fundamentally arrangements of matter, linking the poem to a world it does not merely represent.

These poems evince Graham's deep commitment to thinking about environmental catastrophe, but much of the force behind her ecopoetics comes from this visual scheme.[241] She uses evocative language to discuss this pattern, calling it "exploded haiku" (Graham, "Q & A"), a "fault line" (Graham, Blackie interview 39), a "rivulet" (Deming), and even an index of historical and geological time (Graham, "Instructions for Building the Arc"). The basic structure of strophic repetition remains, yet the period of return to the left margin is irregular. Garth Greenwell sees in these variable and run-on units "a cycle that seems accommodating of endless and shifting interpretations" (Greenwell 119), allowing Graham's prosody to track environmental

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[240] "I think of the center as a place where the past and the future break from each other… the indented lines create an internal margin, the poems are expressing the difficulty of taking any beginning-place for granted. It is our very capacity to begin again which is being both broken and renewed at this juncture of our history" (Graham, "Q & A").

[241] This pattern dominates critical conversation about the book. Some take the form to reject normative lyric, while others (citing Graham's remark that it combines the rhythms of Whitman and Williams) see it as a quintessentially lyric shape. For the former, see Helen Vendler, "A Powerful, Strong Torrent," and James Longenbach, "The Wasted Land." In the latter camp, see Dan Chiasson, "Beautiful Lies," and Garth Greenwell, "Beauty's Canker."

trends that are not cyclical, as well as cycles longer than the timeline of human existence.[242] Jason Guriel shrewdly reads this technique as a move away from conventional lyric poetry, arguing "The ambition to create individually realized poems has been washed away by a tidal form" (Guriel 60). Graham's work indeed frustrates the desire for "individually realized poems," because this "tidal form" washes over the volume, obliterating the distinctive marks of individual poems. By linking up stanzas into an unbroken current that continues for an entire volume, she offers a glimpse of how prosody might speak to the physical precarity of an unmoored world.

However, Graham's technical commitment in *Sea Change* cannot simply be assimilated to general paradigms for ecopoetics, which often regard formalism with suspicion. Writing almost a decade before *Sea Change,* Leonard Scigaj critiques the ecology of Graham's work, asserting that she does not "consider nature as a separate and equal series of interdependent ecosystems" (Scigaj 59). This model for "sustainable" poetry represents a traditional strain of ecopoetics, echoed by critics such as John Elder and David Gilcrest, that rejects poststructuralist theory and avant-garde formalism, attempting to promote "an *awareness* of nonhuman entities unmediated by linguistic structure" (Gilcrest 133).[243] But Scigaj's strange callback to *Plessy v. Ferguson* inadvertently exposes his nature/culture dualism as itself an anthropomorphized and inaccurate model, producing the inequalities he seeks to eliminate. His description of the divide between humanity and the natural world alludes to an artificially legislated rift between two human groups, and he maintains this idea of separateness in spite of empirical evidence that nature and the human are inextricably bound and entirely interpenetrating.[244] Graham's prosody,

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[242] As John Mann asserts, this unpredictable cyclicality "obliterates our sense of conventional stanza" (Mann 72).
[243] Gilcrest champions a poetics that "reinforces ecocentric values by recognizing that nonhuman entities do not exist merely in their relation to human interpretive structures or as material for poetic representation" (Gilcrest 134). Elder more specifically alleges that poetic forms are suited to particular landscapes, implying that our reading practices and prosodic correspondences represent and allow for a kind of mediated biodiversity (Elder 69).
[244] This evidence was widely available at the time, as one can learn from Bill McKibben's 1989 *The End of Nature.* McKibben's book is often seen as the first work on climate change for a mainstream audience. For more

while not exactly avant-garde, firmly imbricates humans in nature: instead of moving "beyond the printed page" (Scigaj 37), she embraces the possibilities of the page to fashion continuities between the aesthetically constructed body and the material world, connections that for traditional ecocriticism threaten to rearrange what is left of nature to suit human forms.

Yet other critics would allege that it is Graham's focus on the aesthetic (rather than the brand of her aesthetic) that risks compromising her environmental project. As Rob Nixon argues, this approach courts "historically indifferent formalism," whereas ecological progress requires writers to engage "nonliterary forces for social change" (Nixon 31-32). He draws on Anne McClintock, who warns explicitly of the "fetishism of form": "the projection of historical agency onto formal abstractions that are anthropomorphized and given a life of their own… In the process, social relations between humans appear to metamorphize into structural relations between forms" (McClintock 64). This fetishism threatens to eclipse the real catastrophe—a rapidly warming world plagued by ecological instability, mass extinctions, and Nixon's "slow violence," the gradual destruction wrought by climate change, often disproportionately on the world's poorest communities (Nixon 2)—if we see only the "strophe" in Graham's work. Even Sonya Posmentier's rejoinder to Nixon in favor of a "historically attentive formalism" for ecopoetics (Posmentier 212) only half-solves the problem, because her countermove still privileges the human by way of aesthetics. Such a focus on technique, many would claim, distracts from environmental crisis and reifies anthropocentrism in the text.

These seemingly potent critiques, I argue, instead delineate exactly the strength of

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theoretically-inclined deconstructions the human/nature divide, see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991), Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), and Margaret Ronda, *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* (2018).

Graham's poetry, in which the nature and culture are neither separated nor abstracted by form.[245] In *Sea Change* she arranges "indrifting" and "chorusing" poems to break down distinctions between speakers, entities, and formal units, evoking the presence of lives beyond (and after) the human, especially kinds of life "comprised of pure, even seemingly abstract, linkages, patternings" (Graham, "Instructions for Building the Arc").[246] Her typographical linkages and patterns reminiscent of traditional stanzas gesture towards a kind of distributed or ecological subject, and by treating poetic form as one more arrangement of matter, not categorically separate from the structures of molecules or the rhythms of waves, she renders the textual corpus part of the material world.[247] This strategy anticipates recent work in ecopoetics, as scholars such as Scott Knickerbocker have argued that poetic form is not confined to the realm of the aesthetic but continuous with the material world (Knickerbocker 162).[248] Graham constructs a visual

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[245] In her poems the natural world is neither objective reality nor purely linguistic construct, and we cannot separate the world of nature from the world of culture, nor the world of the text from the world of the poem. In this way she practices the kind of "sensuous poesis" Scott Knickerbocker finds in the work of Dickinson and Hopkins, who treat the natural world as both immediate and mediated by language (Knickerbocker 17). As Matthew Griffiths suggests, her poems play variously with the figure of "sustainability" that anchored earlier generations of poets and critics in environmental poetics (Griffiths 212). Graham's work stands alongside that of thinkers such as Stacy Alaimo ("Sustainable This, Sustainable That") and Timothy Morton (*Ecology Without Nature*), who turn their ecocritical perspectives toward deconstructing the rhetorics and politics of "sustainability" and "nature" generally.

[246] Graham: "Life is a breath and a next breath masquerading as thought, mediation, evolution, story, progress, inevitability — and worst of all, as a thing capable of arriving at some kind of meaning, truth, conclusion. These hum before us as we consider the possible end of human time. But, again, if we hold this alongside the other kinds of life on the planet — living but non-human, living but non-mammalian, geologic, molecular, sub-atomic, and so on — we can feel how much other life is comprised of pure, even seemingly abstract, linkages, patternings, life-lived outside clocktime, historical time, biographical time, subjective time. What is a leaf living? What is a crystal living? I do feel that we spend very little time trying to represent — to ourselves (to begin with) — how partial our kind of life is, and how much we live in a true 'garden of eden' of other kinds of 'lifeness.' All those many other kinds of Life interest me deeply. I would like the form to be able to represent a kind of ticking, humming, accretion of those other life forms' presence… Who is expected to hear it?: the cosmos. I began the book thinking a great deal about the waves of human and inhuman sound that are cast out into the universe for all time, as we, as amateurs, understand it. We leave a record whether we wish to or not. We also leave a trace. Those are very different. We have agency in some of the tracing" ("Instructions for Building the Arc").

[247] Her visual prosody forces the reader into a recognition of the text as matter, rejecting transcendent and anthropocentric models of poetic form. Recall McGann's remark on visual form in the poetry of William Morris: "we are not borne away with these pages, we are borne down by them. The work forces us to attend to its immediate and iconic condition, as if the words were images or objects in themselves" (*Black Riders* 75).

[248] Knickerbocker highlights the materiality of sonic elements: "patterns of verse do not merely 'echo' the rest of nature; they are nature. More specifically, sound is one way nature in its broadest sense pushes through the poem at the level of form… The body of a poem—its form, its sound—is part of the body of the world" (Knickerbocker

prosody that does not isolate or close off individual units, creating the kind of "open, relational forms in which no element is inherently or lastingly central" that Lynn Keller finds most generative in contemporary ecopoetics (Keller 24).[249] In positioning the poem as one more material body linked to an entire universe of matter, Graham draws the reader into an ecological practice that recognizes patterns in all their irregularity as vital to the imperiled earth.

Yet within this formulation of ecopoetic monism,[250] aesthetic patterns concomitantly picture catastrophe as merely one more arrangement of matter. Graham takes "fiddling while Rome burns" to a new level in "The Violinist at the Window, 1918," riffing on Henri Matisse's *Le violoniste à la fenêtre* (1918) in an attempt to balance the recurrence of catastrophe with aesthetic returns. The poem relies on significant variations in the period between left-aligned lines, first dilating and then compressing the stanzaic negative in the left-hand gaps:

> here he is now, again, standing at the window, ready to
>
> look out if asked to
>
> by his
>
> time,

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162). Joan Retallack links twenty-first century poetics to the empiricist turn in the sciences a century earlier: "In poetics something analogous has been happening in the turn toward alterity via a new foregrounding of the material realities of languages as forms of life" (Retallack). Marcella Durand explicitly targets formal linkages as the ground of a material ecopoetics: "Experimental ecological poets are concerned with the links between words *and sentences, stanzas, paragraphs,* and how these systems link with energy and matter—that is, the exterior world" (Durand 123). Timothy Morton insists on the material dimensions of poetic form as ecological: "Art is ecological insofar as it is made from materials and exists in the world… But there is more to its ecological quality than that. The shape of the stanzas and the length of the lines determine the way you appreciate the blank paper around them. Reading the poem aloud makes you aware of the shape and size of the space around you (some forms, such as yodeling, do this deliberately). The poem organizes space. Seen like this, all texts—all artworks, indeed—have an irreducibly ecological form. Ecology permeates all forms" (*The Ecological Thought* 11); "a text must exist in some kind of (physical) medium, a carrier wave for meaning, as it were. This medium could be electromagnetic waves (radio, television, light); it could be paper or metal or stone; it could be (human) breath. All kinds of nonhumans are already involved in the existence of a poem. So poems, whether they like it or not, always speak, whether consciously or deliberately or not, about their physical architecture" ("The Liminal Space Between Things" 271).

[249] Evelyn Reilly similarly gestures to the open field poetics of Charles Olson as a generative foundation for an ecopoetics based on form, arguing that "ecopoetics must be a matter of finding formal strategies that effect a larger paradigm shift" (Reilly 261).

[250] Such an approach would resonate strongly with Caroline Levine's broad theory of form as any "arrangement of elements" (Levine 3), allowing "form" as a category to unite disparate discursive and material domains.

ready to take up again if he
must, here where the war to end all wars has come
to an end—for a while—to take up whatever it is
the spirit
must take up, & what is the melody of
that, the sustained one note of obligatory
hope, taken in, like a virus,
before the body grows accustomed to it and it
becomes
natural again—yes breathe it in,
the interlude,
the lull in the
killing (Graham 284)

. . . . . .

ugly sound, my hand is doing this, my mind cannot
open—cloud against sky, the freeing of my self
from myself, the note is that, I am standing in
my window, my species is ill, the
end of the world can be imagined, minutes run away like the pattering of feet in summer
down the long hall then out—oh be happy, &
clouds roil, & they hide the slaughterhouse, they loft as if this were
not
perpetual exile—we go closer—the hands at the end of this body
feel in their palms
the great
desire—look—the instrument is raised—
& this will be a time again in which to *make*—a time of use-
lessness—the imagined human
paradise. (286)

The earlier stanzaic units, with vertical extensions of the medial alignment, actually evoke the

long, centered figure of Matisse's painting, with the violin raised and held to the left, but Graham compresses this pattern progressively until almost every line alternates between left-hand and medial alignment, as seen in these passages from the poem's beginning and end. The verticality of the first section instantiates one kind of time, where each short line slows down the act of reading as the poem looks back both historically and iconically to Matisse's painting. And in the concluding sprawl Graham uses more of the page, returns to the left margin more frequently, and runs on more words per line to achieve a different speed, making "minutes run away like the pattering of feet in summer." Where "paradise" ends the poem at the left margin, surrounded by blank space, we are tempted to read a new Eden, interpreting absence as an unspoiled world, but the poem reminds us that "too much has died" (285), that absence evinces disappearance.[251]

Art occupies an uncomfortable space here, indicted with human agency in light of anthropogenic climate change. In the middle portion of the poem Graham turns away from the aesthetic while contracting the strophic period, gradually separating the typographical design from the Matisse figure. Her visual arrangements read as a rebuke of song and traditional Romantic strains of nature poetry:

> heaven conserve us is the song, & lakes full of leaping
>
> fish, & ages that shall not end, dew-drenched, sun-drenched, price-
>
> less—leave us alone, loose and undone, everything
>
> and nothing slipping through—no, I cannot be reached, I cannot be duped again says
>
> my head standing now in the
>
> opened-up window, while history starts up again, &
>
> is that flute music in the

[251] Morton highlights how poems can create tonal effects through absence to evoke an ambient environment: "The absence of sound or graphic marks can be as potent as their presence. Gaps between stanzas, and other kinds of broken lineation, create tone out of sheer blankness" (Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* 45).

distance, is that an answering machine—call and response—& is that ringing in my ears
the furrows of earth
full of men and their parts, & blood as it sinks into
loam, into the page of statistics, & the streets out there, shall we really
be made to lay them out again, & my plagiarized
humanity, whom
shall I now imitate to re-
become
before the next catastrophe— (285-286)

As the visual pattern tightens its returns to the left margin, Graham's awareness of "the next catastrophe" picks up speed. She feints toward the pathetic fallacy, listening for some natural responsion, "is that an answering machine—call and response—& is that ringing in my ears / the furrows of earth," but these antiphonal alignments construct an "answering machine" of a different sort. Graham satirizes the biblical rhetoric of "ages that shall not end" and the illusive eternities of conventional nature poetry, exposing "history" and "catastrophe" as artificial narrativizations of what are simply cyclical patterns. She encapsulates her ecological vision in the climactic image of blood sinking into the soil, as the bodies laid out by climate change become a text ("into the page of statistics") and the form constructs a corpus that can evoke and body forth these patterns, enduring just as Matisse's painting has. Echoing Adam's creation from dust in Genesis, this elegy for art refuses to immortalize the human, subsuming person and voice into the cyclical patterns of ecology and prosody.

Graham rarely maintains consistent linear lengths or stanzaic periods across the poems of *Sea Change,* channeling the volume instead into a continuous flow of recurrent yet volatile shapes, yet this aesthetic strategy ultimately works insofar as it dovetails with the details of climate science. "Positive Feedback Loop" uses typography to evoke the cyclical mechanisms

feeding an enormous "sea change" in the slow alteration of deep ocean currents. Graham slips in and out of a brief lecture on the thermal feedback loops that accelerate ecological catastrophe:

> In Hell they empty your hands of sand, they tell you to refill them with dust and try
> to hold in mind the North Atlantic Deep Water
> which also contains
> contributions from the Labrador Sea and entrainment of other water masses, try to hold a
> complete collapse, in the North Atlantic Drift, in the
> thermohaline circulation, this
> will happen,
> fish are starving to death in the Great Barrier Reef, the new Age of Extinction is
> now
> says the silence-that-precedes—you know not what
> you
> are entering, a time
> beyond belief. (Graham, *Sea Change* 42)

Her lines oscillate from page-spanning prophecies to single centered words, drawing attention to the silent mechanics of the printed poem, while the impossibility of imagining these massive movements of water (and other mechanisms of climatic shift) allows silence to speak. Just as the text might retain some ability to "speak" after the reefs die and the age of extinction arrives, this poetics of silence, ghosting the margins of these stanzas, encourages readers to attend equally to what is not present: the left-hand gaps where conventional stanzas might have appeared with rhymes and refrains, and the many fish that no longer swim the bleached reefs.

Graham's visual prosody instead signals that everything has changed, teaching readers a vital mode of attention in the age of extinction. The poems treat extinction as yet another rearrangement, gesturing toward life here and elsewhere, their stanzaic cycles part of an endless fabric of matter comingling and circulating far beyond our planet: "something else smiling elsewhere on another world, // us in the Great Dying again, the time in which life on earth is all

but wiped out / again" (*Sea Change* 44). Her later verse hums with the recognition of humanity's attenuated existence and a need for forms that stretch beyond the conventional lyric. The faint hope of these poems, as they attempt to replace the singing voice with the construction of a textual body, is to be continuous somehow with a material world both threatened by and threatening the survival of human beings, encouraging new kinds of attention to time and matter.

This Body Lying Here: Verse in the Machine

Graham's visual prosody gestures toward the page as a material dimension, a space where poems can be treated as physical entities, and after employing this formal strategy to engage environmental issues in *Sea Change,* she recalibrates her prosody to address the relationship between the body and technology. Shaped both by the advent of digital word processing and the structures of lyric tradition, her recent work considers the ways that traces of the human are left by technological means, treating the poetic text as a product composed, printed, and even consumed by and through machines. Releasing "The Bird That Begins It" in *Plume,* an online publication that replaces horizontal page turning with vertical mouse scroll, Graham compresses her coaxial form to fit the medium, while outlining the fictive character of the poetic corpus:

> I really only think it—this body lying here is
>
> only my thought,
> the flat solution
> to the sensation/question
> of
>
> who is it that is listening, and who is it that is wanting still
>
> to speak to you
> out of the vast network

of blooded things (*From the New World* 312-313)

She flattens "this body lying here" into a two-dimensional shape to expose the artifice ("lying") of this arrangement. The human agency we trace in the poem's material existence is a convenient fiction, she suggests, because the digitally composed and reproduced text offers a "flat solution" to a persistent lyric question—nobody is "listening," but the digital text does invite our seeing. In an era populated by artificial intelligences and dominated by digital media, Graham unsettles the boundary between the body and the other technologies—poems, computers—by which we live.

She speaks directly to this version of the present in *fast,* with poems strikingly arranged in large strophic blocks. By slicing seeming prose into brutalist stanzas, Graham overwhelms the reader, employing rigid and mechanistic compositional principles to stake out the boundaries of the body in strict marginal alignments. In "To Tell of Bodies Changed to Different Forms," she treats the starkly delineated blocks of text as manifestations of bodily anxiety:[252]

In the market of ideas, of meat—in the teeth of need—you will never be happy with
your body—it is not the right body—the shame of having to appear
in it—as if always a few steps behind it—or like a man standing
at the edge of a small river which muscles-by unaware—slipping by—under
reflection—too fast for its own good—making you a fault in perception—a catastrophe to
which a body is joined—disjoined—all headgear, undergear, tied, trussed, confused—
wearing your arms and legs as if waiting for security to find you—shaven then unshaven—
a bit traditional though all at once too raw too sexed-up—shivering portal and obstruction—
seeing yourself there, features amplified, distorted by normalcy—what you are dying to be
eluding you again, a hole in time, in the consolations of light—
sublime heavy weapon of appearance being detonated right there where your eye
meets your eye. I see you. How your apparition shrinks from itself.

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[252] Her concerns throughout the volume with lyric voice and technological noise—from MRI machines to internet bots—are rooted in corporeal crises, as the autobiographical speaker wrestles with her father's death, her mother's dementia, and her own battle with cancer. The poem's title quotes from the first two lines of Rolfe Humphries's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "My intention is to tell of bodies changed / To different forms" (Ovid 3).

It *knows* there was another body it was intended for, another century another love
another consolation—another sentence in which to place the heavy "I"—another
sex race core time—a different artifice—a different flow of faults. What are you dying
to be. (Graham, *fast* 45)

Six enormous strophes, each separated by a short outride, do indeed verge on the cata-strophic—"a catastrophe to / which a body is joined"—as each line and stanza moves with a speed that makes the turns of verse sudden, dire, and irrevocable. Graham's massive verse paragraphs hardly suggest organized stanzas, but the curated sprawl of these text blocks scribes the body across the page, where formal shifts allow for the possibility of another body: "another sentence in which to place the heavy 'I'—another / sex race core time—a different artifice—a different flow of faults." These varieties of "artifice" represent new ways of configuring the body as text, the "flow of faults" connoting both the defects and discontinuities of poetic form.

The strict maintenance of the left-hand margin and uneven line endings mark the text as poetry, but these strophic blocks offer no form of measure beyond the visual, and the poem's consideration of embodiment increasingly becomes a meditation on linguistic failure:

> appeal—there may be nothing else behind these words—caution—they too
> seek to be changed, they feel unseen, unheard, mis-shaped, mis-
> understood. Caution: you can neither be filled nor consumed. Caution: you are not
> beautiful—there is no such thing—you are a forced withdrawal from an occupied
> terrain—that's what a body is—once you are out you want to go back in—not to the
> same place exactly—but back, back in—the same defiling of your corpse so that you
> can be re-
> surrected as a new you-and-me thing. (46)

The penultimate block, with its suggestion that "there may be nothing else behind these words," highlights the poetic text as a site of misunderstanding, where words are "mis-shaped" into stanzas that do little to distinguish themselves from prose. Yet the outride lines create white gaps

offering a shadow of the unsaid, outlining that "forced withdrawal" Graham takes to indicate the uneasy coincidence between the limits of the person and the shape of the body. The poem's substantial strophes do indeed tell of bodies changed to different forms, its blocks bringing a material solidity to the textual corpus. Verse form affords the capacity to extend and transform the body, "re- / surrected as a new you-and-me thing," even as the transmutation of body into text risks "the same defiling of your corpse" (corpus) in acts of reading and interpretation.

Graham's work walks this border between the manifestation and the fabrication of the body in verse form, and she pays particular attention to the typographical edges of poetic texts as zones ghosted by bodily presences. She meditates on how the spaces of the page hold meaning,[253] where the reader finds the border between a mutable physical body and a textual self that will outlive it, and she describes her prosody in terms of the mechanical limitations of the page:

> the poems interact or flirt with prose, or with the artificially imposed edge of the page—a mechanical impediment. You could say these enact coming up against one kind of ending—say, where the human ends and AI begins, or where the organic ends and 3D matter begins… Another form I use, I would characterize as a mixture of the traditional stanza made of breath-units, and an implacable machine-cut stanza. It seems to come about where the poems explore how the

[253] Graham, on James Merrill's "Christmas Tree": "The missing "other"half is what haunted me.I think the reasons are obvious as one enters the"after"life...what's in the "other"side of which this side is the shadow, the poem?" (@jorie_graham). Merrill's shaped poem uses the left-hand margin to cut away from the tree, manipulating the conventions of print format to trace the edge of physical embodiment on the page. Graham's tweet responds to Dan Chiasson's tweet including a photograph of the centered version of the poem. The centered text was published in a memorial issue of *Poetry* (September 1995), but the left-aligned version appearing in the *Collected Poems* (2001) preserves Merrill's intentional echo of a Fairfield Porter print in the formatting (Hammer, *James Merrill: Life and Art* 785). Graham's tweet suggests a close sympathy with Merrill's physical plight. Merrill suffered from AIDS and was in the last weeks of his life when he composed "Christmas Tree," and Graham has written and spoken extensively about her own struggle with cancer (Graham, "The Possible Absence of a Future").

> body feels itself to be *a body at all*—or be called into being one—in various ways—from being gendered, or becoming incarnate, to reaching a threshold such as death, or cryogenic suspension. (Graham, "The Possible Absence of a Future")

The endings and thresholds she finds and fabricates on the page locate the body within a world of artifice. Her stanzaic patterns attempt to probe the margins of the human, demarcating the limitations of the body and gesturing toward the possibilities of poetry as a conduit for transgressing those limits. By using formal conventions recognizable to experienced readers of poetry Graham evinces the staying power of humanist thought, even as her hybrid prosody foregrounds the technologizing of the human voice.

In this way Graham's recent verse walks the border of posthuman thinking, her formal experiments pushing up against the boundaries separating human and machine.[254] Meditating on the possibility that human agency precipitates human non-existence, as with climate change, she frames the advent of new medical and communications technologies as forces similarly capable of totally reshaping the body. Her strophes remind us of the poem's status as a technological extension of the authorial self, echoing posthumanist thinkers such as N. Katherine Hayles: "the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (Hayles 3).[255] This view breaks down the divides between organic nature and technological culture around the shape of the body, which in turn complicates our

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[254] Graham, on the main project of *fast*: "over these years I became increasingly compelled—invited, forced, ethically tempted—to try to find my way to voices one would generally call 'non-human', as you point out—or voices that attempted to approach, or approximate, such a state… what I ask of my poetic tools now feels more urgent than ever, what I ask of the blank page" (Howe interview).

[255] Hayles builds on earlier accounts of the posthuman body as a technology, such as Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston's "Introduction" to *Posthuman Bodies* (1995). See also Haraway 588.

concept of the poetic text.[256] If the body and the poem are equally prosthetic technologies for extending or transforming the self, Graham's prosody takes on a new corporeal weight, because her formal choices constitute artificial proxies or surrogates for the body.

The written poem thus becomes a technology for self-extension but also a falsification or fictive rendering of the human, a prosthetic that seems to unravel body and voice while imitating, recording, and instantiating them. Where Graham's earlier free verse leans heavily on corporeal conceptions of poetic form,[257] her later poetry deliberately tests those theories, using mechanistic strophes in poems such as "Incarnation" to expose the artifice of lyric embodiment. The poem's strophic paragraphs of identical length, without regular rhythms or rhyme closures, are in fact sonnets. No reliable rhyme pattern demarcates subordinate units, and none of the sonnets coincides with syntactical closure, but these stanzaic units are fourteen lines long. The poem links its mechanical reproductions of the most canonical form in Anglophone verse to bodily processes of reproduction that are both generative and destructive:

> of belonging, instant addiction to breath, I watched it start
> you up, *too late too late* I was thinking in the laughing light,
> make her whole again, put her back in the unshaped, make

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[256] Graham's treatment of visual form and poetic embodiment echoes Haraway's account of poetry's kinship with the body and Colebrook's understanding of literary survival. Haraway: "Are biological bodies 'produced' or 'generated' in the same strong sense as poems? From the early stirrings of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century, many poets and biologists have believed that poetry and organisms are siblings… Like 'poems,' which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction" (Haraway 595). Colebrook: "On the one hand we would need to insist on a certain lifelessness of the letter, but to do so would not be to mark a simple binary distinction between texts and living bodies, but to see all bodies as both living and non-living (and perhaps at their most alive when exposed to annihilation). Perhaps a text, to be a text (or to be read), must at least in part be considered alive… The condition for any being's survival, its 'living on,' is that it take on some distinct and repeatable form" (Colebrook 210). Karen Barad's "agential realism" would similarly accord the poetic text a vital status, with text, author, and reader mutually constituting one another through "intra-action," and she "eschews both humanist and structuralist accounts of the subject that position the human as either pure cause or pure effect, and the body as the natural and fixed dividing line between interiority and exteriority. Posthumanism doesn't presume the separateness of any-"thing," (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 136).

[257] In a recent interview Graham maintains that "The free verse line just carries *voice* in its marrow" (Graham, "The Possible Absence of a Future").

her nobody's business again, invisible girl how I would have
cast the light off you, pushed your hollow chest back up,
head first, got you out of the mediation. But a tube was put
in. You *lived.* The body you were sunk-into washed up on
this shore. With its urgent message no one would ever hear
of course. As if you were the waste product of some
unstoppable subtraction, some buzz the stars thrilled in
messaging their absence, their methods of absence, their non-
irruption from shapelessness—the place without war. And
the nurse's chemise she covered up, to keep the stain off.
I wanted you to stay inside, my life, you, coming out of un-

shape, you permanent now, dying and permanent. What
shape does lie take which is not the *right* shape. All shapes
of lie are its right shape. The star's edge, the orchid's rushed
rim, self-empowerment, the breeze just now—the day I am
in—the shape of the trap before it snaps shut, the calm
keyhole holding its key not quite tight, that it lock us in, that
it let us out—what shall we be let out *of*—into what shape—
I don't fit—don't fit what I think—sturdy little wheeling,
going always forward, glaring, whose picture am I, terminal,
not quite terminal, over-expressing cells, overwhelmed with
self improvement—then something goes wrong—this will
not fit—I do not fit—in place—am forgetting my shape
again—must remember it—have to be a clean fit—good
fit—true fit—a truth—no—how can I be that—they kill you (*fast* 53)

The speaker conceptualizes her daughter's birth and her cancer as continuing struggles with shape and shapelessness, across restless stanzas riven with syntactical disjunctures. This stanzaic scheme undercuts the line despite its consistent line length: the high rate of enjambment and lack of rhyme and meter make the line a procedural unit, a quantity stacked to build stanzas just as

iambic feet can be chained together in pentameter lines. The visual design exposes the artificiality of barriers between ostensibly discrete units, making the stanzaic pattern a technique of reproduction, to generate shapes that figure the body as both "dying and permanent."

In a sense these sonnets present the same formal profile that Shakespeare's do: we look to formal units as tangible shapes that anchor our reading, pushing the poem toward an immortality the body cannot achieve (the "eternal lines" of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18). But in this sequence Graham breaks the sonnet's internal structure, keeping only its typographical outline. The poem reproduces its stanzaic shape repeatedly, although all but the final stanza are enjambed in one convoluted and continuous flow, such that we cannot treat these sonnets as discrete units, until the fragmentary conclusion at last offers "a line brought round":

> try to see. I really mean it. I don't know how to transmit
> meaning to you in there, mercurial. A redbird flits through.
> Look it is gone to both of us now. I would have had you keep
> it. I would have had it be in *your* hand, had it still you, had it
> make you have—as it has—arrival, shape, meaning—a say
> in things. A say in things. In things. A thing. (*fast* 55)

The ending offers an answer to the poem's opening question, "What shape am I?" (50), as the final iambic pentameter line ties off the sonnet with a wink at formal convention. The ultimate stanza ends with a full stop, but this forced moment of closure violates the poem's structural norm. Each strophic unit ends mid-sentence after fourteen lines, and we expect this thirteenth line to continue into a new line that spills over into another stanza, but the short stop and technical flourish clarify Graham's formal aim. By cutting the poem off mid-stanza, she stages prosody as a technology of artificial reproduction, in which the visual scheme replicates beyond

its manifest shape.[258] The strophes accumulate toward "arrival, shape, meaning" while prosthetically manifesting the body and imaginatively extending it, as Graham meditates on what shape will succeed the body, "what shall we be let out *of*—into what shape" (53).

While "Incarnation" and many of the poems in *fast* employ visual techniques that verge on "gimmicky" (Longenbach, "The Wasted Land")—the egregiously asymmetrical alignments of "The Medium," the right-hand justification of "Mother's Hands Drawing Me," the iconic shape of "Double Helix"—these typographical experiments probe the limits of verse as a technology. In "Cryo," first published online in *Prac Crit,* Graham arranges her stanzaic units for vertical scroll in a split-screen format alongside an interview in which she discusses "what I ask of the blank page" (Graham, Howe interview). These strophic blocks hint at the ways voices and bodies become entangled in preserving the text, expanding and contracting interlinear spacing to enable "A leap from one sort of being, one sort of being / immaterial to another":

> But hi. I've been having an interesting discussion with→those who pass their lives on→hastily assembled→dimly aware of the reasons for their wanting to become inanimate→an entity no longer human→an interloper→a possible manifestation, an impersonal person, an impersonation→an apathy from both emotive and organic color→a form of leap→from looper rover lopen→to run away→proto empathy→no memory→no entity. A leap from one sort of being, one sort of being immaterial to another. A possible alien subjectivity. Not idle but at the furthest reaches. Of empire. No song. Downward. Toward the stone terrace. You do not suffer you do not lie in waiting. Without a subject. The self a mere occasion for the swarming of responses, oh weariness, we can suspend, responses can suspend, letting certainty reach apogee, yes, would glance at me furtively but then I, I
>
> hi→I narrate continuity→not what is wanted except absolutely→what is said in my absence→is→my absence→they complimented→me→consistencies orders summaries outcomes→no berries on that bush→arranged terror→I see saints gathering→see enlarging grasps of order→understand this as likeness→is not→

[258] Lyn Hejinian advocates this kind of "exoskeletal" form versus traditional lyric: "Whether the form is dictated by temporal constraints or by other exoskeletal formal elements—by a prior decision, for example, that the work will contain, say, *x* number of sentences, paragraphs, stanzas, stresses, or lines, etc.—the work gives the impression that it begins and ends arbitrarily and not because there is a necessary point of origin or terminus" (Hejinian 46-47).

> visit the clinic→experience swarm fragment→during his increasingly rare visits
> he→we are left in the uncertain state→196 below centigrade→has not yet ex-
> perienced information death→can only begin after legal death→when?→motion to
> lose→grief suction cold→precise unaffronted damnation→cryopreservation→
> preserve my brain information→this peyne was bitter and sharp→this paine driede
> uppe all the lively spirities of flesh→blodlessehed and paine-dried within→
> blowing of the winde and colde coming from without→mete togeder in the swete
> body→jittery→of Crist→of→ (*fast* 65-66)

"No song" indeed. Graham's typically recursive phrasing, combined with the arrows' evocation of logic and programming, suggests the cadences of chatbots, as the poem struggles to sustain any coherent utterance (let alone a mellifluous lyric). The variable linear spacing suggests multiple voices in responsion, as if the strophic blocks are spawned by artificial intelligences conversing in a chat window, proving "the self a mere occasion for / the swarming of responses." The text, figuratively a technology of "cryopreservation," preserves this "swarming" via the "form of leap," fusing the fragmentary cadences of speaker, intertexts (with phrases borrowed from both Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and A. R. Ammons's "Corsons Inlet"),[259] and machine. Like Auden, Graham shapes her stanzas for an uncertain future, but instead of trumpeting the ritual element of form, she figuratively mechanizes her verse, asserting that "even this ATM requires interpretation" (67). The same sequence of prompts and responses awaits each reader on the prefabricated linguistic paths marked out by the arrows, as "Cryo" preserves an automated poetic corpus for future readers, its stanzaic patterns as much the designs of machines as the utterances of a poet.

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[259] The former allusion is clarified in the paratextual interview (not included in *fast*) published in *Prac Crit.* Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) was an English anchorite credited with writing the first surviving book in English known to have been written by a woman, *Revelations of Divine Love.* The *Revelations* detail mystic visions of Christ's passion that she received while on her deathbed in 1373 and that precipitated a seemingly miraculous recovery. For more on Julian and the *Revelations,* see Windeatt's introduction to the Oxford 2016 edition of *Revelations of Divine Love*.

In tandem with this increasingly mechanistic use of stanzaic structure, Graham continues to write in regular multilinear units, though her latest poems are similarly "No song," often coming to life in page-spanning quatrains which trace "my limit of the visible me" (Graham, "My Skin Is" 22). The power of Graham's poetics is that every poem feels like an ars poetica, and "My Skin Is" transforms the scene of reading into an exchange mediated by various skins:

> watching though casually, paring, paring, a glance once in a while – what am I
> missing – what am I supposed to do now suddenly, what at the last minute here –
> what is there to fix – are we alone – am I – packaged so firmly for this short
> interval – vigorous skin, doomed outsideness of me – sadder & no wiser here
>
> blown up, so close, so *here,* I see you net that skeins me in, tight inside my
> inwardness – at this border judged – at this edge bleeding when hit – as was for a
> while – didn't know enough to leave – didn't see the farewell – right there in front of
> me – must it always end this way – must I ceaselessly be me, reinvent you, see the
>
> artifice *us,* feel hand-to-face the childhood gone, the starlight the wind the gaze the
> race, the stranger not knowing, the unsaid unsaid, unseen unfound – look how full of
> void it is this capture, these pores no one can clean, and thoughts right there
> beneath – of course you cannot see me for this wrapping – I notice the cover of *your*
>
> book, the dress you hide beneath, you sitting there reading me – pay mind, pay it
> out, peering as we are at each other here – dermal papilla pigment-layer
> nerve fibre blood and lymph, can we fit into this strictest time, so quick, one click and
> hurry up – we've been trying forever to get out of this lonely place – inside's inside
>
> ("My Skin Is" 22)

She treats the text as a physical membrane wrapped around the self, but the body is "packaged so firmly" in the quatrains' horizontal grid that it hardly feels organic: "look how full of / void it is this capture, these pores no one can clean," "of course you cannot see me for this wrapping – I notice the cover of *your* // book, the dress you hide beneath, you sitting there reading me." In these artificial skins Graham packs many shorter phrasal units into each line, using the expansive stanzaic pattern to stack and compile what could have been dozens of clipped, breath-based lines into mass-produced blocks. Her strophic units compress convulsions of language into prefabricated shapes which appear in the *London Review of Books* as generic signifiers amid

sundry reviews and criticism, arresting the reader with the material contours of the poetic corpus.

Graham's stanzaic configurations both fabricate and extend the presence of the body in the poetic text, in various arrangements of "this body lying here." Over the course of her career her attention to the phenomena of bodily presence and perception becomes inseparable from her prosodic experimentation in the visual field. In cyclical typographical configurations that function as bodily proxies and prosthetics, Graham grounds her visual prosody in a concern for matter. Where some would sideline prosody as a secondary concern in the face of climate catastrophe and the advent of artificial intelligence, she foregrounds the arrangements of poetry as continuous with the world beyond the aesthetic. Graham's work makes a compelling case for visual form as a prosody in its own right, centered on the possibilities of multilinear combination and alignment that body forth her verse on the page. By widening the scope of visual technique in mainstream lyric, she demonstrates the enduring capacity of stanzaic patterns to organize our experience of poetry, no matter what form the poetic corpus takes.

The Other Side of My Sight

Graham's stanzaic schemes locate poetic making on the page, where visual patterns carve a space for embodiment between the margins. While typographical organization is also critical to Auden's jagged quatrains and Walcott's hybrid terza rima, Graham establishes visual form as the core of her prosody, using stanzaic grouping and alignment to construct a somatic poetics not primarily apprehended as sound. Her visual techniques build upon modernist free verse traditions that have shaped much of mainstream American poetics, but visual segmentation is not exclusively a technique for cutting expressive shapes on the page. Visual prosody allows poets

another way to negotiate their relationships with the forms of literary history, from the strophic howl Ginsberg hurls back at Whitman to the epitaphs Auden quietly arranges for Hardy—as Hollander makes clear, poetic tradition is a matter of visually transmitted texts (*Vision and Resonance* ix, 251). Where Graham's stanzas give material contours to the poetic corpus under the pressures of the present, her dramatic variations in alignment, spacing, and grouping are ghosted by conventional stanzaic structures, as in the phantom sonnets of "Incarnation" or the negative space framed on the left-hand side of the coaxial scheme. These shadows of other visual prosodies lead other poets back in time, in search of different visions of the poetic corpus.

As one of Graham's contemporaries, Alice Notley inhabits the same poetry marketplace, writing in the shadows of confessional poetry and the New York School, similarly envisioning the poetic body through a range of typographical patterns.[260] Her early "Incidentals in the Day World" (1973) demonstrates the creative possibilities of white space in the stanzaic frame: this poem of medium-length lines has irregular but frequent rhymes, with some visual units separated by one empty line and some by four empty lines. The larger gaps divide the poem into twenty-five segments (three per page in the original text) all of which end with a rhyme closure:

> Our moving cars through the rain
> I'm grabbing the road
> trees can turn fish or rock
> underwater (or city like toad)
> our compacted gyre, common load
> setting out to win a face
> child was is me, and me, and no one
> spangled with charm, apparently flesh
> you in me with me mean mind clear and fleshed
>
>
> Lovely and wise in a number I

[260] Notley's work has for years pushed the boundaries of poetry's possible arrangements, and one can find in poems such as "The Prophet" (1979) and "At Night the States" (1985) precursors to Graham's coaxial poems.

poignance is a spear in use bossed, with dew
numerical I overcome Sansjoy
numbers are my face when I am flow
when I perform a number I'm in num-
ber's silver clean, exalting hollow
"Thought it was Reader's Digest but
it was Life": number's deepening deepening hum

Their arts they move they escape clean
I serpentine invent my luck
I marry you world, my stolen heart
dispersed into the fray of clothes
I'll get back by wearing everything

it's a number like any other, one
I'll wear my death my baby gives away
I'll wear my death like anyone like day (Notley, *Grave of Light* 9-10)

In a variable scheme of full and half rhymes, the last line before a major (four-line) break always completes a rhyme, often with the flourish of a terminal couplet. If we group visual units based on these longer breaks, we see that the most consistent pattern in these segments is their length in *typographical* lines.[261] Notley's poem includes twenty-five nine-line units that end with a rhyme, with more than half of these divisions including blank lines. The speaker's fixation on her own post-partem body[262] produces a peculiar desire for abstraction rather than material existence ("number" over "flesh"), balanced against the visual format's allusion to Spenser's nine-line *Faerie Queene* stanza (cued by the appearance of "Sansjoy").[263] Notley's poem looks to poetic history to figure its anxieties about the body, creating an "exalting hollow" in the white lines

[261] In its initial publication, "Incidentals in the Day World" was the title poem at the center of a long chapbook (New York: Angel Hair Books, 1973). The whole book was printed only on the recto pages, and the title poem was laid out in exactly three strophic blocks per page, so that there was no confusion over whether strophes ran over the page break, and the reader might have more readily observed the equality of visual length.
[262] The content is loosely autobiographical. Notley's first child, Anselm, was born in 1972, the year before the poem's publication.
[263] A character in *The Faerie Queene,* first appearing in Book I, Canto ii (stanza 25 ff.).

permeating the poem's stanzaic segments, which are as much air and space as they are words.

Notley's typography aims both to realize and to abstract the body, in arranging her stanzaic segments as "rent reliques," traditional prosodic shapes both broken and borrowed:

> I embrace all the dead
> voices instruments waters medicines
>
> their furious loving fits made wind
> strange phantoms in pleasure's valentine
>
> my dead and my ghosts my atoms fine
> by these rent reliques speaking their plightes
> (Spenser, I feared so the other side of my sight) (Notley 18)

The address to Spenser initiates a complicated intertextual exchange:[264] Notley's allusion to *The Faerie Queene* refers to the passage between the Gulf of Greediness and the Rock of Vile Reproach—itself an allusion to Scylla and Charybdis in Book Twelve of *The Odyssey*—where Spenser describes the wrecked ships ("rent reliques") as carcasses and broken rib cages against the rocks (*Faerie Queene* II.xii.7). Notley transforms the ships into stanzas which are equally "rent reliques," as she borrows Spenser's signature stanza but fractures it on the page. These nine-line units always end on a rhyme closure, typically finishing with the longest line, alluding to Spenser's terminal alexandrine. What was initially, to the reader's eye, an incidental feature of the text, becomes one of its most salient details and a ghostly reminder of its prosodic forebears. The poet seems to sail between the shades of literary history, "my dead and my ghosts," while also envisioning her own physical dissolution "my atoms fine" as part of the process of poetic making.

For Notley, these forms are haunted by "the other side of my sight" in the way that they visually evoke broken Spenserian stanzas, as each segment takes up nine lines of space on the

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[264] The quoted line comes from Book II, Canto xii, stanza 9.

page. Her poem forces us both to read these shapes as new configurations of traditional stanzas and to understand the making and breaking of poetic forms, even purely visual ones, as acts of corporeal significance. This is where the stanza makes its mark, by tracing how the body can be fabricated and falsified in arrangements to be read by future generations (human or otherwise). To understand typography solely as instrumental to the realization of the poem fails to recognize how visual shape does the work of delimiting and configuring the boundaries of linguistic units, combining with syntactical and sonic segments to produce the complicated weave of stanzaic prosody. The visual techniques of poets such as Graham and Notley demand reading strategies that treat poems as material bodies by recognizing how visual organization may retain the echoes of stanzaic structure, grounding contemporary nonmetrical poems in lyric tradition.

Coda

A Form that is Many Forms

Against all this experimentation with stanzaic patterns one could quite understandably lodge complaints of irrelevance, triviality, or pointlessness. These forms, after all, seem arbitrary and capable of little influence outside the realm of the aesthetic. Perhaps even within the realm of prosody, the efforts of poets such as Auden, Walcott, and Graham may appear no more than acts of piety toward formal predecessors, derivative practices that expose the lack of prosodic innovation in contemporary poetry. Indeed, as Stephanie Burt has suggested in studying the sestina, form has increasingly become a symbolic gesture toward the ineffectual, and every attempt at complicated formal architecture seems doomed to revel in its own self-consciousness of artifice (Burt, "Sestina!" 222). Her compelling reading of the sestina explosion in the modern and contemporary era offers us one way of thinking about technical intrigue, but her analysis allows too little potential for form in contemporary verse.

Although mainstream free verse may appear ready to assimilate into one large corpus of lineated prose, the twenty-first century has also seen Anglophone poets continue to build, destroy, and rebuild stanzas in enigmatic fashion. The various stanzaic forms often taken to be the hallmarks of traditional verse—sonnets, song forms—continue to populate poetry collections and inspire breathtaking experiments, from the geometrical play of refrain words in the canzoni of Agha Shahid Ali to the complicated fugue of rhymes in Paul Muldoon's "Cuthbert and the Otters" and the metastatic sonnets in Claudia Emerson's *Impossible Bottle.* And in wave upon wave of new verse configurations, we hear the legacies of other formal traditions, as the resonances of blues, ghazal, and haiku inform innovative patterns. For some poets the challenge

of the contemporary stanza is answered with sheer novelty, while for others the formal pressures of the present demand an even deeper and more syncretic devotion to past traditions, and in the work of Terrance Hayes and Jericho Brown we see these entirely dissimilar strategies employed to create new stanzaic forms that anchor entire collections of their verse. Hayes's twenty-stanza "pecha kucha" poems manage to unite the artificial numerical limits of a creative presentation format with a jazz sensibility, turning the stanzaic lyric into a loosely connected riff rather than an orderly progression. Brown's "duplex" poems pack the sonnet, the blues, and the ghazal into one tightly structured seven-couplet form, a hybrid named for the house of traditional form and designed to redecorate its "rooms." Their poetries testify, alongside many of their contemporaries' work, that there is yet "room" for improvement in stanzaic verse.

Hayes's poetic adaptations of the presentation format known as pecha kucha center his 2010 *Lighthead*, with each major section of the book constellated around one of these twenty-part sequences.[265] Designed to be a twenty-slide presentation in which each slide only appears for twenty seconds, the pecha kucha was created by Tokyo-based architects Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein in 2003 (Klein Dytham). This condensed presentation format originally featured at a sort of open mic night for creative industry types, marrying the conventions of the boardroom to the spirit of slam poetry.[266] The format forces speakers to present their ideas succinctly with

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[265] Hayes similarly organizes some of his other volumes around large-scale formal experiments. *Wind in a Box* (2006) is centered on a twelve-part sequence (broken into three groupings of four poems each) of "blue" dramatic monologues that primarily focus on artistic figures and evoke blues thematics and forms. *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin* (2018), riffing on the "American sonnet" form as conceived by Wanda Coleman, includes five sections of fourteen sonnets each, and then an index of sonnets by first line, which becomes itself another group of five sonnets.

[266] The pecha kucha is comparable in function to a TED talk, and its rigorous format was designed to encourage more engaging presentations, cutting out ponderous slide decks and excessive verbiage in favor of clarity and simplicity, specifically in creative industries. The creators talk about the form's rationale and its popularity on their website (www.pechakucha.com), which acts a central hub for a community-based movement (complete with licensing fees and copyright) centered in urban areas. They initially promoted the presentation format with a kind of open mic night designed to showcase their event/performance space in Tokyo (Pink). Hayes makes a questionable assertion that the name derives from an adaptation of the word "picture" (Hayes 96), whereas "pecha kucha" translates nicely into English as "chit chat" (Murphy).

precise language and imagery and then to move on quickly, and Hayes approaches the pecha kucha with the spirit of jazz and the clarity of haiku, relying on formal and thematic similarity to hold the poem together across meandering riffs. He incorporates the format's demands as prosodic requirements, constructing poems of twenty self-contained stanzas each, with headings in between that act as slide titles introducing the next stanza in sequence. Throughout the four pecha kucha poems he uses visual segments of four or five lines (there is only one sestet), limiting the strophic period to a measure that can be spoken in twenty seconds. The result, as in "Coffin for Head of State," is a lyrical journey through radical narrative disjunctures, with the reader carried along only by the form, in this case allusions to twenty Fela Kuti songs:

[DOG EAT DOG (instrumental)]
Inside the coffin was a tomb. Inside the mouth of the bull-
horn was a tomb. Inside the stems of the violets: tombs.
Inside the thin blue shawl of the afternoon and of the dusk.
Inside the words *awe, freedom, territory, fatigue.*

[WITCHCRAFT]
In one village I came to a woman shaped like a bird
and was given a knife as long as a feather. In another
a woman spit a curse to break me like an egg, its sweetness
running between my fingers like something the body makes.

[BEASTS OF NO NATION]
I was born in the year of the war between wars.
I was born to a religion I thought could not hold me
ransom, to sermons walking on the back of the wind.
I was pulled from death's pocket and cradled in its hand.

[YELLOW FEVER]

My father was the sunlight now, but I couldn't understand
a word he sang. When his teeth were removed
and tossed glittering along the tracks of the trains,
I was quiet as the indicted. I myself was the music I lacked.

[GENTLEMAN]
In each village when I tried to tell them I was an American,
AmenAmenAmenAmenAmen spilled like ash from my mouth,
and they knew what it meant. Everywhere I was made
to dance like a man carrying his head before they cast me out. (Hayes 66)

The transitions between "slides"—the discontinuous and isolated stanzas—have no consistent pattern, and each self-contained quatrain has its own internal logic and music. There are occasional rhymes, as in the spliced couplet potentially linking stanzas three and four ("hand / understand") or the fifth stanza's closing rhyme ("mouth / out"), and some stanzas are governed by anaphora, such as the first and third, but on the whole the poem's soundscapes are unpredictable, despite a meticulous measure that is somehow quantitative but nonmetrical.

Hayes finds a unique rhythm in these stanzas, organizing breath-based units not by linear length or rhyme scheme but by performative requirements. The pecha kucha allows him to sustain the fiction that poetic form is intimately tied to the cadences and capabilities of the speaking voice, and gives the visual segmentation an increased significance. Although the interposed titles and narrative disjuncture suggest twenty separate and basically interchangeable poems,[267] these radically discontinuous strophes also preserve a hint of lyrical song, as Hayes compensates for the lack of macro rhythmic structures with frequent medial caesurae. The internal division of these quatrains into eight-piece units enhances the symmetrical appeal of the

[267] Dan Chiasson finds in this form a "total overhaul of linear narrative, a story with twenty beginnings and twenty endings" (Chiasson, "Sense of Self: New Poems by Terrance Hayes and Deborah Landau").

highly ordered form and faintly echoes song forms like common meter and short meter, which are often arranged as long-lined couplets. The middle slides of "Twenty Measures of Chitchat" feature a particularly high incidence of caesurae:

> [QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY]
> I heard you ask, "Why was the dream invented,
> if not to undo?" My mouth opened like the hole
> in the wall you were punching. I barked at the shadows,
> a foot fell above us, the ghosts came back.
>
> [LANDSCAPE WITH RIOT]
> When the house windows were broken, I was one of the people
> stepping in, then out again, with boxes and whole registers
> of what belonged to me, with dream-swollen jewelry leashed
> about my neck, with blood on my shirt and blood on my teeth.
>
> [THE IMMINENT TILL]
> Time is the real cannibal, mesmerizing even at face value,
> weighing down the stars, and the river holding the unlucky
> body attached to a cluster of fish, where the heart is
> so diluted the doctors wear gloves when they handle it. (Hayes 40)

Hayes plays medial caesurae against the visual lines to arrange each quatrain as a grid of small phrasal groups. A diagram of this prosody would render the twenty-second limit of the slide measure roughly legible. If each quatrain contains eight units of two to three stressed beats, that adds up to approximately twenty stressed beats per slide, which at a normal speaking pace would likely stay within the twenty-second timeframe for each stanza. Hayes's quatrains heed no conventional meter in their adherence to the twenty-second rule, but their restrictive limits do ultimately produce composite verbal units that take fifteen to twenty seconds to read aloud at a

modest pace. This formal experiment flirts with silliness, but also displays the capacity of stanzaic structure to adapt another genre of speech act based on iteration and succession, gesturing toward the value of formal constraint in the world beyond poetry journals.

Jericho Brown pursues prosodic innovation down a different path, reaching for traditional stanzaic patterns that might combine in new ways. He ambitiously titles his latest volume *The Tradition* (2019), but the volume's diverse technical borrowings give the lie to the title's definite article. Brown arranges his major sections around poems written in a novel form called the "duplex," but this original shape is really a home for many forms of disparate traditions. This fourteen-line pattern is clearly part sonnet, but it also incorporates structural elements from the blues and the ghazal, with a whiff of pantoum in the linear repetitions that forge links between successive stanzaic units (especially recycling the initial line to close the poem). The volume's first of five poems titled "Duplex" establishes the formal concept:

> A poem is a gesture toward home.
> It makes dark demands I call my own.
>
> > Memory makes demands darker than my own:
> > My last love drove a burgundy car.
>
> My first love drove a burgundy car.
> He was fast and awful, tall as my father.
>
> > Steadfast and awful, my tall father
> > Hit hard as a hailstorm. He'd leave marks.
>
> Light rain hits easy but leaves its own mark
> Like the sound of a mother weeping again.

Like the sound of my mother weeping again,
No sound beating ends where it began.

None of the beaten end up how we began.
A poem is a gesture toward home. (Brown 18)

While these couplets eschew regular meter, the phrasal repetitions allow for a rhythmic stability under the loosely four- and five-beat lines.[268] Brown's deliberate repetition and adaptation of his own lines echo classic twelve-bar blues phrasings, in which the first two lines of an AAB stanza are quite similar or even identical, such that each visual couplet also terminates a three-line blues pattern.[269] Yet he separates the mirror lines into different visual units, imitating the progressive momentum that shapes forms like terza rima and the pantoum, in order to keep the poem moving despite its high ratio of end stops. Because every visual couplet ends with a full stop, the poem takes on an epigrammatic aspect while retaining the evocative lyricism of the ghazal.

Titling this form the "duplex" captures exactly the strange forces of consolidation and separation that overlap in these poems. Each couplet stands on its own as a visually isolated and self-contained syntactical unit, and yet each is also fractured into two lines whose structural and rhyme partners are part of other couplets. Brown treats these interwoven stanzaic patterns as uneasy neighbors, with the three-line blues progressions including one couplet paired by structural parallel and identical rhyme and another couplet consolidated by visual arrangement and syntactical closure. We can see this if we isolate the final three lines: "No sound beating ends where it began. // None of the beaten end up how we began. / A poem is a gesture toward home." Set against this rejection of cyclicality, Brown's form ironically does return to where it

[268] Brown does claim to be consciously shaping the meter around a syllabic norm, but treats this prosody loosely, writing in lines of nine to eleven syllables (Brown, Dumanis interview).
[269] For more on stanzaic adaptations of blues structure, see my discussion of Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues" in the introduction.

began, with the first line reappearing to round off the sonnet, but this "gesture toward home" has transformed into an evocation of rootlessness as well. The duplex describes a house literally divided into two living units (with a corresponding level of economic insecurity) while pointing to the "rooms" of various literary traditions—Eastern and Western, European and African-American—both connected in and divided by this stanzaic structure. Taking these patterns as a set of traditional coordinates, the poet steers his personal narrative on a global tour of stanzaic forms, making what might seem an academic or even abstract practice of adaptation an intensely emotional and political act. Brown designs the duplex form to feel at once black, queer, and Southern, an aesthetic solution to the exigencies of living in twenty-first-century America: "Since I am carrying these truths in this body as one, how do I get a form that is many forms?" (Brown, Dumanis interview).[270]

The answer, for Brown and many poets beyond those I have discussed, lies with the stanza, a form that itself comprises and constitutes many forms. Even after the supposed demise of the rhymes and meters that undergird the vast majority of traditional Anglophone verse, stanzaic structures remain critical to ongoing innovation in the twenty-first century. By disaggregating the stanza into various overlapping forms of multilinear organization, we can see how modern and contemporary poets continue arranging visual and sonic units to coincide in

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[270] Brown discusses the duplex not only in terms of personal identity, but also as a participation in literary and political communities: "Part of the reason why I wanted to invent a form is because I want full participation for myself, but also for anyone who's writing after me, in the tradition. And the way that you become a part of it is that you literally deal with it. You participate by writing in received forms, but also by creating forms for others to receive, and also by subverting forms, by thumbing your nose at them… You know, people keep talking about the ways the country is divided, and I wasn't aware that the country hadn't always been divided. If you listen to people, it's like they woke up and the country was divided, and as a black person in this country, I find that really offensive. I think about Max Robinson, the black reporter, the first black male anchor on the nightly news. He made a TV special about Washington, DC and the fact that Washington, DC was black. At the time, it was as if nobody outside of Washington, DC thought of it as a black city. He called it *The Other Washington*. Even back then, like it or not, there's this division. So I was trying to make a form that asked, *What is it about this very capitalist nation, with all of these people and their middle-class aspirations*? How do I capture that in the title of this poem and in what the poem does? How do I capture this sort-of-making-it but barely-making-it life?" (Brown, Dumanis interview).

measures that afford closure and sonic return, or to intersect one another at regular or irregular intervals in dynamic counterpoint. These shapes still carry the freight of tradition, with the potential to reach back to Horace, Dante, or Spenser, but the chameleon stanzaic patterns of the postwar and contemporary era also enrich our understanding of poetic form as a whole. In an era of Anglophone verse when no formal contract can be assumed as a given, poets who develop new strategies of prosodic organization also push their readers to new practices of attention. Formal innovators such as Auden, Walcott, and Graham craft stanzaic patterns that signal not so much the return to form heralded by New Formalist critics, as the many turns of form developing continuously within and alongside communities of readers, marketplaces of publishing, and new technologies. Where Charles Olson nearly seventy years ago could characterize "inherited line, stanza, over-all form" (Olson 1054) as an antiquated model for poetic composition, we find instead within the stanza's room many poets making it new.

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