The Orchard Will Bloom: Four Arguments on the Poems of Donald Justice

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Four Arguments on the Poems of Donald Justice

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Abstract

The American poet Donald Justice (1925-2004) is read only in limited ways, and critics misapprehend his work and influence. This study attempts to remedy the situation. In the Introduction, I develop Garrison Keillor's notion of a Good Poet, to show one (parochial and corrigible) means of making sense of Justice. I elaborate on his penchant for letting words rhyme with themselves: a superficially flatfooted strategy that yields important results for him—rendering ideas aspirationally self-evident, just so.

In Chapter 1, I trace Justice's "adaptiveness," in which his poems repurpose other texts and create a dynamic relation of teacher-to-student, master-to-apprentice. The (im)possibilities of adaptation become the subjects of his indebted poems.

In Chapter 2, I ask whether Justice's indebtedness necessarily makes him a conservative poet, then challenge the readings that self-styled poet-conservatives perform on him. I counter with Justice's proper conservatism, a Burkean strain he shares with Richard Wilbur and Jane Kenyon.

In Chapter 3, I place Justice within the context of poetic bureaucracy, in which he worked for decades. I show that Justice puzzled through the relationship of lyrics to office culture and the "bullshit work" it demands. Like Justice, James Tate, Rita Dove, and Alice Notley reimagine bureaucratic life, in utopian, or incrementalist-reformist, or revolutionary terms.

In Chapter 4, I turn from Justice to his wife, Jean Ross Justice, and her literary career. Ross Justice's stories develop a problematic of career and care, by which writers achieve "outward"

renown through capital conversions (symbolic to financial to social), while their caregivers toil to support these conversions. I show that Justice's editorship of "obliviated" poets displaces the care he might otherwise have expended on a partner like Ross Justice. And I argue that Jean's publishing timeline coincides with a new era for poetic careers—our own. Today, an other-directed, couple-based caring structure is overlain with *self*-care. The poet must treat herself well: to achieve more, to become better than good.

Finally, in an Epilogue, I recapitulate the four themes of the dissertation, via a selection of notebook entries published late in Justice's life.

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Introduction: A Good Poet

Donald Justice was—is—a good poet. Ask anyone who knew him, or who's read him in a Poem-a-Day email, on Twitter, on a blog, or in his *Collected*, published just after his death in 2004.[1] The poems are the evidence, the mark of his goodness. He wrote good poems, therefore he was a good poet. Or he was a good poet, therefore he wrote good poems.

Many creative writers, critics, and scholars have attested in print to Justice's goodness, including Bob Mezey, Bruce Bawer, Richard Howard, Dick Stern, Dee Snodgrass, Mark Strand, Charles Wright, Philip Booth, Howard Nemerov, Irvin Ehrenpreis, Alan Hollinghurst, Ed Hirsch, and Jorie Graham. Dana Gioia and William Logan have advocated for his poetry for decades; Jerry Harp, Mary Szybist, Mark Ford, David Orr, and David Yezzi are among his most ardent supporters in the younger generation. Jean Ross Justice, his wife of over fifty years, wrote often of her admiration (though she also qualified it, in fascinating ways). Justice's students—there have been many hundreds—often became his most dedicated fans.

But how to define his goodness?

In 2002, the public radio host Garrison Keillor gathered together "a book of poems that got read over the radio on a daily five-minute show called *The Writers' Almanac*."[2] They were, he wrote, "poems that somehow stuck with me and with some of the listeners. Stickiness, memorability, is one sign of a good poem."[3] Keillor titled his anthology *Good Poems* (it was met with a mixture of joy and

[1] Donald Justice, *Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 2004). Hereafter CP.

[2] *Good Poems*, ed. Garrison Keillor (New York: Viking, 2002), xix.

[3] Ibid.

derision),[4] and in it he included two pieces by Donald Justice. This shouldn't surprise us, for after all, Donald Justice was—is—a good poet.

The dissertation you're reading takes up this one thing everyone appears to agree on, regarding Donald Justice—his goodness—and troubles it. Goodness, most would say, is a subjective rather than objective category, a qualitative rather than quantitative one. It's multiform rather than self-evidently "true." In what follows, I'll mostly eschew these terms for another, I hope more helpful and less metaphysical, wager: that good poets become good, and remain good, because people (including the poet himself) invest time, effort, and sentences—arguments—into making sure others believe in this goodness. Like standards of physical beauty, the artistry of a basketball star, the value of items bought and sold in a market, or the stories of the young life of a prophet or political leader, "goodness" is a social construction, a complexly-ramifying description one appends to a text or a person (who, if a poet, is always already a collection of texts). To call a poet or poem "good" is to enter into a game of persuasion with an interlocutor, who can make her own complexly-ramifying arguments about who or what merits this descriptor. To use the language of Pierre Bourdieu, James Guillory, James English, Richard Rorty, and similar social thinkers who are also aesthetic anti-foundationalists, the assigning of goodness is not an enterprise of facts and truths. It is a distinction of taste. "It classifies" the poet or poem, "and it classifies the classifier."[5]

Donald Justice, and his supporters, wanted readers to focus not on publishing debates, abstract French arguments about the stability of the signifier, or the perceived hierarchies of academic power. He wanted them to care about poems. Justice himself was passionate about aesthetic problems, but he didn't even really like the word aesthetic, because it smacked of theory.

[4] As David Orr notes ("Hit Parade," *The New York Times*, Nov. 13, 2005, online, n.p.), Dana Gioia ("amiable") and August Kleinzahler ("mean") wrote paired reviews of the book. See Gioia, "Title Tells All," 43-9, and August Kleinzahler, "No Antonin Artaud with the Flapjacks, Please," 50-6, both in *Poetry* (Chicago), April 2004.

[5] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1984), 6. Hereafter PBD.

He cared something about style: word choice, scansion, and irony; but mostly, he insisted, he cared about poems. He hated terms like "poetics"; he hated "philosophizing" in verse. He wanted to get at what he saw as the kernel of an individual lyric, its quiddity or essence. He built his career on this impulse, pruning away the bad stuff that obscured a reader's—his imagined reader's—view of a poem.

Thus, for Justice, goodness in poetry was social only in its ultimate effects, not in its causes. Good poems came from somewhere, obviously—because good poets had written them—but this goodness was universal, transcendent, basically outside time. Societies might change, and Justice was as aware as many of his contemporaries of the frightening histories of the twentieth century, its wars and economic depredations.[6] But good poems arrived, he believed, from beyond historical debates, as correctives to local histories and local disagreements.[7] They could be taught to students as a release from the here-and-now, with its confusions of politics and fashion.

Justice, and his friends in poetry, wanted something apparently impossible, or at best paradoxical: to save poetry from history while also returning it, somehow, to tradition.[8] The negotiation of these ends was, for Justice, *the* calling of a poet; it was his job. He invested a lifetime of subtle, energetic thinking into making sure goodness—that complexly-ramifying thing—seemed to have no history. It just was; it just is. To better understand Justice's strange, seductive argument about poetry, this dissertation makes four successive arguments about him. It places his goodness, in its sundry forms, back into the discourses of history—those sequences of messy, partial, improvised decisions that people make and revise together.

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[6] A great many of his later poems take, as their subject, the Great Depression and its effects on his family and neighborhood(s) in Florida (and Georgia).

[7] Chapter 1 examines this position in detail.

[8] I address Eliot's influence on this effort in Chapters 1 and 2. I'm indebted to Louis Menand's thinking on Eliot, in *Discovering Modernism*, cited later in this dissertation.

***

In his introduction to *Good Poems*, Keillor writes, "People listen to poems while they're frying eggs and sausage and reading the paper and reasoning with their offspring."[9] He adds that "[g]ood poems tend to incorporate some story, some cadence or shadow of story," and that "they surprise us with clear pictures of the familiar."[10] Among his good poets are Galway Kinnell, Anne Sexton, Raymond Carver, John Berryman, Charles Simic, Jane Kenyon, Denise Levertov, Kenneth Rexroth (a favorite), Robert Bly, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, Walt Whitman, Hayden Carruth, Billy Collins, D. H. Lawrence, Robert Frost, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Charles Bukowski, Dana Gioia, Robert Burns, John Clare, W. B. Yeats, Frank O'Hara, Sharon Olds, e. e. cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Updike, Donald Hall, Kay Ryan, Howard Nemerov, Gerald Stern, Maxine Kumin, William Shakespeare, W. H. Auden, William Stafford, Mary Oliver, Randall Jarrell, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Robert Hass, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Seamus Heaney, Richard Wilbur, Oscar Wilde, Stanley Kunitz, the poet of "Sir Patrick Spens," Stevie Smith, William Blake, Grace Paley, and Linda Gregg.

Though Bukowski, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Shakespeare are about as different as three poets can be, they are nevertheless subsumed into Keillor's "'conspiracy of friendliness,'" the products of which "made people ... turn up the radio."[11] Keillor's introduction is as self-consciously folksy as his Lake Wobegon tales, but it also contains an argument about what poems do: a literary theory.[12] These good poets' surprisingly clear pictures of the familiar, he contends, caused listeners

[9] Keillor xix.

[10] Ibid. xxv.

[11] Ibid. xxv, xxvi.

[12] This idea is Louis Menand's—that all conceptions of, or descriptions of, or intuitions about poetry (even anti-systematic, anti-theoretical ones) are ineluctably theories. See his "The De Man Case," *The New Yorker*, Mar. 17, 2004, online: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/24/the-de-man-case.

to put down the familiar, the material of "real life," and pay attention to language, which floats into life over the airwaves, to be remembered or not.

Keillor, as it happens, is not alone in his theorizing of goodness. Justice's lyrics in the anthology, "The Pupil" and "Poem to be Read at 3 A.M.," offer two complementary metaphors, useful in teasing apart the term.[13] In the former, he is a young piano student, speaking in propria persona:

> Picture me, the shy pupil at the door,
> One small, tight fist clutching the dread Czerny.
> Back then time was still harmony, not money,
> And I could spend a whole week practicing for
> That moment on the threshold. ...

He would "[a]ssault the keyboard with a childish flourish," "with a frail confidence," before "almost doubt[ing] the very metronome," yet carrying on "across Chopin or Brahms,"

> Stupid and wild with love equally for the storms
> Of C# minor and the calms of C.

In the latter, Justice writes (in full):

> Excepting the diner
> On the outskirts
> The town of Ladora [Iowa]
> At 3 A.M.
> Was dark but
> For my headlights
> And up in
> One second-story room
> A single light
> Where someone
> Was sick or
> Perhaps reading
> As I drove past
> At seventy
> Not thinking
> This poem
> Is for whoever
> Had the light on

[13] Keillor 54, 73.

In "The Pupil," an old man looks back, with fondness and a little condescension, on his time as a young artist. "Back then," he could worry absorbedly about his success or failure in a single piano lesson: his ability, that is, to match up to past masters. The teacher would evaluate his progress, telling him what to relearn, or how to position his hands. The implication of the last two lines is rich: though the "stupid, wild love" of a promising student crashes against the redoubtable accomplishment of the Western musical tradition, the older poet, memorializing his education in limpid verse, demonstrates a different command, which others may study. The good poet, in this vignette, is never far from the bad (or improving) student. Indeed, the poet uses apprenticeship—his own or others', in the past or continuing—to construct and maintain his goodness. Justice therefore makes clear one dimension of his idea of goodness: it's the power in the execution; it's the skill of the maker of sentences.

In "Poem to Be Read at 3 A.M.," Justice tells of a nighttime drive, on Highway 6 between Des Moines and Iowa City, that's also a metaphor for poetic composition and reception. The second-story light signals the presence of a reading consciousness, who is "perhaps" already looking over another text, and who may or may not be frail, or in need. The poet flies by "[a]t seventy, / Not thinking," but the poem is the occasion for the reconstruction, in memory, of whatever the poet might have said in the (lived, now recounted) moment. The poet tells the unnamed, embedded reader things she already knows: that Ladora has a diner, that it's quiet at night. Of course, the poem is not solely for this reader; it is also, and maybe primarily, for the extra-diegetic reader, the person holding the volume "outside" the poem, whose communion with poet and embedded reader overlays the missed communion between the latter two, on a cold, dark road.[14] The reader reads of a

[14] Lyric theory debates are pitched, and I intend no more than a sketch of their possibilities in the above. Of recent introductory and/or summative interest are Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015) and Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins's *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014).

poet who's severed, but wants to repair, a communicative thread with a third, fictive reader, whose mind and body are held in the house the poet speeds by, but doesn't dwell in. Justice therefore makes clear another, no less important dimension of poetic goodness: one's willingness to connect with, forge an ethical bond with, a group of readers, of all shapes and sizes. In these two lyrics, the good (skilled) poet trains, and writes of his histories of training; the good (humane) poet tries to speak, from "outside" real life, into the lives of those who will listen. These impulses are intertwined: the skilled poet, having spent many thousands of hours at his desk, can more easily convince or move his reader.

On closer examination, many of Justice's poems are bothered by goodness,[15] by its paired valences: the sharp execution of poems and the elaboration of their moral possibilities. As Jesse Zuba has pointed out, the first poem, "Anniversaries," in the poet's first book finds him writing, half-sardonically, of the "great career" he and his family expect; and this sense of a poetic *Bildungsreise*—of learning how to be good at poetry—runs like a thread throughout that volume.[16] Justice speaks of his youthful flights of fancy, comprising an indoor-outdoor regimen for artistic development ("The Poet at Seven"). He composes four variations on the sestina, a "workshop" form for the demonstration of mastery,[17] and places them one after another in the opening section ("A Dream Sestina," "Sestina on Six Words by Weldon Kees," "Here in Katmandu," and "The Metamorphosis"). He includes a sonnet, "The Wall," which John Berryman declared a nearly perfect poem.[18] Everyone and everything, in these early verses, appears to be practicing, getting into shape.

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[15] See John Ashbery's formulation, "bothered by beauty," from "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name," *Collected Poems, 1956-1987* (New York: Library of America, 2008), 519. Hereafter JACP1.

[16] Jesse Zuba, The First Book: Twentieth-Century Poetic Careers in America (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016), 85. The Summer Anniversaries won the Lamont in 1959.

[17] See Stephanie Burt's comprehensive "Sestina!: Or the Fate of the Idea of Form," *Modern Philology*, 105.1, August 2007, esp. 219-20. See also Zuba, on Ashbery's sestinas, 110.

[18] Jerry Harp. *For Us, What Music? The Life and Poetry of Donald Justice* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2010), 17. Hereafter JH.

Even the "chastened string" of a musical instrument "[r]epeat[s] the lesson she must get by heart, / And without overmuch adornment," ("Thus"), fusing the development of a strong style with the no less strong impulse to discipline, rein in, render austere the elements thereof.[19]

Justice never abandons the framework of the teacher and student, the mentor and mentee, the master and apprentice: it is one of his great preoccupations. "Early Poems," "Mrs. Snow," "The Piano Teachers: A Memoir of the Thirties," "After-School Practice: A Short-Story," and "At the Young Composers' Concert"[20] are but a selection of the lyrics on this theme. How, he wonders across them, does a poet learn the skills necessary to be, to remain a real poet—to have influences, a tradition, a career, and a calling?

But it is as telling, I think, that "Anniversaries," that first collected lyric, includes not only an assertion of talent (potential accomplishment) but also an attempt at communion. Justice writes, perceptively, of the "'really great loneliness' / Of James's governess" that must "account for the ghost / On the other side of the lake," in the tale *The Turn of the Screw*,[21] before moving on to a description of his thirtieth birthday, his face lit up by candles.[22] The poet perceives that the thrill of Henry James's technique—his ability to exteriorize a protagonist's longing, to turn it into a ghost—is also the thrill of the reading mind encountering, on the page, another (purely fictive) mind. This communication makes the story or poem "feel real," but more importantly it expands the reader's empathic range. It broadens him; it improves him. This is the sentimental, as distinct from the technical, education of the writer, and Justice is equally devoted to its elaboration. The formal and

[19] I am indebted to Jake Fournier for this insight. Fournier's dissertation, in progress, takes up early American poetic "training," and I'm grateful to him for many conversations on the topic. I discuss Mark McGurl, on discipline in creative writing, in Chapter 3.

[20] Lyrics cited in this paragraph and the preceding are found in the following places in CP: 9, 14-21, 13, 29, 87, 227, 229, 233, 274.

[21] CP 5-6.

[22] JH 26-7.

familial concerns of his first book, the political excursions of his second, the experimental alleys of his third, and the plangent scenic reconstructions of his late poems all share what the scholar David Bromwich calls a moral imagination: a creative contribution to the ways we know how others feel.[23]

More often than not, Justice welds good technique to good empathizing—good moral imagining. I highlight one brief example of this, in a very late poem, included at the end of the *Collected* and entitled "A Chapter in the Life of Mr. Kehoe, Fisherman." It's a lyric Justice might have tried to add something to, unsuccessfully, before the end of his life.[24] Here is the poem in toto:

> Some nights on the dock,
> When only scales
> And a few pop-eye fish-heads
> Are left out for the moon
> (Which the spread nets entangle),
> There comes a sound
> Of bare feet dancing,
> Which is Mr. Kehoe,
> Lindying solo,
> Whirling, dipping,
> In his long skirt
> That swells and billows,
> Turquoise and pink,
> Mr. Kehoe in sequins,
> Face tilted moonward,
> Eyes half-shut, dreaming.
>
> Sleep well, Mr. Kehoe.

Each of the seventeen lines has at least four, and no more than seven, syllables, and most have two strong stresses (with the outlier being the **few pop-eye fish-heads**, the density of stressed syllables enacting the arrest, the surprise of the heads themselves.) The "scales" and "fish-heads" reflect the pale light of the moon, and both the physical detritus and the mixture of milky, iridescent luminance are "entangled" in the spread nets, which catch no (living) fish in the water. Visual descriptors give

[23] See Chapter 2 for more on this theme.

[24] CP 277; see also the as-yet uncatalogued tranche of the Donald Justice Papers, Morris Library, Special Collections, the University of Delaware. Hereafter DJP.

way, then, to aural ones: the small padding and scraping of Mr. Kehoe's "**bare feet danc**ing," the waltz of which enacts the "Whirling, dipping / In his long skirt / That swells and billows, / Turquoise and pink." By the end of the short poem, the scales of the fish are now the "sequins" of the fisherman's dress, once again soaking in the light of the moon, and suspended between the possibility of wakeful action and of imagined life. The eyes are "half-shut,"[25] and the poet encourages the dream, bidding his subject goodnight. He has described him with warmth and precision, grace and fellow-feeling.

Mr. Kehoe, one realizes, doesn't quite "fit" into the world in which he was born, or thrown. He dances alone on the dock, or in a dream in his skirt, because he's more comfortable doing it that way—or alternatively, because he doesn't feel welcome expressing himself during the day. Having argued till now for Justice's twin aims of technical achievement and moral imagination, I want to turn my argument to show, from the other side, what these two "goodnesses" leave out—what assumptions they depend upon, and what makes the study of Donald Justice, and his good poems, socially valuable for all sorts of readers, and not just parochially valuable for people in English departments.

When Justice, like Keillor, asserts that one or another type of poem is good—accomplished and/or morally nourishing—he is of necessity asserting that other types of poems are not accomplished or are morally unhelpful (or even destructive). This is exactly what Justice does say, or has had attributed to him, in the capsule biography at the back of the anthology:

> He taught many places ... and then retired, weary of debating the deconstructionists, people who'd read Foucault but never looked at Tolstoy. He disliked their jargon and grammar, their vast intellectual pretensions, their easy disdain for things they knew little or nothing about and had no interest in, their lousy taste in literature and the

[25] I'm grateful to Mark Levine for his insight, long ago in seminar, about the prevalence of "half"-described events, in English Romantic poetry.

> other arts, their nasty politicking, their hatred of the past and the tradition in favor of the fashionable and the perfectly silly."[26]

With uncharacteristic vitriol, at least in print, Justice lays it all out plainly. People on the other side of the "poetry wars,"[27] who write bad poems, don't read the right books; they use obscure language; they're prima donnas—untutored, self-centered, frivolous. They have opinions without information; they're all flash and no substance. Good poetry just is, and their thinking just isn't; it's not worthy of serious consideration. But his subtext, I'd venture, is more damning. People who write bad poems are subversive, and they do things other subversives do; they are "silly" and "lousy." One might say (in recuperatory language) that they are queer, or invisible, or un-cared-for, or simply Other. And Justice wants nothing to do with them, not poetically, at least.

I make no judgments regarding Donald Justice's (or any poets') private, unarticulated beliefs: his or her electoral politics, for example, or prejudices, or innermost fears. But one of the great intellectual-discursive shifts of the past twenty years—in disability studies, queer and gender studies, critical race theory, Marxist critiques of neoliberalism, and in the popular consciousness—is that of structural, rather than personal, emphasis; of ableist, bigoted, racist, or class-blind *patterns of thought*, rather than blinkered, unenlightened *thinkers*. Despite Justice's best efforts, of which I'd guess he was generally unaware, the "good poetry" template is also a social and political template. It is a means for naturalizing a set of conditions that are unnatural, because made and protected by persons: heteronormativity, white supremacy, and patriarchy. That these terms jar us out of our typical conversations about someone like Donald Justice (or Donald Hall, or Larry Levis, or any number of twentieth-century poets) is, I hope, a feature, and not a bug, of this project. As thoroughly and

[26] Keillor 445.

[27] JH 96.

generously as I can, I want to read Justice on his own terms and then (and also) against the grain, to show the arguments he made in and about poetry, and the things he left out of his work.

***

This process occurs in stages, across the four body chapters of the dissertation. My arguments represent successive attempts to explain Justice's behaviors and assumptions, his poems and their contexts, while also comparing him to different writers—some he liked and read, and others he'd never heard of (or who attained prominence only after his death). Thus, the scope of the dissertation increases as the chapters go on, and its fidelity to the set of influences Justice arrayed for himself decreases in kind.

I start, as it were, with the weakest lens, honing in on the writers Justice believed most suitable for his own adaptations, for the modeling of his poetry. These poets, I argue, offered him ways of thinking through lyric accomplishment via the careful construction of appropriate subjects. Often, this involved the evacuation of subjects-as-such, and the insertion of the process of adaptation into that void. My first argument, therefore, bears specifically on Justice's armature for the production of good (skilled) poems, poems that work in the ways he valued.

In the second chapter, I take one step beyond the bounds of the poetry collection, to build out the tradition into which Justice, especially later in life, believed he was writing. Here, I develop his concept of moral-poetic goodness, of human connection in poetry, with recourse to David Bromwich, Edmund Burke, and other thinkers for whom conservatism and projective human possibility are continuous concerns. I also place Justice's poetry next to that of two writers, Richard Wilbur and Jane Kenyon, who are themselves Keillorian "good poets," and whose lyrics flesh out the kind of moral tradition that Justice believed inextricable from poetic skill.

In the third chapter, I look at the social matrix in which skill and moral connection are forged, in the second half of the American century in poetry. That is, I examine Justice not as a

"freelance" poet, floating above history, but as a writer within a bureaucracy, whose institutional obligations inform that poetry and his relationships to other institutionalized writers—I call them "buropoets." In this chapter I take up James Tate, Rita Dove, and Alice Notley, as marvelous creators in their own rights, and as complements to Justician ideas of bureaucratic, and imaginative, possibility. And I frame the different accommodations—between writerly accomplishment, human communion, and institutional obedience—that these poets conceive of in their work.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I scrutinize poetic career from the domestic ground up, and not from the institutional superstructure down. Reading the work of Jean Ross Justice, and Justice's editorial recuperation of "obliviated" poets, I develop a space for "care" in career, as discussed already in the writings of feminist care theorists. After demonstrating the historical centrality of partner-based care as a most intimate form of "good" poetic connection, I move into the contemporary moment, in which expected self-care and neoliberal precarity are the conditions under which the poet tries to write skillfully and morally.

***

One has encountered the beginnings of a debate, in recent years, on the use-value of single-author studies in literature departments.[28] Without recapitulating that conversation (a productive one), I want to speak directly to whatever an individual writer can and can't tell us—and why we should care, at least some of the time, about an individual as distinct from a collective, or a thematically-yoked assemblage of artists from different collectives.[29] Outlining my project to patient listeners over the years, I have found myself reaching for, and occasionally saying, the phrase "case study," as a means of motivating Justice's explanatory power for me. But on arraying these four arguments, and

[28] I think especially of a 2020 MLA panel on the subject, chaired by Prof. Sheila Liming of the University of North Dakota.

[29] See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993), 4. See also Chris Spaide's dissertation, "Lyric Togetherness: Saying 'We' in Postwar American Poetry," Harvard, 2019, unpublished.

refining their movement from local to more communitarian, "networked," and global concerns, I've come to believe strongly in that phrase's disutility. This has something to do with the implied referential frame "case study" carries with it: that of the business school teaching module, in which a single company's successes or failures are used as lessons toward the profitability of a future company.[30] I don't know that Donald Justice can, or should, stand in for, or represent, any other poets, save possibly—and even this with hesitation—those he most closely resembles.[31] I think, on the contrary, that Justice really only writes for, and stands in for, himself.

But by saying that I mean something complex, instead of something simple: Justice does represent himself in his poetry, and he cares deeply about the ways things stand in for themselves, too. This is the philosophically robust version of the sort of "just-so-ness" that other Keillorian good poetry takes for granted. Good poems just are skillful and empathetic. Donald Justice just is the represented ideal—the imagined subject—of the lyrics he composes. But why, and how?

I conclude this introduction by highlighting a formal feature of Justice's poems that recapitulates, on the level of the word, the intricacies of making something stand in for itself. In several memorable lyrics, Justice creates a structure by which words rhyme with themselves—establishing what I call a "dead rhyme." This phenomenon demonstrates in poetry something remarkable about the poet, and I'll use the tools of close reading to describe how Justice made sense of himself representing himself.

First appearing in *The New Yorker* in 1997, "There is a gold light" is the last piece in the *Collected* (278) (but not necessarily the last he wrote, though it was revised toward the end of his

[30] See Michael Masoner's *An Audit of the Case Study Method* (New York: Praeger, 1988) for more.

[31] And who might these Justice-ish poets be? Several spring to mind; comparisons at greater length between Justice and like-minded souls could underlie future studies: Donald Hall, Philip Levine, Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht.

life).[32] It is one of Justice's most beloved lyrics, and one of his most theoretically rich. I'll refer to it several times in this project, and I reprint it below:

1

There is a gold light in certain old paintings
That represents a diffusion of sunlight.
It is like happiness, when we are happy.
It comes from everywhere and from nowhere at once, this light,
    And the poor soldiers sprawled at the foot of the cross
    Share in its charity equally with the cross.

2

Orpheus hesitated beside the black river.
With so much to look forward to he looked back.
We think he sang then, but the song is lost.
At least he had seen once more the beloved back.
    I say the song went this way: *O prolong*
    Now the sorrow if that is all there is to prolong.

3

The world is very dusty, uncle. Let us work.
One day the sickness shall pass from the earth for good.
The orchard will bloom; someone will play the guitar.
Our work will be seen as strong and clean and good.
    And all that we suffered through having existed
    Shall be forgotten as though it had never existed.

Its three scenes correspond with the three stanzas into which it is divided; it is a poem of three distinct "spots of time."[33] These stanzas have an identical structure, strictly observed: an end-word pattern, in which the final word of the second and fourth lines, and the fifth and sixth, is repeated, forming two pairs of dead (perfect, exact) rhymes. And although the poem is not metrically regular,

[32] "There is a gold light in certain old paintings," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 24, 1997, 80.

[33] Cf. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Book XII, beginning at line 208 of the 1850 version; rpt. in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th Ed., Vol. D, The Romantic Period, eds. Jack Stillinger and Deidre S. Lynch (New York: Norton, 2006), 378-81. Hereafter NRP.

there are moments in which the meter approaches or skirts regularity: the third line of the second stanza, for example, might be scanned as follows:

We THINK | he SANG | THEN, || but | the SONG | is LOST.

Depending on one's preference (and the question is almost a moral one), this line is either iambic pentameter with a trochaic substitution and a weak caesura in the third foot, or it is free-verse poetry of the kind Justice champions in essays on the subject, most notably regarding Pound's efforts in poems like "Cino."[34] In the former case, the line is a regular meter "dressed down" to simulate the freely-accented lines surrounding; in the latter, it is an irregular meter become sufficiently "magnetized" (as Ashbery might say)[35] to resemble pentameter, but not without reverting to free(er) verse in lines ensuing.

The poem's three scenes, particularly the first and second, are described so as not to implicate the speaker, who takes in and relates them at a considerable remove. The first, really a sustained, static image, is Christ's crucifixion at Calvary, with soldiers "casting lots" at the foot of the cross (here simply "sprawled").[36] The second is the climax of the Orphic drama, in which the poet scans backward for Eurydice and, seeing her, catches only her recession to Hades. And the third is in the voice of Sonya, from *Uncle Vanya*, who states at the play's end, in an English translation, "We'll rejoice, and we'll look back at our present unhappiness with tenderness, with a smile, and we'll rest. I believe, Uncle, I believe fervently, passionately . . . . We'll rest!"[37]

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[34] "The Invention of Free Verse," *Oblivion* (Ashland, Ore.: Story Line Press, 1998), 39-42. Hereafter O.

[35] The term is taken from the Ashbery poem "The Tomb of Stuart Merrill," in JACP1, 453-54.

[36] Cf. The Gospel of Matthew, 27:35-37, in *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, King James Version, ed. David Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 1587. Hereafter NCPB.

[37] Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act. IV, from *Four Plays and Three Jokes*, trans. S. M. Carnicke (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 166. Cf. also Justice's earlier poem, "At a Rehearsal of *Uncle Vanya*," CP 104.

A cynical reading, then, would go something like this: the poem is a rigidly-constituted, Apollonian exercise; its repetons are anchors, demanding a return to a particular sound and particular meaning at the end of each stanza. But it is this supposed Apollonian quality, the inflexibility of the stanzas' construction, which allows for an immense amount of ideational movement within the lines.

For the poem's repetitive concerns, the cycling and recycling of words and images, are not reserved solely for those four end-positions per stanza. Each stanza has also its own motif repeated in the lines' interiors: "light," in the first; "singing/song," in the second; and "work," in the third. The existence of these motifs, unconditioned by the form's strictures, is not dissimilar to the uncanny narrativity of some sestinas, including the Ashbery sestina "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape," wherein an internal cohesion, only tangentially related to the stanzas' end-words, is established despite the six repetons. In that poem, for example, Ashbery manages to craft a convincing comedic narrative of Popeye, with only the end-word "spinach" having to do with the cartoon sailor and his pals.[38]

Following this tack, "There is a gold light" also borrows, in miniature, the propulsive energy inherent to the sestina, especially of the leap between stanzas, in which the final word of the last line of the preceding stanza becomes the final word of the first line of the ensuing. This moment of dead rhyme in the sestina, occurring at least five times in any instance of the poem, lays bare the obsessive quality of that form, its insistence on one of only six possibilities for the end of a line. Justice's nonce in "There is a gold light," then, takes the most concentrated repetitive instance of the sestina as the couplet at the close of each stanza.[39]

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[38] Cf. "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape," JACP1, 206-07.

[39] Cf. Justice's other sestinas, including: "A Dream Sestina" (CP 14), "Sestina on Six Words by Weldon Kees" (CP 16), and the "morphing" sestina "The Metamorphosis" (CP 20). "Sadness" is found at CP 262-63.

Sonically, the dead-rhymed pair serves as rhyme's limit-case, and in this way makes clear the dialectic of sameness and variety upon which rhyme is founded. Dead rhyme is both a perfection of rhyme—an expression of a complete sound-identity—and a reduction of it to a kind of echoic absurdity, since the ghost of a given word has not yet receded from the speaker's, and reader's, attention before it is repeated. It is the apparently simple, and functionally complex, quality of true masculine or feminine rhyme that words have the same *kind* of sound but not the *exact* same: that they have the same "class" of sound but not the identical instantiation thereof.[40] Dead-rhymed pairs, in effect, rhyme so well, they do not rhyme at all.

Dead rhyme serves also as a hinge, torqueing the signification of a repeated word. Some of these torqueings are more severe than others. For example: "sunlight" to "light," in the first stanza, seems merely a restatement of that stanza's subject—something nearly tautological in its obviousness. But on closer inspection there is a more complex dynamic of appearance and actuality in these six lines. The "gold light" found "in certain old paintings / . . . *represents* a diffusion of sunlight." Of course the "light" in the paintings is not actual light; it might normally be understood to be a representation of this actual light. But it represents, in Justice's rendering, a "diffusion" of this light, and thereby a problem of equation becomes apparent. How might light represent a diffusion of itself? It is a kind of metaphoric gesture not dissimilar to that of the first stanza of "Mont Blanc," in which Shelley writes:

> The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
> Such as a feeble brook will oft assume,
> In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,

[40] For a learned discussion of rhyme's range of exactness, and its subtypes, see Anthony Madrid's dissertation, "The Warrant for Rhyme," submitted to the University of Chicago English Department, 2012 (unpublished).

Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.[41]

In the above, the "everlasting universe of things" rolls its (metaphoric) waves, springing from "secret springs"—and these waters are compared to the waters of a (real) feeble brook, which itself assumes the sound of flowing water that is described as half-foreign to the brook itself. There is a mise-en-abyme quality to this chain of reality and metaphor: the thing becomes a stand-in for, and metaphoric equivalent to, itself.[42]

Justice, through a stricter economy of language, nevertheless approaches this level of metaphoric interplay, or of intentional metaphoric confusion. After the relationship between the gold light of paintings and the diffusion of sunlight is described, Justice introduces a simile: he argues that this light is "like happiness, when we are happy." Again, an instance of repetition, here within the line, masks the act of estrangement, not of likeness. Happiness when we are happy is surely different from the feeling or knowledge of happiness when we are unhappy. In fact, it might be said of happiness that it is especially when we are happy that we have an inadequate, or at least distorted, view of what happiness might be. One could note that happiness, when we are happy, is no longer an epistemological condition but an emotion established by its being-lived. After this description of happiness, then, the idea of light in the painting representing a diffusion of sunlight is more easily parsed. Happiness recognized while happy is actually a "diffusion" of the concept of happiness into the moment of the experience of happiness. The painting's light adequately captures

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[41] "Mont Blanc," NRP 762-63.

[42] William Empson calls this Shelley's "self-inwoven simile": *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 160. Thanks to Phoebe Braithwaite, for introduction to the phrase, and to Thayer Anderson, for its elaboration in a tutorial. The idea has prompted its own commentaries, notably that of William Keach. See his "Reflexive Imagery in Shelley," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 24, 1975, 49-69. During the workshopping of an earlier version of this chapter, Michael Weinstein helpfully pointed out that Shelley and Justice are far from the only two practitioners of this style; Michael suggested especially the work of Wallace Stevens, of lifelong interest to Justice. See Matthew Mutter, "Wallace Stevens, Analogy, and Tautology: The Problem of a Secular Poetics," *ELH*, 78.3, Fall 2011, 741-68, esp. 754.

not the image or warmth of light, but the feeling that this light has been subsumed utterly into the scene being illuminated.

The second stanza includes the strongest of the three ending couplets. The beginning of the stanza is the common Orphic scene: the poet stands, looking over his shoulder, and sees only Eurydice's back as she is led to Hades.[43] The repetition of "back" presents a certain self-referential danger—that the word itself might seem mimetic of the process of the poem, of the "turning back" the repetons do on themselves—but this sentiment is complicated by the fourth line: "At least he had seen once more the beloved back." If Orpheus is seeing the beloved disappear—seeing her "back to Hades"—then this elliptical expression raises the question of what other times Orpheus might have seen his beloved disappear. And if the "beloved back" is understood simply as Eurydice's physical back, what he sees, "once more," is not the face of the beloved but the cipher thereof, the turned back.

Just as the interrelation of light and the representation of light undergirds the first stanza, Orpheus' longing for Eurydice as she is pulled back to Hades infuses the couplet:

> I say the song went this way: *O prolong*
> *Now the sorrow if that is all there is to prolong.*

This is the song snatched from the lips of Orpheus, but unheard by others (perhaps even by Eurydice). And the echo of "song" arrives in the interior rhyme with "prolonging." But the prolongation is not without its strangeness. Just as Orpheus could see only the afterimage of his receding love, all that is asked for, here, is a prolongation not of joy but of the fact of living, and of the sorrow that living conditions. The couplet's dead rhyme engenders a truth applying not only to the Orphic story but to the existence of this particular poem: that the poet's song is not an attempt to recapture some lost object, some lost absolute explanatory referent. Rather, the poem is a

[43] See JH 137-8.

prolongation of the sorrow of the inability to recapture that person or object, since the poem accepts, as a condition of its being, the person's or object's irrecoverability.

The third stanza is the poem's most metrically powerful. The first line could be read as iambic hexameter with a curious caesura in the middle of the fifth foot:

The WORLD | is VE | ry DU | sty UN | cle. [| |] LET | us WORK.

But this seems something of an imposition on the organic meter of the line. The roughly conversational, "free" meter of the preceding stanzas, and the strength of the break between the two sentences of the first line, cause the line to be read more persuasively as free verse, or as essentially trochaic verse with a "pick-up" to the first foot:

[The] WORLD is | VE ry | DU sty | UN cle. | LET us WORK.

In either case, the presence of the "uncle"—so foreign, in its direct address, to the rest of the poem—and the strength of the caesura before the subjunctive-imperative ("Let us work)," jar and delight. The line

The orchard will bloom; someone will play the guitar.

shows a similar metrical intelligence. It could be described as roughly dactylic

(The) OR chard will | BLOOM; || SOME one will | PLAY the gui | TAR.

with two half-feet, one before and one after the caesura. But the above is not to argue that this, and the rest of the poem, can be tracked with a metrical regularity. Instead, Justice's free verse in these stanzas can be shown to follow those observations he has made on the power of Pound's and Stevens's metrically-unconstrained verse.[44] Free verse, for Justice, possesses the same rhythmic tensions as standard metrical arrangements; all that is changed is the steadiness or regularity of stressed half-feet. Here, as in Pound and Stevens, the free substitutions of contrapuntal feet,

[44] Cf. "The Invention of Free Verse" and "The Free-Verse Line in Stevens," in O, esp. 30-40 of the former.

especially dactyls and trochees, lend a surface of familiarity or off-handedness to lines that are in fact minutely constructed, imbued with poetic artifice.

The metrical variety of the third stanza is joined to a modern literary referent: Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. And in this stanza, a different relationship between the parts of the dead-rhymed couplet is presented. Because "existence" is an inherently binary category—one either exists or does not—the final two lines of the poem cannot do the sort of emotional and logical torqueing accomplished in the first and second stanzas. The final couplet merely shifts the subject of "existed" from we (the speaker and her uncle, most immediately) to it (referring to "all that we suffered through").

The shift is subtle but important. It is as though the poem itself forgets the suffering of Sonya and her uncle; it hopes that their existence might prove, or condition, the nonexistence of their suffering. This is another possibility for the poem's dead rhymes: that the sheer insistence of these two words in close proximity forces a reevaluation of that particular word's possibilities of signification. The gears of the poem slip when "existence" is mentioned; there is nowhere for the signifying of the word to be pushed. And a change in tone, too, has occurred between the second and the third stanzas. The desire to prolong sorrow is a qualified and modest one; indeed, the speaker admits that this prolongation is desired with the assumption that no joy or happiness may be lengthened, or experienced without interruption. The final couplet, however, is a grand and thoroughly unrealizable wish: that Chekhov's characters—and, by implication, Orpheus and the Christ of the preceding stanzas—might maintain no recollection of their suffering. It is the last and most poignant irony of the poem that the assertion of their having "suffered through" is not forgotten, but captured in, and prolonged by, the poem itself. Sonya's lament, and Justice's song, are not lost but preserved.

Justice's investigation of nonce, likeness, and variation is not confined to the late poems, nor to the form of "There is a gold light." The lyric "Thus," mentioned above, demonstrates a playful engagement with repetition and ad-hoc form:[45]

> As for the key, we know it must be minor.
> B minor, then, as having passed for noble
> On one or two occasions. As for the theme,
> There being but the one, with variations,
> Let it be spoken outright by the oboe
> Without apology of any string,
> But as a man speaks, openly, his heart
> Among old friends, let this be spoken.
> Thus.
>
> The major resolution of the minor,
> Johann's great signature, would be too noble.
> It would do certain violence to our theme.
> Therefore see to it that the variations
> Keep faith with the plain statement of the oboe.
> Entering quietly, let each chastened string
> Repeat the lesson she must get by heart,
> And without overmuch adornment.
> Thus.

Again, Justice employs a pattern of dead rhymes, wherein each line of the first stanza ends with the same word as the corresponding line of the second. Four of these words, in particular, seem not only to bear on the nature of the activity being described, but on the poem's activity: "minor," "theme," "variations," and "thus." The syntactic structure of the first stanza is similar to that of Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," in that each might be read as a set of directions; in Stevens, for funeral preparations, and in this poem, for the composition and performance of a musical score.[46] The minor key is the more dastardly, the more somber, as compared to the brightness of the

[45] CP 29.

[46] R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," *Selected Essays of R. P. Blackmur*, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Ecco, 1986), 77-78.

major, and the theme, never elaborated, is described only as the single theme of poetry, taking into account the "variations" by which that theme may be fitted to a given circumstance.

The beauty of the poem's construction, then, is revealed in its matrix of overlapping notions of sameness, likeness, and difference. For the second stanza is truly "like" the first; if the stanzas were to be described geometrically, one might say the second is definitionally similar to its precedent. Superficially, the second stanza attempts to duplicate, and therefore complete, the nonce. But the second stanza argues that this "resolution," which Justice compares to the major resolution of the minor, is a form of "violence," one that does not permit the theme (again, not elaborated, but here more clearly referring to the compositional motif of a part of a musical score) to reverberate into its many possible variations. At this point, the cleverness of the title, and final word of each stanza, transmutes into a kind of sublimity. For in the first stanza, "thus" refers to the plain speech of a man channeling his heart's emotions; the first stanza argues, not without a wink, that these emotions are channeled exactly "thus," or by way of the poem's activity. The second "thus" makes the same indexical demonstration: the "lesson" of the first is repeated "without overmuch adornment," at the moment the second "thus" is uttered.

"Thus," here, is a word inseparable from its gesture, its assertion that the existence of the preceding lines is the enactment of the meditation on theme and variation those lines develop. But it is the paradox of theme, elaborated in this poem, that theme becomes itself only when viewed as the accretion of its numerous variations. The variations establish the theme, rather than thwart it or undercut it. And so the second meaning of "thus" hangs also in the poem: "thus" as a demonstrator of philosophical cause-and-effect. One might, slightly perversely, read the first stanza as an argument on theme and variation that is linked, through the first "thus," to a second argument on theme and variation. But this second argument, the second stanza, is not resolved; rather, it ends, again, with "thus." In this way, the second stanza hopes, as in the first, that its own activity might serve as

elucidation of its argument. But the "thus" might also serve as the argumentative link to a vanished third stanza: another repetition and elucidation of the theme. It is the paradox, then, of this perfectly enclosed, and regular, form that its last word points to an impossibility of closure—the prolonged and disappeared conclusion—even as it follows the structural demands of the nonce.

In "Tremayne Autumnal," the fourth part of his short "biographical" poem of a man named Tremayne, and in "In Bertram's Garden," Justice carries out smaller, though no less powerful, investigations of sameness, repetition, and difference.[47]

> Autumn, and a cold rain, and mist,
> In which the dark pine-shapes are drowned,
> And taller pole-shapes, and the town lights masked—
> A scene, oh, vaguely French Impressionist,
> Tremayne might tell us, if we asked.
>
> Who with his glasses off, half-blind,
> Accomplishes very much the same
> Lovely effect of blurs and shimmerings—
> Or else October evenings spill a kind
> Of Lethe-water over things.
>
> "O season of half forgetfulness!"
> Tremayne, as usual, misquotes,
> Recalling adolescence and old trees
> In whose shade once he memorized that verse
> And something about "late flowers for the bees . . ."

The poem is one of Justice's more virtuosic demonstrations of rhyming. As in "There is a gold light," the end rhymes (here not dead rhymes) tend to crop up, again, in the interior of lines: "drowned" to "town," and "shimmerings" to "evenings" to "things." This section of the poem is a kind of "over-writing" of Keats's "To Autumn," from the perspective of a middle-aged suburbanite who only hazily recalls the language of the poem itself. Thus Keats's "season of mist and mellow fruitfulness"[48] is tellingly transformed into the first line of the third stanza, wherein Tremayne

[47] CP 226.

[48] "To Autumn," NRP 925.

inscribes his own forgetting of the line into the line itself, and Keats's mists become the mists the speaker uses to set the scene in which Tremayne stands.

The line Tremayne refers to at the end of the poem is, in fact, "later flowers for the bees," not simply "late," and it is characteristic of Keats that these later flowers be "set budding more, / And still more . . . ."[49] But this surfeit of emotion, central to the overabundance of growth in the first stanza of "To Autumn," is reversed in the Tremayne poem. For autumn's mists and rains serve only to obscure the images Tremayne, and the speaker, hope to represent; Tremayne must be satisfied with the half-seen impressions of his landscape, as though the forgetful waters of Lethe have clouded not just his memory of Keats's poem but his ability to render the world around him. And Tremayne's "half-blindness" further complicates the scene: even if October's rain were not distorting the earth's clarity, Tremayne's myopia, without his glasses, would make the scene "impressionistic" regardless. This effect is not dissimilar to that of the final stanza of "In Bertram's Garden," an earlier poem, which reads:[50]

> Soon the purple dark must bruise
> Lily and bleeding heart and rose,
> And the little Cupid lose
> Eyes and ears and chin and nose,
> And Jane lie down with others soon
> Naked to the naked moon.

Jane has been disgraced by Bertram, who lounges on the porch and makes clear his desire that she leave. The darkness here, like the mists of October, renders all the flowers of Bertram's garden the same bruised color, and takes away, in a brilliant progression, the face of a Cupid statue standing nearby. Jane is fated to repeat her mistakes with Bertram, and this chain of repetition, a scene of convincing pathos, is underscored by the last line. Here Justice employs a deceptively simple

[49] Ibid. 926.

[50] CP 40.

instance of repetition to militate against the shadows crawling across the stanza; although night is falling, the moon is unclouded, still shining, and it will pour its light into the forgetfulness of dark.[51] But the moon also illuminates Jane's nakedness, and the sad truth that her mistreatment, at the hands of a young lover, will not be an isolated occurrence.

The title poem of Justice's 1987 collection *The Sunset Maker* is a two-page, blank-verse monologue delivered by a friend of a dead (and invented) composer named Eugene Bestor. The poem is one of Justice's most expansive, not only because it is longer than most, but because it contains an intricate examination of the nature of musical, poetic, and painterly representation and abstraction. Describing one moment in Bestor's last piece of music, named "Elegy," his friend writes:

> . . . The world
> is French, if it is anything. Or was.
> One phrase the cello had, one early phrase,
> That does stay with me, mixed a little now
> With Bonnard's colors. A brief rush upward, then
> A brief subsiding. Can it be abstract?—
> As Stravinsky said it must be to be music.
> But what if a phrase *could* represent a thought—
> Or feeling, should we say?—without existence
> Apart from the score where someone catches it?[52]

And then the score of this phrase is included, in musical notation. Justice cites a painting of Pierre Bonnard's named *The Terrace at Vernonnet* (1939), whose colors are a mix of fantastic oranges and reds, and a set of cool blues and purples. And Justice wonders whether the painting, which is distorted but figural, can be linked to the aesthetic experience of the musical phrase, and to the possibility of representation in language. The coincidence of musical phrasing and the "phrase" of a

[51] One hears, also, an echo of the end of Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight": "Or if the secret ministry of frost / Shall hang them up in silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" (NRP 466).

[52] CP 235. Mark Ford also refers to this poem and to Justice's musical proclivities, although I differ with him on several points, specifically on the extent to which, and manner by which, music and musical notation has influenced Justice's poetics. Cf. "Long Live Donald Justice!," in *Mr and Mrs Stevens and Other Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 144-5.

line of written English is not lost on Justice. For he writes, in a brief essay on "musicality" in poetry, that it is insufficient, indeed it signifies almost nothing, to say that a line of poetry is musical, since music conditions an abstract experience, and poetry participating in this sort of abstraction would be imprecise or bland.[53]

But Justice's argument does not prevent the poem's speaker from wondering how a musical phrase might represent a thought or feeling—and not in its performance, but as pure notation, "without existence / Apart from the score." In this sense music's abstraction can be used to create a language of music that is explicitly not the language of human speech, but is also not the actual effect of performed music, of mechanical waves transmitted through the air, and perceived with the ear. Musical notation, instead, is a third way, a representation of an abstraction that is itself an abstraction. And the speaker therefore bemoans two facts:

> . . . soon nobody will recall the sound
> Those six notes made once or that there were six.[54]

The experience of this musical motif, this small snatch of the "Elegy," does not necessitate that we perceive each of the six notes individually, nor that we know what each of these six notes is. But when the music disappears, its representation as score disappears as well. Justice, in characteristically removed fashion, has written another mise-en-abyme: an elegy for a fictional departed composer, whose last work, the cello piece referenced above, is itself an elegy. And the speaker mourns not only the man; he mourns the "passing" inherent to the act of musical representation: the divide between the score, always waiting to be performed, and the performance, which of itself cannot last, cannot make the score forever alive.

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[53] "Of the Music of Poetry," O 69-79.

[54] CP 235.

In this poem, then, Justice has found a new desire for prolongation that is, after all, the theme of his early and his late poems—the implicit theme with its every variation. The composition must decay, and the music might remain only in its unperformed, inchoate state. Bestor dies, and his papers will be locked "in the quiet archival twilight of some library."[55] But the poem's task of representation is permanent: to prolong the cry for permanence, which is, in Justice, also the cry for change, the expectation of change.

So Donald Justice always was—he remains—a good poet, who is a writer, always, of good poems.

But what else was he? What else can he be?

[55] CP 234.

Adaptations—Landor, Guillevic, Welty, James

Part One: Letters from Stanford

In February 1949, Donald Justice was twenty-three years old, married to Jean Ross, and living at 1055 Forest Avenue in Palo Alto, California. A letter to his friend Richard ("Dick") Stern of that month begins:

> Happy Valentine.
>
> I have been reading Shakespeare's sonnets and find they are not very good. That is, not more than a dozen are first-rate poetry, though you can save lines and passages almost anywhere.[56]

After arguing that Milton, Sidney, and Wyatt (whom he has not yet read much of) are more capable sonneteers, Justice adds:

> Trying the sonnet I feel more than ever that we are unlucky nowadays: we lack so much: not only three or four grand hackneyed subjects to extemporize on, but an approved manner, an available form, the second person familiar, and inversion."[57]

Justice goes on to complain about the "hierarchy" of Stanford, where he is a student ("one of the sheep") under the demanding formalist Yvor Winters.[58] He mentions he has recently read *Anna Karenina* and has been writing "stories," one about an "Agrarian," which will be forty chapters long, actually a short novel, and one called "A Hopeless Case," "about the Negroes," which he fears is "too Faulknerian" and encloses for Stern's examination.[59]

In a follow-up, of March 4, Justice writes:

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[56] *A Critical Friendship: Donald Justice and Richard Stern, 1946-1961*, ed. Elizabeth Murphy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 67.

[57] Ibid. 67-8.

[58] Ibid. 68.

[59] Ibid. 68 and 204fn36.

> I also read the first part of Joseph Frank on "Space in Fiction" in Stallman's anthology; as I remember, Lubbock points out very similar things about Tolstoy as Frank does about Proust, though Lubbock doesn't invent any fancy terms.
>
> I am at work on my short novel, but it's nothing I can dash off. Nevertheless, I am much engaged with the idea, interested in the problems, and am still trying to solve them with the aid of my Tolstoy practically open beside me.[60]

Throughout his career, Justice was "engaged with the idea" and "interested in the problems" of writing fiction, both in its own right and as a kind of cross-training for his poetry.[61] *The Donald Justice Reader* (1991) contains two stories—"Little Elegy for Cello and Piano" and "The Artificial Moonlight"—reprinted from *The Sunset Maker* (1987), and the title poem of that latter volume deals with the compositions of the imaginary composer Eugene Bestor, whose music Justice also treats in "Little Elegy"[62] And although the forty-chapter novel never materialized, other stories and drafts lie in the Justice Papers at the University of Delaware Library, including "The Doctor's Wife" (1949, with "second prize awarded by the Stanford Creative Writing Contest"[63]) and "Death, Night, Etc.," from *The Yale Review*.[64] Some of these projects Justice considered successful; others he shelved. But in the archive, one sees a young, apprentice writer forming himself and his testing out the boundaries of taste: what's in and what's out. He does not want to be a Wintersian "sheep" any longer, that much is clear. He's on the lookout for new teachers, and a new training regimen in creative writing.

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[60] Ibid. 77-8.

[61] The idea is Jake Fournier's, from his dissertation in progress, on poetic "training" in the pre-Civil-War US.

[62] *The Sunset Maker: Poems, Stories, a Memoir* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 49-50 and 51-5. See also Bruce Bawer, "From 'The Poetry in Things Past and Passing," *Certain Solitudes: On the Poetry of Donald Justice*, eds. Dana Gioia and William Logan (Fayetteville, Ark.: Arkansas UP, 1997), 291-4, esp. 293. Hereafter CS.

[63] DJP, F 255, "The Doctor's Wife," 1949.

[64] "Death, Night, Etc." in *The Yale Review*, 86.2, Spring 1998, 63-75.

There is an old saw about Donald Justice: that his poems are about other writers, and their poems, stories, and novels. Critics and scholars have characterized this indebtedness for many years. Philip Hoy, in a book-length interview with Justice, writes that he takes "bits and pieces from the work of other writers and [uses] them as starting points."[65] Dana Gioia, in his "Tradition and an Individual Talent," cites Eliot's essay on Philip Massinger, from *The Sacred Wood*, arguing that Justice, one of Eliot's "good poets," "'borrow[s] from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.'"[66] Gioia notes that Justice is a "postmodern classicist,"[67] who "appropriat[es]" "entire poems," or uses "borrowed situations and characters," or "steal[s] an opening line"; that he "may adopt elements of a poet's style (as in his Guillevic homages)," and that he "has reshaped prose passages into verse while keeping much of the original phrasing, as in 'Young Girls Growing Up (1911),' which recasts an incident from Kafka's diaries."[68]

Jerry Harp, like Gioia, uses Eliot's essay on tradition to grapple, however fleetingly, with Justice's relationship to the Anglo-American modernist canon, taught at places like the Iowa Writers' Workshop (by people like Paul Engle) and Stanford (by Yvor Winters).[69] William Logan sees Justice's adaptations as bound up in his "nostalgia," the first a remembered world of texts, the

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[65] Philip Hoy and Donald Justice, *Donald Justice in Conversation with Philip Hoy* (London: Waywiser/Between the Lines, 2001), 60.

[66] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1972), 125. Dana Gioia, "Tradition and an Individual Talent," CS 70. Ryan Wilson also links Justice to Eliot's idea of personality and its "extinction" (148), concluding that Justice is "a romantic whose techniques are anti-romantic" and "a New Critic whose vision is anti-New Critical" (158). See "'Rich Refusals': Donald Justice and the New Critics," *Sewanee Review*, 123.1, Winter 2015. 147-59. See also N. S. Thompson, "Donald Justice: The Poetry of Departures," *PN Review*, 37.3, Jan./Feb. 2003, 66-71. Thompson argues that, in some of Justice's adaptations, it is Eliot's "objective correlative that allows the poet greater expression of the personal than would otherwise result from the direct use of his voice alone" (67).

[67] Gioia, "Tradition," CS 77.

[68] Ibid. 68-9.

[69] JH 96, 99.

second a realm of lived experience, most often childhood.[70] Walter Martin, a completist, collates "An Informal Inventory of Donald Justice's Translations" and uses that last word expansively. He includes the long "improvisation" on Guillevic's "L'homme qui se ferme," called "The Man Closing Up," and his toying, more reinvention than translation, with Vallejo, Lorca, Alberti, Baudelaire, Rilke, Dante, Catullus, and others.[71] Indeed, not all critics find this a charming feature of Justice's work. Derek Mahon damns with faint praise: "if [the writing] seems a little short on ambition—there is no major attempt at a comprehensive statement—at least he knows what he can and cannot do."[72] Vernon Young asserts, in a review of the *Selected Poems*, that Justice's spring of creativity has, after the first books, simply "[dried] up."[73]

About twenty-five percent of Justice's poems "borrow" in some sense from other writings, beyond spot-allusion to the titles or subjects of prior texts.[74] Yet all these accounts—positive, neutral, slighting—only point to, or describe in a sentence or so, the networks of association a poet finds herself within, when reworking someone else's writing. These networks bear closer scrutiny; they tell us how poetic composition occurs, and how it is always occurring again, for the reader, as she moves backward and forward through an oeuvre. There is to date no persuasive theory in the criticism explaining how Justice's borrowing actually works, what its idiosyncrasies are, and what it tells us about his cast of mind—beyond the stock observations that he was steeped in the written word for over fifty years, and that he taught classes on literature and poetry composition. Justice's critics have mostly called him, self-justifyingly, an adaptive poet because he adapts.

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[70] William Logan, "The Midnight of Nostalgia," CS, 93, 96.

[71] Walter Martin, "Arts of Departure," CS 50-2.

[72] Derek Mahon, "From 'Men at Forty,'" CS 282.

[73] Vernon Young, "From 'Two Hedgehogs and a Fox," CS 264.

[74] Gioia, "Tradition," CS 68.

To establish a more substantial theory, one must go back through Justice's own criticism, patchwork though it is, his interviews, and parts of his corpus, especially poems that do two of the things Gioia identifies above: "adopt another writer's style" or "reshape extant prose passages into verse." One must, in sum, make explicit, trackable, and public the private chutes-and-ladders game between a poet and his poems (Justice and his adaptations) and other writers and their works, critical and creative. This chapter wagers that, by describing the processes and consequences of Justice's interlinked adaptations, we can begin a compositional criticism: one that develops a poet's imaginarium—the pathways between his poems—and, in parallel, a critical imaginarium—the meta-pathways between a critic and his readings of those pathways between poems.

This account echoes a pronouncement of Harold Bloom's, from an "interchapter" of *The Anxiety of Influence*, which Richard Rorty cites approvingly in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*: that "[c]riticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem."[75] No story of adaptation would be complete without acknowledgment of Bloom's arguments on influence. At its core, his theory is straightforward: poets produce new poems through an array of creative misreadings of their precursors' works.[76] He develops possibilities for these misreadings (called misprisions),[77] fleshing out his cases in *The Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*, and pays close attention throughout to those he classifies as "strong" poets, arch-canonical Anglo-American figures like Milton and Stevens. Justice almost certainly would not figure in Bloom's reckoning: more culturally-dominant poets, like John Ashbery, are his later twentieth-century combatants.[78] Dana Gioia notes that Bloom's framework seems not to apply to Donald Justice, but for a different

[75] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 96. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 25. Hereafter CIS.

[76] Bloom 5.

[77] Ibid. xiii.

[78] See the chapter "Apophrades, or The Return of the Dead," in Bloom, 139ff.

reason: "Bloomian displacement," he writes, "offers no more insight than does the simple theory of imitation."[79]

But this chapter makes two wagers: first, that in tracking a poet's adaptive pathways—the roads leading from one to another of his lyrics—one must do serious archival and interpretive digging; and second, that an investigation of Justice's adaptations tells us something powerful about his idea of poetic skill. As a historical and not just aesthetic claim, this latter prong sheds light on an adaptive practice in which many of Justice's contemporaries were also engaged. The difference between this chapter's analyses and Bloom's, then, might be understood not in terms of Gioia's disavowal, but as a repositioning of Bloomian thought. I rework, or in Rorty's term redescribe, Bloom's centermost methodological claim—that poets creatively misread their predecessors—but abandon his revisionary ratios, his location of Freudian agon within and between strong authors' texts.[80] Where Bloom sees misprision as a general condition of poet contra precursor-poet, I see Justice as a particular example of the recontextualization of discourse—or, in plain terms, the filching of subjects, ideas, and language from writers who have gone before. And where Bloom focuses on poets within the lyric canon,[81] this chapter considers Justice's relationships to imaginative writers of different genres—whom Rorty labels poets in the broader sense, of "makers" of new language.[82]

The pathways between Justice's poems demand argumentative and topical turns, which this chapter reproduces. Justice's claim in the 1949 letters to Stern—that their American contemporaries "lack ... grand hackneyed subjects to extemporize on" and "an approved manner"—leads, I argue, to

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[79] Gioia, "Tradition," CS 75.

[80] Bloom, xxiv. Cf. also his *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), 3.

[81] See Guillory, *Cultural* Capital, vii.

[82] CIS 41-3.

his studies and reproductions of poetic and prose-narrative style. These reproductions allow him, especially in the later poems, to draw with complex mastery on writers like Henry James. Justice's subjects, in the adaptations, become those of the older masters and describe the act of transforming the older masters, substituting these for oft-rehearsed topics, like those he finds in Elizabethan sonnets. And his manner, his tone, is the half-distant, half-emotive reanimation of characters and spaces built occasionally in poetry but especially in prose. In tracing this, we can appreciate the importance, to Justice the adaptive poet, of a cast of inspirations and misfits, previously only touched upon in the scholarship: English classicist-romantic Walter Savage Landor; French twentieth-century concretist Eugene Guillevic; Southern short story writer and essayist Eudora Welty; and James and his early commentator, Percy Lubbock.

Part Two: Landor's Hardness and Cleanness

Most of Justice's literary criticism has been anthologized in the 1998 Story Line Press volume *Oblivion: On Writers and Writing*. Dedicated "to the Memory of the Great Critics of My Own Past—Blackmur, Eliot, Empson, Ransom, Tate, & Winters,"[83] the book includes two essays each on free verse and on the neglect of minor poets; "appreciations" of Weldon Kees, W. C. Williams, and Philip Larkin; and two concluding "Notebooks." The second of these consists of fragments from sketched-out works, none of which Justice would complete in his lifetime.[84] The first, "Notes of an Outsider," was pieced together and published in *The Iowa Review* (1982) and in a stopgap collection of the poet's prose and interviews, called *Platonic Scripts* (1984).[85] And they really are notes: sixteen

[83] O v.

[84] O 126-35.

[85] *Platonic Scripts* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1984), 133-43. Hereafter PS.

titled passages, or micro-essays, ranging from a couple words to a few substantial paragraphs. Some of these are flippant, less objective and rigorous, like "The Dying Pleasures of Movie Criticism," in which Justice describes Pauline Kael as "shrill," and refers to "late structuralism" as "the dead hand of the academy."[86] "On Line Lengths" continues one of the poet's formal concerns, that of the organizing principle of free-verse expression in English; it ends with a story about the Columbia poet Mark Strand, artificially evening out and then, years later, roughening up the phrases of unfinished lyrics.[87] The entry for "Measure" asserts, in a vatic tone uncommon for Justice, that "measure objectifies."[88]

Archival evidence suggests that Justice put off finalizing *Platonic Scripts* for years, and Notes from an Outsider" takes the place of a more complete, coherent statement of an artist's vision.[89] This is no "lay of the land," no holistic description of contemporary American poetry, of which Justice might have been capable. And it is worth imagining what being an "outsider" meant to someone who, by 1982, had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, and had spent the previous two decades writing and teaching with the support of land-grant public universities. But amid the craft-talk and occasional score-settling with unnamed adversaries, Justice writes four sections of a more concerted tone, with illuminating results. Three of these take up, as their subject, Walter Savage Landor, a poet whom Justice does not mention in other criticism, and whom scholars have not associated with him. Closer inspection of these passages reveals Justice's sympathy with Landor's poetics—and helps us begin to theorize his passion for stylistic mimicry.

The first, in its entirety, reads as follows:

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[86] PS 141-2.

[87] Ibid.142-3.

[88] Ibid. 140.

[89] See DJP, F308, correspondence with Donald Hall, series editor for "Poets on Poetry" at the University of Michigan Press.

A Personal Note

> The leaves are falling; so am I (Landor).
>
> Here the note of the personal merges with and becomes inseparable from the impersonal convention.
>
> Generations later, same theme:
>
> > Rotting Ginsberg, I stared in the mirror naked today
> > I noticed the old skull, I'm getting balder
> > my pate gleams, etc. [from "Mescaline," in *Kaddish*[90]]
>
> Here whatever of the impersonal was left in the theme has been swallowed up in the merely personal. It is probably funnier than intended.[91]

This "note" is a pun—an entry in his catalogue of "outsider's notes," and, more importantly, a method of understanding how the "notes," or various tonalities, of the personal might succeed in a poem. Justice modifies one of his critical mentors, T. S. Eliot, and "Tradition and the Individual Talent," arguing that the personal and impersonal ought to merge in a poem, that a poem should be an occasion for precisely this merger. (Eliot, of course, wrote that "poetry ... is an escape from emotion ... [and] an escape from personality"[92]). Despite this qualification of Eliot, Justice's comparison of Landor and Ginsberg is clear enough. Landor separates the human from the natural, the personal from the impersonal, so that they might be compared. And in Landor's conception, the personal appears to follow the impersonal—the falling of the leaves occasions, for the poet and reader, the realization that the poet, too, is decaying. The holding-apart of these categories makes, in Justice's estimation, more powerful their discovered relationship. Ginsberg, by contrast, allows the categories to blend from the start. He is "rotting" before he is getting older, and the lines do nothing

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[90] Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1961).

[91] O 119-20.

[92] "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood*, 58. See also Thompson 67. Although I agree with Thompson that Justice often "takes a pre-existing poem and deliberately reworks it or remembers a pre-existing poems and creates a variation from memory," we do not claim this is an instance of the "objective correlative" (67) of Eliot's, rather a fusion of personal and impersonal, private and published, that is distinctly Justician.

to suspend the inevitable feeling that, for the poet, the chaos of aging and the annual turn of the seasons are the same. One gets the sense that Justice objects to the slovenly character of the Ginsberg lines themselves, which, regardless of one's taste, are rougher, less balanced than those of Landor, with their equipoise of meter and fulcrum of semicolon. Justice has laid out a paradox. Landor's pathos inheres in his division of the leaves and the body, which serves only to yoke them more tightly together.

In "A Case of Translating Oneself," Justice identifies another Landor poem, beginning "Ye walls! sole witnesses of happy sighs ...," and argues that its French version, translated by the poet, might in fact be better than the original. Landor's epigram in English is:

> Ye walls! sole witnesses of happy sighs,
> Say not, blest walls, one word.
> Remember, but keep safe from ears and eyes
> All you have seen and heard.

And in the French:

> O murs! temoins de plus heureux soupirs,
> N'en dites mot: gardez nos souvenirs.[93]

The latter is indeed more compact, and might be rendered literally in English: "O walls! witnesses of the happiest sighs, / Speak nothing of them: keep [secret] our remembrances." The four-line English version addresses the walls twice and repeats the sentiment that they stay quiet. The ambiguous "gardez" is, in English, a "keeping safe" and a "keeping from ears and eyes," and "souvenirs" become "all you have seen and heard," a mixture of reported speech and memory. Landor's translation into French of his own English has prompted an economizing, and for Justice a strengthening, of the force of the epigram. Justice demonstrates that the alienation of the text from its source has distilled it, amplified its subtleties. He concludes that "[t]he case does suggest to me

[93] PS 135.

that the same 'content'—not precisely the same, but very, very close—may be carried by structures (forms?) very different, different in important ways."[94]

In "The Economical Version," Justice edits down Landor's lyric "Ternissa," removing at least a foot from most lines. He argues that the final clause—"And your cool palm smooths down stern Pluto's cheek"—"turned out so well as a pentameter that the poet cheerfully rewrote the poem backwards, so to speak, padding skillfully along the way, and all for the sake, at least to start with, of the slow and stately Pluto line."[95] This assertion complements the conclusion of the "Ye walls!" micro-essay. Justice appreciates that not every poem benefits from reduction to a minimum of diction and syntax.[96] "Ternissa" is memorable in part because of the shagginess of its final line, and its refusal to economize every description, every noun and verb. Poetic composition for Justice is, accordingly, dialectical—an unresolved and productive tension between the desire to compress evocative language and the desire to dilate upon it. But he does not state his conclusion as a universal principle of lyric writing. On the contrary, he intimates it only through consideration, and partial rewriting, of the short poems of one Englishman, whom most readers neglect and only a small number of influential poets revere. Justice does not explain how, or why, Landor matters to him as a critical exemplar, but a brief précis on Landor and the recent scholarship clarifies Justice's conclusions in his "Notes."

Born in 1775 and living nearly until the end of the American Civil War, Landor wrote imbricate, thorny poetry, in short forms like those of "Ternissa" and "The leaves are falling," and in "clean, sweet blank verse of [a] quirky narrative," like the long poem *Gebir*.[97] In his book-length

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid. 136.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Robert Pinsky, *Landor's Poetry* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968), 5. Walter Savage Landor, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Keith Hanley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 1ff.

treatment, *Landor's Poetry*, Robert Pinsky calls Landor a poet "who seems to 'mean' something to poets."[98] "He has always been a poet's poet," Pinsky continues,

> because he is the poet of a way of writing; his unifying concern is not an attitude toward love, theology, 'nature,' human folly, or a 'system'—rather, the distinguishing intensity in Landor's work is supplied by an attitude toward language, toward the making, stylistic powers of the mind.[99]

Searching out why this is, in that book's first chapter, Pinsky notes Ezra Pound's term for Landor's style—his "hardness."[100] In his essay "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry," which Pinsky cites, Pound claims that "[s]ubject matter will, of course, not make the poem," and that "on the other hand the man who first decides that certain things are poetry has great advantage over all who follow him."[101] Pinsky understands this rather gnomic statement of Pound's to mean that, for Landor, "originality of conception ... is a cliché," and that "the true conception emerges in the course of stylistic labor."[102] Pound also writes that this method of composition entails "the *least possible* variant that would turn the most worn-out and commonest phrases of journalism into something distinguished."[103] Landor was a writer of hard poetry because he privileged an original style and diminished, or ignored, an original subject.[104] Pinsky goes on to compare Pound's category of hardness to the idea Donald Davie develops, in an essay on Landor, of the poetic commonplace.[105] Pinsky defines the commonplace as "a stock truth legitimately used for the

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[98] Pinsky 3.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid. 8.

[101] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 285.

[102] Pinsky 8.

[103] Rpt. in Pinsky 8-9.

[104] Ibid. 8-9.

[105] Ibid. 2.

purposes of composition,"[106] and so allows Pound's and Davie's descriptions to mesh. Landor is a hard poet who uses commonplaces as springboards for a kind of poetic experimentation, which leads to the creation of a powerful, identifiable style and tone. This occurs at the expense of novel subject matter.[107] Pinsky quotes approvingly Pound's idea that, "in Provence" in the Middle Ages, "it was considered plagiarism to take another man's form, just as it is now considered plagiarism to take his subject matter or plot."[108] "Our judgments of [Landor's] poems," Pinsky asserts, "will not be of 'sincerity' and 'insincerity,' but of successful and unsuccessful writing."[109]

Before returning to Justice, it is worth placing another critical term on the table. Writing more recently, Adam Roberts captures Landor's peculiarities via a related category, that of "cleanness," or what he terms "the Latinate *polish* of Landor's poetry," which "is, in complex and even profound ways, the formal embodiment" of a physical cleanliness, an aversion to crud and grime.[110] Roberts turns the crank of Pinsky's argument, pace Pound and Davie. In acknowledging the austerity and fastidiousness of Landor's writing, Roberts asserts that a privileging of style over content does not eliminate content altogether—for the poems must, after all, be about something. This privileging instead generates a new, and for the poet only semiconscious, subject, which for Landor is the physically (or metaphorically) clean versus the dirty. Although Roberts supports this thesis with varying degrees of success over the course of his study, his point is a brilliant and provocative one: that a "hard poet's" evacuation of subject matter leaves a residuum, from which a

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[106] Ibid. 1.

[107] Ibid. 8-9.

[108] Rpt. in Pinsky 8.

[109] Pinsky 27.

[110] Adam Roberts, *Landor's Cleanness* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), 2-3.

different, initially hidden subject arises. This residuum is the poet's preoccupation, his "secret subject."[111]

Justice's support of Landor's poetry, in the three micro-essays from "Notes of an Outsider," comprises a defense of this Pinsky-Pound-Davie-Roberts idea of hard poetry and its consequences. We can rephrase Justice's arguments on each of these poems with the language Pinsky, et al., use. The sentiment Landor expresses in "The leaves are falling" is a commonplace. For there is nothing revolutionary in the claim that humans age, just as the world approaches its death at the winter solstice. Justice distinguishes between two poets' stylistic adaptations of this commonplace. He approves of the Apollonian reserve in the Landor, and refuses the sloppiness of line, and of metaphoric comparison, in the Ginsberg. Relatedly, Justice takes Landor's French and English epigrams, and his lyric "Ternissa," as examples of the division of form from content. The dialectic Justice establishes between lyric distillation and amplification—the idea that poems ought to reduce like "O murs!" and prolong like "Ternissa"—has to do with Justice's stylistic and tonal intuitions. He articulates, and holds up as an example, the features of an inwrought style in Landor's hard poetry.

If we take seriously Dana Gioia's claim that Justice is a "postmodern classicist," however, we must continue, and identify the disjunction between his compositional theory and that of Landor, as Pinsky describes it. For Justice's poems are not so immediately and invariably concerned with commonplaces. If there is a stock sentiment in the corpus, it is that of nostalgia and childhood memory.[112] Pinsky argues, additionally, that "the wit, the apparent simplicity, the gentle mockery of himself ... are all, in Landor's verse, eminently *conscious* in tone. They suggest a man who is almost

[111] See Ginsberg's *Howl*, ed. Barry Miles (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 4.

[112] For more on this subject, see Chapter 2.

unbearably aware of what he is doing."[113] Gioia claims similarly that Justice is "almost unbearably aware" of something else—that, as he writes, he "practices what accountants call 'full disclosure,'"[114] providing "notes" at the end of numerous collections, and direct citations in epigraphs and titles to other poems.[115] Justice's affinity for Landor's style might reasonably induce us to ask what his versions of commonplaces are—what he relies upon as prompts for tonal modulation and innovation.

As Justice's letters of 1949 intimate, we can combine two of his early and abiding poetic concerns to answer the question. In acknowledging that there are no more "hackneyed conventions" available to Americans of the postwar period, Justice turns, as it were, to the Tolstoy open on his desk. Landor's commonplaces of sentiment become, for Justice, commonplaces of literature, especially though not exclusively of prose narrative—fiction or memoir. He substitutes, per Gioia's and Pinsky's claims, the self-conscious "citations" of previous authors for Landor's knowing acknowledgment of stock feelings. Like Landor's "hardness" and "cleanness," Justice's "adaptiveness" is a way of writing poems that aids us in drawing conclusions about the content of those poems and about the author's attitude toward it. Justice's poems reflect, again and again, on their preoccupation with adaptation.[116]

Of course, the works of imaginative literature Justice adapts themselves contain sentiments and sensibilities, spoken either by the lyric poet or, more complexly, by the characters of fictional scenarios. Where Landor discovered a reflection of common attitudes, Justice finds, at the heart of his adaptive poems, a mise-en-abyme of fictional possibilities. In the fourth of the micro-essays in

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[113] Pinsky 29.

[114] Gioia, "Tradition," CS 67.

[115] Ibid.

[116] For more on this sort of reflexivity, see Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 12. Hereafter TPE.

"Notes of an Outsider," Justice has this to say about a certain kind of poem written in the 1970s and '80s. It bears quoting at length:

> Some poems these days resemble those passages in novels where the narrative slows or ceases, allowing the hero time to reflect or to reach some sort of psychological conclusion or moral decision. With this vast difference, however—that in the novel there is an amplitude of context and we are expected to be acquainted with a certain background the novelist has conscientiously provided, to recognize references to details of setting, other characters, events that have gone before, etc., whereas in the type of poem I am thinking of we are likely to be deprived of any recognizable and knowable context. **It is as if so much of what in a novel gives us that sense of the wholeness of life had been drained away**, **as well as the pleasures of recognition and the privileges of understanding, leaving only a sort of pure and rarefied psychological essence for contemplation.** The rather elementary form of mysteriousness which results is distinctly not an advantage, though perhaps confused with true mystery and therefore praised by some.[117]

Justice offers his reader a warning about the distinctions between poems and prose narratives, and the possible incorporation of the latter into the former. He chides the "rather elementary" mystery a poet might achieve in making the poem seem like a floating piece of an unnamed, unrealized novel. The subject of a poem should not, in this definition, be the reader's and poet's yearning for a text that does not exist. On the contrary, Justice argues that the "true mystery" in a poem must retain, and is bound up in, the "pleasures of recognition and privileges of understanding" with which we might greet a narrative we've read entirely, and whose author, characters, and plot are known to us. Landor stylizes a commonplace—"I am old"—by hinting to the reader he knows it is common, but by insisting its commonness has nothing to say about the originality of its style and tone. If Justice stylizes his literary sources in the same way—if his adaptiveness really is like Landor's hardness—then he will insist, too, that that the fact of the adaptation has nothing to say about the originality of his own tone and style. And if his adaptiveness, pace Roberts, is also like Landor's cleanness, then a Justice poem about another poem, or another story or novel, will thematize and complicate the compositional possibilities native to those kindred artworks, and to the process of adapting them.

[117] PS 139-40; emphasis mine.

Fleshing out these hypotheses, we turn to three instances of Justice's adaptiveness. The first is his engagement with the austere poetry of Eugene Guillevic, about whom Justice spoke often, and whom he "improvised on" more than he translated. The second involves Eudora Welty, whose short stories Justice rendered for the Iowa City "stage" in the 1970s. And the third is a lifelong conversation with Henry James, who, like Tolstoy in the letters of 1949, is one of a handful of fiction writers Justice believes to have mastered the form of the novel.

Part Three: Guillevic's Things

In his interview with Philip Hoy, Justice describes his contributions to *Contemporary French Poetry*, an "anthology [he] co-edited with Alexander Aspel":[118] "I ended up liking almost nothing about the book, including the French originals. Jacottet and Bonnefoy, along with Char, were surely among the best, but somehow they didn't get to me."[119] When Hoy turns the subject to Guillevic, however, Justice opens up, speaking more emphatically of him than he does of almost any other writer over the course of their conversation:

> [His poems were] far less pretentious and arty than the work of most of the poets we were trying to deal with. There was a kind of blunt factuality about it, a concern sometimes with small everyday things, that I respected. He made me think—just a little—of a Frenchified Dr. Williams. But in fact he sounded like no American writer and, for that matter, like no other French poet I had come across. ... The originality I believed I found in his poems had to do in part with the feeling in them, which seemed remarkably warm and humane compared to a sort of French iciness in some of the other poets; but even more with the style, which was spare. I thought it would be interesting to try to bring something of that style over into English—something beyond translation. I believe I succeeded in doing that in 'The Man Closing Up.' But nobody seemed to care. Maybe they were right.[120]

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[118] See *Contemporary French Poetry: Fourteen Witnesses of Man's Fate*, eds. Donald Justice and Alexander Aspel (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1965).

[119] Hoy 53.

[120] Hoy 3-4.

Here, Justice recapitulates in miniature the adaptive process laid out above. He appreciates Guillevic's "factuality," which makes it appear the poems are made not of words but of objects external to the text. This, coupled within a "humane" immediacy of voice, and a strategy of lineation in which empty space does as much work as the French phrase. Consequently, he aspires to transmute into English a quality of "Guillevic-ness" that exceeds typical "translation." He even worries about the "success" of that method of writing, just as Pinsky argues it is success of style and tone, and not novelty of subject, that determines Landor's effectiveness.

Justice notes his indebtedness to Guillevic in three places, across two collections. In *Night Light* (1967), he attributes "The Man Closing Up" to the original "L'homme qui se ferme," and derives "Hands" from Guillevic's lines: "Les mains ne trouvaient plus / De bonheur dans les poches."[121] In *Departures* (1973), Justice remarks that "some images in the "B" section of the poem 'ABC' are adapted from a series of poems by Guillevic (*Choses*)."[122] These markers of indebtedness, within or at the back of the volume, make plain Justice's play with Guillevic. A section of "Les camps," from which his epigraph in "Hands" is lifted, is as follows:

> Le bois durait.
>
> Ni le froid, ni le vent
> N'attenuaient la faim.
>
> Les mains ne trouvaient plus
> De bonheur dans les poches.[123]

The lines in free verse tend to cluster, here and elsewhere in Guillevic, around phrases and clauses, and the divisions between isometric stanzas are ideational, rather than metrical: first the woods, then the cold and wind, then the hands in their pockets. The order Justice finds in this method echoes

[121] CP 94.

[122] CP 280.

[123] Eugene Guillevic, *Gagner: Poems, 1945-1948* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 73-5; 74.

that of Landor, in "The leaves are falling": a separation of categories before those categories might be compared. The particular syntactic arrangement—orderly breakage of sub-sentence units across lines—and the austerity of tone it conditions are evident in other Justice poems in *Night Light* and *Departures*. These do no cite Guillevic explicitly but, lying near him in the same collection, they are imbued with a stylistic development "beyond translation," which Justice has carried over into his English-language compositions. Poems like "Dreams of Water"; "The Thin Man"—"I hone myself to / This edge. Asleep, I / Am a horizon"[124]—and "Bus Stop"—"Lights are burning / In quiet rooms / Where lives go on / Resembling ours"[125]—all exhibit this arrangement of sound and sense.

Even a cursory examination demonstrates that Justice was a ventriloquist of Guillevic. But if Justice's intuition is correct, and he tips past translation into genuine, and multifaceted, adaptation, he will wind up, as in Roberts's example of Landor, combining formal mastery of tone and style with a thematic content marshaled and informed by that tone and style. Justice's poems of this period are not rehearsals of Guillevic's themes in an American setting. They instead harness the mechanics of Guillevic's work to examine the possibilities of inhabiting, and writing through, a poet like him. They dramatize their attempts to fuse the "personal," what Justice saw and felt and what Guillevic saw and felt, with the "impersonal," the fact that Justice has studied someone else's technique to kickstart this fusion.[126]

In the "B" section of "ABC," Justice writes:

B

Be the unfolding page,

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[124] CP 88.

[125] Ibid. 100.

[126] Guillevic says that "translations" of his poems into "German, Alemmanic, and English" "have taught [him] something about [his] poetry. ... I realized how difficult it was for translators to find the equivalent of apparently very simple words. It helped me to understand that my relationship with words was not a relationship of *amour courtois* [courtly love]" (110). See *Living in Poetry: Interviews with Guillevic*, trans. Maureen Smith (Dublin: Dedalus, 1999).

white page, memorial to the absolute,
atlas of heights and depths,

Be the statue leaning out from the stone,
the stone also, torn between past and future,
and the hammer, whose strength we share.[127]

And in "Hammer," one of this "Thing" poems, Guillevic asserts:

Made for my hand,
I hold you snugly,
I feel strong
with your strength.[128]

Addressing the tool, Guillevic argues it has been designed for him to use, and that he becomes strong when he joins his strength, in action, with the potential for strength lying within the hammer. Thus Justice's line, in "B," assumes a doubled meaning. Guillevic shares his strength with the hammer, and Justice shares strength with the idea that Guillevic shares his strength with the hammer. Guillevic's "hands," which do not know "the happiness of their pockets," are synecdoche for soldiers and inmates reduced to walking, talking assemblages of body parts in the aftermath of the Second World War. And Justice tells himself and the reader, in "Hands," to "Think of the hands as breathing, / Opening, closing. Think of / The emptiness of the hands." They hold nothing, they breathe and do not speak, because they have been removed from the scene at Treblinka, to which Guillevic refers in "Les camps." Yet "Formerly, there were brothers / To clasp, shoulders to rest on."[129]

To shake hands with Guillevic is, at once, to remove his lines from their very real, and desperate, historical moment—rendering them "empty"—and "to clasp" the memory of that moment, and of those lines, in a new context created by Justice's composition, in the Midwest of the

[127] CP 123.

[128] Eugene Guillevic, *Selected Poems*, trans. Teo Savory, Modern European Poets Series (New York: Penguin, 1974), 132.

[129] CP 94.

1960s. The camps were "personal" for Guillevic because he lived in temporal proximity to them, and he tries to create them in language by "de-personalizing" them, stripping them of detail and presenting them in balanced short lines. By contrast, the camps can only be "impersonal," or academic, to Justice, who has never seen them, yet his striving to grasp Guillevic's proffered hand becomes the "personal" drama of the poem, its effort to overcome the alienating effects of decades and thousands of miles.

Justice develops this idea further in "The Man Closing Up," his longest treatment of Guillevic, published in a Stone Wall Press volume in 1973, along with a literal translation of the piece.[130] As Justice describes it:

> Sitting in a cafeteria one afternoon in the spring of 1964, I made a first draft of the translation. About a year later, in another city, late one night, I happened to recall Guillevic's poem and, having neither the French text nor my version of it at hand to consult, began to improvise off fragments recollected from the original, almost as if I were remembering a tune, or tunes. The city was Miami, and a certain desolate stretch of the bay there and a memory of an old lighthouse on Key Biscayne ...."[131]

The final section of "The Man Closing Up" reads as follows:

5

There is a word for it,
A simple word,
And the word goes around.

It curves like a staircase,
And it goes up like a staircase,
And it *is* a staircase,

An iron staircase
On the side of a lighthouse.
All in his head.

And it makes no sound at all
In his head,

[130] Martin,"Arts of Departure," CS 43-4.

[131] Rpt. in Martin, "Arts" 43. See also Thompson 67.

Unless he says it.

Then the keeper
Steps on the rung,
The bottom rung,

And the ascent begins.
Clangorous,
Rung after rung.

He wants to keep the light going,
If he can.

But the man closing up
Does not say the word.[132]

Justice has, by his admission, merged the "man" of Guillevic's original with the lighthouse keeper of his own imagining, in south Florida. This character, a fusion of the personal (Justice's memory) and the impersonal (an inherited presence) becomes the subject of the new, adaptive poem. The drama of the lighthouse keeper is one of the adequacy of words to thoughts, and of words to things exterior to the mind—objects in the world. The word "goes around," it resembles a staircase and it "is" a staircase; it is made of iron when found in the world, is all in his head when he imagines it. Only when the man speaks might he unify the word he uses to describe the object, and the image of the staircase in his mind, with the "actual" staircase in the world. But the man is "closing up" the lighthouse, and closing up his mind; he does not say this word. He falters when he might unify, in language, the interior drama of the mind and the exterior drama of his environment.

All this in a poem "improvised" from the half-remembered poetry of another writer, with whom Justice has tried, as in "Hands," to commune. In mimicking Guillevic's style, Justice finds himself compounding the subject of the original poem. Guillevic's man is "open" to the world of things and "closed" to himself and his potential power of speech. Justice's man is open to the world of things, closed to himself and his power of speech, open to Guillevic's world in which the drama

[132] CP 93.

of openness and closedness unfolds, and closed to that same drama—he is not in Brittany but off Key Biscayne. Justice's "The Man Closing Up" thus thematizes the complexities inherent to its adaption. It is, in Pinsky's formulation, aware of the style it uses and its approach to a predetermined subject. And per Roberts, it takes up that awareness and that subject, dramatizing them, examining how Justice's efforts might be adequate to the original, and yet how they fail to become the original—always producing more language, and a different, distant scenario. As in "The leaves are falling," it is the separation of Justice and Guillevic, of what is personal and impersonal to each, that ties more tightly the laces between the two poets.

Tellingly, in his interview, Justice sounds defeated on rehearsing his achievements with "The Man Closing Up." He wonders if it might matter that he's completed this improvisatory adaptation of another poet, even as he believes it is something worthy and beyond the realm of traditional translation. Although he does not say it to Hoy, part of this frustration might stem from the limitations of re-imagining a character posited, and shaded in only lightly, in a previously-written lyric poem. The man who closes up does not have friends, he exists in no real plot, there is no machinery of character binding him to others, as would occur in a prose narrative. The trouble with Justice's adaptation of another poem is that it risks—and to an unconvinced reader, suffers from—a recursion about speakers and subjects in poetry.

But as we have seen, Justice did not only adapt from other poems. And indeed, his efforts to draw on preexisting characters and scenarios in prose continue the work of his Guillevic poems, while opening their vistas onto those compassed in fiction and memoir. These narratives, as Justice writes in *Platonic Scripts*, provide locales in which a "sense of the wholeness of life" can be conjured.

Part Four: Welty's South

Several critics have commented on Justice's relationship to Mississippi short story writer and memoirist Eudora Welty. With his characteristic perspicacity, Hoy remarks that Justice adapted for Iowa City "Readers' Theatre" two stories of Welty's, from *The Golden Apples* and *A Curtain of Green*, in the 1970s: "The Whole World Knows" and "The Hitch-Hikers." Justice, shocked that Hoy has tracked down their catalogue listing at the University of Delaware library, remarks that they're his "two favorite Welty stories," and that the scripts are "something I thought had been completely forgotten—nay, lost."[133] Michael Ryan quotes Welty, writing on Henry Green, when she argues that any author's "virtuosity" must be coupled with feeling; she says that Henry Green is both virtuosic and "moving."[134] Ryan, using this, asserts that "the extraordinary distillation that can be the main virtue of Justice's style" sometimes withers if he becomes too "literary" in his subjects.[135] And Jerry Harp points out that Justice, in his essay "Notes on 'Variations on Southern Themes,'"[136] admits he draws on the "innocent fairy-tale world Eudora Welty's early stories conjured up."[137]

But the longest critical treatment of Justice and Welty arrives in David Yezzi's "The Memory of Donald Justice," published in *The New Criterion* in November 2004. Yezzi asserts that Welty is "perhaps Justice's nearest kindred literary spirit,"[138] and begins with an epigraph from her memoir-in-lectures, *One Writer's Beginnings*: "[t]he greatest confluence of all is that which makes up the human

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[133] Hoy 62-3.

[134] Ryan, "Flaubert in Florida," CS 23.

[135] Ryan, "Flaubert" 23.

[136] PS 217.

[137] PS 219; JH 12.

[138] David Yezzi, "The Memory of Donald Justice," *The New Criterion*. Nov. 2004. Accessed online: https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/2004/11/the-memory-of-donald-justice. All citations n.p.

memory .... The memory is a living thing—it, too, is in transit."[139] He also mentions, but like Hoy has not read, the Delaware typescripts of the Readers' Theater plays, referring to them as "journeywork."[140] He goes on, saying that "Welty's [writing] provides a lens through which to view Justice's poems," that they "shar[e] a way of seeing ... that can wring emotion from the visible world."[141] The "genius" of Justice's poems lies, as for Ryan, in the way "they distill the trappings of memory."[142] "Where Welty took two pages, Justice took two lines," he says, and concludes with a tiny philippic against contemporary verse, not so far removed from Justice's idea of "poems as bits of unwritten novels":

> The affliction of prose poetry, as Justice saw it, may be merely a symptom of a wider malady to which the prevalence of free verse has led. Readers have begun to lose their ear for the verse line, without which, as Justice says, poetry might as well be prose.[143]

Yezzi's linkage of Welty and Justice is astute, and his development of the idea aids in our synthesis. But the lessons he draws from this union are limiting. For as we've seen, Justice does not look to literary models solely as occasions for the turning-out, contra Michael Ryan, of a fine, well-balanced line or two, and Justice's corpus can't be reduced to a valiant rear-guard movement against the prose poem. (Justice has indeed written accomplished verse in prose, including "Orpheus Answers His Morning Mail," in *Night Light*).[144] With Guillevic as our guide, we can look to Welty as a source not only for tone and style but for ideas of subject matter born out in the poetry, their possibilities for adaption.

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[139] Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984), 104. See also Yezzi. n.p.

[140] Yezzi. n.p.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid.

[144] CP 65.

Justice's theatrical transformations of "The Whole World Knows" and "The Hitch-Hikers" are illuminating in their adherence to the originals (their "journeywork"-like quality) and in their small attempts to innovate beyond mere reproductive imitation. In "The Hitch-Hikers," Justice has more or less transposed the Welty story onto the stage. The plot is nearly identical, and characters speak lines very similar to the original. A traveling salesman, Tom Harris, picks up two "tramps," Sanford and Sobby.[145] When Tom goes into a motel that night to make arrangements for the men to sleep outside, Sanford, offstage, tries to convince Sobby to steal Tom's car. Carrying a guitar with him, Sobby opposes Sanford, eventually beating him with the instrument as Sanford attempts to make a getaway. Sobby remains "in jail" in the motel because there is no more room in the small local facility. Tom goes to a party with people he knows from his traveling circuit, speaking to a woman named Ruth, with whom it's intimated he's had a relationship, and with a younger girl named Carol, whom Tom met years ago on a sales call. The story, and play, end with the announcement that Sanford has died of his injuries, and Tom drives away, leaving the guitar with a young man. There is indeed only one significant structural difference between the original and its adaptation: the presence of a narrating actor, who sets the scenes the unnamed, and omniscient, story-narrator simply describes.[146] This embodied narrator coexists with, and amplifies, other pieces of Welty's description, which Justice has retained as notes for staging.

In "The Whole World Knows," Justice has streamlined the rather amorphous narrative of the original story, which Welty relays in disjointed, elliptical fashion. Jinny has been having an affair with Woody, and seems poised to leave her husband, the protagonist Randall Maclain. Randall has been courting a young woman named Maideen and trying to forget Jinny, with little success. After

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[145] Summary in this paragraph drawn from Donald Justice, "The Hitch-Hikers," DJP, F252, photocopied typescript, 15 pp. See also Eudora Welty, "The Hitch-Hikers," *Collected Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 62-74.

[146] Justice, "The Hitch-Hikers" 1ff.

visits to Jinny's home, where he plays croquet with Woody, Randall takes Maideen on a trip to a nearby town. There he pulls out a gun he's been carrying around and tries to kill himself, but Maideen stops him, and they consummate their romance. After she realizes that Randall will never give up loving Jinny, Maideen curses what she has done. She uses his gun to commit suicide, and the other citizens in the town conclude that Randall's anger at Jinny was bound to lead to someone's violent end.[147]

As in "The Hitch-Hikers," Justice's interventions do not merely render the story more suitable for the stage—they introduce, as with the embodied narrator, elements of written storytelling into the fabric of the staged event. Welty presents Randall wading through a phantasmagoria of violent images. He dreams, for example, of bashing Woody's head in with a croquet mallet. But whereas Welty's reader appreciates less starkly the divisions between his ravings and exterior reality, Justice stages these moments with the same apparent realism as other pieces of dialogue and action. Randall's enacted fantasies, in the play, do not result in "actual" consequences for the other characters, who move along as though nothing has happened. Justice has exteriorized a piece of a story that, like the narrator in "The Hitch-Hikers," his audience would expect to be woven into the textual machinery of the original version. He uses the occasion of the Readers' Theater, then, not only to stage two of his favorite Welty pieces, but to draw out and make use of points of formal tension within those stories—moments that the book or the stage must negotiate by different means.

Yet these adaptive mechanisms are not strictly "necessary" in the plays; they might have been otherwise. Justice could have removed the narrator entirely, allowing the events to proceed through the exposition of dialogue. And he might have highlighted, rather than elided over, the gap

[147] Summary in this paragraph drawn from Donald Justice, "The Whole World Knows," DJP, F251, photocopied typescript, 23 pp. See also Eudora Welty, "The Whole World Knows," in *Collected Stories*, 375-92.

between Randall's mind and other characters' lived experience. Yezzi is perhaps fair in calling these plays "journeywork," in that they hew closely to Welty's vision. But they are journeywork engaged in an adaptive project similar to Justice's Guillevic poems, and modified further by the disjunction between stories and theater. Justice dramatizes the limitations and opportunities (or in Caroline Levine's criticism, the "affordances")[148] of the reimagined artwork and makes that artwork, at least in part, about those limitations and opportunities—traces of the original maintained, and altered, in the new version.[149]

Although Yezzi mentions "Vague Memory from Childhood," "The Miami of Other Days," "Pantoum of the Great Depression," "Southern Gothic," and "The Piano Teachers" as prime examples of Justice's Southernness,[150] and as possible intertexts with Welty, Justice's adaptive sensibility is most richly developed along Weltyan lines in "My South," an earlier version of which is titled "Variations on Southern Themes." Justice admits, in his remarks on that poem, that "there was [only] a brief period, three or four years perhaps, when I thought of myself as a Southern writer."[151] He also observes that Welty's (and Faulkner's) fictions "seemed larger than life to me, an art of wonderful exaggerations and fantastications, a kind of *dreaming*; only dimly could anything like the

[148] Levine defines "affordances" as "the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs" (6). Her conception "expand[s] our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience" (2). See *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015). One might rephrase the line of thought Pinsky and Roberts capture, and which we have articulated above, in Levinian terms, saying that Landor discovers an affordance that helps him to join personal and impersonal commonplaces; that Pinsky (and Justice, without theorizing it) see these commonplaces themselves as affordances for self-conscious development of a unique style; and that, per Roberts, this self-consciousness dictates a choice of and attitude toward the subject of poems, with Justice using the affordance of adaptive lyric verse to test, develop, and complicate the poet's relationship to preceding literary exemplars.

[149] Cf. Gioia, "Tradition" 73-4.

[150] Yezzi. n.p.

[151] PS 218 and Yezzi. n.p.

South I had been born and brought up in be discerned beneath the mythic trappings."[152] And it is this idea, the dream of a remembered South, that Justice takes up in the poem's first section:

1 On the Porch

There used to be a way the sunlight caught
The cocoons of caterpillars in the pecans.
A boy's shadow would lengthen to a man's
Across the yard then, slowly. And if you thought
Some sleepy god had dreamed it all up—well,
There stood my grandfather, Lincoln-tall and solemn,
Tapping his pipe out on a white-flaked column,
Carefully, carefully, as though it were his job.
(And we would watch the pipe-stars as they fell.)
As for the quiet, the same train always broke it.
Then the great silver watch rose from his pocket
For us to check the house, the dark fob
Dangling the watch between us like a moon.
It would be evening soon then, very soon.

And from section three, "On the Farm":

Years later,
Perhaps, I will recall the evenings, empty and vast, when
Under the first stars, there by the back gate, secretly, I
Would relieve myself on the shamed and drooping hollyhocks.
Now I yawned; the old dream of being a changeling returned.
The owl cried, and I felt myself like the owl—alone, proud,
Almost invisible—or like some hero in Homer
Protected by a cloud let down by the gods to save him.[153]

Here, Justice has transformed the fugue-state in which Tom Harris finds himself, at Ruth's party, and through which Randall tracks Jinny and Maideen. But the drama of these lines does not inhere in a threat of violence, or in the possibility of sexual union. (It is noteworthy how rare references to sex are in Justice's poems, although they do crop up, with eruptive force, especially in some of the "Odes" of *Departures*).[154] Justice wonders if the stillness, and the strangeness, of the first section

[152] PS 219.

[153] CP 197-8.

[154] CP 168-72.

haven't been "dreamed" by some "sleepy god." He wonders, in section three, if he doesn't belong to his family, his neighborhood—that the scene so familiar to him cannot be right, and that the gods will offer him, as they did to Achilles, the "protection" of "a cloud" to flee the landscape. Justice argues, in the essay on the poem, that Welty and other writers have informed his idea of the South, and he has written a poem that allows him to merge his personal recollections with Welty's technique, of the interlaying of dreamed life and Southern reality. If experience in the towns of Florida and Mississippi is dreamlike for Welty and Justice, that quality is compounded in the latter writer, whose visions are intermingled with Welty's memories, those of her characters, and the poet's previous engagements with his forebear's writing—the dramatic pieces that reframe, embody, and clarify this dreaminess. Justice has at least one other poem transposing Welty's writings, and this one more immediately—his "Song of the Nymph Bathing," published in *The Western Review* in 1952.[155] But whereas that early poem versifies the prose of Welty's "The Wanderers" without much altering its sense, these sections of "My South" allow Justice to capture what Yezzi calls, strikingly and oddly, the "liqueur de Welty."[156]

In using this phrase, and re-examining the poem, we can make a final turn in our consideration of Justice's adaptiveness. For Elizabeth Bishop, in originating it as "*liqueur de [Henry] James*," uses it in a letter to James Merrill, to describe what she sees in his poems as "the imagery of the later [Master], only with a paragraph or a page or two compressed into one or two lines."[157] Yezzi understands Welty to be Justice's great fictional influence, but even in his Welty-infused "My South," Justice cannot resist substantial adaptation of the Master's writing, in a manner more explicit

[155] Donald Justice, "Song of the Nymph Bathing," *The Western Review*, 17.1, Autumn 1952, 25.

[156] Yezzi. n.p.

[157] Elizabeth Bishop, Letter to James Merrill, Mar. 1, 1955, in *One Art: Letters*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 302-3. Rpt. in Yezzi. n.p.

than that which Merrill attempts and Bishop identifies in him. Indeed, the full force of Justice's adaptive work in that poem becomes plain only after consideration of its remaining sections, its epigraph from James's *Notebooks*, its relationship to the other Henry James poems in the corpus, and a conception of fiction Justice derives from Percy Lubbock.

Part Five: Master vs. Journeyman

Justice's dependence on, and re-workings of, phrases and scenarios of James's have not gone unremarked. Edward Hirsch offers that "My South" "reads a little as if Henry James and [the photographer] Walker Evans had collaborated on lyric poems,"[158] and Richard Howard points out Justice's fly-by-night reference to *The Turn of the Screw* in his "Anniversaries,"[159] as does Harp.[160] William Logan traces some of Justice's borrowings in a later poem, "American Scenes (1904-1905)," by pulling together quotations especially from James's *Notebooks*, which form the basis of the later travelogue.[161] But as with Guillevic and Welty, a closer examination of Justice's transformations demonstrates a ramifying subtlety, such that the adapted poems meditate, with knowingness similar to Landor's, on James's own compositional limitations, adumbrations, and omissions. Important to state, at the outset, is the indebtedness Justice feels even for the development of the process of adapting Henry James. Justice acknowledges that Weldon Kees, in his "Henry James at Newport" of a generation before, re-fashions substantial portions of James's prose, also from *The American Scene*. But he mentions to Hoy that, if he did read the Kees before conceiving of his own James poems, he

[158] Edward Hirsch, "From 'Heroes and Villanelles," CS 290.

[159] Richard Howard, "'As the Butterfly Longs for the Cocoon.," CS 54.

[160] JH 26.

[161] Logan, "Nostalgia," CS 93-5. Henry James, *The American Scene* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968). See also Henry James, *Notebooks*, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford UP, 1947).

must have forgotten it. His adaptations of James, he says, can only represent a crypto-emulation of Kees, instead of a studied rehearsal of his poet-predecessor's method.[162]

To be sure, Justice and Kees were not the only poets to view the Master's prose as a wellspring for verse. James was an important stylistic touchstone for the motley modernists and their epigones: Eliot, Pound, Moore, Auden, Winters, Ashbery, and Stanley Kunitz, to name just a fraction.[163] And the secondary literature is vast on Jamesian syntactic, descriptive, and immersive "mastery," alongside aspirational craft-focused "apprenticeship."[164] Studies of the "poetic" qualities of James's prose, too, echo what Mark McGurl and others have identified as the social distinction of the difficult "art novel," in which linguistic density and abstraction from lived event signify that the writer-practitioner is doing serious work: he has arrived "on the scene."[165] For our purposes in this chapter, however, I want to turn the screw one last time—to show how Justice's apprenticeship to James, in particular, allows for the culmination of a career-long engagement with other people's writing. In James, in short, Justice meets his adaptive match.

"My South" begins with two epigraphs. The first is from Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, in which Quentin Compson remarks of the South, "I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!"[166] And the second is from James—an extract from his *Notebooks*. Standing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near

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[162] Hoy 60-1. Weldon Kees, "Henry James at Newport," *Poetry*, Oct. 1941, 16-7.

[163] For just a brief tour of this influence, see the following: Alan Holder, "T. S. Eliot on Henry James," *PMLA*, 79.4, Sept. 1964, 490-7. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley, California UP, 1973), 3ff. Marianne Moore, "Henry James as a Characteristic American," *Homage to Henry James* (New York: P. P. Appel, 1971), 7ff. Anthony Curtis, "Auden and Henry James," *London Magazine*, 33.5, Aug. 1, 1993, 49ff. Jerome Mazzaro, "Yvor Winters and 'In Defense of Reason,'" *The Sewanee Review*, 95.4, Fall 1987, 625-32. John Ashbery, "The Impossible," *Poetry*, July 1957, 250-4. (On Stein, but with illuminating discussion of James). And Stanley Kunitz, "The Poetics of Henry James," *Poetry*, Feb. 1935, 270-6. I'm grateful to Michael Allen for his insights on this topic.

[164] See Mark McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), esp. 1-9.

[165] The "scene," American or otherwise, being James's psychic physicalization of choice.

[166] CP 197-9.

"the exquisite little Florentine urn of Alice's ashes, William's divine gift to us, and to *her*," James cries out:

> But why do I write of the all unutterable and the all abysmal? Why does my pen not drop from my hand on approaching the infinite pity and tragedy of all the past?[167]

James continues by referring to the "cold Medusa-face of life, of all the life *lived*, on every side," before chiding himself and picking up his walk through Cambridge and environs.[168] Tellingly, James suppresses this moment from *American Scenes*, as the editor of *The Portable Henry James* explains.[169] In the more public version, James writes that his "small story would gain infinitely in richness" if he were to describe some of "the Old Cambridge ghosts" that come to mind on his tour, but that "they [swarm] all the while too thick" for him to do so thoroughly.[170] He has written Alice into part of his travels *and* suppressed her from the more widely-disseminated document of those travels.[171]

In section two of "My South," entitled "At the Cemetery," Justice sets a related scene, but changes the characters:

> Above the fence-flowers, like a bloody thumb,
> A hummingbird is throbbing. ... And some
> Petals take motion from the beaten wings
> In hardly observable obscure quiverings.
> My mother stands there, but so still her clothing
> Seems to have settled into stone, nothing
> To animate her face, nothing to read there—
> *O plastic rose O clouds O still cedar!*
> She stands this way for a long time while the sky
> Ponders her with its great Medusa-eye;
> Or in my memory she does. And then a
> Slow blacksnake, lazy with long sunning, slides
> Down from tis slab, and through the thick grass, and hides

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[167] James, *Notebooks* 321.

[168] Ibid.

[169] *The Portable Henry James*, ed. John Auchard (New York: Penguin, 2004), 504.

[170] American Scene 68.

[171] Cf. American Scene 68-70; Notebooks 321-3.

Somewhere among the purpling wild verbena.[172]

Justice has joined a memory, of his mother standing by an unnamed grave, with James's recollection of Alice's urn, and the "Medusa-eye" of life—or is it death?—at which James cannot look directly, but near which he wants to linger. James enacts this ambivalence by naming Alice in his *Notebooks* and slipping past her memory in *The American Scene*. Justice troubles his description by linking his (still living) mother with the "stone" of the cemetery slabs, "animating her face" though there is "nothing to read" upon it. And he wonders if this really happened, or if it isn't merely the reconstruction of a pseudo-memory that has yoked itself to James's own mottled, and revised, memory.

As with Guillevic, Justice dramatizes the dangers, the obscurities of the "personal" and the "impersonal." He transports James from Cambridge into the South, but writes of the South from his own remove of time and space. He places his mother by the grave as James placed himself there, but cannot recall whose marker it is, as James could recall only too well that it was his own sister's. And the "Medusa-eye" travels between them all, a shuttle on the loom of these reflections and memories and partial transcriptions.

"By seventeen I had guessed / That the really great loneliness / Of James's governess / Might account for the ghost / On the other side of lake," Justice writes in "Anniversaries," his much-revised poem at the beginning of his first major collection, *The Summer Anniversaries*.[173] His "Variations on a Theme from James" argues for a descriptive "middle ground," whereby "[t]he warts, the pimples disappear / ... but a shagginess remains."[174] And his use of James as a source for adaptation, and for personal revelation, carries through into the later poems, and into the criticism.

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[172] CP 198.

[173] CP 5-6.

[174] Ibid. 30.

Taking up "American Scenes," William Logan argues that James's "intimacies of detail,"[175] his "mere fragment[s], shattered recollections of a shattered sensibility ...."[176] make their way into Justice's adaptive poems. This underscores a concern of Justice's from his early years, dating back to 1949, when he writes to Richard Stern about his studies in the novel form. In "The Prose Sublime" Justice asserts, on this same theme:[177]

> According to Percy Lubbock ... the reader of a novel finds it impossible to retain what Lubbock calls 'the image of a book' entire. ... Always, says Lubbock, 'the image escapes and evades us like a cloud.' Yet it does not entirely escape. In our memory there remains forever some image of the novel called *Madame Bovary*, and it is not at all the same as the remembered image of *War and Peace* or *The Wings of the Dove*. Ours are doubtless only phantasmal images of the whole—we could never, like a Borgesian character, become the true author of any of these novels—but these cloudy images have still enough of the contours of a wholeness about them to enable us to think of each one individually and quite distinctly.

Lubbock, in *The Craft of Fiction*, also argues that "our criticism is very little troubled by the thought that it is only directed at certain fragments of the book which the author wrote, the rest of it having ceased to exist for us."[178] If the novelist, reader, and critic are engaged already in the project of piecing together, and making sense of, the sundry components of a long narrative, woe be it for the poet, who comes to these figures secondhand and attempts to rearrange, select from, and intensify them, "distill" them into a few suggestive phrases. In another winding of the dialectic, the adaptive lyric poet conserves the memory of "the large, loose, baggy monster"[179]—the novel with its many characters and reversal of fortune, the memoir with its scenes of reunion and loss. Yet he or

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[175] Logan, "Nostalgia," CS 93.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Hoy 76-7. O 46. For more on Justice and prose, see Patrick Kurp, "'Something to Cling to, Just in Case,'" *Anecdotal Evidence*, Aug. 6, 2013, accessed online: http://evidenceanecdotal.blogspot.com/2013/08/something-to-cling-to-just-in-case.html. n.p.

[178] Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Scribner, 1921), 3.

[179] CP 30.

she does so by taking up only a fragment of something that is, in the consciousness of readers and writers, already fragmented and unsynthesizable. As an upshot, the poem-as-fragment-of-fragment becomes, as Logan and Justice argue,[180] a new kind of wholeness, a microcosm from which the sense of the sweeping prose story can be intuited, if not recounted.

Justice ends "American Scenes" with a sonnet, first published separately as "Henry James by the Pacific," and retitled "Epilogue: Coronado Beach, California" in the *Collected Poems*.[181] In it, the relationship of narrative whole to fragment is compounded, as novelist and adapting poet conceive of the texts they will not live to finish:

> In a hotel room by the sea, the Master
> Sits brooding on the continent he has crossed.
> Not that he foresees immediate disaster,
> Only a sort of freshness being lost—
> Or should he go on calling it Innocence?
> The sad-faced monsters of the plains are gone;
> Wall Street controls the wilderness. There's an immense
> Novel in all this waiting to be done,
> But not, not—sadly enough—by him. His talents,
> Such as they may be, want an older theme,
> One rather more civilized than this, on balance.
> For him now always the consoling dream
> Is just the mild dear light of Lamb House falling
> Beautifully down the pages of his calling.

As Logan points out, this section is the least indebted of the four to the original text of James's notes.[182] And it is a revealing capstone to Justice's understanding of the possibilities of literary adaptation. James is here known only as the Master, and has reached the western edge of the United States, a country that, like a multifaceted prose work, cannot be summarized, only experienced and recreated in fragments of observation and recollection. Whatever "novel" one ought to write about

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[180] O 46. Logan, "Nostalgia," CS 92-6.

[181] Logan, "Nostalgia" CS 95. CP 201. See also *A Donald Justice Reader* (Hanover, N.H.: Middlebury College Press, 1991), 5.

[182] Logan, "Nostalgia," CS 95.

this experience must fall to someone else—perhaps to a student of the Master, either in prose or in compacted verse. The "light" running down "the pages of his calling" satisfies inasmuch as it highlights whatever describing, or gluing together of descriptive fragments, he has already completed.[183] Surely another author will do his or her part to craft the capacious narratives of American life that will fail, and fail beautifully, to capture this "sort of freshness being lost."

Justice's engagement with Henry James's Coronado episode clarifies a further dialectical coupling in his adaptive method: that of "mastery," on the one hand, and "journeywork," on the other. As Yezzi argues, Justice's one-act renderings of Welty's stories cannot overcome their debt to their originals, nor do they seek to. Though Justice underlines the formal differences between book and stage—as part of the plays' subjects—these can only be qualified victories, small gains from small creative wagers. The plays are journeywork without a subsequent opportunity for mastery. Logan, Hoy, Gioia, and Ryan, among others, describe Justice's technical virtuosity in their parsing-out of his adaptive practices. And Young, along with other of Justice's detractors, sees these practices as less virtuosic than aesthetically dependent. Justice's relationship to Guillevic, Welty, and James, however, puts these two camps into mutually-reinforcing conversation. His adaptiveness might signal his command of the literary canon, of its wealth of syntaxes giving rise to a knowing, melancholic tone. In this it is a demonstration of lyric mastery. But even the most skilled of adaptors inherits the characters and scenarios, the structural logic and contingency of detail, of the preceding artist. Justice establishes himself as the master of a kind of writing in which mastery is inextricable from journeywork, and he renders this inextricability the subject of the "Coronado Beach" sonnet.

For that poem combines events from James's travels with abstraction-laden depictions of moral and aesthetic struggle. Even for a stylist of James's accomplishments, the novel of contemporary American experience, of life as lived in 1905, is beyond his grasp; to use a phrase

[183] Ibid. O 46.

from R. P. Blackmur, one of Justice's critic-mentors, the "executive" or "technical" form of so expansive a composition James is unable, late in life, to manage.[184] He is exhausted by his surfeit of subject matter; the master of poetry is, in the face of the permanent teacher, James, reduced to a journeyman, humbled by the prospect of a work designed to capture "the continent he has crossed." Justice, in yoking himself to James's visions and declarations (if not his exact diction and phrasings),[185] liberates himself most fully, as Logan intimates: Justice, too, sits "brooding" on the achievements and debts of a career in literature.[186] The poet has fused his style with James's, and this fusion demands that the subject of the sonnet be given over to the Master. James contemplates a subject beyond the affordances of his chosen form; Justice takes this contemplation as the subject of his poem, compressing a novel of "Wall Street" and the "sad-faced monsters of the plains" into a few phrases, and dramatizing the complexity of that projected narrative's many hundreds of uncompleted pages. Only younger writers, journeypersons themselves, can pick up the subject James and Justice are too old to pursue. James has mastered the dramas of American and English social life, and Justice the micro-dramas of adapting these dramas, by acknowledging that both subjects are inexhaustible—suitable for a prolonged career of studious application.[187]

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[184] R. P. Blackmur, "Large and Loose Baggy Monsters." *Studies in Henry James* (New York: New Directions, 1983), 125.

[185] Logan, "Nostalgia" CS 95.

[186] Ibid. 96fn.

[187] Tracing canonical twentieth-century American poets' first books, Jesse Zuba writes that the work of young Marianne Moore, as one example, seems to embody Ralph Waldo Emerson's maxim, that "'life' is not ... progress toward mastery, but ... a perpetual 'apprenticeship'" (48). See *The First Book*. He makes similar arguments about Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens, among others—by which poetic mastery is either unattainable or rendered moot. The simultaneity of Justice's mastery and permanent "journeymanship" is notable: these are *late* poems of stylistic accomplishment that dramatize their dependence on prior master-exemplars. Cf. also Logan, "Nostalgia," CS 96.

Coda: Bishop and Trollope

And as it turns out, Donald Justice is not the only American poet to draw from the notebooks of an established prose master. As Logan describes it, Justice's work on James brings to mind "the Elizabeth Bishop poem 'From Trollope's Journal' ... funded on a few spare lines from Trollope's *North America*."[188] Logan argues that, with Justice-James and Bishop-Trollope, "the reproduction is the supplement to the original, yet it comes to have original force."[189] Other critics, like Mark Ford and Michael Ryan, have linked Justice and Bishop; both call them "poet's poets,"[190] and Ford argues for their shared humility and technical skill.[191] Bishop's final lines, in the Trollope poem, run:

> Th'effluvium
> made that damned anthrax on my forehead throb.
> I called a surgeon in, a young man, but,
> with a sore throat himself, he did his job.
> We talked about the War, and as he cut
> away, he croaked out, 'Sir, I do declare
> everyone's sick! The soldiers poison the air.'[192]

In a letter to Robert Lowell, she explains, "Well, 'From Trollope's Journal' was actually an anti-Eisenhower poem, I think—although it's really almost all Trollope, phrase after phrase."[193] We return, by this example, to the early problems of the personal and impersonal, which Justice identifies in Landor's lyric comparison of the self and nature. Bishop adapts evocative descriptors of Washington, D.C., the "effluvium" and "dried blood" and chewed "cud" of wartime encampments

[188] Logan, "Nostalgia" CS 94.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Mark Ford, "Erasures," *London Review of Books*, 28.22, Nov. 16, 2006, n.p. Ryan, "Flaubert," CS 22.

[191] Ibid. Ford and Ryan.

[192] Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (New York: Library of America, 2008), 126.

[193] Bishop 935.

and field hospitals.[194] She does so to celebrate Trollope, to dramatize the language of his private musings—and to link them to her own distaste at the "poisoning" of the American political climate during the Eisenhower years. Recourse to the archive of Trollope's thoughts, from the American Civil War, allows Bishop to lay out her own opinions of the American Cold War, their contiguities and divergences. She adapts Trollope to speak as Bishop, and so she won't have to speak as Bishop at all. In doing this she is more and less herself.

Hoy asks Justice why he doesn't have a section, in "American Scenes," on the James travelogue's Florida excursion[195]—since Justice possesses a favorite son's interest in depictions of his home state.[196] Justice, again pleased at Hoy's study of his drafts, admits to an unfinished Florida lyric for "American Scenes," built on a phrase of James's:

> Here was the Infinite Previous, an age
> When nothing yet was set down on the page,
> A plate too primitive for all our inks.
> A Nile before the Pharaoh or the Sphinx.[197]

We find in it a counterpoint to the Master's unfinished novels and memoirs, and Justice's published adaptive poems. In the American South the poet can imagine, via his reworking of James, a time before writing, when there is no particular thing or person to poetize, extend, turn in on itself. This isn't one of the "grand hackneyed subjects" of Shakespeare's sonnets—it's a longing for a topic so commonplace, immanent and precedent to everything, that it needs no writing down.

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[194] Ibid. 126.

[195] Hoy 69-70.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Hoy 69-70; O 131; cf. *American Scenes* 462.

Long Views—Poetries of Conserving and Connecting

Part One: Most Hated Man

A critic, poet, and professor in the University of Florida's MFA program, William Logan was a colleague of Donald Justice's in the 1980s and '90s; he is most famous, in literary circles, for his excoriating book reviews, which have appeared in publications for general and specialist readers.[198] In a recent *New York Times* article, Robert P. Baird calls him "a slasher, a burner, a brawler, a big-game hunter with a sleepless eye," and argues, "Logan's negative reviews read ... like giddy blood sport."[199] David Yezzi asserts, in a 2014 appreciation, that Logan relished Robert McDowell's "tagline for him": "the most hated man in American poetry."[200] Yezzi and Jason Guriel observe that Logan used the phrase for the blurb of his selected poems.[201] It isn't surprising, by these lights, that Logan's "twice-yearly verse chronicle[s] [raise] hackles and hosannas in equal measure."[202]

But one person's "big-game hunting" is another's schoolyard taunting. Logan can be harsh, withering, and his negative reviews tend to repeat a few signal concerns. Logan describes Brenda Shaughnessy, in one multi-author piece, as a producer of "emo-drenched poems [that] dribble down the page like a freshman term-paper ... [or an] angsty teen diary."[203] Of John Ashbery's corpus, he

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[198] See, as one early example of his collective, general-interest reviews, William Logan, "On Poetry," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 25, 1996, online, n.p.

[199] Robert P. Baird, "Poetry's Hanging Judge Tries On a Detective Hat," review of Logan's *Dickinson's Nerves, Frost's Woods* (2018), *The New York Times*, Aug. 31, 2018, online, n.p. See also Jason Guriel, "Two Minds," *PN Review*, 38.6, Jul./Aug. 2012, 47. Guriel also uses the term "bloodsport" in the second sentence of his piece.

[200] David Yezzi, "The Perfect Moods of William Logan," *The Sewanee Review*, 122.1, Winter 2014, 91.

[201] One piles up similar appreciations, and critiques, of Logan's work. See Zach Savich, review of Logan's *Guilty Knowledge, Guilty Pleasure: The Dirty Art of Poetry*, *The Rumpus*, Feb. 11, 2015, online, n.p. Savich writes: "I could begin, 'Logan is the poet-critic one can most easily criticize without losing many hugs at AWP—because he ain't in it for the hugs."

[202] Yezzi, "Perfect Moods," 91.

[203] Logan, "Hobson's Choice: Verse Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, Dec. 2017, online, n.p.

notes that one "can no more say what an Ashbery poem is about than ... what a laughing hyena is about." He adds that "the tension between the coherence of the parts and the sheer nonsense of the whole ... puts him in a long line of American charlatans and Ponzi schemers."[204] Dorothea Lasky's lyrics, in another article, "ramble along, unpunctuated as a summer dawn, begging for membership in the New Vacuousness."[205]

For Logan, an overflow of emotion risks cloying angstiness, and deliberate trickery produces nonsense verse of the Tribe of John.[206] A poet errs by giving far too much, or by giving nothing save for false connections and a provisional "coherence of parts." But these are not Logan's only criteria; he prompted special ire, in the summer of 2018, with a critique of Ocean Vuong, a young writer of Vietnamese-American heritage. Vuong's debut collection, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2017), has been a success by small-press standards,[207] and Logan is not wowed:

> Confessional poetry began shading into identity politics a decade or so ago, when the fraught psychology of Plath and Lowell became less important than the still-raw oppressions of biography; but biography has now become the whole sales-pitch. *(I don't have a problem with the identity or the politics, but a lot of bad poetry has been written in the name of putting them together.)*... The emotion that seethes beneath, a rage more unnerving for largely being repressed, is far more articulate than anything he brings himself to admit.[208]

As the poet and academic Paisley Rekdal responds, at *The Margins*,

> Logan's review simultaneously both clings to and denies the power of Vuong's identity ... We are fascinated by those who have unique personal histories, but we also criticize them when those same histories don't make us feel how we want to

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[204] Logan, "Hither and Yon: Verse Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, Jun. 2017, online, n.p.

[205] Logan, "Doing as the Romans do: Verse Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, Jun. 2015, online, n.p.

[206] Cf. *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*, Susan M. Shultz, ed. (Tuscaloosa: Alabama UP, 1995).

[207] See, as one example of Vuong's immediate reception, Michiko Kakutani, "Review: 'Night Sky With Exit Wounds,' Verses from Ocean Vuong,'" *The New York Times*, May 9, 2016, online, n.p.

[208] Logan, "Old Wounds: Verse Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, Jun. 2018, online, n.p. (Emph. added.)

> feel, thus challenging whether we can label the identity before us "authentic" enough ...."[209]

According to Rekdal, Logan precisely *does* have a problem with Vuong's identity and his politics, in addition to his so-termed "identity politics."[210] Indeed, Logan has inveighed against identitarian causes for years. His treatment of Rita Dove's *Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*—which volume Helen Vendler panned in *The New York Review of Books*, and to significant controversy—deserves lengthier quotation:

> ... [R]epresentation can be a very sharp knife. When sociology masquerades as aesthetics, your fairness seems immediately unfair to everyone left out ... [B]logs have been alight with rage over the absence of Appalachian poets, disabled poets, cyber poets, performance poets, avant-gardists of every stripe, and many other groups implicitly maligned. Once you establish "representation" as a shibboleth, there's no stopping. Pity the poets of Hoboken, who get nary a look-in here. Where are the transgender poets? Where have the fetishists gone? Is there even a single pre-pubertal poet? ... No art is an equal-opportunity art. Talent is always asymmetrically distributed. It's an injustice, to be sure, that most of the great modernists went to Harvard or the University of Pennsylvania, just as it's an injustice that more presidents were born in Virginia than in any other state.[211]

Tellingly, in this catalogue, identifiers of location, gender, sexual proclivity, age, lifestyle, veteran status, academic affiliation, and social stratum are commingled and lampooned, yet Logan does not explain exactly how "talent" is "asymmetrically distributed" among them. It is worth clarifying, too, that applicants are not "distributed" to elite universities: they are encouraged to apply, and they were accepted, in the era of the "great modernists," as much for their racial-social "character" as for their

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[209] Paisley Rekdal, "Wounded Elders: On Racial Identity and Reviewing," *The Margins*, The Asian American Writers' Workshop, Jul. 5, 2018, online, n.p.

[210] "*[I]dentity politics* is a peculiar term, almost always used to 'complain about someone else. One's own political preoccupations are just, well, politics. Identity politics is what other people do.'" Laura Miller, quoting Kwame Anthony Appiah, in "Can Human Beings Ever Give Up Identity?," review of Appiah's *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2018), *Slate*, Sept. 14, 2018, online, n.p. Richard Rorty makes a similar point about the term "ideology," with reference to Raymond Geuss, in CIS, 59.

[211] Logan, "Guys and Dove: Verse Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, Jun. 2012, online, n.p. Logan also remarks that Justice isn't included in Dove's anthology.

demonstrated intellectual achievements.[212] If Logan does not entirely work out his idea of social representation in American poetry here, he offers a chord to which he'll return in ensuing years, as reflected, eventually, in the 2018 piece on Vuong.[213] Poets, he argues, should be rewarded for the power of their poems, without regard for the circumstances in which the poets lived and wrote, nor for the reception their poems occasioned. Canonical authors, like Eliot, deserve biographies, which a critic or layperson can read, with enjoyment, as an adjunct to the poetry. But no life-story, regardless of its drama, can make an aesthetically-uninteresting poet worth reading.[214]

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The previous chapter relied on the critical writings of William Logan and David Yezzi, among others, to build a case for Donald Justice's idiosyncratic understanding of literary tradition, and the means by which an American poet in the postwar period might adapt it and add to it. I demonstrated some of what Harold Bloom calls "the hidden roads that go from poem to poem," although I took Richard Rorty's cue in qualifying this statement. The artist does her work insofar as she creates, rather than discovers, these roads, and creates, too, the counterforce of a literary master against whose stylistic and temperamental quirks she fashions her own style and temperament. I

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[212] See Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005). Esp. Chapter 4: The 'Jewish Problem' at Yale and Princeton, 110ff.

[213] One observes, too, that Logan's views on the usefulness of "multicultural" anthologizing have modulated over time. On the subject of Louis Untermeyer's 1932 *American Poetry from the Beginning to Walt Whitman*, Logan is somewhat more charitable; he writes in a letter to Justice (June 23, 1995): "This has not only an American poem pre-Bradstreet ... but a remarkable appendix of all of the marginal sub-categories so fashionable forty or fifty years later, and some not even fashionable yet: American Indian Poetry; Spanish-Colonial Verse; Early American Ballads; Negro Spirituals; Negro Social, 'Blues' and Work Songs; 'Negroid' Melodies (e.g., 'My Old Kentucky Home'); City Gutturals (e.g., 'Frankie and Johnny'). This borrows quite obviously, and quite honestly, from the ballad collecting of the period, and is intimate with the folk revival (then just beginning?); but it seems an unusually prescient reading of American verse, and one by now forgotten. The 'multicultural' readers act as if they were clearing virgin woods." See DJP, F350.

[214] As the novelist and essayist Elif Batuman wrote, in a review of Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* (2011): "I should state up front that I am not a fan of program fiction. Basically, I feel about it as towards new fiction from a developing nation with no literary tradition: I recognize that it has anthropological interest, and is compelling to those whose experience it describes, but I probably wouldn't read it for fun." "Get a Real Degree," *The London Review of Books*. 31.18, Sep. 23, 2010, online, n.p.

used the example of Walter Savage Landor and his commonplaces, as described by Robert Pinsky, to illustrate how a precursor poet reworks inherited subjects, and to build a road between Landor's and Justice's compositional methods. I showed that the idea of the master-student relationship, and Justice's incorporation of it into his poems, especially the Guillevic, Welty, and Henry James lyrics, does not lead to his assumption of the position of master in a new chain of adaptation. Instead, it causes Justice to languish in a prolonged poetic studenthood, and to write with pathos about his languishing.

I focus in this chapter on some of those same critics, related thinkers, and the institutions with which they intersected. But in doing this, I am highlighting features of Justice's poetry that most scholars ignore: its political tones and implications. I use *political* here broadly, with some idiosyncrasy, and in keeping with those I cite later on, more and less approvingly; I mean, in brief, the ways in which poems challenge ideas of individual freedom and social obligation, and offer descriptions of the individual and her society back into the world from which they are derived.[215] Justice's views on these matters are implicit because Justice himself tended not to produce manifestoes, and his prose writings, when they do state things categorically, insist on the accidental, provisional quality of any such statements.[216] In Chapter 1, then, Justice appears not to know, or is in no hurry to investigate, whether he cannot become Landor or James because of his own deficiencies—that he hasn't the patience for writing a long novel or epic poem; that (and it is less likely) he lacks the largeness of erudition and experience to do it well[217]—or because *no* contemporary American writers can.

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[215] This is, effectively, my own description of David Bromwich's use of the term, as I will elaborate in Section 3 of this chapter.

[216] "Of all the poets of my generation who did not get much into the habit of criticism—and that would include the great majority of us—I may be the only one with any regrets at having kept my thoughts more or less to myself. I see now that criticism can be of enormous value in helping to define and refine one's own thinking ...." O n.p.

[217] See *Donald Justice Reader*, 141.

In this ambivalence the present analysis has its root. One might ask whether Justice believes the writers and themes of the past superior to those of his time, and whether, as a consequence, he advocates some return to that past, or a preservation of what he argues the past must have been. This is a question of literary *conservatism*; it is the objective of this chapter to explain Justice's form of it, and the way it differed from that of his interpreters and champions. Like his adaptiveness, Justice's yearning for the past is peculiar, though it is not entirely without precedent, and a review of its precursors distinguishes him further as a poet worth attending to. The individual character of Justice's conservatism helps the critic mark off other conservatisms, in other poets, who have their own powerful, peculiar senses of a self that bears the "blind impress" of tradition.[218]

I should say from the start—and I will have occasion to repeat it later—that one's poetic politics, as I will continue to define them, may or may not relate consistently to one's personal politics. Justice was a self-identified Democratic liberal, and Logan, who has become only more staunchly opposed to aspects of "multicultural" representation in poetry, once wrote to Justice about the "lamentable politics" of *The New Criterion*, in which his essays were and are printed.[219] Logan agreed with substantial features of that magazine's aesthetic positions, and I will explore the extent to which those positions are part of a coherent political-cultural framework. But Logan and Justice probably voted for Democrats, and the editors of *The New Criterion* almost certainly voted for Reagan, and with enthusiasm. One's attitudes toward school busing, or the Electoral College, or presidential power, can be made manifest in the yeses and noes of civic affairs and in the more nuanced, discursive analyses of conversations with friends. So, too, can one's poetic politics be schematized as "traditional" or "experimental," or elaborated on at length. This essay proposes to do the latter, using the term "conservative" as a beginning- and not an end-point, and attempting to

[218] CIS 26.

[219] Logan, letter to Donald Justice, Oct. 27, 1985, DJP, F348.

articulate and distinguish the poetries of traditional- or formal-seeming poets, in a manner not hitherto prevalent in most contemporary scholarship. (An exception is Alan Filreis's illuminating, deeply researched *Counter-Revolution of the Word*, which details the "anticommunist antimodernism" of the 1950s, a poetic movement that "sought to deny the assumption that aesthetic progress required formal experimentation" by "dubbing the verse of formal experiment 'bad poetry.'")[220]

In this chapter, I work primarily with the poetic generation following Filreis's subjects (although he mentions a younger Richard Wilbur several times, in passing).[221] In doing so, I leave to the side the stringent formal requirements of traditionalists like Yvor Winters (1900-1968), with whom, as noted in Chapter 1, Donald Justice studied for a few quarters, before finding him too truculent to get along with.[222] I also refer in more detail to Justice's separate lyrics, as opposed to their interconnections within volumes, and to arguments about how, exactly, art should suggest relationships between selves and social groups. Few writers have supported Justice with greater verve than Logan and Yezzi, and the forum in which they've voiced this support is not lightly, or accidentally, of the right: it is, in its own estimation, one of the primary organs of highbrow conservatism in the United States, a "monthly review of the arts and intellectual life" headed by the pamphleteer Roger Kimball.[223] Only *The Weekly Standard* and *The National Review*, focusing less

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[220] See Alan Filreis, *Counter-revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry,* 1945-1960 (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2008), xi.

[221] Cf., as an example, Filreis 238.

[222] A treatment of Winters's conservative tastes is laid out persuasively in W. W. Robson's review of *Forms of Discovery*, "The Literary Criticism of Yvor Winters," in *The Cambridge Quarterly* 6.2, 1973, 189-200, esp. 198ff. See also Gerald Graff, "Yvor Winters of Stanford," *The American Scholar*, 44.2, Spring 1975, 291-2. The conservatism of Donald Davie, whom Justice does not cite in essays, loops back to discussions of the poetic "commonplace," as in Landor, mentioned in Chapter 1.

[223] Stephanie Burt has noted the relationship between Justice, Gioia, Yezzi, and *The New Criterion*: see "An Unillusioned Life," *Boston Review*, Feb.-Mar. 2005, online, n.p. Burt, like John Ganz, follows *The New Criterion*'s assertion that its politics are a reaction to those of the student protests of the 1960s. See Ganz cit., below.

exclusively on arts and letters, are its peers.[224] Under Kimball and, previously, the founders Hilton Kramer and Samuel Lipman, *The New Criterion* advertised itself as a right-wing rejoinder to the journals of, in Frederick Crews's term, "Left Eclecticism"—a loose band of avant-garde theorists, artists, and university professors promoting (Kimball claims) multiculturalism; gender, sexuality, and queer studies; critical race studies; moral relativism; and other programs of perceived identitarian inclusion.[225]

From the 1980s into the early 2000s, the description of a dangerous, nihilist left in American humanities departments was a genre in popular criticism.[226] Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990) and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) are two of the most widely-read and -debated examples.[227] Others, narrowed to critiques of particular artistic practices and media, include: Kimball's *The Rape of the Masters*, on nineteenth-century painting (2003); Kramer's *The Revenge of the Philistines* (1986) and *The Twilight of the Intellectuals* (1999); Crews's *The Critics Bear It Away* (1992) and *Postmodern Pooh* (2001); Gioia's *Can Poetry Matter?* (2002); Logan's *All the Rage* (1998); Bruce Bawer's *Diminishing Fictions* (1988); Jacques Barzun's *The Culture We Deserve* (1989); Lynne Cheney's *Telling the Truth* (1995); Paul Johnson's *Intellectuals* (1988); and former Education Secretary William J. Bennett's *To Reclaim a Legacy* (1984) and *Our Children and Our Country* (1988). These books, and the critical theories provoking them, prompted efforts to negotiate, within literature departments, between a

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[224] Debates over the qualities and deficiencies of these publications are endless; nevertheless, one could argue that the drop-off in intellectual rigor between the magazines cited above and other conservative publications is steep.

[225] For a dilation on "Left Eclecticism," see Kimball, *Tenured Radicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 32-33, reprinting a passage from Crews's *Skeptical Engagements* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 138-9. As John Ganz notes, the magazine "was founded in 1982 to be a kind of National Redoubt of High Culture, an earthwork against, as the editors subtly put it in the first issue, 'the insidious assault on mind that was one of the most repulsive features of the radical movement of the sixties.'" See "The Decline of *The New Criterion*," *The Baffler*, Jan. 10, 2018, online, n.p. Indeed, *The New Criterion* and those who write about it generally characterize the journal's activity as a holding-back, a repelling, a standing-against the wild ideas of left-liberal ideology.

[226] The list above is, of course, only a small sampling of titles touching on this controversy. For a broader introduction, see Irene Taviss Thomson, *Culture Wars and Enduring American Dilemmas* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2010).

[227] Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Left and Right Eclecticism: Roger Kimball's Cultural Criticism," *Humanitas*, 14.1, 2001, 23ff.

relativist, avant-garde left and a universalist, traditional right, as in Stanley Fish's *Professional Correctness* (1995); David Bromwich's *A Choice of Inheritance* (1989) and *Politics by Other Means* (1992); Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (1987) and *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992); and Mortimer J. Adler's *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind* (1988).

While the war raged, American poets wrote poems, and *The New Criterion* published a certain subset of them, after the Poetry section began in the fall of 1984. Donald Hall, Brad Leithauser, Jane Kenyon, Gioia, David Wagoner, W. S. DiPiero, X. J. Kennedy, Louis Simpson, Robert Pack, and Mary Jo Salter are among the more established of those featured. Near the top of this list, in frequency and accorded prestige, is Justice: fifteen of his poems, along with his essay "Benign Obscurity," appeared between 1984 and his death twenty years later.[228] Kimball and executive editor James Panero marked his passing with a "dispatch" on August 9th, 2004; a longer memorial in the September 2004 issue, with a Logan poem "dedicated to Justice";[229] and a Yezzi essay, cited previously and alluded to by Stephanie Burt in her *Boston Review* piece.[230] A laudatory Logan review of Justice's prose was published in April 2010.[231] Kimball's magazine has treated the death of no other poet, not even of former US laureate Donald Hall in the summer of 2018, with similar thoroughness.[232] No poetry publication has made more of Donald Justice's work than Kimball's; none has insisted so vigorously that his manner be imitated.[233]

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[228] I discuss Kenyon's poetry in greater detail in Part Five.

[229] See "Donald Justice, 1925-2004," unsigned editorial, *The New Criterion*, Sep. 2004, online, n.p.

[230] Yezzi, "Memory," n.p.

[231] Logan, "The Reasonableness of Donald Justice," *The New Criterion*, Apr. 2010. One notes the consistency of this titling format in the magazine: "The [X] of [Poet]."

[232] During composition of this chapter, a retrospective on Hall appeared. Ernest Hilbert, "Donald Hall, 1928-2018: Notebook," Sep. 2018, online, n.p.

[233] Burt, "Unillusioned Life," n.p.

Why do Kimball and Logan revere Donald Justice? What do they think his work stands for, and why do they believe more poets should follow his lead? In this chapter I move on from narrower contextualizations of Justice, in books like *Certain Solitudes* and *For Us, What Music?*, to patterns in the right-left humanities debates since the 1980s. I start by assembling Kimball's and Logan's related, though occasionally divergent, theories of artistic practice and ethical and aesthetic ideals; I imagine how Justice's poems could be seen to enact these theories. I explore other ways Justice's poems can be read for their moral, political, and identity-espousing content, a type of critique to which his work is rarely subjected. I introduce lines of argument from David Bromwich, his treatment of Wordsworth and Burke especially, to imagine a more analytically-useful conservatism for Justice than can be found in Kimball and parts of Logan. And I close with a comparison to the poetries of Jane Kenyon and Richard Wilbur, whose ideas of tradition, continuity, and community enrich the possible meanings of conservatism in postwar poetry.

Part Two: Kimball's Laws

Over nearly thirty years, in a corpus of essays appearing most often in *The New Criterion*, Roger Kimball has called for *evaluation* in arts writing, a practice that ranks, sorts, and makes sense of genius and accomplishment, and elects only the worthiest creators to the pantheon of a sustained readership. Instead of worrying about, or apologizing for, this evaluative technique, Kimball champions it. George Scialabba calls Matthew Arnold "the patron saint of *The New Criterion*," and Milton Birnbaum echoes the sentiment, arguing that "Arnold's famous dictum ... that teachers and critics in the humanities should propagate 'the best that has been thought and said in the world'" is anathema to the "tenured radicals" Kimball inveighs against in his 1990 book.[234] Kimball believes,

[234] George Scialabba, "Living by Ideas," *What Are Intellectuals Good For?* (Brooklyn: Pressed Wafer, 2009), 157. See also Milton Birnbaum, "Reconstruction and Deconstruction," *Modern Age*, 34.2, Winter 1992, 178-9.

per his subtitle, that "politics has corrupted our higher education," and that appreciations of aesthetic and moral value—what is beautiful and good and true in art—have largely lost their place in academic life at the end of the twentieth century.[235]

In this, Kimball echoes Logan's invective against "representation" in poetry. For both, extra-artistic considerations have supplanted previous criteria for valuing poems, paintings, and sculptures, and this agenda is inevitably, and starkly, of the left. According to Kimball,

> [It] demand[s] that there be more women's literature for feminists, black literature for blacks, gay literature for homosexuals, and so on. The idea of literary quality that transcends the contingencies of race, gender, and the like or that transcends the ephemeral attractions of popular entertainment is excoriated as naïve, deliberately deceptive, or worse.[236]

Thus Kimball, even more explicitly than Logan, argues for "transcendent" qualities that distinguish good from bad literature, and that intersect with identity-markers only in the minds, and writings, of academic opportunists with agendas to push. Relatedly, professorial firebrands assault "the traditional literary canon" and the idea that it can be "construe[d]" for "meaning," substituting in classrooms

> an elaborate interpretative game that aims to show the impossibility of meaning .... Writing no longer means attempting to express oneself as clearly as precisely as possible, but is rather a deliberately "subservient" activity meant to challenge the "bourgeois" and "logocentric" faith in clarity, intelligibility, and communication.[237]

Tenured Radicals, Kimball's first and most remarked-upon book, is a hodge-podge polemic. It contains essays on academic conferences, especially those presenting speakers on the crisis of the humanities; the journal *October*, which Kimball finds a pungent, laugh-till-you-cry example of left-wing cant; Paul de Man's wartime anti-Semitic journalism; and the literary criticism of Stanley Fish,

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[235] Scialabba 155-6.

[236] *Tenured Radicals* (hereafter TR) xv.

[237] Ibid.

an anti-foundationalist, champion of reader-response theory, and (later) university administrator. Kimball's methods are anecdotal, rather than systematic, and he often feels it sufficient merely to reproduce the views of his opponents, to show how disturbing, nonsensical, or revolutionary they are on their face.

These anecdotes point, in Kimball's account, to areas of grave concern for cultural conservatives. "Radical feminism," he argues, "seeks to subordinate literature to ideology by instituting a fundamental change in the way literary works are read and taught."[238] The specifics of this ideology Kimball does not elaborate, but he implies it is a shadowy effort to supplant justifiably "major" texts by male authors with inferior, but sociologically valuable, texts by women.[239] He applies the same logic to African-American studies, using a speech of Houston Baker's to claim that a largely "white, middle-class audience" seeks "ecstasies of intellectualized liberal shame" in cheering Baker's critiques of white supremacy, as evident in American political and cultural institutions.[240]

Throughout *Tenured Radicals*, Kimball points to a web of interconnected crises: the above-mentioned incursions of feminist and critical-race studies; the trivialization of high culture, and the replacement of it with essays on MTV music videos;[241] a "deliberate obscurity" in literary theory, which prevents people from understanding what a critic is saying, and which, Kimball implies, means that critics aren't really saying anything at all. He asserts that, beneath literary-Marxist attacks on bourgeois society, there lies a *real* sympathy with political radicalism and violence.[242] Among other academics, like Stanley Fish, Kimball finds only insouciance and nihilism. And he objects, in Fish's

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[238] Ibid. 15.

[239] Ibid. 15-9.

[240] Ibid. 20.

[241] Ibid. 44.

[242] Ibid. 80.

work, to a body of criticism in which poetry, communication, and meaning are nothing other than subverted labels in gnomic language games.[243] After the publication of *Tenured Radicals*, Kimball attempted to assemble, through many years of *New Criterion* essays, a list of productive critical voices—and of their destructive, left-wing opponents. Thus, in his 2002 collection *Lives of the Mind*, Kimball celebrates the clear-eyed cultural valuations of Raymond Aron, Walter Bagehot, Trollope, Lichtenberg, and Wodehouse. And he decries Bertrand Russell as, among other things, a progressive "utopian" who promoted "eugenics and family planning."[244]

But in *The Fortunes of Permanence* (2012) Kimball focuses on, for him, the most dangerous bêtes noires in American intellectual life: relativism and multiculturalism. The first sentences of the volume's preface insists, "It wasn't *that* long ago that a responsible educated person in the West was someone who entertained firm moral and political principles."[245] He follows Paul Johnson in linking Einstein's theory of relativity to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, both being "[pieces] of science that cast a large metaphorical shadow," and that lead to a "seismic shift in the way people view the world."[246] Where once there were standards, values, traditions, exemplars—Newton for scientists, Trollope for novelists; Plato and Aristotle for philosophers—there were, almost overnight, only prejudices, tastes, and "anthropological" accounts wherein critics "[respect] the distinctive values of every culture but [their] own."[247] Kimball ends the preface with an allusion to Allan Bloom, and his

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[243] Ibid. 155.

[244] Kimball, Lives of the Mind: The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 241.

[245] Kimball, *Fortunes of Permanence: Culture and Anarchy in an Age of Amnesia* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2012), 1. Hereafter FP.

[246] FP 3.

[247] Ibid. 5.

assertion that "the essence of education is the experience of greatness."[248] Against the counterargument of "elitism," Kimball argues that "[the] true democrat wishes to share the great works of culture with all who are able to appreciate them; the egalitarian, recognizing that genuine excellence is rare, declares greatness a fraud and sets about obliterating distinctions."[249]

Of course, "distinctions" between artistic practices collide, in complex ways, with distinctions between the products of white ("Anglo-American" or "European-American") and non-white cultures and peoples.[250] And Kimball appears especially galled at instances in which non-white art, literature, and political action threaten to eclipse, displace, or (most frequently) stand alongside white-established precedents. Kimball bemoans the fact that students, in one poll, know more about the works of Rosa Parks than can recognize the text of the Gettysburg Address.[251] He resents that Maya Angelou "never mentioned the words 'America' or 'American'" in her poem delivered at Bill Clinton's 1992 inauguration.[252] He questions the "divided loyalties" of those who claim "compound" identities, whether they be married women with hyphenated last names or Mexican-American and Asian-American citizens.[253] Affirmative action is unfair; ideologues leading classrooms want to dissuade students from their patriotic impulses.[254] The Founding Fathers "settled" the country, whereas peoples from different ethnic and religious backgrounds "immigrated" to the United States later, and therefore secondarily.[255]

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[248] Ibid. 13.

[249] Ibid.

[250] For Kimball on Bourdieu, see TR 24.

[251] FP 52.

[252] Ibid. 53.

[253] Ibid. 53-4.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Ibid. 58.

Fortunately for Kimball, the "[c]entrifugal forces of multiculturalism are espoused chiefly by the intellectual and bureaucratic elite,"[256] and this elite can be replaced with another group, one that recognizes the importance of settled cultural questions. He invokes again the conservative political theorist Samuel Huntington, who urges us to foster "'those qualities that have defined America since its founding,'" above all "the Anglo-Protestant values that wed liberty to order."[257] Armed with these values, which Kimball asserts without further articulation, one can stand up to the onslaught of avant-garde sensibilities, sanctioned in American universities and dispensed by mainstream cultural publications and by sympathetic television and film outlets. This avant-garde, he warns, has "gradually transformed a recalcitrant bourgeois culture into a willing collaborator in its raids on established taste."[258]

Throughout Kimball's analyses, he insists that academic obscurantism threatens clarity of expression, both within and outside the university. The relativism of anthropologist critics, who care only about an artist's identity and socio-historical circumstance, similarly contest the "Anglo-Protestant" values on which Americans used to agree. And the rudeness, the vulgarity of intentionally shocking works of art upset the seriousness of purpose great artists previously possessed. But there remain touchstones to which we can refer, when we seek out calm amid the welter. In an essay on T. S. Eliot, whose *Criterion* inspired the name of Kramer and Lipman's publication,[259] Kimball writes:

> Eliot was obsessed with reality. That is the ultimate source of his power as a poet and his authority as a critic. He was everywhere engaged in a battle against ersatz:

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[256] Ibid. 63.

[257] FP 72. Kimball reprints from Huntington's *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 365.

[258] Kimball, "Calamities of Art," *The New Criterion*, Nov. 1995, online, n.p.

[259] Kimball, "A Craving for Reality," *The New Criterion*, Oct. 1999, online, n.p. See also an unsigned editorial: "The New Criterion at 30," Notes and Comments, *The New Criterion*, Sep. 2011, online, n.p.

> ersatz culture, ersatz religion, ersatz humanity. That, finally, is what makes even the late, religious Eliot congenial to modernism: his impatience with imposture. ... It was his lonely task to remind us of this even as he set about coaxing us toward greater and greater feats of endurance.[260]

This "endurance", this resistance to the "ersatz," Kimball finds, too, in the poems of W. H. Auden, especially the early works, and in those aspects of Auden's essays running contrary to his "dissolute" extra-literary life.[261] And in re-appraising the "mature" works of Rudyard Kipling, Kimball insists:

> [Kipling] was above all the laureate not of Empire, but of civilization, especially civilization under siege. ... [He] endeavored to man those defenses [of civilization] partly through his political oratory, but more importantly through a literary corpus that taught the explicit lessons and the implicit rhythms of emotional continence and restraint."[262]

This final phrase is perhaps the most concise formulation available of Kimball's aesthetic credo. Accomplished literary art "teaches explicit lessons," and it does so via a structure of linked, if not always immediately apparent, "rhythms." These rhythms can be restrained metrically—as to the demands of English prosody—or emotionally, becoming continent and august, not crass or "popular." In their explicit production of meaning, Kimball's ideal poems are clear—they have subjects, objects, settings, predicaments. In their implicit rhythms they exhibit decorum and a reliance on the institutions of the past. From local government to the educational system, they are scenes of civic instruction, wherein patriots are forged in the mold of the original settlers.

Kimball applied his critical laws only to the major, and deceased, poets of high modernism and its immediate subsequent generation. But Logan, in his essays on Justice, extends *The New Criterion*'s critical program into the contemporary field. "Justice," he writes in one piece, "suggested

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[260] Kimball, "Reality," n.p.

[261] Kimball, "The Permanent Auden," *The New Criterion*, May 1999, online, n.p.

[262] Kimball, "Rudyard Kipling Unburdened," *The New Criterion*, Apr. 2008, online, n.p.

that the reader must avoid asking too much of criticism ... because the critic's worst sin is to be clever when a poem is not." He continues,

> Much academic criticism has become merely an intellectual exercise, with merit badges awarded by the MLA. ... Close reading is now somewhat despised—I'm sure some Ph.D. has declared it the dead hand of patriarchal order laid upon the indeterminacy and instability of the poem's matriarchal text. A critic who does not want to out-Herod Herod[263] is a dangerous thing, if he allows the poem to open itself on the poem's terms.[264]

This seems, superficially, to gibe with Justice's "Notes of an Outsider," in which the poet argues against poetry in the lineage of the avant-gardist Charles Olson. Projective verse is, for him, only the "practical demonstration of a theory."[265] Logan believes, in contrast, that an insistence on poetic biography, on the identity and story of the maker, goes hand-in-hand with abstruse (and useless) theorizing on the "patriarchal order" and "matriarchal text." Kimball, concurring, insists that these substitutions—of inclusiveness for genius, of vulgarity for austere beauty—occur not only in poetry but across the arts, and indeed in all realms of contemporary academic discussion.

One might reasonably ask what Justice's poems *say* about these problems. If we are to take his lyrics on their own "terms," as Logan insists, what are the categories, the social descriptors, the expressions of personal identity, appearing in the work? Where does Justice stand on meaning, instructional value, and the determinability of a poem's message? To read him with an eye toward these debates is, at once, to do what Kimball and Logan demand and dread. For they want us to pay attention to what exquisite poems say, and how they enact this saying. But they argue that the values of the very best poems are not constructed contextually; they are, instead, patently recognizable throughout the ages, and they recur in authors of sufficient talent. The next section puts Justice's

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[263] Logan apparently relished this phrase. See his correspondence with Justice, in DJP, F347-50.

[264] Logan, "Reasonableness," n.p.

[265] Justice, "Notes of an Outsider," *The Iowa Review*, 13.3-4, Spring 1982-3, 47.

poems back into these culture-war debates, and parses the attitudes he, and his poetic characters, appear to value most.

Part Three: Anti-Relativist Readings; Rejoinders from Herrnstein-Smith

Critics have long observed, in Justice's late lyrics, a return to themes of childhood, the past, and its recollection.[266] This, especially after the interlude of *Departures*, in which Justice is acknowledged to have indulged his most obviously experimental tendencies.[267] At first glance, Justice's earliest *New Criterion* poem, "Children walking home from school through good neighborhood,"[268] demonstrates amply the backward view of the late style. "They are like figures held in some glass ball, / " he begins, "One of those in which, when shaken, snowstorms occur; / But this one is not yet shaken." Everything in the first verse-paragraph is still, serene, "the almost swaying bridge," "October sunlight" that "checkers their path," that "frets their cheeks and bare arms now with shadow / Almost too pure to signify itself." In the second verse-paragraph, Justice adds to the tableau:

> Today, a few stragglers.
> One, a girl, stands there with hands spaced out, so—
> A gesture in a story. Someone's school notebook spills,
> And they bend down to gather up the loose pages.
> (Bright sweaters knotted at the waist; solemn expressions.)
> Not that they would shrink or hold back from what may come,
> For now they all at once run to meet it, a little swirl of colors,
> Like the leaves already blazing and falling farther north.

The first verse-paragraph contains three metaphors. Justice compares the scene to a snow-globe; he argues that the children are on "a walkway between two worlds," which becomes the "almost swaying bridge"; and their bodies are "polyphonic voices that crisscross / In short-lived harmonies."

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[266] Bruce Bawer, "The Poetry in Things Past and Passing," CS 291-4; David Hartnett, "Mythical Childhoods," CS 299-300.

[267] Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Boysenberry Sherbet" CS 246-8.

[268] CP 205.

The observations of the second paragraph liken the scene to "a gesture in a story," and in the closing sentence, running over three lines, the speaker insists the children "all at once run to meet" "what may come." This vague future, elided into "a little swirl of colors" as from the autumn leaves and the motion of the children's bodies, is literalized in the last line, with reference to the real (that is, non-metaphorical) leaves turning bright colors in a different place, in the north—where the fall is further along and deeper. Thus the children's upcoming adulthoods, in which "solemn expressions" are reserved for catastrophes larger than the spilling of a school notebook, merge with the slightly off-kilter, but easily-parsed, assertion that the south follows the north in the parade of seasons. And winter, as a complement, moves southward, forcing the children soon to wear sweaters they now only "[knot] at the waist."

Hardly is moral teaching obvious in this, although the poem contains, with respect to Kimball's formulation, a good many "implicit rhythms of emotional continence and restraint." Indeed, it is nearly *all* continence and restraint, the work of a few sketched images, body parts, and actions. These impressions illustrate a title like that of a painting—or, more precisely, (with its lopped-off "a" before "good neighborhood"), like the caption on the back of a photograph. Yet there are two moments at which ideas of "goodness" or "purity" escape the moderation that is the poem's dominant mode. These point to a different scale according to which the scene might be judged. What, after all, is a "good neighborhood"? Are the children walking through it to another "good neighborhood," or are they headed to one that is inferior, less safe, more open to the intrusions of adults? What, relatedly, does it mean for sunlight to be "almost too pure to signify itself"?

A caricature of the Kimball-Huntington school, one that incorporates the race-baiting of the former's post-*Tenured Radicals* criticism, might find in the poem a crypto-narrative of students, white and middle-class like the author of the poem, whose purity is reflected in the "goodness" of their

surroundings. Although the poem's images seem initially to be without prescriptive political intent, a Kimball-caricature might go on to develop the pathos of this "lost world."[269] Whether historically accurate or allegorized and imagined, children, in Justice's vision, *can* head safely home from school, in groups. Their good neighborhood, in this reading, is a cocoon of unstated social support, and, most likely, of social homogeneity. It opposes another possible world, in which children are *bused* home through culturally- and racially-distinct neighborhoods, or are picked up and driven away without the opportunity to walk and talk together. In the latter analysis, nouns like "north" and "purity," adjectives like "good," and phrases like "short-lived harmonies" acquire a broad (not to say over-broad) symbolic valence. They are nostalgic "gesture[s] in a story," distinguished from a fallen, more complex, more profoundly "shaken" present.

This, I propose, is a condensed but not distorted summary of a type of aesthetic filleting apparent in Kimball's writing, as noted in Section I, and ricocheting across the columns of *The New Criterion*.[270] But one recalls that it is not his only method. One might ignore R.K. the culture-warring swashbuckler, and conjure instead the Kimball of his Auden, Kipling, and Eliot criticism; in the second case, the results are different though no less illuminating. Here, the poem might be more plausibly a repudiation of the "ersatz," the replaced and replaceable, which same repudiation he finds so prevalent in Eliot's verse. A light "almost too pure to signify itself"—and the children's willingness to "run to meet" "what will come"—become that same "reality" on which Eliot reported. Justice's children see the world as it is. They are really-real subjects in an older writer's recreated story; they live out the recollections of the poet-speaker, who wishes he were as close to genuine lived experience as the children must be, as yet unmarked by a swirling, indefinable future.

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[269] The phrase, in American verse, belongs to Randall Jarrell. See "The Lost World," *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 283-93.

[270] One observes this same tone, for example, in Kimball's architecture reviews; see his "Philip Johnson: The Architect as Aesthete," *The New Criterion*, Nov. 1994, online, n.p.

The poem's clarity, its precision of scene, its lack of dramatic action and showy authorial intrusion—its reserve, limpidity of meter, and imbrication of metaphor—fulfill Kimball's and Logan's shared demand that poems eschew nonsense, vacuity—and, most importantly, nihilism. In "bend[ing] down to gather up the loose pages" of their assignments, the children refuse disorder, even as they embrace an unknown "it" barreling toward them. They are courageous and innocent; these qualities *make* the neighborhood around them "good" and decent. If as a consequence the poem is nostalgic, it is so according to Logan's own definition: the poet does not "wish to return to the past"; he hopes instead to "be privileged to recall it."[271] As Logan continues, Justice's sense of nostalgia "is a gesture of counter-sentiment. [It] is the refuge of poets for whom the current modes of reminiscence have been irremediably stained with sentiment."[272]

To this, I offer a riposte from one of *The New Criterion*'s theoretical archenemies. Although I could present any of a number of anti-foundationalist rationales, I find it most fruitful to turn, as an exemplary case, to former Duke professor of poetry Barbara Herrnstein Smith, whom Kimball and the magazine have differed with at length.[273] Drawing on and extending Herrnstein Smith's reasoning from her 1968 study *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, one can arrive at an entirely contrary analysis of "Children walking home." In this latter reading, the critic emphasizes the lyric's indeterminacies and its relativizing bent, which derive from those same sequences that seem, in a Kimballesque reading, settled with "emotional continence." For as Herrnstein Smith asserts, poems can demonstrate, at their endings, "that particular experience of validity which ... strengthens or secures the reader's sense of finality and stability. In general, it appears that the conditions which

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[271] Logan, "Midnight," *CS* 87.

[272] Logan ibid. Daniel Cross Turner refers to this feature of Justice as "an expression of *meta*nostalgia: nostalgia for the process of nostalgia itself." See "Restoration, Metanostalgia, and Critical Memory: Forms of Nostalgia in Contemporary Southern Poetry," *Southern Literary Journal*, 40.2, Spring 2008, 192.

[273] TR 142-3. Cf. Bradley Bloch article, cit. below.

contribute to the sense of truth are also those which create closure."[274] By this logic, then, some poems—especially those on which Herrnstein Smith chooses to focus—"produce truth" in the manner of "philosophical realism (e.g., positivism and pragmatism),"[275] and can be understood to dramatize this production of truths in the production of endings. Stated another way, poems can make themselves end in the way that descriptions of the world make themselves end—not by stumbling on the truth and the "real," as in Kimball's picture of Eliot, but via construction of a resting-place that feels locally plausible, enough *like* an ending to reader and poet alike.[276]

According to this framework, "Children walking home" does precisely what Bradley Bloch, in his *New Criterion* review of Herrnstein Smith's later *Contingencies of Value*, bemoans: the poem depicts a future in which the young students "just 'keep going,'" keep growing older and moving toward an indeterminable future, and fashion themselves as the poet fashions the circumstances they navigate.[277] The children "are like figures held in some glass ball" that is "not yet shaken," but which, at any moment, might be reduced to chaos, to the flurry of artificial snowfall. The bridge "almost swaying," and the October sunlight "almost too pure to signify itself," test the limits of what can be said, and what can be intuited by the reader. For what, after all, does it mean "almost" to sway, and "almost" to be too pure? In the first case, the bridge almost swaying is a bridge that, despite all appearances, is *not* moving; the light that is "almost too pure" is, consequently, mottled by some shade. A practitioner of Herrnstein Smith-style relativizing could link these partially-canceled descriptors to the first of the poem's "resting-places," in which one hears "short-lived harmonies" produced contingently, by "polyphonic voices that crisscross." What might, at times, become

[274] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968), 154. Hereafter PC.

[275] PC 153.

[276] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), 156. Hereafter CV.

[277] Bradley Bloch, "What's the use?," *The New Criterion*, Apr. 1989 online, n.p.

intelligible speech tumbles quickly again into noise; the voices are "independent" though "moving all together," in a cloud of phrases the hearer and poet cannot discern.

Similarly, in the second verse-paragraph, the idea that the children will "at once run to meet" "what may come" does not resolve into a future life, a clear direction for each of them—but becomes only the dissolution of "a little swirl of colors," which the poet, in a literalizing concession, argues is already apparent in the "leaves ... blazing and falling farther north." The children's futures are thus irresolvable *exactly* as the children push onward to reach them. Though the poet cheers them for running into this oncoming, indescribable "it," he fears it has been made previously, somewhere in the unseen "north." This chimes with Herrnstein Smith's sense of the "predetermination" in poetic endings, signaled by formal structures (like end-rhymes) or, in this case, by the autumn chill that must be moving southward, into the impossible-to-maintain (but momentarily temperate) October of the children's idyll.[278]

In his review of *Contingencies of Value*, Bloch calls this sort of relativizing discourse "horrifying," "a brave new world [with] no community, no society, only detached, unconnected individuals buying and selling in an inchoate existential marketplace."[279] Yet the competing readings I have ventriloquized—using Kimball's and Logan's standards of emotional continence and privileged recollection, on the one hand; and Herrnstein Smith's model of poetic contingency, on the other—need not be limited to "Children walking home." In fact, a great many of Justice's later poems, including some of those published in *The New Criterion*, might be interrogated as productions both of "good neighborhoods"—in which affective and stylistic restraint are championed—*and* of provisional "resting-places," where impressions and assertions are continuously recreated, rather than "discovered" in a transcendent, preexisting framework of values.

[278] PC 155.

[279] Bloch n.p.

Ostensibly, "On an Anniversary" celebrates the poet-speaker's marriage to his beloved.[280] It begins,

> Thirty years and more go by
> In the blinking of an eye,
> And you are still the same
> As when first you took my name.

He insists that "Time (but as with a glove)" has only "lightly touche[d]" her, and asks that they "stand" together "[w]hile night climbs" their "little hill." But by the final stanza, he adds,

> The estranging years that come,
> Come and go, and we are home.
> Time joins us as a friend,
> And the evening has no end.

Is this a poem of stability—"you are still the same"—or of stultifying endlessness—"the estranging years"? One imagines a reading that takes seriously the assertions of the first three stanzas: the beloved is still the woman the poet adores; she remains beautiful, and time's "touch" has not changed her "peach-pale skin." The couple is poised between the mundane "lights of cars" and the "stars" "overhead." In this view, the dominant tone is indeed one of emotional continence. The "estranging years that come" really do come—the two have had their marital difficulties—but these troubles, just as easily, pass. The pair is joined in a mutual friendship with a personified "time," who has served them ably, and who lays out for them an endless evening of proximity and quiet contentment.

But one can imagine, too, an analysis of contingent valuation, in which the estranging years do not depart the couple but *follow* them home. Here, a jointure in *friendship*, rather than a romantic or intimate coupling, makes for an night of drab companionship and sameness. The poem manages, in this second description, a "resting-place," a sense of an ending, in the ironic assertion that the evening does not end even as the poem *does*, in its perfect rhyme with the word "friend." This, like

[280] In a telephone conversation with CS, William Logan referred to this as Justice's only love poem; CP 249.

the "glove-love" rhyme of the second stanza, yokes the mundane, and sexless, to the purportedly transcendent. It casts a backward-moving doubt over the poem, which has insisted from the beginning that the speaker adores and respects the beloved as dearly now as he did thirty years before. The "estranging years" have come and gone and come again, and will continue to "come and go," precisely as the couple sits at home between the flow of traffic and the night sky, unable to change their relationship's monotonous, muted "evening." The strongest (and farthest-reaching) version of such a reading might pun on "evening" itself, both as a time of day when visible distinctions vanish into shadow, and as a flattening-out (*even-ing*) of passions into the chaste, soporific act of sitting side-by-side.

A tour of Justice's *New Criterion* poems shows just how readily these forking, seemingly opposed readings can proliferate. "A Man of 1794," on the death of Robespierre, concludes with an ambiguous gesture:[281]

> ... Nevertheless,
> Under the soiled jabot, beneath the stained blue coat,
>
> Are the principles nothing has shaken.[282] Rousseau was right,
> Of that he is still convinced: *Man is naturally good!*
>
> And in the moment before the blade eases his pain
> He thinks perhaps of his dog or of the woods at Choissy,
>
> Some thought in any case of a perfectly trivial nature,
> As though already he were possessed of a sweet, indefinite leisure.

So, too, does "Villanelle at Sundown":[283]

> Our painter friend, Lang, might show the whole thing yellow
>
> And not be much off. It's nuance that counts, not color—

[281] CP 250-1.

[282] Cf. the "shaken" snow globe of "Children walking home ...."

[283] CP 215.

As in some late James novel, saved up for the long weekend
And vivid with all the Master simply won't tell you.[284]

How frail our generation has got, how sallow
And pinched with just surviving! We all go off the deep end
Finally, gold beaten thinly out to yellow.
And why this is, I'll never be able to tell you.

And even "Psalm and Lament,"[285] on the death of the poet's mother, makes a final conflation:

Sometimes a sad moon comes and waters the roof tiles.
But the years are gone. There are no more years.

In each case, one asks whether the speaker's utterances are indicators of emotional continence—of nostalgia as privileged recollection—or of contingent valuation. The speaker of "A Man of 1794" might genuinely believe in Rousseau's insistence that man is "naturally good." But Kimball and Logan could see this allusion as saturated with the bitter irony of the guillotine. This renders the "sweet, indefinite leisure," in the last line, the final cowardice of a violent man escaping his private pain, his "broken jaw." Per the political reactionary, the dream of the Revolution has devoured itself, even as its architects hold out for a selfish, inward promise of release. A bemoaning of present circumstance harmonizes, then, with the "sallow and pinched" "frailness" Justice finds, in the villanelle, at the close of the day. "Gold" has been "beaten thinly out to yellow," and the "diminishment" of "those tiny cars," "the whole urban milieu," which the speaker makes out on the horizon, is borne of one's looking-back. The past slips away, sharpness into fuzziness, masterful description into a secret that Henry James "simply won't tell you."

Justice also speaks of a "traffic" that "continues," in "Psalm and Lament," as the "black oblivion" enveloping "a world / Without billboards or yesterdays." His mother's death—her lack of further "years"—becomes the cessation of historical time. There are, the speaker implies, no future

[284] For more on Justice's use of James, as subject and teacher of writing, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[285] CP 209-10.

moments for anyone, only "the long desolation" of the past's "flower-bordered sidewalks." The melancholy in these lines derives, in this analysis, from the realization that things are no longer as they were, that the past reduces to a dot on the horizon, leaving only fleeting images of a previously comprehensible world. There is much the poet insists he wishes to say, but keeps himself from saying, and the poems' predicaments are nearly unbearable. He is conjuring the dead and vanished, and they cannot stay long.

But as with "Children walking home," one can construct a different nostalgia from these lyrics, derived from Herrnstein Smith's relativizing views of poetic closure. A melancholy of contingent valuation is established, here, not in the mourning of a golden past, but in the realization that all pasts are *retroactively* golden, and all futures, therefore, comparatively yellow and sallow, pinched and frail. Justice's speaker does not single out Robespierre for his cowardice and hypocrisy; he argues, instead, that the thoughts of any man in pain "are of a perfectly trivial nature," and that the dying man and the ending poem seek, each in their way, the "sweet, indefinite leisure" of a last line, a last breath, an escape from suffering. In the villanelle, after all, the speaker asserts that "[i]t's the nuance that counts, not color." The poem is a space for fine discriminations, for details, just as a James novel is a dense and "vivid" entertainment for a "long weekend" of immersive reading.[286] The speaker insists he'll "never be able to tell" the reader why gold slips into yellow, and not because he is baffled by the failure of the present to live up to the past. Rather, the speaker recognizes the conveyor-belt-like activity of the poem, and of his own recollection. Both "produce" the past; they make thin yellows from once-vibrant golds, with "distance lend[ing] a value to things, ... false" though it "may be," but offering a "view" that "is hardly cheapened." In "Psalm and Lament," one

[286] The topic of "immersion" in novel-reading is a rich one; see, as one example of the stakes of these arguments, *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, Rachel Ablow, ed. (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2010), esp. Ablow's Chapter 1, "The Feeling of Reading." I take up a different kind of "immersion," in administrative tasks, in Chapter 3.

clock "stops," and another "goes on striking the wrong hours." But "the years are gone," and the poet cannot decide which is more unbearable: that his mother suffered once, and is no more, or that he continues to suffer and can reach no oblivion, and subsequent cessation of suffering, on his own.

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I have paid these poems close attention to show, in one sense, that they really are satisfying examples of aspects of Kimball's and Logan's ideas. Both men, according to the critical practices and prejudgments heretofore described, have their reasons for believing in a diminished present, alongside a past worth conserving. They cite, in today's verse-making, a relativizing unconcern for genius, and a compensatory overconcern with "anthropological" factors (a poet's race, class, and gender). These are problems, accordingly, to be corrected by poets of the proper lineage. For both, that lineage is primary Eliot's, or Eliot's plus that of Stevens and a few other qualified modernists.[287] Justice satisfies their aims on two fronts: he himself is a poet of the Eliot-Stevens tradition,[288] and he is, according to the analyses provided, a poet who looks backward to reclaim what he can, and to bemoan whatever escapes that reclamation. But I have also read these lyrics to show, in a second and to me equally plausible sense, that they are satisfyingly explicated via anti-foundationalist principles.[289] That is, they are poems dramatizing the contingency of descriptors like "past" and "present." They then bind up the process of making poems *end* with the process of making statements seem *true enough*, or valid enough.

Another last line of Justice's, from "Nostalgia of the Lakefronts," throws into high relief the powerful-seeming explanatory value of both these schools of reading: "Nostalgia," he chides,

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[287] See the op. cit. Kimball essay on Eliot, and Logan's "The Sovereign Ghost of Wallace Stevens," *The New Criterion*, Oct. 2009, online, n.p.

[288] Bruce Bawer, "Avec Une Elegance Grave et Lente," CS 10 and 13-4.

[289] As background, I draw on Bromwich's helpful summary of deconstructive practice. See his *Politics By Other Means*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 171-3; hereafter POM. And "Slow Deconstruction," *The London Review of Books*, 15.19, Oct. 7, 1993, online, 22-3.

"comes with the smell of rain, you know." For Kimball and Logan, a yearning for the institutions and structures of the past is as natural as the smell of rain, and the thoughts of childhood it inspires. Nostalgia, by this reasoning, is a *necessary* act of privileging the good of the past over the chaos of the present. But for an acolyte of Herrnstein Smith, this last line possesses the contingent effectiveness of an epigram, a statement she describes as "having maximal closure" and which, therefore, is rhetorically crafted to appear unassailable.[290] In this second model, there is nothing *necessary* about nostalgia following the smell of rain. Instead, there is only an as-it-happens linking of the two: the smell of rain sets off, for the poet, a chain of associations leading to images of a personal past. Future recollections will take up newer sets of associations, but none is to be privileged over another.

At this, the stage is set: Justice is a staunch defender of the unalterable precepts of the past; *or*, Justice throws up his hands at universals, obliterates precept entirely, and assembles poems in which valuation is always already relative. In the first case, he is a *New Criterion* conservative. In the second, he is a card-carrying anti-foundationalist. But I don't think either really captures Justice's manner of doing things. There is a third way—in which the poet's repeated confrontation with the past prompts him neither to valorize it nor to dismiss it as an accretion of accidents. For this last view, I turn to the criticism of David Bromwich—both his readings of poetry and his elaboration of the philosophy of Edmund Burke.

Part Four: Bromwich and Justice

When I argue that Justice's tendencies cannot be reduced in the above binary—to the anthropologizing strands of 1980s critical theory, nor to Kimball's and Logan's disdain for it—I am attempting to employ what the critic David Bromwich calls "tact." He defines this, with some flat-

[290] PC 197.

footedness, as "a competence, supported by an instinct."[291] While nearly all reviewers of Justice mention something of the poet's "tact,"[292] or "decorum,"[293] or "austerity,"[294] they do not use these words in quite the sense Bromwich intends. His special definition, which involves "honoring the complex over the simple, the worth-rereading over the not-worth-rereading,"[295] is characteristic of his own method of making essays, and I will develop its application to Justice's method of making poems.[296] If Bromwich's understanding of tact is hard to summarize pithily, it might have to do with his meta-understanding of the task of criticism. For as he asserts, at the end of an essay entitled "Literature and Theory," other people's opinions, in aesthetics or politics, are "not altogether tractable": ideas "will not do everything we want them to."[297] But, he follows, critics generate "a usable record" of people's concepts and feelings, "outside the mastery of the present," which results in an "unforeseen inheritance" to be examined by later thinkers.[298] An excursus into Bromwich's thought, which is at base a theory of this kind of tact, distinguishes him from the two political sides heretofore discussed, and sheds light on Justice's competences and instincts as a poet.

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[291] David Bromwich, "Literature and Theory," in *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), 265. Hereafter CoI. Although Bromwich does not mention him here, I see this assertion as consonant with Blackmur's idea of criticism-as-such, as demonstrated in "A Critic's Job of Work." See *Selected*, 19ff.

[292] Martin, "Arts of Departure," CS 47.

[293] Ryan, "Flaubert in Florida" CS 21.

[294] Bawer, "Elegance," CS 11.

[295] CoI 265.

[296] I can find only one instance in which Bromwich refers to Justice; he lauds him as an influential teacher. See his article on a biography of Robert Lowell: "'I Myself Am Hell,'" *The New York Times Book Review*, Nov. 20, 1994, online, 3.

[297] CoI 291.

[298] Ibid.

Bromwich has no trouble disentangling his views, first, from those of critics—he refers to Kimball and Kramer by name—who have misinterpreted the conservative tradition.[299] In *Politics by Other Means*, he notes that "[m]odern conservatives since Edmund Burke ... defend the things of the past, and are inclined to respect history," but "history will ratify many of the causes they set out by opposing."[300] Kimball and his comrades forget this lesson. They accept little by way of historical ratification. Theirs is a conservatism of *maximal* reclamation of the past, as they construct it, according to their present tastes. What's produced, all too often, is pigheaded, blinkered, or mean-spirited writing;[301] Bromwich labels Kimball, Kramer, et al., members of a scornful "homeless academy."[302] "They satirize the universities," he argues, but "the tone of the attack" resembles that of "the militant avant-garde ... sometimes direct, sometimes ironic, always hectoring."[303] Edmund Burke, by contrast, is more "morally impressive" than his contemporary champions. As Bromwich puts it matter-of-factly: "They do not deserve him."[304]

Bromwich asserts that the Eliotic idea of culture, which Kramer (and Kimball and Logan) follow, enables a critic "to create new values, and not only to guard the values already in place."[305] The literary right misinterprets Eliot's vision, preferring largely to retain what's come before, and not to champion emergent, challenging work conversant with what's come before.[306] After all, Eliot's capacious poet, or Bloom's "strong" author, is she who rewrites precedent poems by virtue of

[299] POM 55.

[300] Ibid.

[301] CoI 146.

[302] Ibid.

[303] Ibid.

[304] POM 57.

[305] CoI 146.

[306] Ibid.

having written her own.[307] A Kimballesque conservative is only "guided in his judgments by a sequence of implicit equations," by which "taste" transforms into a set of "rules" and "social norms."[308] Kimball's acolytes believe that "a team of impartial custodians" can maintain the culture as they fashion it.[309] Bromwich contends that this fits in awkwardly with American creativity,[310] which he sees as expansive and Emersonian.[311]

So much for the Kimball-Logan side. But in rebutting them, Bromwich does not embrace their ideological opponents. He admits that scholars of academic left could disparage his project, relying on weighty abstractions like tact, or on "archaic sources of authority," or worst of all, on "'old-fashioned belles-lettrism.'"[312] To this charge he responds,

> These are not in fact plausible names for a position that anyone can defend today ... But ... I think something is revealed by the choice of these as dismissive epithets. The professionalists are trying to scour our minds of every ameliorative idea of age, beauty, elegance, delight, and love. I cannot agree to despise these things, however shopworn they appear when translated into French and then translated back into English clichés ...
>
> By a professional scholar, I would like to mean a qualified judge who takes into account the interests of people as formed by something besides their knowable background and projectable likings and resentments. The aim would be to perform a separable function in society—as free as that of a free artist; as distinct as that of an honest judge at law."[313]

Bromwich therefore distances himself from a total relativization of values, which academic "professionalists" practice. He is comfortable, as a consequence, with at least a few sweeping

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[307] CIS 28-30.

[308] CoI 146.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid.

[311] CoI 146-7.

[312] POM xv.

[313] Ibid. xv-xvi.

categories—freedom and separateness, as two examples, which combine in a writer's "choice of inheritance."[314] A person imagines herself outside of (separate from) a social world to better comprehend how she fits (freely) into it.[315] Bromwich sees this process as integral to Burke's philosophy, and as invalidating any elitist caricature of promulgated by *New Criterion*-style reactionaries. For Burke, "the connection" between history and today is personally empowering, because it "does not exist for us unless we choose it ourselves."[316] And this choosing, Bromwich insists, gives rise to an "unresolvable" conflict "between the claims of social obligation and of personal autonomy."[317]

Across his books, Bromwich argues that Burke in philosophy, and Wordsworth in poetry, are two "discoverers" of this way of thinking.[318] I amend his claim only gently, with a nod to anti-foundationalists like Rorty, Fish, and Herrnstein Smith, when I argue instead that they are "co-creators" of it.[319] Bromwich's next sentence justifies this alteration, when he writes that any compromise between social demands and individual freedom is "bound to be provisional."[320] Bromwich admits to no absolute primacy of tradition, nor to a perfectly relative scale of values arising only accidentally, according to a person's immediate wants and needs. As a third option, he looks on as some writers, more effectively than others, come to terms with their past deeds, and with other deeds attributable to the groups of which they're members.[321] He views this not as a fixed

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[314] CoI xii-xiii.

[315] CoI xii.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

[318] Ibid.

[319] Ibid.

[320] See discussion of Rorty's CIS, above.

[321] Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998), 72. Hereafter DbM.

but as a continually refreshing discourse, a fluctuation within psyches and between thinkers of different epochs. For these writers, relations between past and present societies—and between past and present selves—are built and honed, rather than uncovered as diminutions, in which the new is a poor substitute for the old.[322]

Bromwich acknowledges that many, including Samuel Huntington, see a "dislike of abstraction and metaphysics" as a constitutive feature of Burke's thought.[323] But Bromwich refines this idea, arguing that Burke accepted some "abstract ideals unconditionally," since people are sometimes "defined by feelings that are customary" and "reasonless."[324] Humans accounting honestly for their motives—their rationalizations, their impulses toward self-aggrandizement—will inevitably stumble on their unexamined presuppositions alongside more worked-out reasoning.[325] The result, for those who care to entertain it, is a thoroughgoing moral humility. Burke's solutions to quandaries of living are not provisional in *all* their principles; they are instead partway, and thus doubly, provisional, consisting of some absolute truths, some half-formed intuitions, and sundry methodological resting-places. As a result, Burke remains hard to score politically. Bromwich appreciates that Burke's aesthetic and political writings are mottled, qualified, rough-and-ready, and responsive to conditions,[326] and he notes that different commentators call Burke a "conservative, a Whig, a liberal, and a Tory radical."[327] For Bromwich, Burke is not so much an idiosyncratic conservative (although we could describe him this way, with some dissatisfaction) as he is "a moral

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[322] CoI 159.

[323] Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review*, 51.2, Jun. 1957, 457.

[324] Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014), 11. Hereafter Burke.

[325] Burke 11.

[326] Ibid. 12.

[327] Ibid. 16.

psychologist."[328] This, because he is invested in the diagnosis and treatment of the predicaments in which persons and societies find themselves—as they choose between, and discard portions of, their magpie cultural inheritances.[329]

Wordsworth, too, is a moral psychologist in Bromwich's rendering. (So is Bromwich; and so, I will argue in the next sub-section, is Justice.) Bromwich's essay on Wordsworth and the French Revolution[330] makes plain the applications of these ideas: of the critic as a competent, instinctive judge of moral predicaments in texts, and of the poet as a stager and describer of these predicaments. Bromwich links Wordsworth historically to Burke, indicating that the poet read the "Preface to Brissot's Address to his Constituents" and insisted he was a friend of a Girondin found in its pages.[331] But Bromwich argues that Wordsworth's politics were far from stable and "moderate," as indeed the politics of the Girondins were occasionally more bellicose, more radical, than those of Robespierre and the Jacobins.[332] Nevertheless, Bromwich sees Wordsworth's task, in poems like "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, as that of the "integration" of previously incommensurable-seeming lives.[333] In the former poem, it is the hermit, mentioned at the close of the first verse-paragraph, who presents the keenest integrative challenge to the poet.[334] In Burke, Bromwich identifies as congruent the religious celibate, the miner, and the stage actor: all carry out

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[328] Ibid. 15-6.

[329] Ibid. 15-7.

[330] DbM, Chapter 3: "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey,'" 69ff.

[331] Ibid. 82.

[332] Ibid.

[333] DbM 81. Stephanie Burt has remarked on Bromwich's views of Wordsworth, seeing this "sympathy" as a wellspring, too, for Randall Jarrell's poetry, in *Randall Jarrell and His Age* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 28-9.

[334] DbM 81.

their social roles, and Burke invites sensitive readers to incorporate these persons, their actions and inactions, into their own pictures of interconnected experience.[335]

Bromwich does not see Wordsworth's political platform, such that it can be stated, as identical to Burke's.[336] No poet's could be; Burke's moral psychologizing asks for too personal a synthesis of private and public life to be entirely shareable between individuals. But he identifies a common source for their moral imaginations:[337] a desire to take note of, in Burke's rendering, those "'things particularly suited to a man who has *long views*,'" who makes plans that "'require time in fashioning'" and that "'propose duration when they are accomplished.'"'[338] Bromwich identifies Wordsworth as a major poet of "long views."[339] At the close of his essay on the French Revolution, he asserts that Wordsworth desired two things: "to survive ... as the individual and reflective mind he had already become," and "to be recognized as a person of some good to his society."[340] Wordsworth does so, in this account, by insisting that his sister depends on him, materially and emotionally; "Tintern Abbey" rests on this, and on the twinned presumption that Dorothy will remain nearby, to comfort her brother and hear his words.[341] Bromwich returns to the theme at the close of *Disowned by Memory*, with a meditation on the poet's jointure of self and society:

> [His] poems *invent a new sympathy*—a new relation among the phenomena of pleasure. ... [t]he line of individual purpose, which makes the flow of emotion communicable within a single life, is for Wordsworth a matter of experience and not just belief. ... This is the nonmystical sense of the doctrine of "two consciousness"; *one stands in the*

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[335] Ibid. 80-2.

[336] Ibid. 82-3.

[337] The phrase is Bromwich's: see *Moral Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 3-39. Hereafter MI.

[338] DbM 79.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Ibid. 91.

[341] Ibid. 90-1.

> *presence of something alien in one's own life*. The idea of self-trust then appears exactly as compelling as the idea of solidarity with friends or strangers. ... Only where each becomes, at most, "a memory to himself," may each also be, though distantly, an intimation to others."[342]

In this rendering, the poet "of long views" is that person whose writing "invents a new sympathy," which in consequence *others* the self and allows for common cause with fellow persons. The two consciousnesses a poet must develop are nonmystical because they are non-theoretical. They require not the invention, in language, of a deity or principle to which one is responsible, but of a self taking solace in society. One must be brave enough to approach one's created selves, and one's social world, with clarity; one must be humble enough to accept them, each in their overwhelming complexity. Bromwich's notion of the individual and the social, in Wordsworth, thus harmonizes with a "maxim" of Burke's, as Bromwich describes it: "that no generation has the right to act as if it were the last," or the first, "generation on earth."[343] A person who becomes a "memory to herself" is one more capable of listening to, and writing herself into, the imagined lives of those she has loved, sparred with, or read about.

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I turn now to two poems of Justice's, which, I believe, bear out the implications of Bromwich's Burke-derived moral psychology. One, "Ralph," was published in *The New Criterion*, and the other, "Childhood," appears at the end of the 1979 *Selected Poems*.[344] "Ralph," subtitled "A Love Story," is an interpolated narrative of a presumed real-life relation of Justice's,[345] who had a tryst with a woman only to abandon her, and their child, and who lived out his days in loneliness and psychic pain. The

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[342] Ibid. 174.

[343] POM 160.

[344] CP 270-2; 189-91.

[345] There is circumstantial evidence for this in the Justice childhood scrapbooks; as-yet uncategorized, though viewable, with the Delaware papers.

latter cites, at its close, the poets of Justice's "mythical childhood," and first in this list is Wordsworth.[346] It is a lyric of the writing self, and of the development of a child's imagination—but it is never so manifestly Wordsworthian as when viewed from Bromwich's perspective.

The poet notes, in a header, that "Childhood" is set in 1930s Miami. It opens with the speaker spinning a globe, whose "doomed republics pass" in a "blur of colors" reminiscent of that blur into which the children, in their "good neighborhood," rush. Abounding are representations and comparisons of scale, from smallest to largest: the "Katzenjammers" cartoons on which his grandfather "catch[es] the stray curls of citrus from his knife"; "pilgrim ants / Eternally bearing incommensurate crumbs / Past slippered feet"; "a ceiling" in a movie house "so theatrical / Its stars seem more aloof than the real stars." The setting sun becomes a "smoky rose of oblivion," blooming and hanging, and it is reduced to a reflection on the young man's knee. "Counters of spectacles" in the arcades and shopping plazas give "new perspectives ... through strange lenses," and the poet's "ghostly image" is caught "skimming across nude mannequins" in "a shop window." At the end Justice expands on a scene, between the city and the slightly-tamed country beyond it:

> How thin the grass looks of the new years—
> And everywhere
> The fine sand burning into the bare heels
> With which I learn to crush, going home,
> The giant sandspurs of the vacant lots.
> Iridescences of mosquito hawks
> Glimmer above brief puddles filled with skies,
> Tropical and changeless. And sometimes,
> Where the city halts, the cracked sidewalks
> Lead to a coral archway still spanning
> The entrance to some wilderness of palmetto—
>
> Forlorn suburbs, but with golden names!

It would be one thing to argue that Justice, in "Childhood," longs for the past, that he recalls fondly "the warm cashews in cool arcades." It would be another to argue that the "counters of spectacles"

[346] The others are: Rimbaud, Rilke, Hart Crane, and Alberti; CP 191.

are, for the poet, windows into the indeterminacy of his recollections, of scenes encountered hazily in youth—that the "strange lenses" and distorting "mirrors, tilting" are not fascinating addenda to his experience but are constitutive of it. In this latter reading, the suburbs become a site of confusion, deracination, small terror—"first embarrassments." And in the former, "forlorn suburbs" "with golden names" are born of nostalgia as privileged recollection, wherein "certain solitudes" of a child's days are preferable to the complex, riper solitudes and confusions of adult life. But even the most robust fleshing-out of either side cannot capture what Bromwich's moral psychology puts at its center: the creation of a peculiar poetic tone—a choice of inheritance in the haecceity of Justice's style.

For what do we make of the exclamation point in the last monostich? Perhaps Justice laments, and ironizes his lamentation, of the suburbs, whose names set aesthetic standards the partially pre-fabricated developments never can attain. Perhaps the "golden names" are recompense for the mundaneness of sandspurs and barber shops. But I see this final exclamation as fundamentally in keeping with the "long view" Bromwich asserts in Burke and Wordsworth. Justice's Miami had its antecedents and will have its descendants. In locating himself among the small, odd businesses of his hometown, Justice-as-young-man attempts a connection with others and an estrangement of the self—as Rimbaud, cited in the poem's epigraph, demands.[347] To become a "memory to himself," Justice recalls days gone by; but to become an "intimation to others," he refuses either to reject entirely or to embrace, in nostalgic complacency, a world that will not come again. In his quiet self-fashioning,[348] as he "sit[s] nodding, among kin, happily ignored," Justice is reminded of the "coral archway" between the "city" and "some wilderness of palmetto." There, new

[347] Arthur Rimbaud, Letter to Paul Demeny, *Rimbaud Complete*, trans. Wyatt Mason (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 572.

[348] The term is Stephen Greenblatt's; see *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984).

families move into new houses, from which their children fan out through half-wild suburbia, beginning the work of imagining themselves.[349]

If "Childhood" presents the negotiation of self-creation and social communion as a dreamy, indeterminate one, "Ralph: A Love Story" offers a bleaker portrait. Ralph is "at seventeen the first projectionist" of the first cinema in Moultrie, Georgia. He enjoys "the flickering images on the screen" but, "given his luck," he knew that, one day, something would force him to leave town. Ralph and Margot, the owner's daughter, have an affair, and Margot is pregnant; Ralph makes for the railroad and, as the speaker reports, "he watched with a certain nostalgia / The sparse pale farmlights passing from his life / And he understood nothing, only that he was young." Ralph goes into the navy, thinking occasionally of Margot, and he reads billet-doux she has sent his mother during his absence. "But he could not go back to it," the speaker argues, "he could not." Even with other women he is reminded of Margot and his unseen child:

> And when it *was* all finished for him, at the end,
> In the small bedroom of his sister's house,
> Surrounded by his shelves of paperbacks—
> Westerns mostly, and a few private-eyes—
> Lying there on the single bed, half gone
> On Echo Springs, he could not call it back.
> Or if it came back it was in the form
> Of images in the dark, shifting and flashing,
> Badly projected, spooling out crazily
> In darkness, in a little room, and he
> Could not control it. It was like dying.
> No, it *was* dying, and he let it go.

This, notably, is Wordsworth's personal and emotional predicament during the Revolution—to say nothing of the trauma his lover and child suffer—and Bromwich sees some of the "escape" of "Tintern Abbey" as a mixture of expiation and self-justification, felt upon leaving the two in

[349] See CIS, op. cit.

France.[350] Where the young Justice finds reflections of his face in "Childhood," Ralph merges the phantasms of the film screen with quickened images of his beloved and "the great romance his life would know." Ralph is a man with only a limited "long view," seeing himself in a chain of sexual encounters, of jobs from which he derives no satisfaction. And he is not a writer but a consumer of books, and these dime-store fare, which for him are interchangeable diversions and poor imitations of his preferred escape, the movie theater. Ralph understands that generations came before him and others will follow,[351] but he *finds* himself with Margot, then running away, then in the navy. He *makes* no interventions into his life. If he can become no memory to himself, he is less an intimation to others than a real, and sorely-felt, absence, a non-recipient of letters on which Margot has scribbled "hearts, some broken, pierced by arrows."

The tone of "Childhood" derives from the "invention of a new sympathy" between the poet and his forlorn suburbs; it is compounded of the complexities of youthful self-creation, and of the navigation of a world in which others are also self-fashioning, sometimes in mysterious, indefinable ways. The tone of "Ralph," by contrast, is that of the *failure* to invent a self and imagine a social world. Ralph has no narrativized, revisable "I" toward which to be other, and no fellow person with whom to build a sustained emotional colloquy.

This is the source of Justice's qualification in the final couplet: that Ralph does not simply feel like dying, but that he really *is* dying. The "it" that Ralph lets go, in the final sentence, resembles the "it" the children of the good neighborhood pursue: the dual consciousness of an always-refashionable self and an ever-changing set of social obligations in which that self is forged. The past in Justice is not the arbiter of present value, nor merely another data-point in a stream of

[350] DbM 73.

[351] See also Justice's poem "Hell" (CP 214), which ends: "'Say this: / I sought the immortal word.' / So saying he went on / To join those who preceded him; / and there were those that followed."

information. It is, simply, a moment in which an inheritance is chosen or not chosen. If one actively makes this choice, as in "Childhood" a litany of poet's names, suburban shops, and archways of coral leading to emptiness can be joined, revised, reconsidered. If a speaker refuses it, as in "Ralph," he has ceased to exist as a self-creator and a subject of others' intimations. He has let himself go.

Part Five: Extensions—Wilbur and Kenyon

I conclude this chapter with two more poets who "invent new sympathies," and who provide further evidence of the usefulness of the Burke-Bromwich line of thinking. I introduce them here not to speak exhaustively of their poems. Rather, I demonstrate how a focus on "moral psychology" (as opposed to, say, form or the line) can yield fresh insights into other post-war writers who, as Justice shows us, might otherwise fit uneasily into the traditional-experimental paradigm.[352] Jane Kenyon and Richard Wilbur are not experimental writers—they are not members of the academic, left-leaning avant-garde. But they are not quite traditionalists, either. Kenyon's work has been called "crystalline"[353] or "simple,"[354] and Wilbur's lyrics have been praised for their formal accomplishment.[355] Both have written, at times, about their changeable relationship to the spiritual, especially a species of Christian thinking and practice.[356] Kenyon's poems appeared frequently in *The New Criterion*, alongside those of her husband, until the late 1980s; she died in 1995. Richard Wilbur,

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[352] For a compelling discussion of the relationship between conservative politics and the New Formalism, see Thomas B. Byers, "The Closing of the American Line: Expansive Poetry and Ideology," *Contemporary Literature*, 33.2, Summer 1992, 396-415. Byers states unequivocally that "it is wishful thinking to maintain that sending poems" to *The New Criterion* "is politically neutral" (413).

[353] John H. Timmerman, *Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 56.

[354] Mike Pride, "The Abiding Presence of Jane Kenyon," *The Sewanee Review*, 113.3, Summer 2005, 459.

[355] William Baer, "Richard Wilbur," in *Fourteen on Form: Conversations with Poets* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004), 3-4.

[356] See Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, "Settling into the Light: The Ethics of Grace in the Poetry of Jane Kenyon," in *Bright Unequivocal Eye: Poems, Papers, and Remembrances from the First Jane Kenyon Conference,* ed. Bert G. Hornback (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 87-97. See also John B. Hougen, "Intuitions of the Spirit in an Imperfect World," *Ecstasy within Discipline: The Poetry of Richard Wilbur* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 25-55.

on the contrary, was never published in that magazine, although his verse seems superficially to mesh perfectly with its aesthetic principles.[357] Like Justice, Wilbur and Kenyon were not political conservatives. James Longenbach has explained the complexity of Wilbur's self-identifications, as a younger man;[358] Kenyon's politics tend toward the local and communitarian, inflected by particularities of rugged New Hampshire.[359] But Wilbur and Kenyon *look like*, *sound like*, *write like* poetic traditionalists, in the way that Justice did, and it is not difficult to understand why *The New Criterion* might find something satisfyingly rearward-facing, affirming of the narrowly common-sensical, in Kenyon's work. She focuses on baseball, church, mountains, spiders; she reads Keats and Dickinson with devotion; the poems, though very rarely rhyming, occur in a stately, measured free verse that Justice might greet with approval.[360] Similarly, in a typical essay on Richard Wilbur, reference is made to his being out-of-step with postmodern American literary tastes.[361] His poems were composed slowly, buffed to a high sheen: they take the "October Maples" in Portland and Roman railway stations for their subjects.[362]

But I think neither Kenyon nor Wilbur tells us anything useful about the self-reinforcing cultural binary of the conservatives and the avant-gardists, which so obsess Kimball, Logan, Yezzi, and others, at *The New Criterion* and beyond, and which Donald Justice wished to move beyond.[363] I *do* think, however, that Kenyon and Wilbur admit to conserving traditions in the Burke-Bromwich

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[357] For a nuanced analysis of Wilbur and his early reception, see Edward Brunner, "The Notorious Example of Richard Wilbur," *Cold War Poetry* (Urbana and Chicago: UP of Illinois, 2001), 15-38.

[358] James Longenbach, *Modern Poetry After Modernism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 74-5.

[359] Pride 461-2

[360] See "The Free-Verse Line in Stevens," O 13-38.

[361] See Brunner 35.

[362] See *The Poems of Richard Wilbur* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1987), 24, 109.

[363] "Interview with Dana Gioia," CS 200.

sense. They look backward, to previous generations, *and* forward to those that will come—not via small gestures but as a dominant, organizing principle throughout their oeuvres. Their poems are structured on this communion, and on the related drama, as in "Childhood" and "Ralph," of removing oneself from accustomed patterns of thought, and of imagining that self in a sustained discursive relationship with others.

As Mike Pride notes of Kenyon in *The Sewanee Review*, "For all her problems with manic depression and her need for solitude to write poetry, she thrived on country life," meaning in this case on the opportunities for interpersonal connection available in small towns and villages.[364] Elsewhere, in a letter to a friend, Kenyon argued that a just-completed poem of hers was "personal, and painful. There's very little invention in it. It is memory and reportage."[365] These twinned ideas—of small-town selves and social groups, and the journalistic act of writing poetry of the present—crop up repeatedly across her corpus. Sometimes, Kenyon's verse reads like an anthropological account of the residents of New Hampshire.[366] In "American Triptych," as one example, she notes,

> Cousins arrive like themes and variations.
> Ansel leans on the counter,
> remembering other late spring snows,
> the blue snow of '32:
> Yes, it *was*, it was *blue*.
> Forrest comes and goes quickly with a length of stovepipe, telling
> about the neighbors' chimney fire.[367]

In the third section of this poem, subtitled "Potluck at the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church," Kenyon observes in prose from the car, after her husband's (Donald Hall's) poetry reading: "On the way home we pass the white clapboard faces of the library and town hall, luminous in the moonlight, and

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[364] Pride 461.

[365] Mattison 17.

[366] For Bromwich on such "anthropologies," see CoI 17; Pride 461-2.

[367] Jane Kenyon, *Collected Poems* (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2005), 53-6. Hereafter JKCP.

I remember the first time I ever voted—in a township hall in Michigan." She recalls, "I found myself among people trying to live ordered lives. ... And again I am struck with love for the Republic." In "The Painters," hired hands prepare for the coming winter at the Hall-Kenyon home at Eagle Pond Farm.[368] They "have cut the vines / from the shutters / and scraped / the clapboards clean, and now / their heads appear all day / in all the windows ...." The poem ends without epiphany, arguing only that they "squint / against the light, and lay on / the thick white paint," while "a few wasps levitate / near the vestige of a nest." Following immediately in the collection *The Boat of Quiet Hours* (1986), "Back from the City"[369] has the poet-speaker describing a recent visit to the Cloisters museum in New York, with an admission, emotionally uninflected, that Kenyon later "turned [her] back" on a man "asking for 'a quarter for someone / down on his luck.'" Kenyon turns to more powerful self-recrimination, as the speaker quotes a passage from the Gospels, in which Christ asks a disciple, "'Do you love me?'" and, when the disciple answers yes, Christ replies that he must "feed" the "sheep" of Christ's flock.[370]

As these early lyrics indicate, Kenyon imagines a range of emotional and intellectual responses to the problems of living with other people. They are not, of course, unique in this regard—one finds, for example, in Kenyon's beloved Keats a similar insistence, at whatever the cost[371]—but in Kenyon's work the injunction to "invent a new sympathy" is notable for its foregrounding, its starkness at the center of poems. Kenyon efficiently pares away other concerns,[372]

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[368] JKCP 66.

[369] JKCP 67.

[370] See John 21.

[371] Kenyon uses a passage from *Endymion*, Book I, as the epigraph to *The Boat of Quiet Hours*; JKCP 59. See also Mattison 22-3.

[372] See Robert Spirko, "Affective Disorders: The Treatment of Emotion in Jane Kenyon's Poetry," *Bright Unequivocal Eye*, 123.

leaving lines with very little sonic adornment, and with closely proximate scenes of the poet's interior life—worried, distracted, annoyed—and depictions of other people's behaviors. The men work while Kenyon is inside, presumably reading or writing; Kenyon's guilt is reframed against the Gospel requirement to care for another with at least as much energy as one devotes to the self. Occasionally, as in "Main Street, Tilton, New Hampshire," Kenyon wonders if the attribution of outsized emotions to the characters of a New England life isn't somehow a distortion of those characters' interiorities:[373]

> A woman sat
> in the cab, dabbing her face
> with a tissue. She might have been weeping,
> but it was hot and still,
> and maybe she wasn't weeping at all.
>
> Through time and space we came
> to Main Street—three days before
> Labor Day, 1984, 4:47 in the afternoon;
> and then that moment passed, displaced
> by others equally equivocal.

Kenyon admits these are equivocal moments and emotions that, even to the accustomed observer, could be responses to an argument or to the sweltering weather. And she transforms this flatness of sentiment—in which psychological stakes can fluctuate between the extreme and the mundane—in the last of "Three Songs at the End of Summer," in which she writes,

> In my childhood
> I stood under a dripping oak,
> while autumnal fog eddied around my feet,
> waiting for the school bus
> with a dread that took my breath away.
> ...
> I had the new books—words, numbers,
> and operations with numbers I did not
> comprehend—and crayons, unspoiled
> by use, in a blue canvas satchel
> with red leather straps.

[373] Mattison 19; JKCP 88.

Spruce, inadequate, and alien
I stood at the side of the road.
It was the only life I had.[374]

As in "Childhood," the drama of the young self is, at once, the horror of all this newness—that which the speaker "did not comprehend"—and the internalized reminder that, for children, *all* is imagination and freedom, with low stakes and empty hours: a pre-time before entry into the adult world. Inadequate, somehow, to everything around her, even "the complex organic scent" of the "damp dirt road," and "alien" to her peers and teachers, Kenyon has led herself to this reminiscence from the previous song. There, "the cicada's dry monotony breaks over" her, and "[t]he days are bright / and free, bright and free," though she asks why she has spent the day crying "for an hour / with [her] whole / body, the way babies cry." This same flattening affect Kenyon sees in the water-skiers at the camp nearby, who have learned the tricks of activity ("Relax! Relax!")—"or they haven't."[375]

In Kenyon's "long view," there is the anguish of major depression and episodes of mania, and the equivocal-seeming anguish of living with others who might not see that pain, and who in certainty have their own pains, rendered in language or not. What is to be done about a husband's (a stranger's, a child's) heartbreak? And yet, how can one go on as though it didn't exist? Kenyon's "alien" feeling, in the last of the "Three Songs," echoes Bromwich's description of Wordsworth, when he creates, and reports on, "the presence of something alien in [his] own life." And she addresses these networks of pain-for-the-self and pain-for-others at greatest length in "Having It Out with Melancholy," a poem her colleague Mike Pride considered an equivocal breakthrough. For

[374] JKCP 143-4.

[375] Ibid.

it brought Kenyon legions of admirers with whom, Kenyon believed, she was now obligated to discuss her mental illness.[376]

In the first section, Kenyon blames her depression for having taught her "to exist without gratitude": "You have ruined my manners toward God," she says. She notes that she wants to "go to bed as soon after dinner / as seems adult" "in order to push away / from the massive pain in sleep's / frail wicker coracle." She is "a piece of burned meat" in her own clothing; she takes a half-dozen medicines, reaching a precarious plateau with MAO inhibitors. But she finds some solace, too, on other days. The dog wakes her, "put his head on [her] foot." In the fifth section, she states:

> ... I was a speck of light in the great
> river of light that undulates through time.
>
> I was floating with the whole
> human family. We were all colors—those
> who are living now, those who have died,
> those who are not yet born. For a few
>
> moments I floated, completely calm,
> and I no longer hated having to exist.

And in the ninth and final section, Kenyon realizes, with the aid of the drug Nardil, that she is "overcome // by ordinary contentment." She asks herself how she could have suffered for so long, then ends with the image of the "swiftly / beating heart" of a wood thrush "singing in the great maples," along with "its bright, unequivocal eye." Kenyon thus narrates her veering from illness into wellness and back again, longing throughout for the eye of the wood thrush, which seems so steady, so unambiguously calm. The thought of a great coalescing of spirits, as in the fifth section, is presented without irony and, simultaneously, without credulity, for Kenyon sees that she has been plucked from "the glowing stream" by the same sadness that keeps her awake at night, that pulls her from her "marriage and her friends." Importantly, Kenyon in the final section sees that her

[376] Pride 460. JKCP 231-5.

contentment is *ordinary*, neither wild nor compensatory; it does not make up for the pain "all [her] life until this moment." During episodes of mania and dejection, Kenyon is other to herself and fused utterly with her pain. It is the work of the poem to retain a critical purchase on the happy as well as on the dismal times, while recognizing that the "bile of desolation" need not always "press into every pore," suffusing her body with the imagined pollution of her mind. Kenyon invents a new sympathy, directed even to her versions of self she finds most disappointing, most repugnant—those trapped in the endlessly-ramifying equivocations of a major depression, during which she "can't sleep" yet "does nothing but sleep."

"Having It Out with Melancholy," in its assiduous work of self-examination, complements that of a major late poem, "At the IGA: Franklin, New Hampshire."[377] Here, Kenyon trains her long view on the lives of a fictional woman, whose "husband worked felling trees / for the mill, hurting himself badly / from time to time." The family has three children, and the speaker closes with this counterfactual, followed by a report on the circumstances of her life:

> Things would have been different
> if I hadn't let Bob climb on top of me
> for ninety seconds in 1979.
> It was raining lightly in the state park
> and so we were alone. [...]
> In ninety seconds we made this life—
>
> a trailer on a windy hill, dangerous jobs
> in the woods or night work at the packing plant;
> Roy, Kimberly, Bobby; too much in the hamper,
> never enough in the bank.

Kenyon sends a dispatch from Franklin, reversing perspectives with the woman in front of her in the checkout line. Her "inventions" are limited only to the work the speaker and her husband do, and their daily trials. No conclusions are reached; the speaker thinks "how it would be / to change lives with someone," as Kenyon does, yet neither the poet's nor her character's counterfactuals—

[377] JKCP 305-6.

their exchanged preoccupations—yields insight, per se, into the value of those lives and those decisions. There is, simply, "an end to it," as there was to a Hanover dinner party, in an earlier poem, during which "no one ... was entirely at ease."

It is tempting to read into Kenyon's poetry her suffering, physical and psychological, and her death of leukemia after fifteen months' illness. These are components of her life's story, elements of her self, and they become, throughout her *Collected Poems*, the subjects of lyrics. But the most persistent discomfort in her work is that slight "unease" in "After the Dinner Party," the quick pang of an imagined life different from one's harried present.[378] In Kenyon there is the "equally equivocal" quality of mundane action—visits to the dime store; payments to workmen removing shingles from the lawn—and the unequivocal hardness of interactions with birds and trees and flowers, or with deaths and the ends of things. Between these two are the incremental, uneasy but necessary movements toward or away from oneself, and toward and away from other people—lovers and friends and strangers seen only fleetingly, all "undulat[ing] through time."

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Even for those who do not know Richard Wilbur and his poems, Randall Jarrell's critique is familiar:[379] "Mr. Wilbur never goes too far, but he never goes far enough."[380] If an unsatisfying and infelicitous introduction to the poems, it is also a useful description of potentially traditional-seeming work, designed not to inflame, rather to satisfy in its technical command, as critics argued Justice's did.[381] Like Kenyon, however, Wilbur is a poet who wishes to other the self, to find himself

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[378] JKCP 156-7.

[379] See Lew Powell, who reprints William H. Pritchard, reviewing Robert and Mary Bagg's *Let Us Watch Richard Wilbur: A Biographical Study* (2017), in *Commonweal*. Aug. 27, 2017. "Randall Jarrell stung Richard Wilbur with 'that damn review.'" Nov. 14, 2017. *North Carolina Miscellany*. Online. n.p.

[380] Hougen 4, reprinting Jarrell. *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Vintage, 1953), 227-30.

[381] Mezey, CS 3-6.

in others, and to invent new sympathies between his present and those historical pasts to which he has access. Unlike Kenyon, Wilbur's is a rich diction and a poetry of nonces, often in metrically-complex forms.

"The Fourth of July,"[382] from *The Mind-Reader* (1976), consists of five stanzas in eleven lines. The first tells of "Liddell, the Oxford lexicographer," who, in the high days of summer, has tea with his three daughters and an "oarsman," Mr. Dodgson. They discuss grammar and the nature of the universe. In the second, Wilbur writes of General Grant, who, toward the end of the Civil War, sought to bring the Rebels to surrender. In the third, he describes Alice, "who in the termless wood / Lacked words to thank the shade in which she stood," and in the fourth, he speaks of the "reaches of" Carolus Linneaus's "branchy thought," as he went about naming all the living things of the earth, carrying out the first taxonomic project begun by Adam. It is not until the final section, however, when these far-ranging scenes—these longest of long views—coalesce:

> ... Copernicus, who when
> His vision leapt into the solar disc
> And set the earth to wheeling, waited then
> To see what slate or quadrant might exact,
> Not hesitant to risk
> His dream-stuff in the fitting rooms of fact;
> And honor to these States,
> Which come to see that black men too are men,
> Beginning, after troubled sleep, debates,
> Great bloodshed, and a century's delay,
> To mean what once we said upon this day.

The poem's sweep overflows the stanzas that are meant to contain it. Wilbur himself is "not hesitant to risk / His dream-stuff in the fitting-rooms of fact," and he sees the progress of knowledge in the humanistic sciences, the study of the heavens, the prosecution of war, the naming of plants, and the incremental assurance of civil rights. It is difficult to imagine a poem of fifty-five lines that goes

[382] Wilbur, "The Fourth of July." *New and Collected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), 69-70. Hereafter WNCP.

significantly *farther* than this; yet it is Wilbur's final litany, of "troubled sleep, debates, / Great bloodshed, and a century's delay" that articulates the necessity of a vast moral psychology, a new sympathy, and discursive continuity, between advancements in science and advancements in equitable political arrangements of human beings. Like Justice and Kenyon, Wilbur devotes his considerable craft to the "integration" of other's histories into his own, and to the complementary de-stabilizing of the self that might otherwise seem the placid center of the poems.

There are similar works throughout the oeuvre. In "The Prisoner of Zenda,"[383] a piece of light verse, Wilbur puts himself in the mind of the audience, asking, when Stewart Grander has "renounc[ed] his co-star, / Deborah Kerr": "Must it be so? / Why can't they have their cake / And eat it, for heaven's sake? / *Please let them have it both ways*." Later in his *Collected Poems*, in the second of two "Flippancies,"[384] he goes on in a comic mode, echoing Kenyon's mixed feelings about her own poetic reportage, and coupling it with sharp satire. Addressing would-be poets, Wilbur writes, "If fictive music fails your lyre, confess— / Though not, of course, to any happiness." Wilbur tosses out a few subjects a budding "Confessional" poet might take up, including "... Nixon on the TV news, / God's death, the memory of your rocking-horse, / Entropy, housework, Buchenwald, divorce." And he ends the poem epigrammatically, asserting that, despite the discordances between these objects, thoughts, and registers, "All hangs together if you take it hard."

Though Wilbur speaks with announced "flippancy" about the (caricatured) Confessional impulse for self-revelation, he nevertheless manages to make his ideas "hang together" after all. Wilbur's send-up—of Lowell's or Plath's penchant for "taking it hard"—cannot wash away the profounder sense in which Wilbur's actual poetic jointures, of self and the social world, occur. He objects to a particular high seriousness of tone, but not to the importance of this yoking-together of

[383] WNCP 93.

[384] WNCP 90.

divergent manners of being. All hangs together, in his poetry, if the poet makes it so, "setting" his idiosyncratic "world to wheeling." For Wilbur, the only way to "mean what once we said," about our own lives and about the history of the American political experiment, is to create new ways of thinking and saying it.[385]

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This last sentiment, I believe, captures most succinctly what this paper has argued for at length. Some critics might see (and have seen), in Justice, Kenyon, and Wilbur, varieties of deference to established tastes or to literary tradition. But far more persuasive, in these authors, are their *long views*, by which new descriptions of selves and of others are tested, negotiated, and rendered in language. These three poets differ substantially in their tones and preoccupations, but they are most helpfully classified as conservative when it's a Bromwich-Burkean conception of moral psychologizing on which one relies. This idea—of the poet as mediator and translator between persons, groups, and lineages—is a powerful rejoinder to what otherwise appears a stale schematic: of universalist versus hermeneutically-relativist poetries, cultural guardians versus artistic insurgents, nostalgists versus obscurantists.

I consider a final poem of Wilbur's, to offer again how one might disrupt these otherwise infrangible-seeming binaries. In "Running,"[386] Wilbur begins:

> What were we playing? Was it prisoner's base?
> I ran with whacking keds
> Down the cart-road past Rickard's place ...

He elaborates the full course of his adventure on foot, and ends the section with a simple assertion of his childhood glee: "Thinking of happiness," he says, he conjures this scene. In the next section,

[385] CIS 48.

[386] WNCP 137-9.

entitled "Patriots Day: Wellesley, Massachusetts," Wilbur moves on, to a display of mature athleticism winding through the Boston suburbs:

> We waited for the marathon to pass,
>
> We fathers and our little sons, let out
> Of school and office to be put to shame.
> Now from the street-side someone raised a shout,
> And into view the first small runners came. [...]
>
> Legs driving, fists at port, clenched faces, men,
> And in amongst them, stamping on the sun,
> Our champion Kelley, who would win again,
> Rocked in his will, at rest within his run.

And in the third, "Dodwells Road: Cummington, Massachusetts," he concludes:

> Boy-shouts reach me, and barking.
> What is the thing which men will not surrender?
> It is what they have never had, I think,
> Or missed in its true season,
>
> So that their thoughts turn in
> At the same roadhouse nightly, the same cloister,
> The wild mouth of the same brave river
> Never now to be charted.
>
> You, whoever you are,
> If you want to walk with me you must step lively.
> I run, too, when the mood offers,
> Though the god of that has left me.
>
> But why in the hell spoil it?
> I make a clean gift of my young running
> To the two boys who break into view,
> Hurdling the rocks and racing,
>
> Their dog dodging before them
> This way and that, his yaps flushing a pheasant
> Who lifts now from the blustery grass
> Flying full tilt already.

Throughout the first part of the poem, Wilbur isolates running as *the* activity binding his childhood together—it is that which he can, and must, do alone, but that which he also does happily among others, careering in the company of friends. By the second section, he understands running as an

exhibition of human fortitude, an activity needless yet somehow made necessary by the "heartbreak" and power it produces and requires. And in the third, Wilbur sees his own progression—from energetic child to office-bound middle-aged man, then to occasional, private runner—as one link in a far longer chain. The boys he observes are to receive the "gift" of his own running, which Wilbur knows cannot be given so much as encouraged. Wilbur returns, then, to the reader, asking her to "step lively" if she is to go with him: to head out on a course of her own. Trapped between two prisoners' bases; marveling at the mass of athletes, each in a private drama of pain and ebullience; handing off a remembered freedom to those children primed to experience it—like Justice and Kenyon, Wilbur takes a long view of a long race, and creates a new metaphor to describe it. Runners (like poets and people) surpass themselves, and in doing so, inch closer to, or fall exhaustedly back toward, their companions.

Adding Value—Bureaucracy and BS in Justice, Tate, Notley, and Dove

Part One: Two Workshop Stories

It's 1965 in Iowa City, and Donald Justice is being charitable. A kid named James Tate, just out of Kansas State College, Pittsburg, has blown into town.[387] As he narrates it to Charles Simic,

> One of my [undergraduate] teachers had been to Iowa, and toward the end of my senior year he started saying that I really should go too. I didn't apply, but I drove up and walked into the office and said, I'd like to go to school here. This was in August and—this is unbelievable, but true—the secretary said, Donald Justice is just back from vacation, I'll call him and see if he'll come over. And—can you believe it?—he came over on the spot. I didn't know Justice at all, but now that I do, I can't believe he did that. I wouldn't have done it. So he came over, I handed him ten or twelve poems, and he said, All right, you're in.[388]

At Iowa Tate writes his first book, *The Lost Pilot*, which wins the Yale Younger Poets prize.[389] He moves to a farm beyond the suburban developments.[390] And Justice continues supporting him—at least for a while. Tate says,

> He ... praised me. And he was pretty stingy with his praise. I remember once he came back from a reading and he said, I read some of your poems at my reading. I just about hit the ground. I couldn't believe it. I have to say that I'm sure he was immensely disappointed with the rest of my career.[391]

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It's the late 1970s in Iowa City, and Donald Justice is being uncharitable; the students are pushing his buttons. They've just handed in their MFA exams—short close-reading assignments on an

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[387] James Tate, "Interview (1979)," from *The Route as Briefed* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1999), 91.

[388] James Tate and Charles Simic, "The Art of Poetry," No. 92, *The Paris Review*, Vol. 177, 2006, 58. See also Seth Abramson, *The Insider's Guide to Graduate Degrees in Creative Writing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 11.

[389] Tate and Simic, 59; Tate, "Interview (1975-1978)," *The Route as Briefed*, 45. See also James Harms, "Clarity instead of Order: The Practice of Postmodernism in the Poetry of James Tate," from *A Poetry Criticism Reader*, ed. Jerry Harp and Jan Weissmiller (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2006), 52-60.

[390] Tate and Simic, 59.

[391] Ibid.

American poet or fiction writer—and the "faults," he writes, are legion: "habitual overstatement," "overinterpretation," "a failure to edit [one's] own texts."[392] In a mimeographed memo, Justice reminds all second-years that the "perfect confidence" of their assertions is "like a form of arrogance," and that their hazy, purple descriptions of poetic effect are symptoms of an "intellectual ... hangover." Their essays rely on "trivial details" to make grand claims, "resulting in a poor sense of proportion regarding the properties of art." He laments that "no one—no one!—was responsible enough to proofread his (her) own paper," and that "[t]his laziness and sloppiness ... may sometimes, in the real world, count against you." He says, "[o]f course, we all make mistakes, but not this many!" and concludes, "to reverse Pound's dictum: prose ought to be at least as well-written as poetry."[393]

Part Two: BS and Bureaucracy

What is bullshit? We feel we understand it.[394] It can be: wasting time filling out an application's paperwork, standing in line at the post office, mailing it off, waiting to hear back; then, on acceptance (to, for example, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, often delivered via phone call[395]), it's more forms, for healthcare, tuition remission, student housing; required classes, if they exist; the MFA exam, and a first and second deposit of the master's thesis. Reams upon reams of paper (or

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[392] Donald Justice, "Copy to All Who Took the Recent M.F.A. Examination," memorandum, "Univ. Iowa, late 70's," DJP. See also Cristina Favretto's live reading of the memo, from "And Justice for All," a celebration of Donald Justice, Aug. 21, 2016, accessible at donaldjustice.org.

[393] For more on the history of the office memorandum, see JoAnne Yates, *Control Through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), esp. 66 and 92.

[394] See Harry S. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 1-2. I am grateful also to Adrienne Raphel and David Gorin, who, separately, each quipped to me, on hearing I was writing the chapter, that poets are "the unacknowledged bureaucrats of the world."

[395] The most thorough recent account of the ins-and-outs of applying to creative writing MFA and PhD programs is Seth Abramson's. See esp. chs. 2 and 3 of *The Insider's Guide to Graduate Degrees in Creative Writing*, op. cit. For a less editorialized (and more sanguine) version of the same, see Tom Kealey, *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook: A Guide for Prospective Graduate Students* (New York: Continuum, 2005), esp. ch. 4, 57-81.

dozens of online dialogue boxes),[396] and only a tiny stack of it poetry. Tate can't avoid the curriculum at Iowa, but he can the applicants' red tape: a packet of poems, a quick chat with Justice, and he's matriculated. No administrative records appear to corroborate this story, but others have repeated it.[397] If it's not true, it *feels* like the kind of thing that could have happened in those days, at an institution operating mostly according to rules of its own devising.[398] Many workshop students, from later years, attest to the ad hoc nature of acceptance and advancement there.[399] For some, there's a handshake and nod; for others, a submitted form, a response in the mail, and no fellowship for the next year.[400]

Bullshit can also be: what Justice describes in his memo—imprecise, indulgent, searching overanalysis of a poem, or indifferent, dashed-off underanalysis; prose hurled onto paper without a plan or an outline, and sent off without a proofread. And bullshit can *also* be, most damningly: a poem that's built on, and built of, nothing—a figment, a joke, a jumble; "word salad."[401] On this, Justice's opinions are known, or easily adduced. He has as little patience for BS verse as for BS

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396 See David Graeber, The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015), 11, 140.

397 "Iowa stories" resemble "fishing stories," full of exaggerations and selective omissions. Many come from administrators like Connie Brothers, who ran the program until 2019, or from faculty. Abramson (op. cit.), an Iowa poetry MFA, doesn't cite sources to corroborate the assertion that applicants could get in without actually applying; but the Tate story harmonizes with this nostrum about the Workshop.

398 For more on the Workshop's rules and norms in the 1950s and '60s, see Stephen Wilbers, *The Iowa Writers' Workshop: Origins, Emergence, and Growth* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 1980), esp. 94-7. "Because of the proximity in age between the students and faculty and owing to the ambience generated by the predominantly male group, a spirit of friendliness and camaraderie characterized student-faculty relations" (95). Mark McGurl calls Wilbers' account the "quasi-official history of the program," TPE 148.

399 One contemporary tale of applying for second-year funding, lightly fictionalized, is Curtis Sittenfeld's, in "Show Don't Tell," from *The New Yorker*, June 5 and 12, 2017, accessed online, n.p.

400 Alexander Chee's account of successfully arguing for more money, as a first-year no less, is illuminating; see "My Parade," in *MFA vs. NYC*, ed. Chad Harbach (New York: n+1 and Faber, 2014), 91.

401 For more synonyms for bullshit, see Frankfurt, 5-6.

critique—lines "floating around somewhere in the sort of as-if realm of, say, an Ashbery poem."[402] (Or a mature Tate poem, if fear of Justice's reproof is to be believed.)[403] One is reminded of Justice's knock on Ginsberg's less-considered work (from Chapter 1), and of the *New Criterion* crowd (from Chapter 2), who think Justice is on their side: Apollonian, grounded in the tradition, devoted to poems with clear purposes and meanings.

The most famous contemporary English-language theory of bullshit is Harry G. Frankfurt's, put forward in a very short 2005 monograph, *On Bullshit*.[404] Assembling his definition of the "concept," Frankfurt cites some of Wittgenstein's favorite lines of Longfellow's: "In the elder days of art / Builders wrought with greatest care / Each minute and unseen part, / For the Gods are everywhere,"[405] before describing the philosopher's apparent aversion, in his life and work, to the kind of intellectual output (anecdote, argument, poem) in which one is "not even trying."[406] But it is in distinguishing the bullshitter from the liar that Frankfurt makes his case most persuasively:

> Both ... represent themselves falsely as endeavoring to communicate the truth. The success of each depends upon deceiving us about that. But the fact about himself that the liar hides is that he is attempting to lead us away from a correct apprehension of reality; we are not to know that he wants us to believe something he supposes to be false. The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides, on the other hand, is that the truth-values of his statement are of no central interest to him; what we are not to understand is that his intention is neither to report the truth nor to

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[402] Donald Justice, unpublished letter to Howard Moss (poetry editor of *The New Yorker*), Mar. 25, 1979, DJP.

[403] M. L. Rosenthal offers a strong version of a common critique of Tate: "... there are meaningful thoughts, feelings, impulses here, but the ordering is minimal, really insufficient. The justification might be that the poem seeks to evoke in a single quick sweep the pervasiveness of the death principle. The loss of what is to hand, of all our 'known' reality, seems to take place in the wink of an eye. All right, but in the process some fine possibilities have been subordinated to the emergence of a near cliché." From "At Full Speed," a review of *The Lost Pilot*, rpt. in *On James Tate*, ed. Brian Henry (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2004), 118.

[404] The book reprints an essay of the same title from several decades previous: *Raritan*, 6.2, Fall 1986, 81ff.

[405] Frankfurt 20.

[406] Ibid. 32 and 44-5 (with reference to Ezra Pound's Canto 74).

> conceal it. ... *[The bullshitter] is unconcerned with how the things about which he speaks truly are*."[407]

Frankfurt winds up his essay arguing that bullshit might be opposed to "correctness" on the one hand, and to "sincerity" on the other, which he defines as "honest representations" of a self.[408] But the "elusively insubstantial" parts of the human mind make these kinds of "honest" self-reports extremely difficult to render. Frankfurt thus says, coyly, that "[i]nsofar as this is the case"—meaning, so long as people have a hard time pinning themselves, and their inner states, down—"sincerity itself is bullshit."[409]

Another significant contemporary theorist of bullshit, anthropologist and political activist David Graeber, expands on Frankfurt's theory, as he acknowledges.[410] He also transposes it from the realm of analytic philosophy to that of social analysis. In Graeber's account, bullshit inheres both in a person's relationship to her own discourse, public or private, and in her simultaneous navigation of a *bureaucracy*—into the maws of which essentially all people, today, are thrown.[411] Graeber defines his concept of bullshit in (appropriately) *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, and his concept of bureaucracy in *The Utopia of Rules*, each a blend of academic argument and general-interest summary of preceding scholarship.

He frames "bullshit jobs" against John Maynard Keynes's 1930 prediction of an eventual "fifteen-hour work week," arguing this program to be feasible today "in technological terms."[412] But "instead," he continues, "technology has been marshaled ... to figure out ways to make us all work

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[407] Ibid. 54-55 (emphasis added).

[408] Ibid. 65.

[409] Ibid. 67.

[410] David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 8.

[411] BSJ 17.

[412] Ibid. 16.

more. In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people ... spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed."[413] Millions of professional-hours, of millions of professional-days, are thus given over to *busywork*—labor designed to signify its being labor (and conversely, its being non-leisure). It is work for the sake of working, and more specifically, for the sake of *appearing* to work.[414]

In this rendering, the elimination of most bullshit jobs would prompt only superficial disruption; and in the long run, Graeber contends, society would be better off without them.[415] Like Frankfurt's, Graeber's theory of bullshit is defined by a non-relationship to truth-value and its consequences. Unlike Frankfurt's, Graeber's is a theory of labor, inseparable from the historical and social world in which labor is constructed. An American HMO doesn't care—not really—if its filing clerks are attuned to the patients depending on the documents they file. Indeed, HMOs operate more smoothly, more "efficiently," when clerks (at least publicly, to say nothing of their mental states) have no relationship to their work at all, no investment in its effect on people outside the bureaucratic ranks.[416]

Graeber refines his initial definition over the course of the book, arguing, generally, that one can take someone's self-description of bullshit employment at face value;[417] and that these occupations are not, despite popular representations, confined to "government offices," but are "just as rife in the private sector," because of the interlocking nature of government contracting and

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[413] Ibid. xvii.

[414] Ibid. 93.

[415] Graeber self-identifies as an anarchist. For more on his elaboration of the term, and its relation to his work and politics, see his *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), esp. 2-12.

[416] BSJ 247-57.

[417] Ibid. 10-11.

private capital.[418] (More on this in a moment.) Graeber also taxonomizes bullshit work: there are **flunkies**, who "exist only or primarily to make someone else look or feel important";[419] **goons**, whose (often violent) jobs "exist only because other people employ them" (like national militaries);[420] **duct tapers**, who "solve a glitch or a fault in the organization ... that ought not to exist";[421] **box tickers**, who "allow an organization to ... claim it is doing something that, in fact, it is not doing";[422] and **taskmasters**, who "create bullshit tasks for [others] to do."[423] Although each of these jobs, in isolation, is easy enough to laugh off, Graeber believes the consequences of the "bullshitization of work" are severe: "a scar," he insists, "across our collective soul."[424]

In *Bullshit Jobs*, as in other of his texts (like the encyclopedic *Debt*, offering a social theory of the monetary concept),[425] Graeber lays out a complex problematic of office (or "private" or "corporate"), "political," and "economic" life. All three of these demand existence within, and a struggle against, bureaucracies of different shapes and sizes.[426] In twenty-first-century neoliberal capitalist societies, bureaucracies *create* the conditions of possibility for wasteful, meaningless labor, and this BS labor in turn perpetuates the apparently "natural," but in fact socially-scripted and

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[418] Ibid. 16-17; UoR 13-18.

[419] Ibid. 28.

[420] Ibid. 36.

[421] Ibid. 40.

[422] Ibid. 45.

[423] Ibid. 51.

[424] Ibid. xvii.

[425] See David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), esp. ch. 5, "A Brief Treatise on the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations," 89-126. *Debt*, *The Utopia of Rules*, *Bullshit Jobs*, and *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (discussed below) comprise an informal tetralogy on bureaucracy, power, and socially-produced ideas of moral, economic, and symbolic worth.

[426] See BSJ, 290, note 9: "The term 'bullshit' is first attested in an unpublished poem by T. S. Eliot."

ideologically-supported, operation of bureaucratic machinery.[427] Bureaucracies run on bullshit, and bullshit justifies bureaucracies.

But of what, in refined terms, do bureaucracies actually consist? How are they organized? Graeber relies, to start, on the theoretical ground laid by German sociologist Max Weber:[428] his 1922 essay "Bureaucracy," from *Economy and Society*, is the originary study of organized office systems.[429] In his Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of American Bureaucracy*, editor Robert F. Durant writes that Weber's bureaucratic features have been memorized by undergraduates and reprinted in "'classics' of public administration."[430] In Weber's schema, bureaucracies exhibit six "characteristics." (And I default here to the bureaucratic form of the list-summary; *Table 1*):

> First, they are domains having fixed boundaries and responsibilities, from which subdomains might be carved. This applies equally to governments and to private businesses. Thus the super-bureaucracy known as the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (to take one example) is parceled into the Consumer Protection and Industry Services Division, the Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality, and the Food Safety and Animal Health Division, each with its own sub-subdivisions, or bureaus.[431]
>
> Second, bureaucracies are hierarchical, such that higher-ups determine and rate the work produced by lower-downs.[432]
>
> Third, interactions between higher-ups and lower-downs are "based upon written documents," rather than the spoken word.[433] Weber calls these, with emphasis, "'the files,'" and notes that they bespeak "scribes of all sorts" to create and manage them. The combination of Weber's second and third characteristics, as we shall see, makes necessary a

[427] For a helpful introduction to this tranche of Marxist thought, see Ron Eyerman, "False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory," *Acta Sociologica*, 24.1-2, 1981, 43-56, esp. 44-5.

[428] UoR 55-6.

[429] Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," from *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California UP, 1978). I cite hereafter from the version published in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (2009).

[430] Robert F. Durant, "A Heritage Made Our Own," from *The Oxford Handbook of American Bureaucracy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 5.

[431] See iowaagriculture.gov for more information.

[432] See, for more context, Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk* (New York: Norton, 2018), passim.

[433] See JoAnne Yates on memoranda, op. cit.

Table 1 (Continued).

plan for workflow, which one can define as *the movement of the files between and among the higher-ups and lower-downs*.
Fourth, bureaucracies demand that staff members be trained, to handle the files properly and follow workflow correctly.

If this training is well effected, then the fifth characteristic should become evident: that *all staff-members in a bureaucracy are working at "full capacity,"* neither short of nor beyond the generally-understood abilities of the individual.

Finally, bureaucracies are not run according to favoritism or "sacred tradition," but rather by impersonal rules, which can be learned by any new admits to the ranks.[434]

Addenda to, and clarifications of, these six characteristics are the subject of nearly a century of sociological research, along with their very nature: whether Weber intended them to be prescriptive, descriptive, or some combination thereof.[435] In applying Weber's vocabulary to postwar (or consequently to post-"embedded liberalism"[436]) economic activity, one might choose from a number of recent accounts.[437] Wil van der Aalst and K. M. van Hee, as a prominent example, supplement Weber in their *Workflow Management*, a textbook on information systems that typifies the latter-day, tech-focused, and benignly pro-bureaucratic view.[438] Trained as computer scientists, Van der Aalst

[434] Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," from *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 196-8.

[435] Durant, 5-11. Loren Glass does an admirable job comparing Weber's ideas to those of Paul Engle at Iowa, in "Middle Man: Paul Engle and the Iowa Writers' Workshop," *minnesota review* 71/72, Winter/Spring 2009, 256-268; esp. 259; and 264, where he discusses a "routinization of charisma" that leads to "a rationally organized bureaucracy of functionaries whose authority inheres in their appropriation of the prophet's original charisma."

[436] Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith offer a useful gloss of "embedded liberalism": "Four Phases of Neoliberalism and Literature: An Introduction," in *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2017, esp. 4-5.

[437] In his review of *The Utopia of Rules*, Evan Kindley cites in particular the writing of "Robert Merton, Alvin Gouldner, and Michel Crozier," op. cit., n.p.

[438] Wil van der Aalst and Kees van Hee, *Workflow Management: Models, Methods, and Systems* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). Throughout their text, van der Aalst and van Hee develop a framework that is, in sum, a hyper-acceleration of the memorandum paradigm JoAnne Yates describes in pre-personal-computer offices. Digitization of "the files" both simplifies the transmission of any single document *and*, as a consequence, increases the normative standard, per worker, for manageable file loads. In other words: the authors provide techniques for coping with the geysers of information created by an ostensibly more efficient bureaucratic system. Other proponents of institutional creative writing believe that poetry-writing itself is a highly-coveted and transferable skill in the workplace. See, as one example, Patrick Bizzaro,

and van Hee argue that, because human exigencies far outstrip a person's ability to "manufacture all the products that we use," "we are instead organized into specialized 'business units,' in which people produce a limited range of products in a highly efficient way, with the help of machines."[439]

This is a familiar-enough explanation for large-scale manufacturing in industrial and post-industrial state- and market-based societies.[440] They go on,

> With production distributed [across a variety of specialties and sub-specialties], there is also created work that would not exist if everybody was entirely self-sufficient in producing all the products they need. ...
>
> *There have thus developed all kinds of services and products that do not make a direct contribution to keeping us alive, but are necessary to keep the organization operating. Despite this 'burden,' we are able to produce so efficiently that we have a large amount of free time—thus further stimulating the demand for entertainment. The leisure industry therefore is also a flourishing one.*
>
> Modern society has become so complex that nobody can entirely survey it any longer, and many people do not know what role their work plays in the overall scheme of things. This 'alienation' is a major social problem that falls outside the scope of this book.[441]

The authors thus find themselves restating a version of Keynes's idea, that advancements in "efficiency" will decrease demands on workers and increase "free time" away from the job. In this way, they engage in the perpetuation of what Ceri Sullivan calls the "mythical" in "Weberian bureaucracy," such that theorists need only describe an abstracted "relationship between social roles rather than between real individuals on the ground."[442] As leisure studies scholar Benjamin Hunnicutt has shown, the "increasing free time" argument has a long, influential history in

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"The Future of Graduate Studies in Creative Writing: Institutionalizing Literary Writing," *Key Issues in Creative Writing*, ed. Dianne Donnelly and Graeme Harper (Bristol, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 169-177, esp. 172.

[439] Van der Aalst and van Hee, 2-3.

[440] David Harvey offers a capsule-critique of the pro-bureaucracy "efficiency" argument in *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014), 79-80 and 121-2.

[441] Van der Aalst and Van Hee, 2-3.

[442] Ceri Sullivan, *Literature in the Public Service: Sublime Bureaucracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13. Sullivan calls for an engagement with bureaucracies that this chapter takes seriously: that "evading institutional structures" and operating within them both entail creative human decision-making—that is, new imaginative discourse (17). Sullivan indeed falls on the pro-bureaucracy side, by the end of her monograph: "Bureaucracy turns out to be ... a positive extension of the repertoire of human possibilities, not a dehumanizing or disempowering subtraction from them" (156).

American life.[443] But do bureaucracies really create this form of freedom? If they do, what modes of self-creation (or recreation) do people engage in, when they're no longer slogging through paperwork and clicking through dialogue boxes? How can any one economic actor fight "alienation"—and what do we feel alienated from?

Van der Aalst's and van Hee's pro-bureaucracy justification is therefore utopian and ameliorist—a full-throated articulation of the sort that Graeber skewers. In *The Utopia of Rules*, Graeber writes that North Americans, western Europeans, and other citizens of developed countries have "become accustomed to" bureaucracy, and that the political left in these regions has no critique of it to speak of, whereas the right does—understanding the bureaucrat, of the government variety, to be a "feudal holdover" and "an inherent flaw in the democratic project."[444] But he goes on to debunk this rightist anti-bureaucratic logic, which lionizes "private" initiative over public "waste":

> While the idea that the market is somehow opposed to and independent of government has been used at least since the nineteenth century to justify laissez faire economic policies designed to lessen ... [its] role, they never actually have that effect. ... This apparent paradox ... can be observed so regularly that I think we are justified in treating it as a general sociological law. ... *The Iron Law of Liberalism states that any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs.*[445] ...
>
> [Thus,] 'democracy' ... came to mean the market; 'bureaucracy,' in turn, government interference with the market.[446]

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[443] As Benjamin Hunnicutt writes, of the United States in its first hundred-odd years as a nation-state, "[t]he economy was ... understood to be the servant of Higher Progress. Its ultimate purpose was to free humans from scarcity; its goal, abundance. Creating a stable democracy, taming the frontier, establishing successful farms, and building industry all had a purpose, an end: the end of the day, the weekend, retirement, and posterity—and for many, God's kingdom on earth. Until the end of the nineteenth century, few expected that the economy might be the place where humans would realize our full potential—our full, *free* humanity was to be discovered outside the economy, beyond pecuniary concerns" (3). From *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2013).

[444] UoR 7.

[445] Ibid. 8-9.

[446] Ibid. 11.

For Graeber, bureaucracy self-mystifies. Even as bureaucracy has taken over embedded-liberal and neoliberal societies—seeping into every facet of life—those controlling capital insist that bureaucracy only happens "over there," where *the government* meddles, ruins, and obfuscates. By contrast, productive, value-adding work is supposed to happen "right here," in a flourishing market system. In reality, Graeber contends, markets are always eventually instruments of state control. And "regulations" are another name for the power dynamics within the overlapping domains of market-government colossuses—like the healthcare or energy industries.[447] Graeber calls these fusions "total bureaucracies."[448] And they rely on a fundamental threat of violence (not imagined or "symbolic," but very real) to perpetuate "dead zones of the imagination," in which people are forced to act "stupidly," in nonsensical or countervailing ways, to keep the bureaucracy going.[449] Total bureaucracies commit the creative capacities of those caught within them to paperwork—a ceaseless, self-justifying flow of files, which the bureaucrat reads, edits, scans and forwards; produces and consumes.[450] *All* work in such a system collapses into the management of a reified *workflow*; van der Aalst and van Hee, therefore, are right in underlining the concept, though they are terribly wrong in ignoring its (bodily, material) costs.

An important feature of total bureaucracy is its replication, in miniature, of its forms, methods, and mores, even in institutions that do not advertise their bureaucratic arrangements.[451] Writing workshops, of course, are parts of colleges and universities, which, whether "public" or

[447] Ibid. 17.

[448] Ibid. 42-4.

[449] Ibid. 90-101. See also Evan Kindley, "Bashing Bureaucracy," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 26, 2015. n.p.

[450] Graeber has a virtuoso essay on the Western metaphor of "consumption" in its various forms—helpful in understanding the possible valences of the term: "The Very Idea of Consumption: Desire, Phantasms, and the Aesthetics of Destruction from Medieval Times to the Present," in *Possibilities* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 57-84.

[451] As we'll see throughout this chapter, considerations of bureaucracy in the poetry of Justice, Tate, Dove, and Notley exhibit the same "reflexive modernity" that Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, et al. have defined, and which McGurl makes use of in TPE; see esp. 12-13 for an introduction to the phrase.

"private," are enmeshed in combined market-government bureaucratic frameworks. Mark McGurl has examined creative writing and institutional culture extensively, in his trailblazing *The Program Era*, and in an addendum-essay on Amazon.com's literary influence.[452] This chapter's project, broadly speaking, is complementary to and in some sense continuous with McGurl's: it takes up (mostly) poetry, a space McGurl admits to leaving open, and one which, for Evan Kindley, has its own imbricated relationship with the university—via the early-twentieth-century "poet-critic" who "administers culture."[453] Kindley's work, as he acknowledges, focuses on the "interlude" between modernist patronage and the "rise of creative writing," and ends with a brief, suggestive chapter on W. H. Auden and John Crowe Ransom, two figures for whom bureaucratic questions were live.[454]

Although McGurl and Kindley mention bureaucracy-as-such, they do not place the theoretical pressure on the term that Graeber does.[455] (Notably, Kindley has reviewed *The Utopia of Rules*, and is sympathetic with Graeber's thinking; he does accuse him, not unfairly, of penciling in certain institutional histories and power dynamics).[456] Many contemporary scholars have understood these bureaucracies as social epiphenomena—fascinating features of stories told alongside the composition-histories of poems and novels. Eric Bennett, in his *Workshops of Empire*, sees the MFA bureaucracy as interlinked with the CIA's network of domestic and international espionage.[457] Merve

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[452] See "Everything and Less: Fiction in the Age of Amazon," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 77.3, September 2016, 447-71.

[453] Evan Kindley, *Poet-Critics and the Administration of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2017).

[454] Kindley, op. cit., "Conclusion: With the Program," 130-43. Kindley insists throughout, as at 119-20 of the above, that modernist poets and their successors demonstrated an "uneasiness with bureaucracy," as exemplified by Auden's late-career "laissez-faire libertarian attitude" toward the features of the literary landscape (publishing venues, grant-awarding institutions) that "already exist[ed]" (120).

[455] McGurl's term of choice is "program," or with less emphasis "institution" (the latter is an oft-used, author-specific concept in sociological/anthropological literary scholarship, the generality of which I've mostly shied away from here).

[456] See Kindley, "Bashing Bureaucracy," op. cit.

[457] Bennett writes, "Creative writing programs proliferated in a decade [the 1960s] when their initial ideological rationale was losing relevance, their original sources of funding on the wane. The semblance of success—the singular success at Iowa—that at least in part inspired their proliferation, depended not exclusively on writing and writers but also on the

Emre describes William Faulkner's failed bureaucratic organizing efforts as a kind of "paraliterary" work, of the sort midcentury authors sometimes were asked to take on.[458] Stephen Schryer, in *Fantasies of the New Class*, ingeniously joins a history of literary close reading to that of American sociology; he produces a realist understanding of "social trustee professionalism," whereby bureaucracies are no longer anathema to creativity but aspects of the contingent worlds giving rise to imaginative art. (The critic Kenneth Burke is one of Schryer's guiding lights, as he notes in an epilogue.)[459] Mike Chasar, like Eric Bennett, sees MFA honcho Paul Engle, of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and International Writing Program, as an "oracle and bureaucrat"; his genius for the consolidation of institutional creative writing establishes tastes within "popular and elite literary cultures," and shapes the career aspirations of many poets and novelists[460] And these studies, in turn, build on several important treatments of literary professionalism and modernism from the 1980s and '90s, including Louis Menand's chapter on Eliot's professionalism, in *Discovering Modernism*,[461]

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global aims of strange and disparate parties ... foundations, publishers, Washington elites, mid-level bureaucrats, and, of course ... [Paul] Engle himself" (116); in *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2015). For Bennett, the bureaucracy of the workshop is diminished by comparison to the "serious" government bureaucracies of, for example, the CIA.

458 Merve Emre, *Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2017), 175.

459 Stephen Schryer, *Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post-World War II American Fiction* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011), esp. 200-1.

460 Mike Chasar, *Everyday Reading: Poetry and Popular Culture in Modern America* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012), 192.

461 In an oft-cited chapter of *Discovering Modernism*, Louis Menand redescribes *Heart of Darkness* as a study in the problem of professionalism: that "putting the literary vocation on a respectable standing among occupations ... in order to prevent it from seeming, like Kurtz, outmoded and slightly absurd, risked sacrificing all the advantages derived from the general perception of its essential *difference* from respectable kinds of work" (117). Menand shows that Eliot squared this circle. In his critical essays, he "[makes] his discourse seem not a new, but in fact the traditional discourse," *overwriting* "the language of the amateur" (124). Menand argues that the "formalism" Eliot espoused helped writer-professionals define and internally rate their own skills; legal, medical, and academic professionals did the same, in their own associations, at around the same time. Menand's Eliot, like any other pro, is thus "a worker whose identification with his job is most complete because there is, ideally, so little that is personal about it" (130). The abstraction "Literature," in this model, belongs not to the amateurs who claim to adore it, but to the professionals whose livelihoods and reputations are intertwined with it. As a result, writers in the in-group might show off "tastes and principles" rejecting "the capitalist world view," because these are "a feature of their socialization" (132). Having been admitted to the practice, writers can imagine a de-professionalized alternative they need never know firsthand. See *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

and Langdon Hammer's summary of Crane's and Ransom's work ethics, in *Janus-Faced Modernism.*[462] Evan Watkins's "Work and Time" offers a compelling sociological analysis of English departments, which he contends are "encountered in ways not altogether different from how you encounter voter registration offices, driver's license and employment and welfare offices, debt counseling, insurance and tax forms ... and countless other examples."[463] Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man* sees bureaucracies as proving-grounds for the production and negotiation of "crisis," normalcy, and stifling professionalism in the evacuated personages of mid-century fiction.[464] Poets themselves have written on the subject: Auden's anecdote of the poet, the "illiterate peasant," and the bureaucrat—in which the former two, with nothing else in common, instinctively fear the last—is a notable moment in his essay collection *The Dyer's Hand.*[465] And Donald Hall's idea of the "McPoem," developed in "Poetry and Ambition," has achieved notoriety at least among creative writers and people contemplating MFA degrees—a danger to be avoided.[466] Without renegotiating all these claims, the ensuing argument builds on the primary conclusions many preceding works have made convincingly: that, for over a century, "creative" or "literary" writing in North America has intersected with, and

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[462] Hammer's "Janus-faced modernism" "[peers] both backward and forward in time," trying to harmonize, as in Kindley, the demands of "professional" or "middle-class" or "information-management" workplaces with the demands of erumpent, individuating artistic practice. The ambivalent poetic modernist, even after Eliot's attempts to settle the question, must necessarily grapple with dialectics of artistry and professionalism, freedom and constraint, autonomy and authority (9). Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). See also Langdon Hammer, "Plath's Lives," *Representations*, 75.1, Summer 2001, 66. Hammer's importance of "the culture of the school" for his poet-professional rhymes also with John Guillory's insistence on the syllabus as an instrument of status-formation for authors and readers within an institution; see *Cultural Capital*, op. cit.

[463] Evan Watkins, "Work and Value," in *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 241.

[464] Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), esp. 135. Thanks to Stephanie Burt for this insight.

[465] W. H. Auden, from "The Poet and the City," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber, 1963), 88-9. Auden's "The Fall of Rome" also contains lovely, ironizing scenes of bureaucratic detachment, for example when "Caesar's double-bed is warm / As an unimportant clerk / Writes *I DO NOT LIKE MY WORK* / On a pink official form." Auden, *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 188.

[466] Donald Hall, "Poetry and Ambition," *The Kenyon Review*, 5.4, Autumn 1983, 90-104, esp. 95.

borne the imprint of, offices and institutions, and the rules and norms allowing those spaces to function (and dysfunction).

But this chapter's wager is distinct from these arguments—and especially from McGurl's and Kindley's—in one fundamental, and several downstream, ways. While McGurl insists he is assembling a neutral, rather than recuperative or critical, survey of creative writing programs and their authors, he finds himself repeatedly justifying the artistic value of the books he cites.[467] Elif Batuman has made this point previously, in her review of *The Program Era*; their exchanges amount to an insuperable disagreement, regarding whether McGurl exaggerates the merits of workshop fiction or Batuman diminishes them.[468] On closer inspection, however, chapters like McGurl's, on Raymond Carver and Joyce Carol Oates—whose "shame" and "pride" produce "minimal" and "maximal" fiction—rely on the robustly-defended substance of those authors' stories.[469] If McGurl doesn't oversell these texts' agreeability, he nevertheless argues, implicitly, that they are meaningful in every way: contributions to discourse that, in themselves (and through reinscription in creative-writing pedagogy) tell us something valuable about shame and pride as emotions. Carver and Oates, in short, create value in their fiction, McGurl says. They don't BS.

It should be noted, too, that Justice does not invent the mid-century burolyric or the critique of bureaucracy in US poetry. In his polemic "Creative Glut," Karl Shapiro (1913-2000) argues, crankily, that "Creative Writing today has penetrated all levels of American education, and insofar as it has an educational philosophy, [it's in] three components: therapy (or medicine), hedonism (or

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[467] See TPE ix, the first paragraph of its Preface; see also Loren Glass, "The Poetics of the Program Era," *Critical Quarterly* 59.3, October 2017, 12.

[468] Elif Batuman, "Get a Real Degree," op. cit. For more on this exchange, see McGurl on his personal website: "A Response to Elif Batuman," http://www.markmcgurl.com/response_to_Batuman.html, n.p. For a full-throated jeremiad against the workshop, see Anis Shivani's review of McGurl's book, in *Against the Workshop: Provocations, Polemics, Controversies* (Huntsville, Tex.: Texas Review Press, 2011), esp. 173.

[469] "The Hidden Injuries of Craft: Mass Higher Education and Lower-Middle-Class Modernism," TPE 273-320.

entertainment), and egalitarianism (or politics)." Shapiro sees these aims as of questionable use socially, and of almost no use aesthetically.[470] Among his many poems of the company man, the buroman, "Buick" is hard to surpass for its pure (and perhaps only three-quarters-ironized) Babbittry: "As my foot suggests that you leap in the air with your hips of a girl / ... And I touch you again as you tick in the silence and settle in sleep."[471] And as Stephanie Burt has argued, bureaucratic entanglement is a feature of many of Randall Jarrell's lyrics, including the devastating "Mail Call," in which the alienated soldier, separated from family and cast into an anonymizing military hierarchy, "simply wishes for his name."[472] Philip Larkin ("Homage to a Government") and Seamus Heaney (in portions of "Station Island") have written arrestingly about the things institutions do to the people they corral, abroad and domestically.[473]

But Justice, and the burolyric-composing students of his I discuss later in this chapter, do not merely make bureaucracy the subject of many of their poems. They extend the preoccupations of artists like Auden, Shapiro, and Jarrell, wagering as they do that bureaucracies are founded on varieties of bullshit, and focusing on the interrelation of homogenized burolife and the non-language, the empty words, on which offices run. I do not mean to say, following this, that Donald Justice (and Tate, along with Rita Dove and Alice Notley) write a kind of mimetic worksheet-BS themselves. But I fear that McGurl's squeamishness at the very thought of meaninglessness—his account's anxiety that workshop literature need be rescued from the bullshitization of

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[470] Karl Shapiro, "Creative Glut," *Poetry*, 135.1, Oct. 1979, 36-50, esp. 46.

[471] Karl Shapiro, "Buick," *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1978), 14.

[472] Randall Jarrell, "Mail Call," *The Complete Poems*, op. cit., 170. See also Stephanie Burt, *Randall Jarrell and His Age*, op. cit., 123. "Absent with Official Leave" (171-2) takes up, with similar stakes, the "life into which" the soldier "composes his body," desperate to conform to rigid bureaucratic circumstance and the idea of a stable persona.

[473] See Larkin, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 141; Heaney, "Station Island," esp. section III, *Hudson Review*, 36.2, Summer 1983, 257ff; for useful holistic treatment of the latter, see Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 92-5. For Justice on Larkin, see O 111-5.

bureaucracies—keeps him from looking at the subtle renderings of bullshit that poets like Justice foreground.

In truth, the four writers under consideration here had to cope with enormous quantities of bullshit, as they wrote, published, and climbed the "greasy pole"[474] of the workshop system. Justice himself famously called the workshop model "a kind of pyramid scheme."[475] And, to be fair, each of them sometimes wrote mediocre, undercooked stuff—Tate was known to dash off a poem now and again.[476] But far more frequently, they trained a critical-creative eye on the bureaucratic nightmares surrounding them. They used poems (and a few stories) to imagine possibilities for freedom against and within the routinized lifeways of total bureaucracy.[477] For their own sanity, they added value to their work, and to their writing lives, in specialized ways. I want to tilt analysis like McGurl's away from the program in itself—the arguments justifying and defending it—and toward this consideration of socially-constructed value.

McGurl and others have emphasized the workshop's metaphoric constitution as a space of "therapy" and "discipline," to pick only two models.[478] Joining in their project and offering another metaphor, I begin by schematizing the MFA-workshop according to its bureaucratic features, as otherwise exemplified in one of Graeber's prototypical public or private offices (*Table 2*):

	Bureaucracy (gov't or private)	**"The Workshop"**
Leadership	Boss	"Director"

[474] William Deresiewicz, Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life (New York: Free Press, 2014), 132.

[475] D. G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006), 164-5, and Wilbers 137-8.

[476] For one assertion of this position, see Dana Gioia, "James Tate and American Surrealism," *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture* (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2004), 253 and 256.

[477] Throughout this chapter, I take as methodological inspiration Heidi R. Bean's and Mike Chasar's introduction to *Poetry after Cultural Studies* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2011), esp. 8.

[478] TPE 5, ch. 3, 183ff., ch. 5, 273ff.

Table 2 (Continued). **Subleadership**	Team leader/project coordinator	Workshop teacher/practicing poet
Effective leadership	Office admin (actual manager)	Program admin (actual manager); Connie Brothers
Group forum	The meeting	The weekly workshop
Filetype	Internal reports/memoranda	"The worksheets" ("the packets")[479]
Buroresponse	Feedback; performance review	Feedback; individual meetings with faculty
Improvement mechanism	Best practices	"Craft"
Advancement	Petition for promotion	Second-/third-year funding applications

One can conceptualize the workshop in workflow terms. The fundamental deliverable-unit is, as in Weber, the "files," in this case the poems students produce each week, stapled together to make packets. Poems begin with the poet, at home or in the cafe, and in whatever generative sense;[480] she brings a "draft" copy to class, or pre-circulates via email or a centralized printing setup. At the workshop meeting, she collects peer feedback according to certain rules, typically that she remain silent; after all students have spoken, she can ask for clarification, or report on her intentions for a line or image. (This can produce frustration among peers.) One-on-one meetings with the sub-boss/workshop leader offer further opportunity for the imparting of best practices/craft, including encouragement in navigating the distribution of subsequent draft-files to other, non-workshop institutions (online or print literary magazines, or small publishing houses). Students receive no grades, but they fill out narrative workshop-feedback forms at the end of the semester, some of which are included in the leader's renewal or tenure dossier. (Others might be discarded, or shelved

[479] Throughout his personal correspondence, Justice refers to weekly poem-files as "worksheets," whereas "packets" tends to be the term of art in the present-day Workshop.

[480] The workshop offers any number of antecedents, which instructors typically sketch out for students depending on everyone's taste: the roughly Romantic (inspired); the roughly Conceptual (procedural, programmatic); the roughly Modernist (impersonal and Eliotic/Stevensian).

semi-accessibly in a basement or offsite archive.)[481] Poems, naturally, can be about the poet's life, or not. But one reserves discussion of poem-life synonymies for post-workshop conversation in the para-institutional space of the college-town bar.[482] Along these lines, students might joke that the bar is in fact the "real" workshop space, and the classroom merely its presager and necessary precondition.[483]

The nondescript, "neutral" office and the workshop model are each complete ecosystems—resilient, absorptive worlds, capable of internalizing critiques from without, which power new iterations of the system via the propagation of committees, discussion groups, classes, and graduation requirements.[484] Like the deconstructionist's trace or the Hydra's heads, these bureaucratic masses flourish precisely when erased, attacked, or ostensibly "destroyed."[485] But are workshop-bureaucracies, like their corporate or government "parent" bureaucracies, also total? Is there anything "left over" when the system operates—anything that retains an individual, non-institutional character? For scholars of workflow management, this might be "outside the model"; but for Graeber as for literary researchers, non-regimented time, or time construed as such, is crucial, either as a respite from the system or as a dream conjured within it.[486] "Free times"[487] at Iowa are those hours not spent workshopping, grading, providing "feedback," reading "feedback," or

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[481] Worksheets at Iowa, as of this writing, are divided between the UI Library Archives and a Workshop-run storage system, in the basement of the Dey House (Deb West).

[482] Studies of poetry and alcohol are surprisingly limited. See Allan Beveridge and Graeme Yorston, "I drink, therefore I am: Alcohol and creativity," in *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 92, Dec. 1999, 646-8; for a mixture of memoir and analysis, see also Leslie Jamison, *The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018).

[483] As was often the case at Iowa, ca. 2011-14.

[484] At Iowa in the last decade, students have formed at least two poetic "committees" for the discussion of texts they have not found accommodated within the "official" channels of workshop- and seminar-based instruction.

[485] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2014), 25.

[486] Cf. McGurl, "Everything and Less," 467-9.

[487] Ibid. 469.

reporting to higher-ups. They are the hours approved for artmaking, for putting writing "at the center of life."[488] Write in the morning; write late at night; "write what you know."[489] But what happens when a bureaucracy bolsters, apportions, and directs this ostensible freedom? What kind of art does a bureaucrat make, when a bureaucrat *must* make art?

One coping strategy is to write about the bureaucracy itself—to repurpose the machine.[490] This is what Justice and Tate do.

Part Three: Justice's and Tate's Bureaucracy Poems

Before his MFA-memorandum, Justice writes a poem-memorandum, one that provides much of the orienting material for a more encompassing theory of his burolyrics. In "Memo from the Desk of X," from *Night Light* (1967), an unnamed speaker responds to an administrator's "question of poems," saying that an as-yet unelaborated "proposal / Merits consideration."[491] He goes on,

> I myself recall fondly
> Old friends among the poems—
> Harmless, but to what purpose?
>
> Some few indeed we might keep
> Alive, in transparent tents,
> As an example to youth
>
> Of the great waste the past was.

[488] Professor Lan Samantha Chang often uses this phrase in an introduction to Workshop students, during the start-of-program plenary meeting.

[489] TPE 23.

[490] Cf. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash on "reflexive modernity," as discussed in *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), passim; McGurl cites them at TPE 12: "[t]he utility of this concept for understanding the metafictional impulse in postwar writing leaps off the page, suggesting that literary practices might partake in a larger, multivalent social dynamic of self-observation."

[491] CP 108-9. For Lewis Turco's understanding of the "memo" form, and of Justice's career around this period, see: "Memo from the Muses' Committee on Un-American Activities," *College English* 26.1, Oct. 1964, 49; and "The Progress of Donald Justice," *Hollins Critic*, 29.4, Oct. 1992, 1-8.

Perhaps the speaker in "Memo" was a poet himself once—although this goes unexplained. The hospitalized poem-of-the-future, which the speaker imagines on behalf of the memo-recipient, is frightfully ill, with a "white face," an "almost / Visible heartbeat" and "deep / But irregular breathing." The speaker sets up a thought-experiment to be worked through: if poems might be maintained in an institutional setting, he offers, then members of the public could be brought in to observe them, and "guides [could be] trained to interpret / Their curious expressions / For the new generation, // Those who have had no chance to / Learn much about suffering." This musealized arrangement is logistically possible; but is it materially feasible? "The cost" of poem-maintenance, he tabulates, would overwhelm any meager educational benefit to the community. The speaker thus concludes, with a marked disinterest:

> I am told by our experts
> That an esthetic response
> To straight lines and to circles
>
> May be acquired, with study.
> This strikes me as promising.
> Our landscapes already are
>
> Shifting in that direction,
> Likewise our lives. This approach
> Is not unrealistic.
>
> I therefore must recommend,
> Though not without some regret,
> The extinction of poems.

In his 1972 collection *Absences*, Tate offers a different kind of institutionalized poetry, via a brief burolyric entitled "Teaching the Ape to Write Poems":[492]

> They didn't have much trouble
> teaching the ape to write poems:
> first they strapped him into the chair,

[492] See also Tate, "On Influence," from *The Route as Briefed*, 116-7, in which he uses "Teaching the Ape" as a (brief) illustration of how influence, and teaching, might work. See also James Tate, *Selected Poems* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1991), 122.

then tied the pencil around his hand
(the paper had already been nailed down).
Then Dr. Bluespire leaned over his shoulder
and whispered into his ear:
"You look like a god sitting there.
Why don't you try writing something?"

When we place Justice's and Tate's poems side-by-side, we attune ourselves quickly to their resonances. In each there are bureaucratic actors and subjects, along with the alienated speaking tone of the institutional manager; images of illness and decay run up against those of bodies, machines, and the observational and experimental operations of the scientific method. On closer examination, indeed, the poems each typify a certain network of relations between these bureaucratic elements: they contrast *forms* of offices, and their specific aims; routinized responses to the provocations of poetry and poet; and actionable conclusions delivered by a reporter. In table format, one can schematize the poems—demonstrating patterns of official subject matter, attitudes toward poetry, and the relationships between them (*Table 3*):

	"Memo from the Desk of X"	**"Teaching the Ape to Write Poems"**
Burotype	Biomanagement (total government); Giorgio Agamben[493]	Lab protocol ("normal science"); Thomas Kuhn[494]
Speaker-audience dynamic	X—"you"—poems	Dr. Bluespire—the ape—passive listeners (us)—poems
Diagnosis	Looking like a corpse	"Look[ing] like a god"
Poetotype (1)	"Deep / but irregular breathing"; poetics of (troubled) inspiration	Procedural poetics
Poetotype (2)	Poem as sick patient *and* as patient's disease	Poem as output of animal-instrument interface
Ontostatus of poetry	What are poems?—poisonous "bad ideas"	What are poems?—byproducts of a functioning system

[493] See, as a foremost example of biomanagement and "bare life," Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).

[494] See Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1962), passim.

Table 3 (Continued). **Buroresponse**	"Extinction of poems"	Extraction of (unread?) poems
Upshot	Destruction of (dangerous) language	Neglect of (useless) language

Justice's bed-ridden "poem" (as depicted within its container-lyric, "Memo") is a dying body, kept on life-support. Tate's poet, meanwhile, is an animal *strapped to a machine*, goaded by a human doctor and compared to something divine. Justice's poem can barely breathe, but Tate's ape-poet need not pause even to consider its work (or review it for typos). Justice offers, as "esthetic" alternatives, "straight lines" and "circles," but Tate's Dr. Bluespire insists on the romantic possibility of the blank page, "nailed down." For Justice, the final recommendations are "extinction" and "destruction," but for Tate, they are "extraction" and "neglect": Justice's poem-system breaks down and dies, while Tate's hums along. In both, the rough-and-ready lyric notion of the poem-as-linguistic-and-emotional-occasion is removed to the margins, sickly in the first example, ignored in the other.

It should be added that "Memo from the Desk of X" *ironizes* banal administrative detachment, in a manner characteristic of some of Justice's middle lyrics.[495] Its apparent straightforwardness, re: doing away with poetry, is belied by its obviously *being* a lyric, one with arresting images ("The white face of a poem / Turned to the wall"). Tate doesn't think of himself as a poem-writing ape-machine, or at least not exclusively that.[496] But the tone of these two burolyrics, I suggest, is queasily indeterminate, ambivalent even, and aware of the totalizing power of bureaucracies to incorporate criticism into any new official practice. Poems have this power, too; Justice writes elsewhere of a poem "not addressed to you," one that is "not for" the critical reader for whom it always-already is.[497] Justice and Tate, after all, are university professors, whose work-

[495] Most notably in *Night Light* and *Departures* (1973).

[496] For more on this subject, see Lee Upton's "The Master of the Masterless: James Tate and the Pleasures of Error," From *On James Tate*. Ed. Brian Henry (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2004), 56-73.

[497] CP 160-1.

product—poetry—leads to institutional advancement, a raise, eventually permanent job security.[498] They don't want to destroy or neglect poetry, to saturate it with an *absolute* irony. But their poems remain vehicles for the playing-out of these fantasies of destruction and neglect. In their free time, they've dreamed themselves to be bureaucrats who scrutinize and institutionalize poetry, rather than bureaucrats who write it.

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Bureaucracies, and their penumbra of associations, are the secret and not-so-secret subjects of other Justice and Tate works, as critics have hinted but not seriously explored.[499] Justice's "On a Painting by Patient B of the Independence State Hospital for the Insane," from *The Summer Anniversaries* (1960), examines the visual art that the complex's residents produce from within their publicly-funded psychological institution—which, as we have seen, McGurl likens to programmatic creative-writing, in his chapter on Kesey and Stegner.[500] The speaker in "Patient B" begins his ekphrasis with "seven houses [that] have learned to face one another, / But not at the expected angles"; he wonders whether the painting's figures are children or "leopards," and if "the little maids that hang from the windows" are really "tongues." He muses that the "clouds" (which might only be "smoke from the seven aspiring chimneys") "will be given names by those who live under them / Not public like mountains' but private like companions'." He also insists that the houses are those of "the very rich," because they are "solid-gold," or appear that way.

At first blush a "sane" man's appraisal of phantasmagoric, "non-rational" work, the poem concedes, in its last section, the importance of "private," idiosyncratic descriptions of the clouds,

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[498] The shape of poetic careers, Justice's and others, is the subject of Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[499] Jo Gill's analysis of Justice, cited below, is the clearest example; Katy Lederer comes closest as regards Tate—in "'Adventitious Obstacles': Process and Intent in James Tate's Work," from *On James Tate*, op. cit., esp. 81-3.

[500] TPE 201-5. I'm grateful to students in my fall 2017 Harvard Junior Tutorial, especially Thayer Anderson, for discussion of ideas of institutionality that have informed the present chapter.

floating "impassive" overhead. These descriptions signify only in the hermetic consciousness of the artist-patient; to the speaker, their connections (child-leopard; maid-tongue) are far more attenuated than those the speaker-observer might ever use.[501] More ontologically stable are the "seven houses," which the observer notes the artist has, at times, allowed to deliquesce into "hills," but which he sees as keeping the "skies" at "an understandable distance." Thus the poem toggles between the bureaucratic frames of the asylum and the office of the mortgage lender. Just like McGurl's teacher-therapist, *we* can turn the tables on Justice's narrator-appraiser, asking: what does he *really* see, when he takes in the houses of the materially comfortable (and at the same time assumes the perspective of the socially marginal)? What do these homes, and the files supporting their owners' claims to possession, signify for him? Along this interpretive axis, the voices of many Justice poems converge, their unnamed but similar-seeming speakers circling a set of common preoccupations. How is this type of Justician speaker shackled by the demands of bureaucracy? A review of these poems reveals a ground of what we can call "bureaucraticity"—the condition of having to cope with the bureaucratic systems in which one is always-already imbricated. This sort of analysis elaborates new possibilities of signification throughout Justice's corpus.

In "Men at Forty,"[502] another early lyric, Justice writes of middle-aged souls who "[l]earn to close softly / The doors to rooms they will not be / Coming back to." They are hounded by a sheepish, awkward guilt, and a continuing sexual longing, after midday trysts; alarmingly, they catch in the mirror both their younger (half-forgotten) faces and their fathers' ghostly ones. All this, before the appearance, if not the reality, of some revelation:

> Something is filling them, something

[501] For more on these perceptions, see Jo Gill, *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 124ff.

[502] CP 46-7.

That is like the twilight sound
Of the crickets, immense,
Filling the woods at the foot of the slope
Behind their mortgaged houses.

The grand unnamable "thing," so "like" (but not actually) the "sound / Of the crickets," runs up against the brute reality of "their mortgaged houses," the poem's final, brick-and-aluminum-siding image. Whereas a house, for the "non-rational" Patient B, is an imagined "in-between" amorphousness, here it's a non-metaphoric wall—against the waves of evocative sound that emanate from the development's adjacent, untamed woods. Like the windowless rooms the speaker books for extramarital sex, the woods, and their frightening possibility, clash with the regular payment-schedule of the mortgage: *the* definitional midcentury burden for the poem's male protagonist.[503]

"The Missing Person"[504] takes up a similar, or perhaps the same, character from "Men at Forty," who has now reached a crisis:

He has come to report himself
A missing person.

The authorities
Hand him the forms.

He knows how they have waited
With the learned patience of barbers

In small shops, idle,
Stropping their razors.

But now that these spaces in his life
Stare up at him blankly,

---

[503] As Jo Gill writes: "From the outset, the poem is about the closing down of possibilities—realized in a sequence of architectural and domestic metaphors: the shutting of doors to rooms that will never be reopened, the suspension on the stairs landing and, in stanza three, an imprisoning gaze in a mirror that gives back only a shocking image of the distance the speaker has travelled from his own boyhood. The disempowerment and claustrophobia of the middle-aged suburban male's lot in life are confirmed in the closing stanza where, as twilight descends, the men's entrapment within their 'mortgaged' suburban houses is rendered complete and final"; *The Poetics of the American Suburbs*, 158-9. Cf. also Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1985).

[504] CP 89.

Waiting to be filled in,
He does not know how to begin.

No longer concerning himself with mortgage documents, the missing man must navigate the forms that prove he is, in fact, no longer reachable—no longer present. The "spaces" on the form are, for him, the "spaces in his life," and he must "fill in" each. But the correct answer for these "blanks" is devastatingly difficult to imagine:

Afraid that he may not answer even
To his description of himself,

He asks for a mirror.
They reassure him

That he can be nowhere
But wherever he finds himself

From moment to moment,
Which, for the moment, is here.

Searching for reassurance, the missing man, the man-after-forty, looks back in the mirror. But he finds there "emerging / Slowly, as from the dark // Of a furnished room / Only by darkness, // One who receives no mail / And is known to the landlady only / For keeping himself to himself ..." Both he and the Forty-Year-Old Man are caught in a dialectic of location and dislocation. But whereas the latter must walk home to his "documented," mortgaged house, The Missing Person, a renter and shut-in, struggles to fill out a document with geospecific information. So much of this required data—who he is; his identification numbers; the details of his life—derive from other forms. Yet he "receives no mail." He is caught in an emblematic bureaucratic nightmare: unable to provide the supporting information that allows him to *enter* the system, which, once inside, provides the information that already *justifies* and corroborates his role within it.

From no letters at all to an abundance of circulars and notices: the bard of "Orpheus Opens His Morning Mail" begins:[505] "Bills. Bills. From the mapmakers of hell, the repairers of fractured lutes, the bribed judges of musical contests, etc.," before remarking flatly on "[a] note addressed to my wife, marked: *Please Forward*." The initial joke is no less resonant for its simplicity: Orpheus, like everyone else, is caught in the formular systems of ordinary life. He must respond to the papers he receives in the mail, paying what he owes; he must figure out what to do with mail he cannot forward to the woman he loves, pulled back "to the dolorous shades."[506] A "group photograph" from young women, his "*Admirers*," provokes thoughts of them in "some debauched seminary," "locked" in their "barren cells, beds ostentatiously unmade," "read[ing] [his] work." And the last note is merely "an invitation to attend certain rites" for the "equinox, on the river bank." Though Orpheus is to be "guest of honor," he can imagine only the "tipsy" security personnel and a faceless crowd, which become a single, imagined sound, "the perverse gentility of their shrieks."

As with "Memo from the Desk of X," the poem is tonally deflationary, placing Orpheus at the center of two bureaucratic networks: the first, of institutional education, which both frustrates and encourages the sexual development of the young girls immured there; and the second, of awards-based recognition. "[C]ertain rites" are organized in Orpheus's name, and amid the ruckus he might be asked to "recite [his] poems." But the bard understands that his presence is merely an occasion for the revelers' letting-loose. Although *he* is the artist, disencumbered of non-artistic responsibilities (and bereft, of course, of his beloved wife), he transfers the apparently artistic-romantic prerogatives of sex, Dionysian fellowship, and fun to the young women of prep schools and to the posh board members, along with their guests.

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[505] CP 65.

[506] Cf. "The Return of Alcestis," CP 52.

Justice's free translation of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "For a Freshman Reader"[507] at first carries on in this tone, though it offers, by the end, a possible redress to feelings of bureaucratic encirclement. An unnamed speaker instructs the hearer, a schoolboy, "Don't bother with odes, my son. / Timetables are more precise," before praising anonymity, imploring, "Learn more than I did: to change // Your identification, / Your address, your appearance." He closes,

> It will take more than anger,
> It will take patience to force
>
> The lungs of authority
> With the fine deadly powder
>
> Ground by those with the know-how,
> The precisionists, like you.

Here, the administrative "nightmares" of school and prize committee give way to the horrors of state violence: "The day will come when once more, /" Enzensberger's speaker warns, "Lists will be nailed to the door // And numbers stamped on the chest of anyone who says No." Just as the poem approaches its final sweep of intergenerational advice, it moves from the actionable to the provocatively obscure: is the "fine deadly powder" to be stuffed in the "lungs of authority" a metaphor, or is it real poison? Should the Freshman Reader work hard, like a "precisionist," to upend the state by killing its agents? Or should he strive "anonymously," as far outside the state's grasp as he can manage, and use "patient," nonviolent means of reform, saving "encyclicals" for the "fires," and "manifestos" "[f]or wrapping up the butter / and salt given to victims"?

Justice allows Enzensberger to ask these imponderables without stepping in to solve them. Indeed, he continues in this vein in still another lyric. "Twenty Questions"[508] picks up the problem of state bureaucracy, intermixing among more personal queries the routinized lines of a customs

[507] CP 110-1.

[508] CP 137.

official: "What is your occupation?"; "Do you often travel alone?"; "What is your native language, then?"; "What is your destination?"; "Will you please take off your glasses?"; "Is this a holiday for you?"; "Is that a scar, or a birthmark?" But these collide with more absurd questions—"Are you a public fountain?"; "Are you the watermelon flower?" The result is an ambivalence. On the one hand, impossible queries point up the strangeness in even the most straightforward of bureaucratic interrogations; the traveler *always* bristles, a little, when asked by the nameless official whether he has been to Mallorca for work or for pleasure. On the other, the blank-filling at customs makes all experience feel, for a time, like fodder for the checking of boxes, on forms we've not yet encountered. I'm not a public fountain, not today—but perhaps down the line, on some application, I'll be asked to prove this; and do I have the documentation necessary to do so?

Even Justice's "From a Notebook,"[509] so apparently dashed-off (as though ripped from his commonplace journal), contains the administrative subject. After mock-remarking on an "ambassador[ship] / To the High Court of Prose," to which he's "been named," this speaker includes his description of a "Workshop":

> G. maintains that the Adjective somehow penetrates the Noun with all that is most private, thereby becoming the most Personal of the Parts of Speech, hence the most Beautiful.
>
> I, on the contrary, maintain that the Conjunction, being Impersonal, is the more Beautiful, and especially when suppressed.

Again, Justice applies a tone of ironically dismissive scrutiny to a bureaucratic feature—and here it's not just any official space, but *the* constitutive space of his pedagogical career. The personal and the impersonal, long themes for poetry criticism, achieve here, and across the burolyrics as I've elaborated them, new stakes. For Justice, the bureaucratic is *the* supremely impersonal locus, a

[509] CP 149-51.

refined version of the Eliotic imperative;[510] yet the bureaucratic inevitably bears the dialectical trace of the intensely *personal* and private: the secret room, the clotted wood, the opportunity for solitary imaginative industry. In the late sequence "Tremayne,"[511] Justice dilates once more on a particular life lived, in one of the "mortgaged houses" like those of "Men at Forty." As with Weldon Kees's "Robinson" poems, the "Tremayne" lyrics are notable for their extreme plainness and mediocrity (depicted, and sometimes bodied forth, by the poet): the man's "mild despair," his observation of the street lamps, "How simple it all seems for once!— / *These sidewalks, these still houses*."[512] The third section, "Tremayne Autumnal," offers an illustratively indeterminate vision:

> The all-night stations—Tremayne pictures them
> As towers that send great sparks out through the dark—
> Fade out and drift among the drifted hours
> Just now returning to his bedside clock;
> And something starts all over, call it day.
> He likes, he really likes the little hum,
> Which is the last sound of all night-sounds to decay.
>
> Call that the static of the spheres, a sound
> Of pure in-betweenness, far, and choked, and thin.
> As long as it lasts—a faint, celestial surf—
> He feels no need to dial the weather in,
> Or music, or the news, or anything.
> And it soothes him, like some night-murmuring nurse,
> Murmuring nothing much, perhaps, but murmuring.

The "little hum" and "the static of the spheres" indicate that the station is broadcasting, and yes, nothing substantial is heard; but "it soothes" Tremayne. The indefinable houses and clouds of Patient B's painting; a cricket's wordless song for a Forty-Year-Old man; a paper's blank spots, for which the Missing Person has no appropriate answers; shrieks of the gala crowd; impossible

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[510] See Eliot on influence (and Justice's Eliotism) in Ch. 1.

[511] CP 224-6.

[512] Many critics have noted the similarities between Justice's "Tremayne" and Kees's "Robinson." See, as one example, David St. John, "Review: Memory as Melody," *The Antioch Review*, 46.1, Winter 1988, 102-109, esp. 108.

questions in the customs queue; a "suppressed," "impersonal" Conjunction—all these, like the voice of the "night-murmuring nurse," offer the form, but pointedly *not* the content, of reassurance, human connection, something so simple as a trackable chain of cause-and-effect. Justice consistently (even obsessively) examines the affective consequences of a life lived in a total, encircling bureaucracy. His burolyrics create predicaments in which persons encounter *placeholders for substance*: containers to which value might be added.

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Though different in form and timbre from Justice's, Tate's bullshit-and-bureaucracy poems also crop up throughout his career, and they increase in frequency in his second *Selected* (1990-2010), *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*. Here, Tate's chosen late form—a discursive extension of what Nicanor Parra has called, in the Chilean context, the "anti-poem"[513]—is shaggy and capacious, a half-story, half-associative block, composed in an elastic line, with a stable narrating presence at its center, a protagonist I'll refer to as Jim.[514]

Before working through Tate's bureaucratic preoccupations, I want to address a classificatory question well worth posing: are anti-poems like Tate's, for our purposes, also burolyrics? Over the last decade, the status and history of the lyric has occasioned spirited debate, especially as a purportedly default mode for the parsing of poetic utterance.[515] Indeed, Virginia Jackson's and Yopie Prins's account of the "lyricization" of poetry coincides, largely, with the emergence of the workshop as a dominant patronage/funding model, in the second half of the

[513] Vernon Young writes derisively of both Tate and Parra in "Nature and Vision: Or Dubious Antithesis," *Hudson Review*, 25.4, Winter 1972-3, 659-674, esp. 666-7.

[514] I don't mean that the *exact same* personage moves through these poems; but they are temperamentally so similar as to be the same *form* of character.

[515] See note on lyric theory and Culler, Jackson, and Prins, in Chapter 1.

twentieth century.[516] Some might argue that Tate's poems, with respect to an explanatorily useful "theory of the lyric," are not so much lyrics as utterances opposed to the lyric, committed to the absurd. As a consequence, their "resistance" isn't exactly "anti-professional" but rather, and much more broadly, anti-systemic, arrayed against the abstract networks from which human subjects try to derive love, contentment, and meaning. In this model, persuasive as far as it goes, the narrating subject of Tate's anti-poems is not a person but a "hollowed-out" "non-person," with regard to whom attributions of will and desire make little sense.[517]

Although I take this objection seriously, I defend what follows with two qualifications specific to my argument. First, Tate allowed for South American Surrealist influence in his work, and his anti-poems really do resemble, in tone and structure if rarely in electoral-political implication, the anti-poems of Nicanor Parra.[518] And Parra's poems, like "The Trap," "Childhood Memories," and "The Viper," are massaged into the dialectic of lyric and anti-lyric with about as much difficulty as are (to cite prominent examples) those of Ginsberg, Ashbery, or O'Hara.[519] In the case of all four writers, and also of Tate, the "rich refusals" of the anti-lyric—their evacuations of stable identity, of post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc causality—contain within them the originary provocation of the (imagined, "mainstream") poet's idea of the lyric.[520] The lyric, in this sense, is the projection against which the anti-lyricist writes, and the field in which his work is interpreted.[521] Tate himself believed

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[516] For an overview, see *The Lyric Theory Reader*, 1-7.

[517] I am grateful to Stephanie Burt for her feedback on this chapter; the counter-claims I voice, in the paragraph above, are a paraphrase of her critique, via private correspondence.

[518] See *Anti-Poems*, trans. Jorge Elliott (San Francisco: City Lights, 1960) and *Poems and Anti-Poems*, ed. Miller Williams (New York: New Directions, 1967). See also Tate, "Art of Poetry" 60-1.

[519] *Anti-Poems* 9-11, 12-3, 17-9.

[520] One could argue for the range of "anti-poeticity" of specific writers on this list; I place them, without overmuch distinction, on a continuum above.

[521] See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 29-34.

his lifelong poetic project to be continuous; what he began in *The Lost Pilot* he never repudiated or totally abandoned, even as his poems made do without lineation and approached the shape and scope of stories, parables, or tales.[522]

Second, the "non-lyricism" of Tate's anti-poems, their insistence on an interpellated and non-humanistically legible "subject" acting with befuddlement and anguish in the face of complex systems, gives the lie to its own objection: this, as we'll see, is exactly what a buropoet might imagine for himself, as he negotiates not only his role in the bureaucracies of poetry but his multiform debts to teachers like Justice and craft precursors like Parra. Jim's (the character's) run-ins with strangers perplex him; they miscommunicate together, they grope for meaning; and many of the poems' auxiliary characters, like Jim himself, are affiliated with, trapped inside of, rigid, hierarchized, totalizing networks.

In "Annual Report," an illustrative first example, Jim remarks,

> Only one Disorderly Person was reported.
> (No one cared enough to report me.)
> Likewise, only one Noise Complaint.
> (Can the whole village be deaf?)[523]

Jim stars in his own version of Justice's "The Missing Person," but the stakes have changed, and the scenario's realism is more tenuous. Jim marvels at only one "Indecent Exposure" in the neighborhood, and one "Disturbed Person," implying in both cases that it's he. Unlike Justice's lyric, however, nearly a dozen people in the area have been "reported missing," and "thirty-six were identified as Suspicious." This problem applies not only to humans: "there were five Deer Complaints," too, and the poem ends abruptly, with the speaker hinting that he, in fact, is a deer.

[522] Cf. The Route as Briefed 158.

[523] James Tate, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream: Selected Poems 1990-2010* (New York: Ecco, 202), 56. Hereafter EOD.

Or, perhaps he's a disturbed person who merely *thinks* he's a deer; in this town (so similar to Tate's Amherst, Massachusetts, as in the other anti-poems)[524], it can be hard to tell the difference.

Jim moves from the police bureau to the private, corporate office in "The New Ergonomics."[525] After a report on the title's subject has been "delivered" (to no one in particular)—a file the employees feel free to "ignore[]"—everyone goes out for a "lunch" that's "most satisfying." Their celebration, however, turns bizarre. Jack, one of the team-members, "believes in alien abduction / and Roberta does not, / although she has had / several lost weekends lately / and one or two unexplained scars / on her buttocks." Jim becomes lost in reverie as the meal concludes; he wonders about abductions, since, after all, "[p]eople disappear / all the time, and most of them / have no explanation / when and if they return." A man named "Squid" settles the check, and Jim asks himself what "these new ergonomics," ostensible problem for the team's attention, really are. No one at the company, he says, "tell[s] us anything." He ends by noting that Squid "looked tired / like he wanted to sleep ... / in a barn somewhere, in Kansas. / I wanted to sleep there, too." Jim's company might be tasked with developing new methods, through which to become comfortable; but comfort, for Jim, arrives in a kind of disappearance (a self-abduction) into the country outside town—the place where the biographical James Tate was born and raised.[526] A barn might not be "ergonomically" perfect, but it's more than *gemütlich* enough for Jim-on-the-lam, hiding out where his bosses can't find him.

"The Workforce"[527] introduces the bureaucratic setting of the armed forces, which the title compares to the work-structures of non-military life, and in which the boss-employee relationship is

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[524] Tate, "The Art of Poetry," 73.

[525] EOD 100.

[526] Tate, "The Art of Poetry," 43.

[527] EOD 113.

supplemented by the (formally similar) officer-subordinate dynamic.[528] In a dialogue, the officer asks his man (another Jim): "Do you have adequate oxen for the job?" Jim says, "No, my oxen are inadequate." While he's on the subject, he also requests "fishcakes for the men," "maps of the mountains and the underworld," "seeds," "plows," "scythes"—and "women." The officer responds, grimly, that "there are no maps of the underworld," and that he "can't get" Jim "women." But he tells his subordinate to "[o]rder [his men] to begin singing immediately. / Either women will find you this way or you will die / comforted. Meanwhile," he exhorts, "busy yourselves / with the meaningful tasks you have set for yourselves." To which the soldier answers that they "will not rest until the babes arrive." The last sentence is, of course, intended as a punch-line. But as with many of Tate's lyrics, and especially the late anti-poems, the humorous and the serious interpenetrate. Even if Jim knows that waiting for "the babes" is ludicrous, he looks forward to their company. And perhaps the officer's advice—singing them into existence—is more practical than simply doing nothing.

For Tate, too, the psychiatric institution becomes a place for bureaucratic rumination. His version of Justice's "Patient B" poem, "Mental Health Workers,"[529] introduces "a hairy thing / in the corner" of a psychiatric facility, "leaking some green / fluid" and "[giving] off / an unpleasant odor, a cross between Limburger cheese / and a decomposing skunk." Whereas Justice's Patient makes the amorphous "things" that his speaker tries to interpret—as hills, clouds, or houses—Tate's Hairy Thing is both frightfully real and difficult, linguistically, to pin down. The employees, for their part, manage around it, and the narrator (an unseen Jim) says he's "heard it singing," as "it / seemed to say I love you. / And then one day it wasn't / there anymore, not lost but gone before." The Hairy Thing is Tate's version of an "open secret," something so large it can't really be ignored, yet so

[528] BSJ 161.

[529] EOD 119.

terrible, one's only coping strategy is to work around it, pretend it isn't there—and hope one day it will be "gone."[530]

A similar explanatory aporia is found later in the same collection, *Memoir of the Hawk* (2001), in a piece titled, fittingly, "No Explanation."[531] Another Jim reports, "Down the street they are pulverizing the old / police station. ... / All that's left is a mountain of woodchips. ..." He goes on,

> "Where are the policemen?" I asked one of the
> workers. He pointed to the mountain of woodchips
> and said, "We never saw them." I walked on
> thinking about Officer Plotkin, how he'd arrested
> me when I was guilty, and how he'd come to my aid
> when I'd needed him. I stopped and looked back
> over my shoulder. I longed to be arrested,
> to be saved.

The police, so prevalent in Tate's later poetry, are here a productively ambiguous force. A collective embodiment of bureaucratic might, they're also hard to understand—omnipresent, ineffectual, bland observers and wielders of power within the bizarre environment of Jim's ever-shifting "town."[532] "No Explanation" does to all police officers what one character, in the Coen brothers' film *Fargo* (1996), does to another: murders him and runs him through a woodchipper, attempting to turn him into mulch. Officer Plotkin was Jim's benign guardian angel *and* his omnipresent spy. But now Plotkin is disappeared, and because Jim worries he'll no longer intersect with state power—no longer have the opportunity to be detained—he'll also never be "saved."

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[530] For an illuminating recent use of the term in the general-interest press, see Charlotte Shane's "Eyes Wide Shut: Power, shamelessness, and sex in Washington, DC," in *Bookforum*, Summer 2019, accessed online, n.p. For a treatment of the openness-secrecy dialectic in recent scholarship, see K. Q. Andrews's marvelous "Trade Secrets: Poetry in the Teaching Machine," on Jorie Graham's work; *New Literary History*, 49.1, Winter 2018, 71-91, esp. 84-8.

[531] EOD 127.

[532] Cf. Mark Greif's "Seeing Through Police," *n+1*, No. 22, Spring 2015, accessed online, n.p.

Tate returns to a scene of laboratory investigation, so fundamental to "Teaching the Ape to Write Poems," in "Doink."[533] Rather than an experimental scene primed to produce an efficient ape-machine writing interface, "Doink" involves something more humdrum—and less professional. "I am a scientist who don't know nothing / yet. But every morning I peer into my micro- / scope to see if any wee thing be swimming / around." This scientist-Jim then walks over to his telescope, training it on the evening sky, saying he's "spotted several / stars and named them all after me, Prince / Hubertus zu Lowenstein." When he's not doing his version of Kuhnian normal science, he's relaxing with "ladies' fashion magazines," which "give [him] many of [his] best ideas." "When my wife, the Princess, sees me ... / she always says, 'Cowabunga!' / several times." In this lyric, Tate inverts the basic supposition of the scientific lab: that the people in white coats have some inkling what's up and what's down.[534] Science-Jim (aka the self-styled Prince Hubertus) speaks agrammatically, and trains his scopes on whatever passing body strikes his fancy. He's not producing knowledge, not this way; instead, he looks to acts of self-creation, and ornamentation, to give his life meaning. And his wife appears to enjoy what she sees.

The large-scaled administrative structures of "public" life—hospitals, police stations, labs, and offices—become the smallest replicable administrative unit, the household, in "Negative Employee Situation."[535] Mary, "live-in maid" to the Huntingtons, spends nearly all her time praying, so much that she "pretty much cease[s] / working altogether." Mrs. Huntington takes on the role of servant-to-the-servant, and Mr. Huntington "believe[s] her prayers benefited the whole / household." But

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[533] EOD 132.

[534] Though one is reminded, by scientist-friends, how much experimentation really consists of making errors. Thayer Anderson has written powerfully of Pynchon's lab comedy in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

[535] EOD 138.

> when Mary died after a short illness, they hired
> another Mary, but this one cleaned and scrubbed
> and vacuumed and dusted and polished and cooked.
> The Huntingtons were terrified for their lives
> and discussed plans for killing the new Mary.

The original Mary has a very "real," non-bullshit job, in cleaning up after the Huntingtons, but they don't want her to do it. (A classic duct-taper, Mary must fix whatever the Huntingtons invariably ruin). They want her to pray, to shirk. When a new Mary comes along, and carries out the tasks the "previous" Mary put aside, the Huntingtons don't know how to cope. The administrative order of the home—in which the masters do the servant's chores, so that the servant can do the spiritual work of preserving the masters' souls—has been upended, and the only remedy is murder. As in many of Tate's anti-poems, the act of killing can be used to set straight a bureaucratic process gone awry.

And killing can *be* that bureaucratic process. In "Capital Punishment,"[536] Jim offers that "[n]o one was allowed to know the name of / the town executioner, and he wore a mask at / all times." People ask how many citizens he's put to death; Jim admits, too, that "[w]e don't really know / who gives him his orders, some committee probably. / Mr. Executioner is married to Mrs. Executioner" and both are utterly anonymous. "[T]heir children wear masks as well. They don't / even know who they are." With a boss out of sight, the Executioner family—unknown to themselves—carry out the boss's imagined prerogatives, killing when killing is requested. The townspeople are frustrated by the state of affairs, but there's nothing they can do to remedy this severest application of state power. Jim understands the Executioners, in their matching masks, as just another local family, identified by the occupation of its breadwinner. In his quasi-Amherst, it's not always clear why people have to do what they do, but a boss can be projected backward from the "necessary" act of official murder. The consequences are so dire, someone somewhere *must* be giving orders.

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[536] EOD 154.

Back in the private sector, a scene of customer-employee interface defines "Banking Rules."[537] Jim waits in line at the local savings branch, and someone in front of him is "humming." He asks the man to stop, and the man insists he *is* stopping, only to continue. Finally, Jim "find[s] the manager," who counters that "'[t]here's no crime in humming.'" Defeated, Jim goes back to the line, before realizing he's getting smaller:

> ... I felt myself shrinking.
> The manager of the bank walked briskly up
> to me and said, "Sir, are you aware of the
> fact that you're shrinking?" I said I was.
> And he said, I'm afraid we don't allow that
> kind of behavior in this bank. I have to ask
> you to leave." The air was whistling out
> of me, I was almost gone.

Humming's not a crime, but whistling might well be. The manager is charged with ensuring the smooth operation of the branch (the ticking of all boxes), and Jim has broken a part of the social code. Sure, it's hard to know which behaviors are allowed in official spaces, and which are labelled disruptive. But getting smaller is a far better outcome than dying—even if tiny Jim, in the end, is "almost gone."

Like his anti-poems, Tate's short stories, collected in *Dreams of a Robot Dancing Bee*, also orbit the problems of total bureaucratic life. "The Torque-Master of Advanced Video,"[538] a standout from the collection, develops this problematic with particular robustness. In it, Arthur Tomten is "the new manager" of a local video-rental chain; he has "five employees working for him, all older than himself. ... It was only natural that they would initially resent his having been chosen from 'outside' for the newly vacated position of manager."[539] But after an adjustment period, Arthur's coworkers

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[537] EOD 170.

[538] James Tate, *Dreams of a Robot Dancing Bee* (New York: Verse, 2002), 117-24.

[539] RDB 117.

appear willing to give him a shot as the new boss. Unfortunately, Arthur's superior, Earl Smith, the owner of the chain, is a bungler—a consummate taskmaster, and something of a goon to boot. "He bought any movie in sight, generally following the principle that the public wants garbage ... sex and violence and work-out videos."[540] Smith permits no dawdling among his ranks; he'll occasionally stop by Arthur's branch, on "one of his surprise raids,"[541] to see how the employees are getting along—and he "issue[s] rigid orders, new rules, strict guidelines of behavior."[542] Although Arthur believes these regulations to be cruel and bizarre, he promises "'all employees [will be] kept busy every minute they are on payroll.'"[543] The narrator, focalized through Arthur, describes the branch's morale:

> When Earl Smith left there was a collective sigh of relief and the workers went back to work pretty much as before ... The work was, in fact, dreadfully boring. ... The garbage man from Belchertown who checked out 'Seka's Fantasies' three times every week, the boat people with their obsession with Chuck Norris films ... Something about a VCR that says nowhere-to-go, no-one-to-speak-to, nothing-to-do, little-on-my-mind. And to stand behind a counter eight hours a day, five or six days a week, was a window on the world that needed constant cleaning.[544]

Arthur tells his coworkers about childhood in his beloved Shamokin, Pennsylvania—a severed head in a jar; "Albino twins" named "Eunice and Eugenia Smitherman"[545]—and sometimes about his live-in girlfriend, Angie, who "date[s] other men occasionally,"[546] to Arthur's consternation. One day, Smith asks Arthur to audit Advanced Video's logs, to determine which films are non-rentals;

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[540] Ibid. 118.

[541] Ibid. 118.

[542] Ibid. 118.

[543] Ibid. 118.

[544] Ibid. 119.

[545] Ibid. 120.

[546] Ibid. 121.

although Arthur wants to stock more aesthetically-complex fare, Smith claims that the other branches do much more business than his. Only an attitude of rental *maximization* will allow Arthur to keep his job and (relatively) high salary (in truth, only a bit more than minimum wage). Arthur dreams of standing up to Smith:

> He was like some kind of despicable football coach, never satisfied, always insulting, with no notion of human dignity. And Arthur despised himself for not telling him to his face. ... In Shamokin he and Angie had always thought they didn't need anyone else, they had this unspoken contract with one another that nothing could tarnish their private world as long as they remained strong and true to one another. They knew when the world was false, they knew what it was they would do and what was beneath them.[547]

Arthur worries that, by auditing the films on overtime shifts, he'll be neglecting Angie, who might wind up with another boyfriend. Going through the store's stock, the ones customers never ask for, Arthur stumbles on a harrowing "homemade video of a seventeen-year-old boy's suicide[,] made by his older brother." Normally a fan, like Angie, of "splatter films,"

> [h]e shoved the paperwork to one side of the office desk, then pushed the cassette into the VCR and leaned back. Surely he deserved a break after so many pages of figures. But it was Angie he was thinking of the whole time, how they had first gotten together. It always had been a kind of suicide pact, he realized now, and now that he was really dying,[548] she was breaking the pact. It wasn't funny one bit.[549]

Surveilled by his boss, Arthur undertakes his own scopophilic enterprise, only to realize he has watched something utterly private and devastating. No one, Arthur thinks, should see this film—and by extension, many of the films his omnipresent taskmaster-superior wants him to stock. Smith watches his employees, who are to track what the customers are watching. But Arthur wants to

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[547] Ibid. 122-3.

[548] Cf. EOD 5.

[549] RDB 124.

disrupt this chain of intrusive observation, even as he regrets the "breaking" of the romantic-suicidal "pact" he's established with Angie.[550]

Arthur's concern, like those voiced by the Jims in Tate's burolyrics, has to do with *value*. Justice's burolyrics, too, are containers in search of value, as a re-analysis of the poems reveals. What do one's labor, one's lifetime, one's consciousness really matter, in the grand scheme? Is it possible to rescue local pockets of value within an otherwise crushing regime of total bureaucracy—when one is ticking boxes, or creating tedious work for others? In his treatise *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, written before *Bullshit Jobs* and *The Utopia of Rules*, Graeber puzzles out the methods by which cultures assert the "value" of ideas, and the (typically monetary) "values" allowing goods to be shown off or circulated.[551] "Value," in this framework, is "the importance of actions"; as any antifoundationalist anthropologist will tell you, societies do not *inherit* values a priori, but instead make and remake them daily, by "going about" their lives.[552] People act on, then reflect on, the social world they are (re)creating together, and this dialectic of action and reflection *is* valuation itself—a metadescriptive process, wherein the bestowing of meaningfulness on a given action is itself a personally- and socially-meaningful endeavor.[553] Thus value, for Graeber, is "Heraclitean," an event or "flow," rather than a fixed category (even with a given social frame).[554] *Values*, for their part, become attached to physical things, but these things have their own dialectical relationship to value-as-action. As Graeber explains, to know "the value attributed to any particular object means that one

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[550] Ibid. 124.

[551] David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1-2.

[552] ATV 45.

[553] Ibid. 54.

[554] ATV 50, 52.

must understand the meaning [value] of the various acts of creation, consecration, use and appropriation ... that make up its history."[555]

Graeber notes that, in a regime of bullshitized work, meaningful or interesting jobs—those in which the value of the labor itself is apparent to the worker, in some form—become especially (meta)valuable within society. And in thinking of other people's valuable jobs, workers employed in BS fields typically respond with jealous rage.[556] In the last poem of his *Collected*, however, Justice approaches, obliquely, this *problem of value,* and sets up a distinction between a domain of self-defined human action and that of bureaucratically-necessitated BS. The final section runs,

> The world is very dusty, uncle. Let us work.
> One day the sickness shall pass from the earth for good.
> The orchard will bloom; someone will play the guitar.
> Our work will be seen as strong and clean and good.
> And all that we suffered through having existed
> Shall be forgotten as though it had never existed.[557]

As critics have noted, the scene is taken from a play of Chekhov's.[558] Although the world is "dusty"— impossible to tidy—the speaker enjoins her uncle once more to begin their labor. It's a Revelatory vision, of heaven-on-earth: "the sickness shall pass," there will be flowers and fruit in the fields, and music will abound. Whoever oversees their work—whoever is responsible for rating and categorizing it—will find it passing muster, "strong," "clean," "good." And the "suffering" that life once engendered, since life for them *was* work, will be erased. They will be rid of ill memories—of useless, exploitative labor, for which suffering is its only lasting mark. Going forward, their time will be valuable, and their time will be free.

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[555] ATV 114.

[556] BSJ 257.

[557] CP 278.

[558] See, as one example, Jennifer Habel, "Stanzas: Donald Justice," *The Sewanee Review* (online), Feb. 2019, online, n.p.

In "Memo from the Desk of X," Justice's speaker requests "the extinction of poems" because they are dangerous; they contain, by his lights, the kind of value-ratifying potential that could disturb (oppressive) social unity. Poems have their aesthetic merits, as even Justice's bureaucrat will acknowledge. But geometric forms, too, can be beautiful, and they lack the revolutionary potential—the ability to assert and create value for individuals and groups—that poems seem inevitably to carry. In the paintings of "Patient B," Justice insists on the private names of clouds, which, like pet-names for a companion, speak to a self-created value of human fellowship, even in the otherwise dreary confines of the mental institution. (Graeber sees naming-rituals as occasions for the imbuing of value: a means for groups to fashion or revise bonds between members.)[559]

In "Men at Forty," the Rockwellesque depiction of a father shaving, and a son looking on, becomes a site for the *assigning* of social value, as distinguished from the monetary value of the "mortgaged house," to which the Forty-Year-Old must return after his tryst. For the son, a shaving father embodies adult mastery; for the father himself, shaving is a "mystery of lather," a reminder that he, once a son, is another link in the (admittedly stylized, patriarchal) chain of fathers and sons stretching backward. The fixed-term mortgage, then, is a future-directed caricature of this chain. It signifies only the *debt* the father has incurred, in agreeing to buy a home from which he hopes to stray, some nights, alone.[560] The mirror-scene of "Men at Forty" stands, in a perverse doubling, against the mirror-scene of "The Missing Person." There, the lost speaker realizes a genuine *desire* to fill in the bureaucratic "blanks." These forms remind him that he has valuable information to provide—that there is a value-making self beneath layers of illusion and misrepresentation. As Graeber notes, "display" and "hiding," or "visibility" and "invisibility," are dialectically enmeshed in

[559] ATV 73.

[560] For Graeber on mortgages, see *Debt*, 380-1.

societies' processes of valuation.[561] To develop this, Graeber refers to Marc Shell's chapter "The Ring of Gyges," from *The Economy of Literature*, about two kings in Herodotus's *History*, Gyges and Deioces.[562] Graeber notes that Gyges, a "usurper" who gained his position by stealth,[563] is known to ensuing generations as the inventor of "coinage"—which Graeber understands as a means of making otherwise private "hoards" of monetary value "tame and domesticated *by rendering* [them] *visible*."[564] The paranoiac Deioces, by contrast, "filled his kingdom full of spies," after serving most of a professional life as a beloved, wise judge.[565] Valuable *objects*, like gold, and valuable *bodies*, like the king's, therefore are thrown into the public-private dialectic. To signify an object's value, one may cache it sometimes, flaunt it at others; to signify a cultural value, one frequently will reserve it for special, in-group events, *and* promulgate it as a public doctrine.[566] In this sense, Justice's Missing Person reverse-engineers the process: *because* his "true, inner self" has been hidden for so long, he concludes, it *must* be stable and meaningful. This induction forms the emotional core of the poem, in a riddling "last disguise" he can "bring to light" but never remove. And in making the poem "public," he is insisting, before an audience, that some part of it must remain in the shadows, unknown.

"Orpheus Opens His Morning Mail" and "For a Freshman Reader" turn the stakes of valuation from the personal-psychological to the social. In a satire of poetic awards culture, Orpheus wonders what it means, if anything, that he is feted for his lyrics. Indeed, he fears that the people of

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[561] ATV 101-2. See also Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 11-62.

[562] Ibid. 102.

[563] Ibid. 101.

[564] Ibid. 101-2, 103.

[565] Ibid. 101.

[566] Ibid. 102, 104, 110.

the town hardly understand what he's written. They merely like the *fact* of his being a poet. The dead-serious jesting of the Enzensberger poem advises its "reader" to give up poetry for the cause of revolution. In both lyrics, poems are supposed to be cultural ornaments, for the delectation of the leisure-class. But poetry, of course, is also the means by which Justice transmits this ostensible valuation of poetry. Poems can be grounds for a prize-regimented aesthetic hierarchy; they can be a distraction from the insurgent's cause. But they can also be the forum by which the poet tests and refashions her attitude toward inherited social values. This, as McGurl and Menand have noted, is the propensity for creative writing to be "an outside that is inside," a condition Justice was known to have acknowledged.[567]

"Twenty Questions" and "From a Notebook" stage, in their own ways, a scene common to the creative-writing student (or to the talk-attending academic): the leading, answerless question. The customs official asks the visitor where she comes from, what her business is—and relies, at least superficially, on her self-report to admit her to the country. But the customs official, in asking these questions, also reinscribes her own social value *as an official*, and the visitor's personal history as history, reminding the visitor-applicant that, in the destination-country, even the smallest details of her life are collected, reviewed, and approved. Similarly, as in the "Workshop" section of "From a Notebook," the poetry workshop itself can be an exchange of ideas *and* a verification that this kind of exchange is really valuable. One need only attend a few sessions, anywhere in North America, to encounter the bloviator: schematized as white, youngish, and male, this speaker asks questions to demonstrate his own perceived worth, to the immediate community of voices. The workshopped poet's response to these "notes" is, for the bloviator, generally beside the point, and students can

[567] TPE 197; Louis Menand, "Show or Tell," *The New Yorker* (review of McGurl), Jun. 1, 2009, online, n.p. See also Justice's "Notes of an Outsider," op. cit.

construct more authentic value against whatever windiness occurs in the classroom.[568] Although Justice might indeed believe the Conjunction more valuable (as an expressive tool) than the Adjective, his exchange with "G." paints, for comic effect, the self-aggrandizing valuations that eager, entitled poets make in the supposedly "open," unfettered space of the writing classroom. Justice then turns the image of the bloviating-poetaster on its ear, in Tremayne. Otherwise a figure to be derided, Tremayne—in his half-depressive shuffling through the suburbs—becomes a poet-aspirant to be admired and pitied. Tremayne "misquotes" Keats and renders the autumn colors "Impressionistic" by looking at them without glasses. In this, he manufactures his own quasi-artistic experiences by linking them to the "valuable" artworks of the greater Romantic tradition—whereby one's worth is bound up dialectically in one's potential to create, and enjoy, disruptively edifying poems and paintings.[569]

Justice's poems of bullshit and bureaucracy thus point to an ideal hinted at in Graeber, and made explicit in the work of antifoundationalist theorists like Rorty, Bloom, and Poirier: that personal value-making—the identification of some self-directed projects, and not others, as worth attempting—is an ongoing endeavor. This endeavor entails a refashioning of vocabularies, those codes of the lives into which we are thrown, to suit a maker's situational needs.[570] Justice's structurally-subtle, Apollonian burolyrics dramatize efforts at personal value-making—they render them a whirring engine within imagined structures otherwise predisposed to balance, self-adjustment, and poise. His poems therefore *accommodate* and *assimilate* the potentially-disruptive processes of value-creation. These become the lyric sub-spaces I've described previously as substanceless substances (like Tremayne's backyard sounds of "static" and "murmuring"); they are

[568] See the parody Twitter feed "Guy in Your MFA," as a prominent (funny) example.

[569] Cf. ATV 260.

[570] See preceding discussion of these ideas in Chapter 2.

revealed, on reanalysis, to be areas for the "pouring-in" of value. Such meaningfulness might not be evident to the speaker—not yet intelligible or useful. Indeed, the men of Justice's buropoems greet incipient valuation both as a revelatory ideal, like in "There is a gold light," and as something terrifying, outside the comfortable norm. Bureaucraticity in these works demands an individual struggle—partial, self-thwarting—to create value against the stultification of a total system that, at times, doesn't seem so bad.

In the first section of this chapter, James Tate wondered aloud whether Justice agreed with certain of his later-career aesthetic choices. But Tate, like Justice, conceived of poems as proving grounds for potentially-valuable lifeways—imagined worlds in which a person figures out how to be. Tate did so, however, according to a different frame. In "Teaching the Ape to Write Poems," Tate offers his own form of valuation (and validation), for a "procedural" rather than single-product poetics.[571] That is, even if the poems the ape writes are useless, no good and unread, the "poem" itself—the real act of creation that Tate depicts—is here the *fusion* of the ape and the writing implements. More a *contraption*[572] and less a "well-wrought urn," the ape-machine "looks like a god" first, and writes second, on Dr. Bluespire's encouragement. Tate's process, then, isn't a demonstration of wheel-spinning, or heedless creation. It's instead an opportunity to make different machines, events—interactions and reactions—in language.

Tate forces his "Jims," within these poems, to respond to, make sense of, and evaluate bureaucratically-prompted events. The acts of "reporting" (in "Annual Report"), "lunching" (in "The New Ergonomics"), "quartermastering" (in "The Workforce"), "rehabilitating" (in "Mental Health Workers"), "arresting" (in "No Explanation"), "experimenting" (in "Doink"), "praying" (in "Negative Employee Situation"), "punishing" (in "Capital Punishment"), and "banking" (in

[571] Cf. ATV 47.

[572] Auden, "Making, Knowing, Judging," from *The Dyer's Hand* 50.

"Banking Rules") become, in themselves, procedurally-poetic. They are ways of unfolding, of making and re-making, society, by "re-doing" the little processes that play out, again and again, on any given Main Street. Tate invariably *tilts* these processes from their expected patterns, and creates new opportunities for the making of meaning, or the imparting of value, from the jumbled remnants of our inherited ways of doing things. Critics who read Tate as a value-free, playful "Surrealist" miss this displacement of purpose in the poems. These anti-poems *do* have a purpose: to see what value might be found, in the cracking-open and reprocessing of the routines of contemporary life.

"The Torque-Master of Advanced Video" encapsulates, in prose, what amounts to a statement of Tate's idiosyncratic poetics of value. Arthur's job, as manager, means little to him, and he's hesitant to direct others, especially when he feels the store's tasks to be meaningless make-work. Smith wants mostly to surveil his employees and increase rentals; if violence and sex move off the shelves, then Advanced Video is to stock violence and sex. Initially valuable, to Arthur, are his relationship with Angie, their shared memories of Shamokin, and his love of slasher films, a genre from which Arthur derives meaning detachedly. Fictional horror movies are windows into an exaggerated, operatic world. But the film on which the story ends—documenting a *non*fictional suicide—prompts Arthur to ask what, exactly, gory films are *simulating* (and often, though not exclusively, *celebrating*). More locally, this final film demands that Arthur answer to the specific processes—the actions of meaning-making—in which he finds himself thrown. What *are* the value-creating processes in his life? Being-from-Shamokin? Being-with-Angie? If Angie is "breaking" their tacit "suicide pact," how have they set this pact into motion? And what would life be like outside it? Settling neither on misplaced nostalgia (there's no move back to Shamokin) nor on tropes of salvation-by-relationship, "Torque-Master" leaves Arthur on the cusp of self-fashioning. What local procedures does he want to craft, live within, and reflect upon? And does he care at all that, so long as he's in the store, Earl Smith might be watching?

Part Four: "Staying In" and "Getting Out"—Rita Dove and Alice Notley

Above, I've established two options for the production of meaning among buropoets: through "value-adding," within the structured lyric frame, in Justice, and through procedural-poetic self-creation, in Tate. These efforts, I contend, are a crucial reaction to the bullshit-bureaucracy problematic. In this last portion of the chapter, however, I want to step back and survey, in a different sense, these two poets. Justice and Tate are cisgendered, straight white men, and to a large—sometimes frightfully large—degree, the bureaucracies in which they lived and worked were skewed *toward* them, even as they *devalued* them. While they mourn the various limitations on their imaginative freedoms, they are relatively free to renegotiate their relationships to value within total bureaucracies, and against these limitations. To put it another way: bureaucracy devalues everyone, yet in these networks, some persons are more equally devalued than others. For Justice and Tate, these problems appear formal and theoretical, but for poets with less political and social power, they are instead taxing and continually-emergent.

An Iowa MFA graduate, Rita Dove is one of the country's most influential poets and poetry-teachers of the last three decades.[573] In interviews and essays, she has described the difficulties she experienced, in school and afterward, as a woman of color in poetic spaces created, then reserved, primarily for white men.[574] These spaces have run the gamut from blithely dismissive of, to openly hostile to, contributions from writers of color, and from other marginalized groups. Indeed, a reconsideration of the supposed inclusivity and non-hierarchical attunements of creative-writing programs has become one of the field's indispensable topics of research and debate.

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[573] For a comprehensive "bio-critical introduction" to Dove, see Therese Steffen, *Crossing Color: Transcultural Space and Place in Rita Dove's Poetry, Fiction, and Drama* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 2001), 3-22, 8. See also David O. Dowling, *A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers' Workshop* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2019), 208.

[574] As one example, see Rita Dove, *The Poet's World* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1995), 85.

Dove's response to, and analysis of, racial and gender dynamics in American poetry are well-documented; they are also complex, and resistant to quick summary. Generally speaking, Dove has said that, at Iowa, her modus operandi was one of self-possessive care, along with devotion to personal projects of reading and writing.[575] Her responses to white privilege[576]—which amplifies already-existing, and supposedly race-neutral, "program" structures of rules, deadlines, and internal applications—was understated, if occasionally forceful.[577] Like Joy Harjo and Sandra Cisneros (who were more outspoken in their public critique of the Workshop), Dove tended to think that figures like Donald Justice were embodiments *both* of stylistic-aesthetic expectation *and* of administrative power.[578] (Although he frequently complained about the University's admins, Justice was less willing, in letters, to admit to the leverage he held over faculty and students.) A professor like Justice could determine fellowship "winners" and "losers," and his ideas of poetic craft did not always include the visions of writers like Cisernos—to say the least.[579] In the final section of this chapter, I wish to extend the conclusions I've drawn above—about value, bullshit, and bureaucracy—to two women, Rita Dove and Alice Notley, whose relationships with the academy, and thus with poetic bureaucracy, are mutually-enlightening. As with Justice and Tate, I'll do so textually, beginning with

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[575] See Dove's 1985 interview with Gretchen Johnsen and Richard Peabody, in *Conversations with Rita Dove*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Jackson: Mississippi UP, 2003), 16-17.

[576] For the poet Claudia Rankine's examination of the subject, see: "I wanted to know what white men thought about their privilege. So I asked." *The New York Times Magazine*. July 17, 2010; accessed online, n.p. For more on white privilege's intersection with poetry, see Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, "The Program Era and the Mainly White Room," in *After the Program Era: The Past, Present, and Future of Creative Writing in the University*, ed. Loren Glass (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2016), 137-146.

[577] "I was the only Black person in the Iowa workshop at the time, and I think many Black writers who have been in workshops will have had the same experience: you're always the only one. There falls the burden—and it is a burden, whether you choose to bear it or not—the burden of other people's guilt. I discovered in that workshop, though I did get some valuable comments on some poems, that the poems dealing specifically with my heritage always got the worst comments, because people could not find a way around the guilt; they couldn't quite figure it out" (98). [Interview with Wayne Ude, 1992; 88-102]; from *Conversations with Rita Dove*. See also Dowling 226.

[578] Dowling 203-5; 212.

[579] Ibid. 204-5.

a late poem of Dove's that, on its surface, takes up the kinds of bureaucratic questions we've addressed till now.

"Desk Dreams" is in five sections.[580] Each depicts an office space in which Dove has worked, in "Tempe, Arizona; Paris, France; Research Triangle Park, North Carolina; Bellagio, Italy; and Charlottesville, Virginia." In the first, Dove's speaker (an autobiographical stand-in for the poet)[581] says, "I love this unconscious solitude— // the way whole afternoons belong to the cicada," while the poet sits above the desk's "honeyed wood." In Paris, a "black desk" supports "a full palette of notebooks / offering up their moonlit pages."[582] But in North Carolina, the circumstances have changed; they are unromantically grim:

> White-bricked cell. One leafy, appreciative plant.
> General issue desk and a balcony
> leading nowhere, though the eye travels
> deep into androgynous green.
>
> Blue-ruled paper from grade school days.
> I languish for hours
> on the near side of a hyphen: great expectations
> cut by the call
> of a single prehensile jay.

In Italy, her space is "[n]ot a studio so much as an earthbound turret / or a periscope thrust / through the earth's omphalos," and the poet avers she "will write [her] way out on a spiral of poems." Hemmed in close by walls "sleek as a shell's," she wonders if it's "true [that] goldfish grow / to fit their containers[.]"

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[580] Rita Dove, "Desk Dreams," *Collected Poems: 1974-2004* (New York: Norton, 2016), 413-5.

[581] Although one ought not to do so for all Dove's poems, this particular lyric tracks closely the details of her academic life.

[582] For more on these descriptions, see Pat Righelato, *Understanding Rita Dove* (Columbia, S.C.: S. Carolina UP, 2006), 219.

In Charlottesville, however, the matter is different; the poet can open up. She contrasts the presence of her desk there with a family calamity: a fire that has destroyed many of their belongings. Dove addresses the desk in apostrophe:[583]

> Under crashed rafters
> you stand,
> honey in the ashes.
>
> Your soaked plywood
> and crazed veneer
> aren't even worth
>
> the hourly wage
> of these men
> in blue shirts
>
> building boxes,
> Salvage Experts trained
> in the packing and storage
>
> of household effects
> singed by adversity,
> anointed by the fireman's hose.
>
> I save you by begging
> sentimentality:
> a female prerogative
>
> I am grateful this once
> to claim, since
> tears will not serve
>
> on a day as blue
> as this one, the heavens
> scrubbed and shining.

In this poignant scene, Dove's desk is a link between the office and home, and between professional and private lives. The "Salvage Experts" have arrived to see what they can do with Dove's and her husband's "effects"; the desk, by Dove's own account, isn't really worth the trouble of recuperating.

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[583] "Fire Damages Home of Poet Rita Dove," *AP News*, Sept. 9, 1998, online at https://www.apnews.com/0e23b68d8cbd807c500146924676795a. See also Erika Meitner on Rita Dove, in *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*, ed. Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2008), esp. 117.

Its value is non-monetary, rather "sentimental," which Dove half-seriously calls "a female prerogative," opposed, somehow, to the stolid, unsentimental nature of a desk at which work is done. But, of course, it is *at* desks like this one—or the desks Dove has won access to, in residencies abroad and in the US—that the poet writes the lyrics cementing her position within the trans-bureaucratic system of "national" creative writing. Those poems are the primary engine of Dove's eventual ascendance to the position of Poet Laureate, *the* most visible poet-job in the country, and frequently a platform for public verse-related advocacy.[584]

To the extent that her Virginia desk is a metonym of her writerly and professional achievements, there could be nothing incomprehensible about Dove's attachment to it—and if not to a single material item, then to the *fact* of a writing-desk, the continually-remade compositional "omphalos" of her career. Even when some desks, like the one in North Carolina, feel more like the furniture in a prison cell, they are important to the poet. There, the desk is an institutional reminder of the poet's expectation to *finish her work*—to complete the dyadic-syntactic relationship bespoken by her recently-typed "hyphen." Moving between desks—in different bureaucratic arrangements, and with different levels of funding and oversight—isn't incidental to Dove's work. These movements are the sine qua non of it; and in this poem, they form also its substance. In the last section of "Desk Dreams," the writer concedes it might not be worthwhile to remake a desk tarnished by fire. But Dove transposes the polishing of it to the "scrubb[ing]" of "the heavens," and looks ahead to new "degrees zero" from which her writing will emanate: new desks, with other histories, in other places.

As in "Desk Dreams," Dove's relationship to a sponsoring institution in other poems becomes an occasion for, and not merely a material ground of, her poetry. In "At the German

[584] See *The Poet's World* 107.

Writers Conference in Munich,"[585] the poet-participant describes what she sees, when she looks out at those organizing the event:

> In the large hall of the Hofbräuhaus
> above the heads of the members
> of the board, taut and white
> as skin (not mine),
> tacked across a tapestry
> this banner:
> Association of German
> Writers in the Union of Print
> and Papercraft.

"This banner" occludes a full view of the tapestry below, but parts "poke out": "some flowers" that are "typical medieval," "a king with a scepter," "an ash-blonde princess," and "a white horse," among others.[586] All are features of a schematically feudal world: the basis Graeber identifies for the "managerial feudalism" that constitutes contemporary bureaucratic arrangements.[587]

Throughout this first part of the poem, Dove joins in a long, rich tradition, pointing up the quiet absurdities of German bureaucratic goings-on: their formality, stuffiness, and insistence on historical precedent. Just out of college, Dove herself was a Fulbright scholar in Germany, before her matriculation at Iowa as an MFA student.[588] Her fellowship experience was formative, as she notes in interviews: it was her first substantial period of life abroad; it deepened her knowledge of non-English-language literatures and cultural practices; and it enabled her, later, to engage with the visiting artists of the Iowa City International Writers' Program, directed by Paul Engle and his wife Nieh Hualing.[589] In the poem, however, Dove refers only briefly to that visible marker

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[585] RDCP 86-8.

[586] For more on this scene, see Righelato 42 and Malin Pereira, Ch. 4 "*Museum* and Cosmopolitanism," *Rita Dove's Cosmopolitanism* (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 2003), 85.

[587] BSJ 175-8.

[588] *Conversations with Rita Dove* xvii.

[589] Dowling 211-4.

differentiating her from the other participants at the Conference—her skin, after all, is "dark," not "white." But this difference Dove buries in consideration of the banner and the tapestry it hides, behind the persons running the event. Her "reading" of the administrators and the room becomes, at one remove, a reading of the signs those admins have chosen to celebrate the day. After noting the "fur flat bread loaves," "two doves," and "green hills" of the partially-blocked tapestry, she concludes with another banner altogether, this one "above them all,"

> unfurled and inscribed
> in Latin. Maybe it says
> Association of Tapestrers
> in the Union of Wives
> and Jewish Dyers.
> No one's feet are visible
> but those dainty shoes
> beneath the printed silk
> that first caught my eye,
> and the grotesquely bent
> fetlock-to-ivory hoof
> of the horse. And both
> are in flowers.

The gentle ambiguities of this description are telling, as are its further insistence on forms of cultural difference. The "dainty shoes" of the maidens first "caught" Dove's "eye," yet the bits and pieces of the tapestry blocked by this second banner resolve to very little: the horse's body has been "grotesquely bent" for all time; all figures "are in flowers." But who else is trapped here, in an unexplained, remarkable (and visible) invisibility? The "wives" and "Jewish Dyers," the latter of whom are almost certainly not present at the Conference as currently constituted, because those dyers are no longer alive. With tactful reserve, Dove brings up, and admits to having no answer for, the fact of violent social trauma and its memory: the Shoah as an imperturbable historical reality in the chain of collective German events. One is reminded of the disappeared persons of Justice's Enzensberger translation.[590] And Dove illustrates this memory-forgetting dyad through the visual

[590] See Dove, interview with Gretchen Johnsen and Richard Peabody (1985), in *Conversations with Rita Dove* 26.

metaphor of the banner-tapestry interface—the banners signifying a bureaucratically-organized event, partially blocking, partially elaborating the tapestry, with its signs of a differently-structured (feudal), though no less hierarchical, past.

Dove takes on another bureaucratic space—the office and its attendant processes of "interview" and "career progression," in "My Mother Enters the Workforce."[591] She begins,

> The path to ABC Business School
> was paid for by a lucky sign:
> ALTERATIONS, QUALIFIED SEAMSTRESS INQUIRE WITHIN.
> Tested on sleeves, hers
> never puckered—puffed or sleek,
> leg-o'-mutton or raglan—
> they barely needed the damp cloth
> to steam them perfect.

Dove's mother is able to attend business school because she is a "qualified seamstress." Her craftwork with other people's clothing, and her "[taking] in piecework" when not at the shop, earn her the money necessary to bootstrap up to a different form of labor, this one removed from craft, and dedicated instead to the typing of memoranda:

> And then it was day again, all morning
> at the office machines, their clack and chatter
> another journey—rougher,
> that would go on forever
> until she could break a hundred words
> with no errors—ah, and then
>
> no more postponed groceries,
> and that blue pair of shoes!

The "ah" in the penultimate line echoes some of Justice's wistful pronouncements.[592] Dove imagines her mother's courage and commitment, in moving from the demanding occupation of sewing (both in a shop and freelance) to the equally demanding, but craft-transformed, environment of an office

[591] RDCP 303.

[592] See CP 255, as one example.

typing pool.[593] Whereas the goal in sewing is the "perfect" stitch, "never puckered," the goal in typing is at once more straightforward and more outwardly intimidating: "a hundred words" per minute, "with no errors." Dove's mother must become a "perfect" writer, but as a consequence, she is to be perfectly alienated (in her new, more stable, higher-status profession) from the office notes she renders for others. Dove's mother's desk is, in this way, a preamble to those in "Desk Dreams." It is a signifier of ameliorated social status, and a reminder of the extraordinary effort demanded of women of color (only recently amplified in progressive American discourse), in order to advance in professional contexts maintained for a putative white-male "majority."

Dove turns her attention to an abstracter problem of bureaucratic value-creation, in "Describe Yourself in Three Words or Less."[594] Here, she attempts to answer the kind of question an interviewer might pose—or a conference organizer, at an event promoting team "bonding." Dove asserts herself apophatically, focusing on the descriptive boxes into which, she argues, she cannot be placed:

> I'm not the kind of person who praises
> openly, or for profit. I'm not the kind
> who will steal a scene unless
> I've designed it. I'm not a kind at all,
> in fact: I'm itchy and pug-willed,
> gnarled and wrong-headed,
> never amorous but possessing
> a wild, thatched soul.

In short, Dove doesn't bullshit; when she speaks, she wishes to recreate in language—via terms into which she's invested meaning—her "wild, thatched soul."

> ... Then I sing
> to the bright-beaked bird outside ...
> then I will stop, and forget the singing.
> (See? I have already forgotten you.)

[593] Righelato 189-90.

[594] RDCP 396

The end reminds one of Justice's "This poem is not addressed to you," the penultimate stanza of which runs: "Close your eyes, yawn. It will be over soon. / You will forget the poem, but not before / It has forgotten you. And it does not matter."[595] Understood in the context of Dove's burolyrics, "Describe Yourself" defies not merely inherited lyric convention, as does Justice's poem, but the expectations of a poetic-critical template of taxonomizing. Some poets, Dove contends, might accept their placement into this box or that. But she refuses, even if it means being "pug-willed" and "wrong-headed."

Indeed, Dove *has* been accused of poetic "wrongness," in a public exchange of letters with the critic Helen Vendler.[596] These accusations, like the bureaucratic scenes in Dove's verse, cannot be separated from the embodied experience of the poet of color. In the 2000s, Dove was commissioned to edit *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, a task she accepted with an awareness of its likely pitfalls.[597] In her introduction to the volume, Dove offers a summative history of American poetry, touching on Frost, Stevens, Eliot, Pound, and others. After some time spent on postwar movements, including the Confessional, Beat, and New York School poets, she adds a short autobiographical section:

> I might have been a bit shy but was not faint of heart when, in the midseventies, I attended the Iowa Writers Workshop, that Grand Smithy in the country's heartland where, for well over half a century, writers have been forged and sent out to captivate America from sea to shining sea. What would be the name for a movement that's already institutionalized? There was a chimera known as the Iowa Poem, whose dispassionate diction, spare vocabulary, and unassailable surface concealed a profound fragility; I struggled diligently against its lure and felt a perilous guardedness creeping into my creative marrow. Competition was fierce, at times cutthroat—but did it trample budding talents before they could blossom or merely

[595] Op. cit.

[596] Helen Vendler, "Are These the Poems to Remember?" *The New York Review of Books*, Nov. 24, 2011, accessed online, n.p.

[597] See Rita Dove, "Defending an Anthology," *The New York Review of Books*, Dec. 22, 2011, accessed online, n.p; see also *Penguin Anthology*, li-ii.

> guarantee the survival of the fittest? Who knows? As the only African American and one of only three minority students in my two years there, I was spared the most bruising battles simply because the other members of the workshop didn't consider us competition; we sat by, an invisible trio, as our white classmates slugged it out in the Iowa sandbox of American poetry.[598]

The debate between Vendler and Dove is a multiform one, and critics from different backgrounds, especially online, have weighed in on some of its cruxes: movements vs. individual poets; the historical record vs. patterns of lyric (or formal) achievement; "canonical" vs. "non-" or "paracanonical" writers.[599] For our purposes, however, one particular issue stands out—the question of race and a "sociological," rather than "literary," criterion for inclusion.[600] As Vendler writes, in her repudiation of Dove:

> Selectivity has been condemned as "elitism," and a hundred flowers are invited to bloom. ... It is popular to say (and it is in part true) that in literary matters tastes differ, and that every critic can be wrong. But there is a certain objectivity bestowed by the mere passage of time, and its sifting of wheat from chaff: Which of Dove's 175 poets will have staying power, and which will seep back into the archives of sociology?[601]

In one sense, the Dove-Vendler debate echoes, in the literary sphere, the American legal rulings on affirmative action that have occurred, with regularity, over the past four decades. In those opinions, members of the U.S. Supreme Court have argued that diversity *in itself* is a value to be safeguarded, by various methods of affirmed or proactive inclusion (and with various standards of scrutiny) in university acceptance and government hiring protocols.[602] This justification has been hotly debated,

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[598] *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Rita Dove (New York: Penguin, 2011), xlix.

[599] See "Helen Vendler, Rita Dove, and the Changing Canon of Poetry" (Dec. 13, 2011) for a radio overview, online: https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/175385-helen-vendler-rita-dove-and-changing-canon-poetry.

[600] One is reminded of William Logan's critique of Ocean Vuong, in Chapter 2, op. cit.

[601] Vendler, op. cit., n.p.

[602] See *Regents of the Univ. of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 267 (1978); *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 307 (2003); and Justice Kennedy's precis of the subject in his opinion for the Court, in *Fisher v. Univ of TX at Austin*, 570 U.S. ___ (2013).

on the right and left. Leaving out the possibility or non-possibility of any racialized animus in Vendler's writings, her review of the *Penguin Anthology* rather firmly declares that diversity in itself is *not* a sufficient justification for, or underlying theory of, a broad selection of English-language verse. Vendler argues for this, implicitly, in the introduction of the term "sociology," which, in her rendering, implies a value-neutral and studiously-observed survey of the work poets from various backgrounds produce. Elif Batuman, in her review of McGurl's *Program Era*, uses the term "sociopolitical," with essentially the same connotation.[603] In both cases, the sociological (or social-scientific, or if broadly construed, anthropological) frame relativizes (literary) value and renders it meaningless, thus filling the anthology with the kinds of poetic "BS" affirmed by the checking of boxes—one or more writers from each micro-camp or identity subdivision, with "a hundred flowers" (cynically) blooming.[604] Batuman and Vendler claim they don't want to read a lot of the Program writers, because they believe those writers "only" to be documenting cases of personal or group difference; these documents, lacking literary-aesthetic distinction, do not signifying value in the literary domain.[605] The declaration of the non-value or pseudo-value of diversity—a supposed imperative of bureaucratic institutions, like universities or the Library of Congress, bent on increasing their own perceived, inclusivity—leads, in these critics' estimation, to the frequent promulgation of BS-poetry in place of distinguished poetry.

For Dove, however, value, bureaucracy, and bullshit interact far differently. Like Vendler and Batuman, Dove conceives of poetic value as that which is rescued from, or generated in the face of, the obligations of a bullshit-laden bureaucracy. In her Poet Laureate lectures, Dove

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[603] Batuman, op. cit., n.p.

[604] Vendler, op. cit.

[605] For a more in-depth discussion of the "interconversions of value" (to use James English's phrase) in poet's careers, see Chapter 4.

acknowledges that she feared, at times, that her position would wreck her writing career, drowning it in functionary obligations with no bearing on her art.[606] But Dove describes the purportedly "objective," meritocratic features of workshop life as encoding a value-system distrustful of non-white viewpoints, and of the aesthetic decisions non-white authors might make in the face of white-dominant canons.[607] Dove's goal is not to abandon the Workshop or the Iowa Poem as such, but to so broaden the possibilities of that Poem—in, for example, its reflections of identity-difference—that the Workshop would of necessity adapt to *it*.[608] For Dove, a more expansive and flexible workshop system—a bureaucracy decoupled from the white prerogatives of preceding creative bureaucracies—is capable of generating poetic value, and of avoiding bullshit. Dove's institutional poetics ask that the poet of color "stay in" the system, thoroughly transforming its aims from within. Thus the core benefits of the workshop, reduced to a minimum of funded, sustained community, are made possible for generations of promising writers.[609]

In "Maple Valley Branch Library, 1967," Dove describes her "fifteen-year-old" self, wandering through the stacks and taking in everything: "the place of women in the tribe of Moost"; "Harold's purple crayon"; "binary codes, / phonics, Gestalt theory, / lead poisoning in the Late Roman Empire."[610] She continues,

> As for the improbable librarian
> with her salt and paprika upsweep,
> her British accent and sweater clip
> (mom of a kid I knew from school)—
> I'd go up to her desk and ask for help.

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606 *The Poet's World* 46-7.

607 Dowling 218-9.

608 Cf. Dove's idea of the "Workshop poem," in *Conversations with Rita Dove* 16.

609 See Adam Johnson, "Counterpoint: A Guide to the MFA and Beyond from an Outsider Who Became an Insider," in Kealey 121-130, esp. 123.

610 RDCP 296-7

[...]
I would claim to be researching
pre-Columbian pottery or Chinese foot-binding,
but all I wanted to know was,
Tell me what you've read that keeps
that half smile afloat
above the collar of your impeccable blouse.

In the silent, "pre-Workshop" of the local library, Dove self-directs an education that will lead her, years later, to sustained colloquy with her writer-peers. The scene is rich with intertexts: in the African-American literary tradition (Richard Wright's reading of Mencken in *Black Boy*)[611], and in modernist accounts of an artist's formation (Proust's, Joyce's, Woolf's). Dove's embodied experience, and her silent address of the librarian, are not incidental, but central: the ground on which the poem-account is built. But equally important are the knowledges born of different identities and subject-positions—those which, in a never-realized "total," comprise the "universal" experiences projected from the intersubjective joining of thousands of collated, individual accounts. At its best, then, Dove's workshop model *becomes* the Maple Valley Branch Library. It is a space for self-creation (Bildung), wherein the cultural-historical facts of bureaucratic practices (i.e., that Bildung itself is a nineteenth-century German-pedagogical concept)[612] do not pre-set the educational possibilities for students of genuinely diverse backgrounds. Dove wants to "stay in" the Branch Library, and her Revisionary Workshop, forever; this is precisely what she's done.[613] But it's a Workshop distinct from the model in which Justice and Tate operate. Dove's work rescues "sociology" from Vendler's aspersion, by insisting that the Workshop, like her mother's office pool or her own desk in Virginia, exists in a web of pre-assigned, racially-marked codes. Where Justice

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611 Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1966), 268-77

612 See Rita Dove, "Poet's Choice," *Callaloo*, 31.3, Summer 2008, 748.

613 Dove is now a Commonwealth Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Virginia. For a useful history of Dove's relationship to established (often white-presenting) institutions and to Black radical thought, see N. S. Boone, "Resignation to History: The Black Arts Movement and Rita Dove's Political Consciousness," *Obsidian III*, 5.1, Apr. 2004, 66-83.

and Tate need not recognize these codes to continue the system's operation, Dove sees no choice. She builds a career in the Workshop, because she believes it ought to be so, and might just as well have been otherwise.

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The avant-gardist Alice Notley, on the other hand, has developed a lifelong poetics of "getting out"—of leaving behind, at least partially, the workshop-bureaucratic system that figured prominently in her early career. Notley studied fiction at Iowa before switching to poetry.[614] She wrote voluminously, published at a young age, and established a career; she also began dating, and later married, Ted Berrigan, a short-term visiting professor in Iowa City, with whom she raised two children until his death in 1983.[615]

Notley has lived in Paris for decades, although she occasionally teaches or visits at universities in North America.[616] Like the Canadian experimental poet and essayist Lisa Robertson, Notley's practice is pointedly non-institutional in its feminism; or, more aptly, the institutions with which Notley and Robertson engage tend to be provisional, de-hierarchized, and mostly indifferent to workshop models of career advancement.[617] Notley has indicated the substantial importance of mentorship, often though not exclusively mentorship *by women*, as a feature of her creative

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[614] Claudia Keelan and Alice Notley, "A Conversation: September 2002-December 2003," in *The American Poetry Review*, 33.3, May-June 2004, 15-19, 15.

[615] "Ted [Berrigan]'s influence on me was profoundly benign and necessary. I'm not sure what poet I would be now if I hadn't met him. When I first knew him he was a little skeptical about women poets. He wasn't sure that he liked the poetry of the women poets he know about as much as he liked the men's poetry, partly because women were denied involvement in the parts of life that seemed to give poetry its edge. He quite quickly changed his tack though. It seems to me now that he recognized my talent before I did and fostered it as much as he could ...," in "An Interview with Alice Notley by Judith Goldman," in *What Is Poetry? (Just Kidding, I Know You Know): Interviews from* The Poetry Project Newsletter *(1983-2009)* ed. Anselm Berrigan (Seattle and New York: Wave Books, 2017); interview pub. date Feb./Mar. 1997, 78. See also Kane, Daniel, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: California UP, 2003), 166.

[616] For more on her idea of "expatriate" life, see the *What Is Poetry?* interview, 76.

[617] Cf. Robertson's Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture (Astoria, Ore.: Clear Cut Press, 2003).

development.[618] Notley and Robertson are both extraordinarily adaptive writers, in the formal and material senses; indeed, they seem willing to accept that poets like them, thrown into late capitalist societies and unwilling to compromise the expansive (and sometimes theoretically-dense) qualities of their work—must make do monetarily however they can. Thus, both artists intersect with institutional poetics to the extent that they (like Justice's Orpheus) are awarded for their writing. They have so far mostly eschewed permanent teaching positions within programs, when those jobs might have saved them from want.[619]

Notley has written a vast corpus, many books of which circulated among the eager members of coteries; but until recently critics have tended to pigeonhole her or minimize her achievements.[620] Articles and interviews tend not to dwell on her relationship to the networked, institutional prerogatives of academic creative writing.[621] But Notley's desire to distance herself and her practice, as much as she can, from that "system"—and to build a different supportive system in its place—provides a powerful coda to the bureaucraticity of Justice, Tate, and Dove. I therefore end the present argument with a fourth strategy for coping with bureaucratic poet-culture—namely, leaving it behind.

Notley's widely-acknowledged masterpiece, *The Descent of Alette* (1996), is a ranging feminist epic-lyric, in which a poet moves through interconnected chthonic spaces before challenging the

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[618] See Notley's interview in *What Is Poetry?*, op. cit., 77.

[619] The author met Alice Notley after a "visitor's reading" she gave at Coe College, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 2013—just one example of such a temporary position.

[620] As a notable counterexample, Julia Bloch's "Alice Notley's Descent: Modernist Genealogies and Gendered Literary Inheritance," in *Journal of Modern Literature*, 35.3, Spring 2012, 1-24, offers a powerful reading of *The Descent of Alette* according to a different metaphorical rubric—that of the "subway" "as an ongoing public to which poets since Pound have returned to experiment with impersonal poetic form" (1). See also Alice Notley, interviewed by Nick Sturm, at The Poetry Society of America online, https://poetrysociety.org/features/interviews/seeing-the-future-a-conversation-with-alice-notley, n.p.

[621] The *What Is Poetry?* interview, op. cit., is an important exception.

authority a character known as "the tyrant."[622] It offers many mythopoeic options for reading and allegorizing, some of which scholars have already elaborated,[623] and I only amplify those preceding readings—and the poem's enormous suggestive power—in proposing an addition to them. To whit, I offer that the poem foregrounds, and subsequently works through, Alette's negotiation of a *bureaucratic* hellscape—and her encounters therein with a repugnant, literally "tyrannical" boss.[624]

The poem begins (employing its characteristic quotation marks, denoting ((among other things)) units of breath):[625]

> "One day, I awoke" "& found myself on" "a subway, endlessly"
> "I didn't know" "how I'd arrived there or" "who I was" "exactly"
> "But I knew the train" "knew riding it" "knew the look of"
> "those about me" "I gradually became aware—" "though it seemed"
>
> "as that happened" "that I'd always" "known it too—" "that there was"
> "a tyrant" "a man in charge of" "the fact" "that we were"
> "below the ground" "endlessly riding" "our train, never surfacing" [...]

Alette meets "a world of souls," on a train forever grinding its way beneath a city—a dingy, abstracted New York.[626] Above them, the tyrant rules unseen. This boss-figure corresponds remarkably to the personage Graeber cites, and Marc Shell describes at length, in his essay on "The Ring of Gyges." That is, Alette's tyrant, combining the figures of Deioces and Gyges in Herodotus, is an arbiter of values *and* of *value*, a "coiner" of wealth and a disciplinarian of others' behaviors. All humans are visible to him; his is a panoptically-surveilled domain. Yet the tyrant himself is perfectly

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[622] Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

[623] Cf. Page DuBois, "'An Especially Peculiar Undertaking': Alice Notley's Epic," in *Differences* 12.2, 2001, 86-97.

[624] For a worthwhile comparison with the figure of the "Adviser," see the poem "Waltzing Matilda," from *Waltzing Matilda* (New York: Kulchur, 1981), 77-96. There is also the notion of writing teacher as "evaluator" or "examiner," as in Stuart Greene, from "Can Writing Be Taught?" *Pluridicta* 30, ed. Johannes Wagner, Odense 1995 (ISSN 0902 2406), 25.

[625] DoA 3.

[626] Or so one assumes, based on the density of its subway traffic—and on the details of Notley's biography.

invisible: his power is delocalized, derived from his ability to escape beyond the sense-capacities of his terrorized subjects. Like Mr. Earl Smith at Advanced Video—or the members of a workshop's application committee, who review every applicants' dossier—the tyrant exposes those around him to utter nakedness, without endangering his own body or revealing his stratagems.[627] He, like Smith and the workshop leader, aren't up for discussion, for critique; they review without oversight the products of other people's minds. In a world of bureaucratic entanglements and nasty bosses, Notley's tyrant is the *nastiest*, the least humane.

Throughout the chilling train ride comprising Book One, Alette encounters men and especially women in pitiable states, and these proletarian figures she contrasts sequentially with mythic-heroic characters, like "an old man ... dying ... in his bishop's robe & gown," and a "snake" with "ghostly ... brown coils." New characters are introduced as they enter the cars, and new scenes as Alette moves between them.[628] Soon, she stumbles into a kind of office:

> "In one car people work" "seem to work there" "It's their office"
> "But when you enter it you" "see them" "perform actions" "without objects"
> "As if in pantomime" "Without papers" "without machines" "Most of
> these are women" "They wear dresses," "pantyhose," "grown-up shoes,"
>
> "& makeup" "They carry" "leather pocketbooks" "And they do things"
> "continuously" "with their hands" "perform motions" "of working"
> "Work invisible" "keyboards" "carry invisible" "files," "invisible
> papers" "Hold up airy" "phone receivers" "against hairdos"
>
> "& move their lips "say silent words" "they are working, working"
> "Then a man" "in a suit" "enters" "& they hand him" "all their
> invisible work" "He goes through it" "as if page by page" "& scrutinizes
> air" "with a grave," "lined face" "sometimes smiles with" "mild
>
> approval" "Appears to think" "hard" "goes quiet" "they watch him as"
> "he picks up" "the invisible" "phone receiver" "his lips" "begin to
> move" "He motions" "the women" "to resume their work"[629]

[627] ATV 101-2.

[628] DoA 3-42.

[629] DoA 19.

We have returned to the original scene of Weber's bureaucracy, transposed now to the airless realms of a subway tube. The women do their "invisible work," and hand it to the "man in the suit" for "scrutiny." No one else will see their "files," but the sub-boss must report *something* to the tyrant, enough to justify the women's continuing "actions without objects" below the surface of the earth. Additionally, we cannot have access to the substance of the sub-boss's thoughts. We know only that he reports what he sees to the higher-up. The files, after all, *must* circulate to justify the exertions of the bureaucratic machinery, and these documents' movement-within-the-system precipitates the middle manager's movement-of-lips, which substitutes for meaningful colloquy, upward to the primary boss and downward to the women-deskworkers. For Justice's Tremayne, at least, a detectable "humming" signifies the operation of a contentless institutional system. But here, even this last vestige of insubstantial substance is removed. The women's labor is met with an aggressively performative, masculinized silence, which conveys only that the underground official hierarchy continues to obtain.

Notley's poem, by contrast to the sub-boss's contentless speech, is *alive* with detail. The reader moves between an allegorically-suggestive protector-owl, "herb gardens," "statuary," and "wild flowers" at the tyrant's house. The work's allegorical dimensions—its relations to Dante, and to feminist-revisionist mythology—comprise a significant portion of extant scholarship.[630] But Alette further distinguishes herself from Justice's burolyrical subjects, from Tate's Jim, and from Dove's ameliorist-speaker, in her evident desire to fight against, and not collaborate with, bureaucratic tyranny. Alette describes the world she sees in order to destroy it. For her (and for Notley), the poet's freedom—her creation and maintenance of "free time"—need not be blind to, or naïve about, the dangers of bureaucratic entrapment. But Notley refuses a reformist vision in which

[630] See Page Dubois's article for more on this subject, op. cit.

bureaucracy might be tamed, and by which poets might compromise with it—making a space for themselves inside, and therefore halfway protected from, the worst ravages of official hierarchies.[631] In Notley's, realist-utopic dispensation, women's work is made permanently visible—and the tyrant's body rendered permanently violable and, ultimately, eliminable.[632] And Alette and her poet appear unconcerned at the "practicality" of such a scheme. For them, *practicality* is only a value in the value-evacuated hallways of bureaucratic bullshit. It is a method for reinforcing the supposedly neutral concepts of (patriarchal) domination, in the forms of workflow maximization and resource rationalization.

By Book Four, Alette has met the tyrant, and after their long conversation and ensuing struggle, she corners him. They battle, and she gains the upper hand. "'Your wings are covering me,'" he argues pathetically, raging at the first demonstration of the fullness of Alette's authority. Within moments, the tyrant dies.[633] And a final scene echoes Justice's post-Revelatory hour of total *non*-bureaucracy, of uninterrupted free time, from "There is a gold light":

> ... "all the
>
> lost creatures" "began to" "emerge" "Come up from" "below the subway"
> "From the caves &" "from the dark woods" "I had visited" "they emerged"
> "I watched through" "tears of clarity" "many" "forms of being"
> "I had never" "seen before" "come to join us" "or come to join us
>
> once more" "Whatever," "whoever," "could be," "was possible," "or
> had been" "forgotten" "for long ages" "now joined us," "now
> joined us once more" "Came to light" that morning"[634]

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631 See Rachel Greenwald Smith, "Six Propositions on Compromise Aesthetics," *The Account* (online), 3, Fall 2014, https://theaccountmagazine.com/issue/fall-2014, n.p.

632 DoA 144-5.

633 Ibid.

634 Ibid. 148.

The office has no boss now, and the workshop no leader. The self-justifying flow of unreviewable information has ceased; the typewriters have fallen silent; the humming of machines (and the unspoken judgments of superiors) are replaced with the reassuring conversations of embodied human voices—shared worries and elations; their imagined and newly-achievable worlds. The hierarchies of managerial feudalism have given way to the possibilities of care, and non-compulsory, person-to-person mentorship, that Notley has urged throughout her career.[635] All who were categorized and forgotten, surveilled but not understood, have "joined once more" in authentic, because self-directed, communion. It isn't a system for the circulation of files; it's a method for speaking and listening. New, self-valuing "forms of being" will "emerge" in the daylight, and more writers may participate, because Notley has made them welcome.

[635] See Eleni Sikelianos on Notley, from *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*, op. cit., esp. 221.

Career and Care—Jean Ross Justice to the Precarious Now

Part One: A Miami Archive

Jean Ross Justice first published "The Dark Forces" in 2005. In its opening scene, the protagonist, Dillon, arrives at a South Florida home, having already dropped off his wife to care for her mother. In this sliver of Miami "where Coral Gables and Coconut Grove merge[]," Dillon's "dead father," the professor-poet John Searcy, lived with his second wife, Susannah.[636] She'd once studied under John—their relationship began in scandal, though it slowly attained social respectability. The property's exterior walls are "an assertive yellow," and the "white tile roof gleam[s]," but Dillon rates it all as "'[r]ather conventional.'"[637] Still in the car, he rehearses for himself what he'll find inside:

> [Susannah] was said to keep [John's] study the way it had been when he was alive—a shrine. The books his father had written would be on display, and pictures of him, and pictures of the two of them. Soon he would see the shrine, even if he didn't worship at it. He wondered if any literary people, young poets, say, made a pilgrimage here. A few, perhaps. It was possible that his father's stock was going down now that he'd been dead ten years; that seemed to be how things worked. He'd never been quite top-ranked. But good; everyone said that. *Good*.[638]

Dillon has come to gather some of "the family things"—items from John's personal collection—because his sister, Helena, worries their stepmother might hand them over "to some library, some university." John had begun ridding himself of books before he "dropped dead reaching for his drink in a lounge in the Chicago airport."[639] As Dillon speaks to his stepmother about his siblings (including his brother Sonny, suffering from clinical depression),[640] he remembers John's

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[636] Jean Ross Justice, "The Dark Forces," *The Yale Review*, 93.1, January 2005, 144-56, rpt. in *The End of a Good Party and Other Stories* (Tampa: Tampa UP, 2008), 56-68. Hereafter EGP.

[637] EGP 56.

[638] Ibid.

[639] Ibid. 57-8.

[640] Ibid. 58.

relationship with their mother: his drinking, heavy and steady; their quarrels; and a car wreck, revealing the affair and prompting this second, less cumbrous mode of life, near the beach. Dillon, Sonny, and Helena move in with their maternal grandparents, in Illinois, where their mother has returned to school; their father, soon after, wins a major literary award. Dillon recalls his mother (unnamed throughout) doing gigwork when the children are little, "typing theses late at night, theses and dissertations with hundreds of footnotes."[641] John wonders why she takes such drudgery on, though he's not much for financial prudence himself, and relies on Dillon's mother to balance the budget.[642] Later, she marries again—a swaggering hothead—and becomes a teacher, then splits from him when the children are grown.

Dillon and Susannah walk through John's office, and he remarks on its tidiness. Susannah describes the poet's workflow system—drafts and correspondence—and points to a "basket on the floor," exclaiming,

> [p]eople were always sending him manuscripts, including people he didn't know! I begged him not to bother with them after his health declined, but he looked at every one of them. Just in case it was some real undiscovered talent, I guess.[643]

According to Susannah, John worked best "at night," under the sway of what he called the "*dark forces*."[644] Without prompting, she insists to Dillon (and to no one in particular) that John, married with children, stuck in a midcareer rut, "needed something new"—and that she had "stimulated him." She says that "[h]e did some of his best work after we got together," because she "more or less gave up [her] own ambitions." She "made his life [her] work, [her] *art*." "'I understood what he was doing,'" she concludes, "'[t]he *imperishable* word, the imperishable line, that was what he was

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[641] EGP 60.

[642] Ibid.; see also Jean Ross Justice, "Graduate School: The Thin Young Man," CS 124-5, and W. D. Snodgrass, "Justice as Classmate," CS 129.

[643] EGP 62.

[644] Ibid.

after.'"[645] The narrator hints, as an aside, that Dillon desires his stepmother—in an abstracted, "dreamlike, drowsy, almost sensual" way.[646]

But Susannah hasn't quite said her piece. As if fearing that Dillon will soon depart, she adds, after an interval, that John "was terrible the last year or two. Simply awful," though she "forgave him" for it.[647] Unsure of how to right the conversation, Dillon picks up his share of his father's estate—"the selected, the collected; semi-rare early books by [John's] contemporaries"—and Helena's, too, although this upsets Susannah, who has expected her to visit.[648] Dillon wonders if "the dark forces" was really John's phrase for his nocturnal urge to write, or if it came, instead, from Susannah. He remembers, too, reading "carefully written letters" from his father, addressed to all the children, and evincing "the value, possibly too high a value, that he put on his own experiences," since "[h]e expected the letters to be saved." Dillon has obliged him in this.[649]

The story ends in a series of small revelations. Dillon thinks of his mother, in an Illinois "retirement complex," paging through "an old anthology," and pointing out a poet named Irving Kessler, whom she dated briefly. Dillon asks himself if he'll eventually relay Susannah's grief, about John's cruelty, to his mother, who "would try hard not to be glad" at the news, but who "would see it as just." He realizes he feels no lasting anger toward Susannah, though he wants to, somehow, on his mother's behalf.[650] And the narrator adds this final report of Dillon's consciousness:

> It came to him that he'd read probably less than half his father's work. Maybe he'd catch up now. Not in the editions in the trunk, but in the everyday books on his

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[645] Ibid. 64.

[646] Ibid.

[647] EGP 65.

[648] Ibid. 66.

[649] Ibid.

[650] Ibid. 67.

> shelves at home. Stanzas perhaps not imperishable, but good, waiting patiently all these years, hidden by so much else. He gave a small mental wince, a mental shrug. But for the moment it was all behind him, back in Susannah's keeping, and he sped along peacefully through the patchy sun and shade of the avenue.[651]

Part Two: The Career-Stories of Jean Ross Justice

I've summarized "The Dark Forces" in detail because it includes—embroiders, rejiggers—so much of Donald Justice's life in poetry, his legacy and its interpersonal complexities. But it also demands a complementary reading, as a suggestive, fictional text. Jean Ross married Donald not long after the Second World War; they had one son together, Nathaniel, who now lives in North Carolina.[652] Donald died in 2004, Jean in 2015. Like John, Donald (and Jean) made homes for a spell in South Florida, in and around Miami. Like John, Donald won a big prize—the Pulitzer, in 1979, along with the Lamont (for his first book), the Bollingen, in 1991,[653] and the Lannan, in 1996. Like John, Donald sold his papers to a library, at the University of Delaware, and kept first editions of his own and his friends' works.[654] But much of the power, and resonance, of "The Dark Forces" derives, as it were, from the story's insistent darkness, its obversion to reports of Donald and Jean's years together. Unlike John, Donald never remarried, for they did not divorce. Unlike John, Donald was a man of putatively abstemious personal habits, rarely drinking too much, never totaling his car or making a scene.[655] But Susannah, his widow, is a complement to Jean, author-widow of a poet who is

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[651] Ibid. 68.

[652] Nathaniel's involvement with Justice's estate is minimal; Logan and Gioia are its executors.

[653] Justice shared the award with Laura Riding Jackson; see DJP, F474.

[654] The majority of Justice's papers at Delaware have yet to be categorized.

[655] See John Jeremiah Sullivan short essay, "Donald Justice's 'There Is a Gold Light in Certain Old Paintings,'" *The Paris Review Online*, Dec. 1, 2011, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2011/12/01/there-is-a-gold-light-in-certain-old-paintings/, n.p.

and is not John, who certainly sought the "imperishable word" and who, for many critics, was merely "good."[656]

One could continue in this vein at length, mapping out the microdistinctions between John's and Donald's careers. (John, for one, seems to have taught in "north Florida" earlier than his "real" counterpart.) But I intend more than to present this story as a rarely read, and illuminating, curio, at the end of a critical dissertation on a "good poet." Jean Ross Justice produced only three books in her lifetime: two collections of stories and one novel, along with a scattering of poems.[657] Her career as a public writer mostly (though not exactly) began after Justice stopped writing and publishing, because he was no longer alive. And so many of Jean's texts, like "The Dark Forces," bear on the question of what it means to have a career—what exactly a creative career is; how it changes over time, while the author is alive to maintain it; and what happens once the author is gone, and must leave his or her corpus to others. Susannah, by her admission, has abandoned her proper art, her self-directed writerly practice, to assume management of John's writing. She runs his home office, just as a workshop director and its bureaucratic apparatus direct the school office to which John must, at least sometimes, report.

Jean Ross Justice's writings return, again and again, to a particular model for understanding an artist's (or really any person's) career: as bound up in mutual relations of care. As Dillon wonders, why does a poet's stock rise or fall, in life and after death? And who helps or hampers the poet,

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[656] Jean Ross Justice mentioned something like this to me, in an email shortly before her death. There are some dissenting opinions: see Calvin Bedient, "New Confessions," *The Sewanee Review*, 88.3, Summer 1980, 474-88, esp. 475, where he calls Justice a writer of "uncertain talent that has not been turned to much account."

[657] In addition to EGP, these are: *Family Feeling: A Novella and Five Stories* (Iowa City: Prairie Lights/Iowa UP, 2014) and *Till My Baby Comes Home* (Middletown, Del.: self-published, 2019). I am grateful to Anthony Hatcher, of Elon University, for finding a .doc copy of the completed portion of Ross Justice's memoir, *In My Foreign Country*, which discusses her family life before Donald. Jean's sister is the poet Eleanor Ross Taylor; see her *Captive Voices: New and Selected Poems, 1960-2008* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2009). Their brother, James Ross, was a fiction writer and reporter: see Anthony Hatcher, " 'It didn't sell much': The Publishing Struggles of Novelist Turned Newspaperman James Ross," *North Carolina Literary Review*, 2013, 164-85.

when times are good or bad? I outline Ross Justice's little-cited stories—their moments of spare beauty, marked in odd, disconcerting rhythms—before teasing out their interrelations: how they build a vocabulary for the maintenance and redescription of a person's lifework. Although Jean, like Donald, did not consider herself a practitioner of theory, there lies in her oeuvre an extensive literary-critical apparatus—feminist, social, and political—that is elaborated in the plots of her fictions. This apparatus demonstrates an otherwise hard-to-spot terminological subordination of career to care: that *care holds open space for career, even as narratives of career erase these care relations.* Ross Justice re-centers (often female) care within the narratives of heroic (often male) writerly work. As with "The Dark Forces," I summarize these fictions attentively, because critics to date mostly have neglected them, and because their descriptive lexicons, their metaphors of career and care, form a conceptual framework for what follows.

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In the brief "Night Thoughts," a woman, Beverley, from the neighborhood, in an unidentified town, visits a man named Luke, for obscure reasons. Beverly, Luke remembers, is caring for her husband Arnie, a dentist, who's recently fallen ill with stroke. She reminisces with Luke about Cooper Braswell, a former student in the graduate program to which, it's implied, Luke also belonged, in the small college town. She wonders if Braswell has ever written the novel he spoke of, to her, when he was younger. Luke recalls Braswell as pompous, a Yalie, but "a reasonably smart guy, basically decent ... ordinary, so very ordinary."[658] She leaves as abruptly as she dropped in, and Luke is shaken—he thinks of his two previous wives, and of a couple he saw recently, kissing outside their car parked in the middle of the street.

The protagonist of "The End of a Good Party"—an artist-adjacent figure whose practice and medium are never revealed—describes his bohemian days, attending get-togethers in Coconut

[658] EGP 4.

Grove, Miami (the setting appears to be the 1950s).[659] His second wife, Reine, doesn't approve of his behavior—often, by his own admission, he gets "sloshed." Calling up images of these long, rowdy nights, he thinks of Julian, a nonconformist and seeker, whose "early occupations had been jokes":[660] the army, the police force, and a stint in the west as a high school teacher. Julian later succumbs to cancer, and at a subsequent gathering in the Grove, the protagonist joins in a séance for him, organized by Claudia, a free spirit with a young child and a past full of romantic adventure. Although they don't "reach" Julian, exactly, Claudia and the narrator fall into fond reminiscences, and they go home together and make love. The protagonist worries about his infidelity for a couple months, then forgets it. The story ends with him ticking off the fates of the Grove crowd—early deaths; returns to the north; newfound religious faith. On the subject of friends' obituaries, he adds, wistfully:

> You know that little feeling of relief people are supposed to have reading them, that it's somebody else and not them? I don't believe I'd feel that at all. In my mind I go back to that last party, the sound of car doors slamming out in the yard as people begin to leave. ... That's what I go back to, that moment at the end of a good party. Things winding down, but not for keeps, you know; not forever.[661]

"The Three of Us" takes as its protagonist a woman whose husband, Emmett, suffers from dementia and lives nearby, in a care facility. She begins a relationship with Joel, a former faculty colleague of Emmett's at the local university; Joel's wife Mary Beth has died. The woman and Joel have, themselves, been sick. "'We've both been irradiated," he tells her, "like that milk you don't even have to put in the refrigerator."[662] Emmett was once an historian of the Civil War,[663] and the

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[659] Ibid. 7.

[660] Ibid. 9.

[661] Ibid. 15.

[662] Ibid. 25.

[663] Ibid. 29.

protagonist admits that "[t]here are moments when I hate everyone who knows that Prof. Emmett Yates, head of his department for years, has now lost his wits."[664] But she keeps visiting him, reminding him of the details of their honeymoon in Maine, and insisting, despite his incomprehension, that her relationship with Joel can't alter their marriage, or the times they've shared. The story concludes with her calling Joel on the phone, patching things up after a minor disagreement. They exchange, "for a few minutes," "the half-truths [they] live by."[665]

"The Next to Last Line" dramatizes a specialized form of writerly economy—that of appropriated language. At a conference to discuss the work of a student, Sean Smith, Bettina Thayer, visiting professor of poetry at a nameless university, is unimpressed by his recent efforts. She asks after a previous "short poem" of his, "The Beach House," and admits that "one line of that poem really stuck in my mind ... I liked it so much—well, in fact, I borrowed it and put it in a poem. I hope," she adds, "you're flattered."[666] Sean wonders how to square this with his own work—he wants to keep his line for himself—but Bettina offers to dedicate *her* poem to Sean, as compensation. Sean says he'll consider it, and the story moves ahead to a party that weekend, at Bettina's house. Sean and several other poetry students discuss strategies for submitting their writing to journals, and he dreams of a poem he wants to compose about his classmates, focusing on their anxieties about their creative output and futures. He wonders what descriptors they'd apply to him: he can't decide if they like, respect, or slightly pity him, and that appears to characterize his feelings about them. The party draws to a close, and Sean stays, talking to Bettina. He admits he doesn't really want her to use his line, and she, in turn, reveals that she's *already* sent her lyric out to a publication. They plan to run it. She says she'll dedicate the poem to him, and he asks for a clarifying

[664] Ibid. 30.

[665] Ibid. 31.

[666] Ibid. 69.

footnote instead. She offers to read her version aloud, from the sofa, but Sean is insulted that she finds her own writing superior to his—when indeed hers is buoyed by his.[667] She apologies, and they change the subject. The conversation becomes more intimate, leading them to spend the night together. The next morning, Sean accepts Bettina's dedication as recompense, and leaves.

Neither Sean nor Bettina let on to the writing program about their dalliance, although it doesn't continue, and Sean acknowledges, halfway to himself, that he hoped it would. He can't decide whether or not their time together was "a simple transaction" for the line, and he worries he was insufficiently "practiced" in bed.[668] Bettina leaves at the end of the semester, and a new visiting lecturer, "of moderate reputation," arrives.[669] The story jumps ahead to Sean's final conference with him:

> [H]e said to Sean, "Teaching's a funny business. You can be so wrong. I've seen people I thought had very modest talents make it pretty big. It's partly just sticking with it, working like a dog. Maybe you don't know whose talent *is* modest till later on." It sounded wise; but had the guy been trying to send him a message?
>
> A copy of Bettina Thayer's last book came, not from her with an inscription, but from the publisher, with a card that said "Compliments of the author." He found the poem dedicated to himself; his name on the page gave him a little *frisson* of feeling. A pretty good poem, his line neatly fitted in. If it was any longer his line.
>
> When anyone asked later why he'd left the program and enrolled in law school, he would say, "Oh, it was all so competitive. Maybe I'll keep it up on my own."

At home with his wife years later, Sean mentions the incident; his wife finds it fascinating and manipulative of Bettina. Sean drifts off to sleep, contemplating a poem, toying with phrasings: "*that line of mine you lusted for one night* ..."[670]

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[667] Ibid. 73.

[668] Ibid. 75.

[669] Ibid.

[670] Ibid. 76-7.

"The Offer" presents another form of giving, with drastically higher stakes. A husband, a wife, and their mutual friend, all unnamed, live near each other in an Iowa City-like college town. The husband and friend are departmental colleagues. Their friend is seriously sick with renal disease, and after a dinner at the couple's home, the wife—substantially younger than both men—tells her husband she'd like to give the man one of her kidneys. The husband mulls this for days, and experiences a range of emotions—anger, confusion, concern. "Her new idea," he thinks to himself, is "beyond generosity and beyond most friendships."[671] He recalls his colleague's demeanor, when he was acting department chair: slow to anger, and patient among the petty squabblers comprising the university's liberal arts faculty. He also remembers his anxiety at bringing his wife to campus events—he fears she's intellectually undistinguished, though he has given her things to read to broaden her horizons.[672]

But the wife, like the friend, maintains a sunny disposition around her increasingly gloomy husband. Gradually, the husband reveals his jealousies: he worries his wife and the friend are having an affair (the man was, in health, a "skirt-chaser").[673] He can't conceive of how the town and school would respond to news that his wife (and not he?) has given a kidney to an all-too-deserving, mild-mannered person. He keeps asking if his wife will offer, and she keeps saying she will. She reminds him to call the friend, to see how he's doing, but he cannot. He's consumed with the idea of the pair's extramarital "exchange," its disarming intimacies. The friend eventually dies, and the husband is "astounded; he [is] as surprised as if his friend had never been sick a day in his life." His wife reveals, on preparing to attend the man's memorial, that she *did* in fact offer the kidney, but the friend declined. The husband sits in church, wrestling with his, and his wife's, capacities for care:

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[671] Ibid. 90.

[672] Ibid. 91.

[673] Ibid. 88.

> It was necessary to have trust. What was marriage without trust? He closed his eyes, as determinedly as if he would never open them again. Nothing had happened. What if it had? What if people knew? (And smiled because he didn't?) No one knew, and anyway, his friend was dead, very dead. Which he would certainly never consider a relief. Never.[674]

Other Jean Ross Justice stories approach career and care in more oblique, but still powerful, ways: the suppression of an affair from the biography of a workshop poet, named Wortham, in "The Sky Fading Upward to Yellow: A Footnote to Literary History";[675] the reputations and marital subterfuges of the novella "Family Feeling."[676] Via these fictions, published one after the other at the end of her life, Jean Ross Justice assembles her own appreciable literary career.[677] She catalogues the relational possibilities of career-possessors (writers) and career-supporters (carers) in small communities—academic towns, rarely called Iowa City but nevertheless *that sort of place*. Amid the corn and soy, some people create language for a public, of whatever size. And others work to enable that work.

Part Three: Care, Career, and Conversions of Capital—A Theory

But what to make, systematically, of this preoccupation with the things people do—voluntarily or less so—for the sake of others' professional lives? There exists a substantial body of English-language scholarship on poetic career; curiously, much of it argues that no such scholarship can be found precisely useful.[678] Everyone, it seems, conceives of the term differently. One critic's idea of

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[674] Ibid. 97.

[675] Ibid. 198-210.

[676] See the op. cit. volume.

[677] Cf. Jeff Charis-Carlson, "Author Jean Ross Justice dies at age 91," *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, Apr. 6, 2016, online, https://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/2016/04/06/author-jean-ross-justice-dies-age-91/82705394/, n.p.

[678] Zuba 170n7. Zuba has two long, helpful footnotes, building an "essential bibliography" of "career criticism," at 169n3 and 170n6. Picking just two poetic-career studies: Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: California UP, 1983) (also in Zuba's note) and John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser,*

career is another's idea of *vocation*: a diffuse, vaguely Romantic—and long disputed—concern with something immaterial and extrahuman, inducing the poet to compose.[679] Debates about the social-political meanings of "job," "work," "success," "esteem," and "calling"[680] shade frequently into under-historicized readings of poets' cascading tributes, rivalries, and symbolic tombs.[681] Jesse Zuba, for his part, clarifies literary career by emphasizing the production of a poet's first volume, which, he argues persuasively, at once produces the poet herself and the possibilities she might realize as she continues writing.[682] In his introduction, Zuba lays out important aspects of the idea of "poetic career," including that "[p]ursuing a career as an American poet during the twentieth century has typically meant pursuing a career as something else."[683] Situating his method, he continues,

> I take as a basic premise the idea that poets' trajectories generally lead across the field of production from a dominated position to a dominant one through the accumulation of recognition in the forms of publications, honors, and profits. ... The perceived decline in autonomy attendant upon recognition generates a sense of vocational crisis that is embodied in and negotiated through the representation of career.

He concludes his synthesis by noting,

> [a] poet's every gesture and reference, including those that are less than self-conscious and those only obliquely related to genre, index more or less specific relations to one or more of the practices, norms, values, figures, schools, subjects,

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Milton, and Literary History (New York: Columbia UP, 1983). For an illuminating comparison, see Anne Ferry's review in *Renaissance Quarterly* 37.1, Spring 1984, 133-5.

[679] Craig Morgan Teicher's Romantic-ish claim reiterates a certain commonsense understanding of poetic growth: "[a] poet's apprenticeship begins when he or she starts to recognize [a] sense of mission, of necessity, when silence and words can live together" (24), in *We Begin in Gladness: How Poets Progress* (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2018).

[680] See, as one example, Allen Grossman's "The Calling of Poetry: The Constitution of Poetic Vocation, the Recognition of the Maker in the Twentieth Century, and Work of the Poet in Our Time," *TriQuarterly* 79, Fall 1990, 220-38.

[681] See Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984), 138-79, esp. 160-77. Zuba asserts that Helgerson and Lipking "inaugurated" "career criticism" (3).

[682] Zuba 17-8.

[683] Ibid. 1.

> and styles that define the field of production, and in this way they participate in the process of career making.[684]

Zuba's analysis, therefore, draws on a sociological criticism which, in American literature departments, Pierre Bourdieu and John Guillory have most rigorously and comprehensively advanced.[685] In this, and though he says he does not,[686] he posits "autonomy" as the dialectical counterweight to the institutional-professional-bureaucratic enmeshments of career. The poet wants to *achieve*, in poetry, by carving out her (sometimes symbolic, sometimes physical) space, by asserting her self-creation. But that space, and that self-creation, can only exist within a matrix of other poets' lives, works, and continual refashionings thereof. Zuba admits that careers are messy by definition, and that "selling out" and "maintaining credibility" are caricatures of the sorts of behaviors in which poets actually engage, as they chart their paths.[687] But the elegance of Zuba's account derives in some measure from its reliance on poets' first books, with their illuminating, localized subset of concerns: "beginnings," pathbreaking, and, eventually, repetitions and rebirths.[688]

In this chapter, I, too, rely on a sociological base derived from Bourdieu and Guillory, though I find its most robust presentation in the work of James F. English, especially his 2005 book on artistic prizes, *The Economy of Prestige*. As he elaborates, with characteristic brio,

> [p]rizes are not a threat or contamination with respect to a field of properly cultural practice .... The prize *is* cultural practice in its quintessential contemporary form. The primary function it can be seen to serve—that of facilitating cultural 'market transactions,' enabling the various individual and institutional agents of culture ... to

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[684] Ibid. 4.

[685] Ibid. 6.

[686] Ibid. 4, 9.

[687] Ibid. 5.

[688] See Zuba's chapter on Louis Glück, 128-53.

> engage one another in a collective project of value production—is the project of cultural practice as such.[689]

English explains that prizes "are the single best instrument for negotiating transactions between cultural and economic, cultural and social, or cultural and political capital—which is to say that they are our most effective institutional agents of *capital intraconversion*."[690] By remaining thoroughly dialectical—and skeptical of inherited ideas of separate cultural and economic spheres—we can develop, by extension, an Englishian definition of career. It becomes the *concatenation* of instances of capital conversion (cultural to economic, or vice versa, and so on), over the course of a poet's life, and in the years after the poet's death. Moreover, where English thinks of awards as a demonstrable *site* of conversion, I expand the possibilities of this form of exchange, to include all the ways (departmentally, among friend-groups, by rumor) that a poet's reputation might fluctuate. In this way, the word "career" sheds much of its commonsense fuzziness, and is rather a dynamic, and trackable, set of relations in time. It is finally a social phenomenon that grounds the lives and works of literary producers, instead of a materially insubstantial, decorative feature of certain "careerist" poets' poems.

English refers to "administrators, judges, sponsors, artists, and others involved in a prize" as "agents" of capital conversion,[691] and he is doubtless right to do so. But this essay adds a further—and as yet undertheorized—figure to the "game" of literary production over a lifetime: the caregiver. If literary awards are the (highly visible) blazon of a poet's career status at any given moment—and a means of summarizing authorial importance in an obituary[692]—relations of care, or emotional

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689 *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural* Value (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 26. Hereafter EP.

690 EP 10. I've referred throughout this chapter simply to "conversions" of value, a term I find less obfuscatory.

691 Ibid. 11.

692 Ibid. 21.

maintenance, are the almost definitionally *invisible* tethers that support, and give shape to, a career. Via readings of fiction and poetry, this chapter centers those carers who are otherwise (if sometimes temporarily) sidelined, and who make possible another writer's capital conversions while engaging, of necessity, in social, symbolic, and economic processes of their own.[693]

Scholars of sexuality, gender, and queer life, and of philosophy and literary-cultural studies, have developed frameworks for the analysis of care throughout the twentieth century.[694] As Chloe Taylor summarizes, Emmanuel Levinas employs "masculine/feminine" binaries to describe symbolically dominant and recessive modes of selves understanding others, in his re-envisioning of aspects of the post-Kantian Western philosophical tradition.[695] In complementary fashion, latter-day feminist care theorists—including Nel Noddings, Sara Ruddick, and Carol Gilligan, to name three[696]—have "point[ed] out that persons gendered feminine have in fact done more of the face-to-face caring work in society than persons gendered masculine, or have been more responsible for others in proximate relations."[697] Gilligan, in her widely-cited *In a Different Voice*, builds a psychological case for an "ethic of care" that relies on the "logic of relationships, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs" a traditionally masculine view of "objective justice."[698]

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[693] See English 264-96 for the beginnings of commentary on the social network effects, within communities, of prize-bestowal.

[694] Chloe Taylor, "Levinasian Ethics and Feminist Ethics of Care," *Symposium*, 9.2, Oct. 2005, 217-240, esp. 223.

[695] C. Taylor 217-9.

[696] Critical literature on the subject is vast. For a foundational bibliography: Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: California UP, 1984) and *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: California UP, 2002); Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); and Carol Gilligan's *Joining the Resistance* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2011), along with *In a Different Voice*, below. Gilligan argues expansively for the importance of her model, in *Joining the Resistance*: "a feminist ethic of care is integral to the struggle to release democracy from the grip of patriarchy because it roots that struggle in the exigencies of survival. ... [It] encourages the capacities that constitute our humanity and alerts us to the practices that put them at risk" (177).

[697] C. Taylor 221.

[698] See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982), 73. Hereafter IDV.

This ethic, she continues, derives from a postulate that there are no philosophical or psychological selves without others,[699] and that a "weblike" structure of relationships, a "network of care," is the most genial method for mapping the responsibilities some persons take on, for a time or permanently, for the sake of their family members, friends, and neighbors.[700] In the wake of the publication of *In a Different Voice*, critics have debated the extent to which Gilligan essentializes and reifies categories of the "masculine" and "feminine," along with her insistence on explanatory mechanisms that are psychological, as opposed to social or material.[701]

To a significant degree, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* presages the postwar feminist ethic of care, anticipatorily situating it within Elizabethan and high-modernist letters, in the famous anecdote of Judith, a fictive sister of Shakespeare's. William attends school, reads the great (Latin, male) masters, becomes an actor then a playwright and entrepreneur. Meanwhile, Judith sits at home, sneaking what desultory reading she can, and hiding from her parents, who otherwise seek to assign her domestic duties. They do this, Woolf says, not because they want to be cruel, but because they want Judith, and the family, to remain socially secure, admired. Woolf imagines Judith's father "severely beat[ing]"[702] her for opposing her arranged marriage to a class-appropriate man, and finds Judith sneaking out of the home, trying, like her brother, to become an actor, and falling instead into a relationship, then child-rearing, emotional disarray, creative stunting, and eventual suicide. The polarities, in this anecdote, make themselves known readily: the woman's domestic sphere against "the world" of men and letters; the physical "getting" of offspring against the "making" of poetry

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[699] IDV 74.

[700] IDV 173. See also Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, annot. Susan Gubar (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 41.

[701] See, as one example, Nodding, *Caring* 96.

[702] Woolf 47.

and theater.[703] And the care for a man that is, in the reversals of heteropatriarchal life, reformulated as an act of pity, bestowed on a woman. For Judith's husband Nick Greene does what he can to "rescue" her, their "illegitimate" relationship and her family, from public scorn.[704]

Woolf—along with subsequent theorists across literary periods—establishes implicitly still another dyad, of amateur dabbling, on the one hand, and polished, professional writing, on the other. As Linda Zionkowsky has demonstrated, women's writing is unprofessional to the extent that women are shut out of the professions, however they're constituted in a given period.[705] Yet male litterateurs, preoccupied with the possibilities of a public career, must engage in sometimes contradictory avowals and disavowals of their careerist designs, to signal at once their seriousness as artistic producers and their distance from the marketplace, to which only hacks and drudges pay attention.[706] Part, then, of the (woman's) care supporting a (man's) career is that which manages, from a nondominant and less-visible position, aspects of art-making that seem unartistic, unglamorous. And this role, by ironic consequence, requires that women providing care understand the literary markets—the capital-conversion opportunities of bylines and publication dates—as well or better than any male producer of texts.[707]

Other theorists have insisted on the historicization of time-bound gendered relationships, rather than the reliance on apparently "preexisting" templates for the interactions between men and

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[703] For an illuminating critical account, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Introduction: Gender, Creativity, and the Woman Poet," in *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979), xv-xxvi.

[704] Summary from this preceding paragraph made from Woolf 46-8.

[705] Linda Zionkowsky, Men's Work: Gender, Class, and the Professionalization of Poetry (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4-5, 8-9.

[706] *Men's Work* 8-10. See also TPE 324.

[707] See UoR 242 for more on this subject.

women (or dominant and subordinate partners, or care-givers and care-recipients.)[708] Put simply, care and career bespeak a context, and one such context is Ross Justice's. As I've noted above, her stories depict multiplicities of support that ground the achievements of others. A focused re-reading of her corpus, with the feminist care framework in mind, thus allows for a fuller articulation of the care-career problematic in postwar American creative writing.

A first, if obvious, characteristic of Ross Justice's narratives is the proliferation within them of different modes of caring. In "The Dark Forces," Susannah's roles are various: she cooks for her visiting stepson as she did for his father; she maintains what amounts to a museum of his artist's study, complete with texts, small library, and furniture; she similarly holds onto his papers, in case a scholar should, one day, drop in to ask about Searcy's work. Susannah also offered the writer, during his lifetime, an informal (that is, unrecognized) form of psychological therapy, insisting to Dillon that her care allowed Searcy to break out of his slump and write with renewed vigor. She performs, in addition, the emotional labor of minimizing John's cruelties that were spurred on by his alcoholism.[709] Helena, John's daughter, can't visit (and therefore doesn't learn about Susannah's precedent care) because she is busy caring for her husband Michael, who, Dillon tells Susannah, has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.[710] And Dillon's unnamed wife doesn't visit Susannah because she's looking after her own mother.

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[708] For a useful treatment, see W. C. Dimock, "Feminism, New Historicism, and the Reader," *American Literature* 63.4, Dec. 1991, 601-22: "[i]ndeed, in order not to reify gender into an unvarying category of difference and in order not to limit different to an unvarying site of production, a feminist reading must also be a historical reading" (620).

[709] See Amy S. Wharton, "The Sociology of Emotional Labor," *The Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 2009, 147-65. In the abstract, Wharton cites Hochschild as the source of the phrase; see A. R. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: California UP, 2012). I've largely avoided the phrase in this chapter, leaving it, as many studies to, do the non-domestic workplace. But because Susannah's therapeutic intervention approaches that of a carer in a treatment facility, I've found it apt, above.

[710] EGP 62.

In "The Dark Forces," then, Susannah's self-abnegation stands at the center of a network of overlapping, sometimes competing caring relations, typified by the offloading of responsibilities from men onto the most proximate women, who possess the highest "idle capacity" for juggling them.[711] Notably, this does not diminish but accentuates the freedom Dillon feels, in driving away from Susannah's Miami shrine. Because he's not in charge of John's legacy, he can engage in his own, self-directed post-mortem project: reacquainting himself with those of his father's poems he's not yet read. Searcy's lyrics are the fruits of a career rated (per Dillon and Susannah) not preternaturally strong but satisfactory, accomplished—good enough. We can thus reframe John's oeuvre, with English and other sociologists of literature in mind: it's a medium-sized cache of symbolic capital (reputation among peers and readers, trending slightly downward), plus some money (in the form of residuals, a pension, and possible life insurance), plus a few art objects (mostly first editions).

In "Night Thoughts," Ross Justice assembles a tetrad of persons—Luke, Beverly, Braswell, and Arnie—whom care binds together. Beverly looks after Arnie following his stroke, when he no longer can practice dentistry. Frustrated by her position, but without power to change it, Beverly rehearses for Luke Braswell's (former) career potential, evident to her years ago, and wonders what could have become of him. Luke, meanwhile, refuses to answer calls from his second ex-wife, but leaves the receiver plugged in, in case his mother tries to reach him, presumably because of an emergency. For Beverly, care defines daily life, and leads to a dreamy precis of the ways she might have supported another figure, a novelist rather than a service professional. For Luke, however, care impinges on routine as Beverly or his mother might—through the door, or over the phone line, unannounced, disconcerting—and then, just as quickly, no more.

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[711] For more on this idea, in an unrelated context, see Ruth Wilson Gilmore's brilliant *Golden Gulag: Prison, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: California UP, 2007), 27.

"The Three of Us" introduces systems of institutional (rather than personal or familial) care, as the protagonist juggles obligations to Emmett, her ill husband, and Joel, her romantic partner. Joel's idea—that he join the protagonist in visiting Emmett at "the home"— adds another thread to the story's web of concerns. The protagonist worries whether the institution treats Emmett well, and about the other patients cared for there. She hopes to manage Joel's conversation with Emmett, which Emmett follows as he can. And, most poignantly, she tries to balance her desire for emotional and physical intimacy (with Joel) with her preexisting marital intimacies—which are in danger of fading without shared, mutually-refreshing recollection. Whereas her negotiations with Joel result in necessarily partial "truths"—a jumble of provisional understandings and elided information—she reveals to Emmett those aspects of their marriage that cannot, and will not, be altered. This, even as Joel fills Emmett's former partnership roles in the domestic sphere.

"The Next to Last Line" and "The Offer" examine the subtleties of gifts, and the extent to which they're made freely between professional acquaintances, friends, and lovers. Bettina takes Sean's line without asking, and leaves him with a choice that, as she reveals, is no choice at all: her poem, with Sean's words in it, is slated for publication. Bettina relies on her far greater cache of symbolic capital, in the poetry world, as insurance against any potential complaint of Sean's. Yet Bettina recognizes that her theft, however small, has produced for Sean a surplus of aggrieved feeling—a bad taste in his mouth, since the teacher otherwise unenthused by his writing has scooped up his best phrase. Though Bettina never acknowledges the transacted quality of their relationship, its circumstances create a paradoxical solution to the problem, in Sean's mind, of his value as a poet. Bettina has paid him with her attentions, even as he refuses to believe he'd accept sexual recompense for his language. Their night together is, simultaneously, just what it appears and, because tacitly managed, nothing of the kind. It demonstrates how much Bettina cares for Sean's line, and how little she cares for the quasi-Romantic commonplace that another's poetic expression

cannot be appropriated, or bought. Sean becomes a footnote in the story of Bettina's career. And he finds work as an attorney, only to return, late at night, to the thought of a "kiss-and-tell" poem about Bettina's carefree theft.

"The Offer" presents, by contrast, a gift that is not forced but supererogatory. The wife wants to give a kidney because she cares for the friend (and, more distantly, because she values the friendship the three of them share, her husband included). Yet her husband fears that, in relinquishing a kidney, his wife must be neglecting him, the primary recipient of her care (as he constructs it, in his implicitly patriarchal understanding of their relationship). For him, the gift is tantamount to admission of an affair between her and the friend. Otherwise, the offer makes no sense to the husband, as he fears it wouldn't to the college town, the whisperings of which he fears. His wife's superabundance of care—she maintains their household, even apologizing for a downtick in her domestic duties during a period of depression—opposes the husband's equal-and-opposite evaporation of care for his friend, who is dying. Indeed, the husband, though he is not prepared to admit it, finds satisfaction in his friend's death and in that friend's refusal of his wife's (over)generous offer of a body part.

And Julian, from "The End of a Good Party," introduces a final, significant recipient of care: the poète maudit, whose writerly life is in shambles, and whom people must assist with money, a bed to crash in, relationship advice.[712] Julian cycles through jobs, but as the protagonist describes them, they are more parodies than occupations, let alone vocations. Julian can be, at base, only one thing—a poet—yet he cannot really be that, because psychic and material obstructions prevent him

[712] "A phrase that reflects the widening gulf in 19th-c. France between the gifted poet and the public on whom his survival might depend. It was given currency by Paul Verlaine's *Les Poètes maudits* (1884) ... [and a] half century earlier, Alfred de Vigny's *Stello* (1832) had developed ... the idea that poets ... are envied and hated for their superior qualities by society and its rulers who fear the truths they tell. Thereafter, a sick, impoverished, or dissolute poet of significant but generally unrecognized talent came to be seen in these terms as doubly victimized by a hostile and insentient society"; A. G. Engstrom, "Poète maudit," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2017), 1051.

from creating.[713] Claudia wants to bring Julian back, to hear from him across the pale of existence, but she cannot; the séance fails. She and the protagonist, in an act of redirected longing, spend the night together, and his infidelity forces him to confront not the realities of his distant marriage, but his sense of cosmic impotence. Claudia soon finds religion and leaves the close-knit artistic community of the Grove. Julian remains gone. Their attempt at an extrasensory relationship with him—one of care across the boundaries of empirical science—cannot give Julian, post facto, a body of work, a career as an artist. Like Susannah, like Sean, they have given up their art, have changed occupations, moved, and survived. Julian wandered romantically, made no art, and passed on. The community mourns him, alongside their own vanished youths and unfinished creative enterprises.[714] The protagonist and Claudia, in this melancholic story, find compensation for the dead-ends, the banalities of their own lives in the pluperfect potential of his.

Part Four: Justice and His Obliviated Poets

I have drawn especial attention to the title story of Jean Ross's first book, because it constructs an explanation—however partial and, as I will show, displaced—for the dynamics of care and career within Jean and Donald's literary relationship. Simply put, though they dedicated themselves, matrimonially, to one another, Jean cared (in the feminist-theoretical sense of the assumption of responsibility) for Donald the poet, before she cared for herself as a writer of fictions and essays.[715]

[713] EGP 9.

[714] Ibid. 14-5.

[715] Ross Justice did publish at least one poem, too: "Thoughts of Home," *The Sewanee Review*, 123.2, Spring 2015, 205-6, dedicated to her sister Eleanor.

That concern ran mostly, if not entirely, one way.[716] Meanwhile, Donald the poet cared for the careers of a cadre of lost, "obliviated" writers, whose works he hoped to rescue from neglect.

Much has been made of Justice's editorship of the poems of Weldon Kees (1914-1955), a writer of some distinction from Nebraska, best known for the crowd he ran with, and for his mysterious disappearance near the Golden Gate Bridge.[717] But Justice also edited volumes by the writers Raeburn Miller (1934-1990), Joe Bolton (1961-1990), and Henri Coulette (1927-1988), all of whom are obscure today. In his estimation, they deserve greater consideration in death than they received in life. The care Justice demonstrates, in organizing and advocating for their work, is complemented by the anguish these poets feel about their artistic (and professional) achievements. Using different aesthetic strategies, they try to make their names, and they long in their verses for laurels, for support, for carers to lean on.

In the introduction to *The Comma After Love*, his selection of Raeburn Miller's lyrics (from a substantial corpus collected on compact disc),[718] Justice begins with his clearest—if still gnomic—classificatory statement on the professional life of a writer. As far as "literary careers" are concerned, he declares, "there are perhaps three or four main types of poets." (Intriguingly, he only sketches out two.) The first is "a public figure," who renders her own poetry "secondary." And "another ... seem[s] hardly aware of a public to be cultivated at all; what matters is just the writing of poems,"

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[716] Justice's letters home, especially from artist residencies like MacDowell, betray how much he missed Jean Ross and Nathaniel—and how dependent he was on their companionship. See DJP, F330.

[717] James Reidel's biography is well-researched and comprehensive; see *Vanished Act: The Life and Art of Weldon Kees* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 2003), esp. 352. Kees's disappearance, and mental state at that moment and before, is at least as famous as his poetry; see William T. Ross, *Weldon Kees* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 139-40. Other poets used Kees's relationship to life and death, mystery and career, as a jumping-off point: see, as one example, Larry Levis, "My Only Photograph of Weldon Kees," dedicated to Donald Justice, in *Aspects of Robinson: Homage to Weldon Kees*, eds. Christopher Buckley and Christopher Howell (Omaha: The Backwaters Press, 2011), 226-7. Kees himself cared about the ends of poets' lives and careers: see *The Poems of Weldon Kees*, ed. Donald Justice (Iowa City: Stone Wall, 1960), 86-7.

[718] Raeburn Miller, *The Comma After Love: Selected Poems*, ed. Donald Justice, Cooper R. Mackin, and Richard D. Olson (Akron: Akron UP, 1994), x. Hereafter CAL. Miller also wrote criticism; for an essay on Shakespeare, see "The Persons of Moonshine: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the 'Disfigurement' of Realities," in *Explorations of Literature*, ed. Rima D. Reck (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1966), 25-31.

which is "a compulsion, very secretive perhaps and certainly very private."[719] Justice places Miller in this latter camp. And he applies a statement of R. P. Blackmur's to the pitiable figure at hand, asserting that the "fragmentary, adventitious, disorderly, generally out of bounds, becomes within the bounding lines of death, the very chorus and commentary of the only order of which poetry is capable."[720] Miller's career, such as it was, achieves coherence only posthumously. And if that's true of many poets with larger audiences, it's doubly true of Miller, who believed himself, in life and art, so terribly alone.[721]

Justice admits that Miller's compositional mode—a steady, inward "flow," which he commits to paper at the end of most days—is alien to his own. "I cannot help finding it," he says, "not only enviable but appealing."[722] Miller was Justice's master's student at Iowa, and he worked as a professor of English at the University of New Orleans for three decades.[723] Yet despite these institutional supports, Miller, in Justice's depiction, knows only toil and neglect—not merely socially (although he hints at the poet's romantic agonies, which Miller himself writes of, elliptically, across poems), but in the reputational economy of his peers. Although Miller published, he gained no renown beyond a tiny circle, and his output dwarfed the attention reviewers paid to his books when they did appear, in limited print runs.[724]

As with Jean Ross Justice's corpus, one finds in Miller's numerous poems developing the problematic of career and care. Indeed, throughout *The Comma After Love*, the capital conversions in

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[719] Ibid. xi.

[720] Ibid. xii.

[721] See "Some Sums," CAL 103-7.

[722] Ibid. xi.

[723] Ibid. ix-x.

[724] Ibid. ix.

which writers take part, before their publics and at home with themselves, are never far from the poet's mind. He is angry, despondent, and angry again, sometimes in the course of a few lines.[725] He wonders how any poet attends to his personal needs while drafting, revising, and publishing, and with whose help. And he wonders, further, whether his needs are too great or few; his poems too personal or abstract for a wide readership; his helpers too nosily present, looking over his shoulder, or distant, having stranded him with his notebooks and his pains.

"The Summing Up," a progression of crystalline couplets, illustrates this state of affairs:

> I cannot believe I am unimportant—
> a failure, of course,
>
> but such an important failure.
> When I say it has been in vain
>
> I speak with such grace,
> posturing my splendid vanity.
>
> My sowings wait somewhere,
> broadcast, faithful, beyond stone—
>
> some archivist will unfold me
> shuddering under my light.
>
> Surely such nothing could not come to nothing.
> I buck up,
>
> I start to cook supper,
> I look forward to stacking the clean dishes on the shelf.[726]

The poem unspools a thread-thin anger, its phrasal padding ("of course") and colloquial injunction ("I buck up") trying to mask, and so revealing, Miller's interior recriminations. To be an "important failure," or to have created nothingness beyond nothingness: these are the poet's crimped, qualified expectations. If the writer does not produce a full shelf of his own volumes, he can, in bitter parody,

[725] See "Poets and Their Bibliographies," CAL 47.

[726] Ibid. 14.

"stack the clean dishes" on his kitchen shelf. One could situate this lyric in diachronic sequence, tracing it back to Greek and Latin antiquity, wherein the poet considers her (or another's) accomplishments in life and reputation after death.[727] But synchronically, within *The Comma After Love*, Miller's summations of his lifework speak to a specific anguish: a desire to be attended to—to be seen, heard, and understood; to be taken responsibility for—as an embodied person and as an assemblage of texts.

Miller expands on this effort in "On the Success of Former Students," writing,

> As many words as the Eskimos need for snow
> I need for jealousy, or for the stations between
> that kind of reaction and the reactions of pride,
> an irregular range that includes disbelief and fear.

He acknowledges that, as a lapsed Catholic, he has "trouble with the forgiveness of sins," but he "does believe," he goes on,

> in the resurrection of the body
> simply, in spite of this body, of all evidence.
> And I believe as simply that the success of others
> will be changed utterly, will put on incorruption.[728]

He closes with the credo that his "own failures will rise from the dead, / in petulance, in awe, in hope, in exasperation, in mercy." Here, as in "The Summing Up," Miller believes that failure, given sufficient time and amplification, might thematize itself: the poet's perceived limitations will be read, more charitably, as the subject of his work. He does not much worry, after his secular conversion, about the fate of his body after death. But the reanimated body of his work, "in spite of" that

[727] See, as just one example, Callimachus, rpt. in Alan Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), 59. Miller was an avid student of the "classics," CAL ix.

[728] CAL 59.

physical body, might allow for the reinterpretation of those "ugly feelings" Miller understands to hamper his success, as his former students construct their sterling careers.[729]

Returning to the household routine of "The Summing Up," he provides this additional precis, in "Regimen":

> I eat cheese dips and pie
> And vitamin pills. I talk
> Long hours with casual friends.
> Occasionally I walk
>
> A block or so. I teach
> Half-truths by rote. At night
> I wait up through the news.
> And now and then I write.
>
> My subject, tragedy.
> My form, deliberate verse.
> My end, a sort of prayer
> Against this vacant curse.[730]

It is a poem of loneliness and personal neglect, in which indulgent care for the body tips, of an instant, into the auto-destructive. The poet's diet, which might be enjoyable as he consumes it, is a parody of genuine nutrition (processed food chased with "vitamin pills.") All pleasures are leavened with despairs: serious conversations find only "casual" interlocutors; walks are curtailed; teaching and writing are mechanical, utterly without fulfillment. "Regimen," in short, details the lifeways of a clinical-depressive subject, whose rehearsal of suffering produces more suffering, and whose desire for human connection prompts frustration at the insufficiency of that connection.

This malignant psychological fog is evident, with varying degrees of intensity, throughout the lyrics. It plays a significant role in "Q.E.D.," a poem similar to Justice's "This poem is not addressed

[729] Sianne Ngai has popularized the term; see her *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005).

[730] CAL 74.

to you."[731] "Let me begin," Miller writes, "by saying I am tired. / I have no poems to write. I write no poems." After reformulating his self-lashing, and blaming his listlessness on the ambient disruptions of television and professional rigmarole, he comes upon an imaginative clearing:

> Today I saw a pear tree. It is spring.
> If I remember right, last month was winter.
> Summer at length will transpire, I suppose.
> I used to watch and turn aside and write.
> I used to fend off seasons from the world.
> But pear trees cannot lie about the season.
> I write no poems. I am growing old.
> I write no poems. And food and architecture
> And eyes in photographs—it leaves me tired.

Miller's verses remind us of Landor's, from Chapter 1 of this dissertation; the natural world undergoes its cycles of growth and decay, but the poet must write his lifework while he can, before his strength diminishes and is gone. The miasma of chronic depression thus suffuses Miller's work and his understanding of its production: he is tired and cannot write, and when he can, he can write only of being tired. This amplifies the affective cage in which he's trapped. He cannot imagine a way toward outward-directed, satisfyingly-intimate interpersonal experience, because he is depressed. And because he is depressed, he is ashamed of his work, and does not wish to share it with others. His depression therefore justifies his continued depression. "Q.E.D."

In "Depression," another of Miller's lacerating psychological lyrics, he steels himself to live, asserting, "I will call my own bluff. I will keep on."[732] It's a plea, affecting in its simplicity, from the self to the self, not to end the only life the narrating consciousness has known. If no one will care for him—because he asserts, in the lyrics, that he's permitted no one to do so—*he alone* must take up that burden. He must will himself to care for himself; he must beg himself to try to want to stay alive. But other lyrics, like "Two Fragments toward a Suicide Note," entertain, at length, possibilities

[731] Ibid. 83.

[732] Ibid. 88.

for the termination of poetic possibility. First, Miller would quiet the urge to write; then he would cease to write, to track his mind on the page; then, having gathered his self-denying "courage," he would write of the urge to leave life behind. "I thought today, walking home through the good weather," he says at the poem's outset,

> ... I was happy, walking lightly and smiling,
> With two books I had just bought, and planning new poems,
> And my love for you like a hand-warmer strapped to my chest,
> Everything right between us after such weeks
> Of flat lies and distance—I thought today
> That this happiness, really, was the mood in which one should choose to die.[733]

Here, Miller's self-abnegation reaches its paradoxical limits. Because he is happy; because his relationship (with an unnamed lover) is now secure; because he is prepared to read and write anew—for all this living he can finally die. Miller's care for his artistic projects, and perception of another's care for him, become, via the logic of the depressed person, the final justifications for self-inflicted death. He does not want to care for himself so he can go on living. He wants to put his life and works in order, so he may die.

The poet's anguish—arising from a lack of readership, of intimacy, of self-regard and trust in his own talents—achieves a final complication in the quatrain "For Donald Justice." Composed in the style of the 8th-century Chinese-language poet Li Po, it runs:[734]

> I met you in an overcoat
> in the Corn Belt in August.
> Why are you so scrawny?
> Been living on poetry?

The speaker and addressee of the poem are productively ambiguous.[735] If we assume Justice is talking to the Miller-character, in the third and fourth lines, we encounter, at the level of immediate

[733] CAL 38ff.

[734] Ibid. 78.

sense, the sort of ill-considered joke a (relatively) well-fed poetry professor might make to his gifted, brooding student (as Miller was, at this time). Per Chapter 3 of this dissertation, master's students at Iowa were, and are, squeaking by on graduate teaching stipends, leading courses in general-education literature, rhetoric, or occasionally creative writing itself. In this way, Miller really *is* living on poetry—namely, on the instruction of introductory reading strategies, essay composition, prosody and forms. This witticism of Justice's, attributed to him if not factual, thus reveals a multilayered irony: Miller *is* "living on poetry" to the extent that he's living at all, but his "scrawniness" points up the precarity of this living—the material exchange of part-time lecturer-duties for cheap rent and grocery money.

But Justice's mock-question points to an insuperable institutional divide, between tenured professors and "at-will," contingently waged apprentices. It bespeaks the impossibility of really living, or living "presentably," on the writing of poetry alone, without the symbolically consecrated support of an academic department. Justice cares for Miller, as an Iowa student, and as a young poet of promise. But Miller registers, in the lyric, the peculiar mixture of derision, sympathy, dismissal, and engagement characteristic of teacher-student relations in mid-century American graduate writing programs.[736] And the poem is no less fascinating if considered from the opposite vantage—as Miller speaking *to* Justice. In this latter case, Justice's "living on poetry" and his "scrawniness" appear a whimsical (at best) or destructive (at worst) deviation from his role as poet-emblem within the creative community of Iowa City. An artist like Justice, Miller implies, shouldn't need to live on "poetry" alone, since he has his status as Workshop Poet—a position for which he is suitably remunerated—to fall back on. And one can be a Workshop Poet without "living on poetry" at all.

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[735] To whom, for example, does the overcoat belong? There is the syntactically proper reading, and then the colloquial (but still highly plausible) counter-reading.

[736] In this way, Miller's affect resembles Tate's—although Tate was a highly successful Workshop poet.

That is, one can carry out the job without writing anything of note, over a period of many years.[737] In this reversed reading, steeped in resentment, the Miller-speaker really does attempt to "live" on the art the production of which destroys him. This, while Justice thrives in a structure of support so thoroughgoing, he need not publish a line to remain within it.

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In *The Comma After Love*, then, Miller experiences anguish as a self-destructive feedback loop: his spite for others feeds an ever-greater, rebounding spite for himself. He disparages his abilities, work ethic, and capacities for intimacy and affection. This leaves him with a framework of personal care so denuded, he believes happiness to be a fitting prelude only for self-destruction. By contrast, the poet Joe Bolton—whose writings Justice collected in a 1999 edition for the University of Arkansas Press[738]—arrays his rage outwardly, at any and all who are near him. Where Miller is dejected but ultimately unwilling to blame others for the curtailments of his career, Bolton engages in precisely this blaming. He castigates former friends, lovers, and carers. Indeed, this is the emotional engine of many of his lyrics. In, for example, "The Changes,"[739] Joe begins a letter to a friend, "Frank," with a combination of frustrated longing and misogynistic anger:

> I'm nursing my hangover with coffee and chili and ice water
> At Carol's Kitchen on Shepherd.
> The place has that Southern feel I miss,
> Plate lunch special, film of grease on the booths,
> All the waitresses mothers or bitches.
> I'd bet money none of them has been fucked since 1965.

[737] The slow labors of some Iowa writers are legendary: see former Director and novelist Frank Conroy, as one example.

[738] Joe Bolton, *The Last Nostalgia: Poems 1982-1990*, ed. Donald Justice (Fayetteville: Arkansas UP, 1999). Hereafter LN. Jerry Harp's review provides useful background information on the poet: "On Joe Bolton," *The Iowa Review*, 30.2, Fall 2000, 165-8. Secondary literature on Bolton is minimal: see, as one other example, Baron Wormser's fictionalization, in *The Poetry Life: Ten Stories* (Fort Lee: CavanKerry, 2008), 173-90. Bolton's "Tropical Courtyard" is also included in *The Kentucky Anthology: Two Hundred Years of Writing in the Bluegrass State*, ed. Wade Hall (Lexington: Kentucky UP, 2005), 809. In a headnote, Wade writes: "I'd like to pay homage to a young man who, sadly, did not survive the demons, the impulses that perhaps gave him the sensibility to become a great poet."

[739] LN 73-5.

Despite his rage, Bolton seeks out women at exactly those moments in which he's most inconvenienced. When his cars breaks down, two women mechanics come to drag it to the dump; when, on the "Metro downtown," he's squashed tightly against his fellow Houstonians, he sits next to "a Chicano girl," who both cramps and arouses the speaker. That night, he winds up soused at a bar, and "call[s] a woman to come rescue him," asking his epistolary companion Frank, "Christ ... what would we do without women?" He then describes an affair, his "first," that leads to the break-up of his marriage, and a "slow exile from Bowling Green," Kentucky. He recalls his unnamed lover with "a thermos of hot buttered rum," and her tendency to walk through that city "on bare, numb feet / Among the statues she imagined she resembled." At the close of the missive, Joe tells Frank that he must "do a job" and "survive the city / By giving [himself] over to its beauty only from a distance." He goes on,

> I've tried to learn to love only so far
> As that love is specific and precise,
> And to leave when I feel it becoming otherwise.
> But sometimes, when I'm holding a women in the dark, ...
> [s]omething nameless shudders through me, tempting me
> To make the connections that can undo a life.

This amounts to a thesis statement for Bolton. In his poetry, characters do not protect but *endanger* themselves, in establishing emotional bonds with those physically nearest them. Choking on his outwardly-directed anger, Bolton ensures that human connection contain, inevitably, the agon that will sever it, creating turmoil for the poet himself. This turmoil, in turn, feeds his anger, and he seeks new partners on whom to take it out.

"Laguna Beach Breakdown"[740] finds Bolton, who addresses himself in the second person, arguing that "any sense of purpose" is "nothing more than something else to lose." He envisions suicide by drowning, "neutral as seaweed in the war / The sea continually waged against the shore."

[740] Ibid. 107.

The poet thus comes to "in the indifferent embrace / of your own arms," in a double parody of romantic estrangement: the displaced I, which becomes a "you," cannot muster the care necessary to comfort the down-on-his-luck artist, who is always already failing to comfort himself. And this poète maudit has nevertheless arrived, according to the mid-century American trope of male self-reckoning, at the beaches of California, to better understand, and soothe, his roiling psyche.[741] Instances of self-loathing, in Bolton's work, are inevitably displaced, producing a narcissistic fantasia in which the writer hates the stranger within himself.

But Bolton reserves his greatest scorn for the women who become close to him. He dramatizes a romantic relationship, with an unidentified partner, in "Hurricane";[742] after a description of the alien Houston skyline, he writes,

> ... too tired to sleep
> Without whiskey and pills, I'd lie awake
> With a towel over my eyes, touching
> The soft backs of your legs below your panties.
> And when I couldn't touch you, couldn't respond
> To even the simplest of questions, it wasn't
> Any reflection on the desire I felt
> For you, though it must have appeared that way. ...
> If anything, it was a profusion of desire ...

Here, the mechanisms of Bolton's poetic "inspiration" are on full display: the torment of substance abuse that is also, for the artist, a portal to deeper feeling; the cool abandon of a city laid out before him, seemingly devoid of other people beside barkeepers and servers in diners; and a woman whose passivity and sexual expressiveness are her only distinguishing features. These circumstances are not merely the material ground of his "living on poetry"—they are the subject of his most searching, and self-serious, lyrics.

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[741] Compare this to Justice's "Henry James at the Pacific," in Chapter 1. Cf. also Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 464-8.

[742] Ibid. 117.

Bolton's "Bad Sonnets"[743] carry the theme of an irredeemably broken career, and its attendant inadequacies of care for the poet, into new terrain. The three, thematically linked sections size up an artist in successive stages of disrepute and dereliction. "Women Bicycles" sees Bolton longing "to occupy / That barless space, that sweet and chasmic lull / Between the gyrations" of a woman's "tanned thighs." And in the subsequent "Starlessness of the Fortieth Year," he projects into his creative future. He notes that, at that age, "even grand failures" will be "beyond his reach," and he'll write instead only "heartbreak letters" soon to be "burned." Even his sexual escapades will be decadent and futile, involving (in a picture of casual anti-Semitism) a "Jewish girl" from whose "orgasm" no person "could return." Meanwhile, the washed-up figure of "'B' Movie," the last of these Bad Sonnets, reviews a life that has taken "two giant / Steps backward for each little step forward." The poet "wait[s] in grocery stores" for some faint creative spark, but this afflatus never arrives, and he carries on in a life of banal consumerism and abject loneliness.

Bolton's anger pushes away those same persons without whom, he claims, life is without purpose, without value. Like Miller, he wonders if suicide is a balm. Miller's poetics of suicidality grow more or less immediately from his hatred of himself and his work, whereas Bolton's reflect a last-ditch turning-away from those patient friends who have, till now, absorbed his scorn. Bolton describes these modalities of self-destruction most starkly in "A Couple of Suicide Cases," in which the "successful" self-murder of a Texas gas station attendant precedes the "thwarted" attempt of Pat, an "ex-boxer" at Ole Miss.[744] Bolton and his friends prevent Pat from leaping off a dorm roof, and so the former fighter trains his invective—a virtuosically multipart swear word—on the "campus policemen." Bolton is left comparing the profitability of these acts: a self-death achieved without audience, and a self-death averted, pathetically, before a supportive crowd.

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[743] Ibid. 178-9.

[744] Ibid. 186-7.

In his "Weightlifter" sequence, Bolton's transposes his fixations—women, potency, career, and legacy—from the poetic to the athletic spheres.[745] Here, the (male) bodybuilder asserts to the reader that "[m]usculature" is "a way of life, / Breaking it down to build it / Up." His "oiled body can hardly / Contain itself." And like the poète maudit figure of Bolton's other lyrics, the weightlifter sleeps alone, without the domestic care a woman-helpmeet—girlfriend or mother—might provide. Instead, the only women depicted in these sections are the grade-school teachers the speaker observes from his small apartment. They lead young children outside on a tether, for safety, and he imagines "rais[ing] them so gently, one at a time," in order to spend time with them. This tenderness, a disarming revision to his usual wounded aggression, is only temporary, however. The final poem of the series, in a nod to Yeats, sees the bodybuilder as he envisions "his death."[746] He writes plaintively,

> ... I will be the man no one remembers,
> Who won't be able to tell them—
> Even if he knew—whether it's worth,
> After all, the strength it takes to carry on.

Bolton's exteriorized rage leads him, and his weightlifter, to a quiet room like that of Miller's precarious poet. Both make do without material comforts; both abjure the company of those from whom they demand succor. They marvel at the ways they disappoint themselves and are disappointed by others, from whom they would ask everything, if they could seize the right opportunity, in life and in language.

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I've presented two obliviated Justician poets whose anguishes—inward, then outward in their vectors—define their literary careers. A third, Henri Coulette, emblematizes still another possibility,

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[745] Ibid. 69-71.

[746] Cf. W. B. Yeats, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," *The Collected Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 135.

for the capital conversions and care dynamics of underappreciated poetic life. In their introduction to the *Collected*, Justice and co-author Robert Mezey say, of Coulette's verse, that "through all the play of wit, the great skill, the polish and subtlety, a person shines forth ... not perhaps the poet naked and undisguised, but someone distinctly resembling one or another of his several selves."[747] They assert that "the world of the double agent" is Coulette's "special obsession," that this is "his metaphor for the life of the poet."[748] The poet-agent, in their account, assembles a set of identities to be put on and taken off. His allegiances (to the self, his friends, his public) can be slippery; it's difficult to know him, let alone to care for him.

In "The War of the Secret Agents," a closet drama comprising the bulk of his 1965 Lamont-Prize-winning first book, the poet assembles a "Dramatis Personae" of fictional, World War II-era spies and counterspies, modeled on an historical account from the period.[749] Prosper and Kieffer, Archambault and Hilaire, and the clowns Cinema and Phono speak of their loves and losses of the early 1940s, in occupied Paris. And Jane Alabaster, a journalist writing a book on their careers in espionage, remarks to T. S. Eliot, her "editor" at Faber, in a letter:

> ... I have spent some five years
> with the words of ghosts,
> in the company of men
> who, if they were not ghosts, were more mad ...[750]

The spy, like the ghost (another word, of course, for spy, in CIA parlance), is all appearance, with no traceable substance. The poet-spy leaves reads the clues of his adversaries, and leaves further clues for his readers; the poet-ghost is a moving memory, whom Alabaster hopes to capture in language.

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[747] Henri Coulette, *The Collected* Poems, ed. Donald Justice and Robert Mezey (Fayetteville: Arkansas UP, 1990). Hereafter CCP. For the implications of this kind of subtlety (patrician, white, male, Eliotic, conservative), see Chapter 2.

[748] CCP xiv.

[749] CCP 95.

[750] Ibid. 47.

Throughout the first sixteen, short sections of the sequence, characters speak in fractured monologues. They lay out their amours, their suspicions of one another, the details of professional lives that are both intimate and utterly performed, for the sake of "state security." By the Epilogue, the unnamed author of the text has this to add:

> Reader, you have been as patient as an agent
> waiting after midnight
> outside a deserted house
> in a cold rain. You will ask yourself,
> what does it all mean? ...
>
> Reader (you will be known henceforth by that name),
> there is no meaning,
> no purpose; only the codes.
> So think of us, of Prosper, silly
> Prosper, of Archambault of the marvelous eyes,
> of Denise combing her hair.[751]

Coulette creates, in this most accomplished (and critically lauded) of his early poems, a *field*, in the Bourdieusian sense, in which players find themselves arrayed, negotiating with one another and with abstract directives, understood to be "the rules."[752] The codes, or transmissions, these players send out, receive, and interpret are, then, the metaphoric redescription of "the messages" or meanings the poet might try to promulgate. Poetry and secret communiqués are baffling to outsiders because these exterior subjects are, by definition, excluded from the field on which the game is played. It wouldn't be the "game," after all, if non-initiates could participate. And so the poet-agent must play this game as a full-fledged participant, and must remain grounded enough, in fields outside that game, to relay to non-poets its dizzying moves, counter-strategies, and rivalries.[753]

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[751] Ibid. 74.

[752] English, EP 9-10.

[753] See Morris Dickstein, *Double Agent: The Critic and Society* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), who extolls critics "who played the double agent, combining a deep feeling for art with a powerful sense of its changing place in human society" (xiv). See also EP 3-6.

But in this de-Romanticized, and witticized, realm of poetic production,[754] what position might caretakers assume, if they have a position at all? What, as Bourdieu would ask, is their *habitus*?[755] Coulette answers this question, via a different mode of double-agent duplicity, in "The Academic Poet." Throughout this persona-poem, the author attacks his profession and the related study of English letters, in the manner of his fellow midcentury poets (and poet-teachers), many of them white men (like Jarrell, Shapiro, and Snodgrass).[756] Coulette takes up the disposition of the frustrated, department-bound creator-bureaucrat and projects it outward. He begins,

> My office partner dozes
> at his desk, whimpering now
> as he dreams his suicide.
> The November light kisses
> The scar of his last attempt.

The poet-protagonist then speaks, dismissively, of "a plea / for the starving Indian / children of North Dakota," which has wound up, as junk mail, on his desk. In a fit of pique, he returns to his grading:

> I circle two misspelled words
> and write, "Help, I am being
> held captive at Mickey Mouse
> State College," across the top,
> wondering, is this the one,
> or the fat woman, perhaps,
>
> with the post-menopausal craze
> for strict forms.

[754] Coulette's verse is Augustan in tone: more Pope than Eliot, more Johnson than Pound.

[755] See EP 364n1.

[756] See Snodgrass, "The Poet Ridiculed by Hysterical Academics," *Selected Poems, 1957-1987* (New York: Soho, 1987), 266.

In response to an imagined, or remembered, student query about sestinas,[757] he concludes that the end words "should define / a circle, which is the shape / I describe, chasing my tail / from class to class, the straight line / disguised, degree by degree." Here, Coulette implies that the poet, within the walls of the university, is nothing but a spy.[758] He might imitate the classroom methods of the teacher, and he might even show up for department meetings. But the real writer, according to Coulette, cannot take seriously the duties of his purported "profession." What he can do, however, is plow his pedagogical non-caring into his poetry: like war-time espionage, it can become his subject.

Coulette's students are unskilled practitioners of their craft, to whose assignments he compares the non-human output of "LBG-30, Computer, Poet." The speaker in this lyric considers the machine's "circuits open and hot," and its "dials iridescent," before remarking on his own frailties,

> ... for see
> how this hand trembles among
> these half-finished, abandoned
>
> odes, how migraine dulls the eye
> that looks on them.[759]

He begins a fantasia, in which his otherwise impacted, affected, unwritten poems prosper, "in that odd, recurring dream" of "my dying," and with "the whole world ... / forgiving me, blessing me— / my mad mother, my good wife // the poets I've stolen from." He approaches the mainframe,

[757] For the sestina form as midcentury proving ground, see Brunner's wonderful chapter "The Lure of the Sestina," in *Cold War Poetry* 160-82.

[758] See also TPE 21-2.

[759] CCP 85.

begging that it purify him, before asking finally, "If I feed you my sick lines, / will your indifference clean / and polish and complete them?"[760]

This leads one to a poignant late lyric of Justice's, "Invitation to a Ghost," dedicated to Coulette's memory.[761] In it, Justice echoes his friend's sentiment, as expressed at the close of "LBG-30." But instead of looking to a motherboard for sanctification and companionship, he turns to the departed artist himself, requesting that he "sit with him" to "help ... with these verses," and "whisper to [him] some beautiful secret" that Coulette "remember[s] from life."[762] What Coulette sought, from disguise-wearing tricksters and computer terminals (but not from his students), Justice looks for in memories of friendship, of poetic exchange and edifying critique.[763] The "secret" of the poet-agent is not a plan or set of documents, to be decoded and discarded. Rather, the lifework of the poet is no more or less than the *continuance* of the game—the web of espionage, the computer program—by which some new "beautiful secret" or successive "code" is produced. Responses to this code, in the form of still newer codes (poems), suspend the closure of these descriptions and memories. Sometimes a Jane Alabaster records the game as it was played. And sometimes, the sharing of secrets outlives the death of an agent, so long as another, like Justice, preserves his communiqués in an edited volume, and composes his own in response.

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In addition to Miller, Bolton, and Coulette, a final obliviated poet merits explication—a longtime friend of Justice's named Robert Boardman Vaughn. Like Julian's, in Ross Justice's "The End of a Good Party," Vaughn's is a most extreme case. He's a poet who has published almost nothing, save

[760] Ibid.

[761] CP 245.

[762] Ibid.

[763] Ibid.

for two lyrics in *Poetry* and a third in *The Western Review*. Although Vaughn was long rumored to have completed a manuscript, none of the poets involved in Justice's estate have read it, or even seen it. If caretakers once tried to publish it, their efforts stalled long ago.[764] Vaughn's life, with its cascading, multiplying misfortunes, first thwarted, then overshadowed the writing it inspired. Describing him, in his essay "Oblivion," Justice notes that

> [w]hoever knew Vaughn well ... seemed automatically to assume that his life was emblematic. He did himself. He was a Poet, Wanderer, Revolutionary. All his life he had a frail look ... and no one expected him to live long. To pass the ripe age of forty, as he was to do, was a matter of luck and grace.[765]

More self-loathing than Miller; quicker to anger than Bolton; more inscrutable to himself than Coulette—Vaughn is the sad paragon of poetic oblivion. He is at the horizon of Justice's editorial care: a poet whom no one, not even a devoted friend and reader, can save. Yet Justice wants to save him, all the same.

Vaughn's two *Poetry* magazine lyrics convey, each in apostrophic form, something of his creative desperation and desire for companionship.[766] In "The Last Chance," the poet's images dart and transmute from line to line, and the speaker ends in a fugue: danger, speed, late nights, and jazz. In a final passage, he "dream[s]" of "long lines of shining / New Ferraries, driven by the dead."[767] But the cars soon "cannot make the turn" and crash, their "wheels spinning in the empty air." In "Judith," printed on the next page of the journal, Vaughn apostrophizes "Judy" and "Lily," who are objects of intense, and unquenchable, desire. He exclaims, skirting the limits of sense, that his visions of the exotic Orient "have

Driven wedges through Blankness

[764] Neither Jerry Harp, William Logan, nor Dana Gioia are aware of the manuscript's whereabouts.

[765] O 65.

[766] Robert Vaughn, "The Last Chance" and "Judith," *Poetry*, May 1963, 90-1.

[767] "Ferraries" sic.

Towards the Oneness that I
Always hoped and never thought
I would achieve."

But this oneness, like so much for Vaughn, is no more than illusion. The more he seeks an "authentic" self, the more he discovers that self to be bent on immolation. Along these lines, his "Sestina on Ezra Pound," from *The Western Review*, is a clever recapitulation of the *Cantos*.[768] Like il miglor fabbro, Vaughn draws on the vigor of the troubadours, and pays to them, and to Pound, a complicated homage.[769] But where some sestinas insist on eros, Vaughn's signals a thanatic fixation, a concern with, and heedless ignorance of, the hereafter, and a belief that poetry describes, but does not change, the course of man's experience. In each stanza, the lines end in a skein of six suggestive words: *light*, *death*, *done*, *vanity*, *all*—and *sestina*. "The world is almost done," he concludes; "the world's our vanity."[770]

Indeed, in "Oblivion," Justice argues that Vaughn lived "a wasted life of fragments."[771] His poetry should be read in snatches, so the brilliant strangeness of his "assemblages" might play, quickly, before the mind's eye.[772] Justice argues that Vaughn is best served when he is recapitulated as a *character* in poetry, carried forward through the (necessarily partial) assimilation into another writer's verse. And Justice does just this, writing several poems about him. In "Portrait with One Eye,"[773] dedicated to Vaughn's memory, Justice says, "You have identified yourself / To the police as quote / Lyric poet. What else?— / With fractured jaw." He adds that "[y]our life's a poem still, /

[768] Robert Vaughn, "A Sestina on Ezra Pound," *The Western Review*, 23, 1958, 41-2.

[769] See Ezra Pound, "Sestina: Altaforte," in *New Selected Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2010), 10-1.

[770] Vaughn, "Sestina" 42.

[771] The allusion to Eliot's "fragments," in the last section of *The Waste Land*, is surely intentional.

[772] O 66.

[773] CP 132.

Broken iambs and all, / Jazz, jails—the complete works." And he closes, referring to the pervasive, yet untranslatable quality of Vaughn's small cache of poems:

> Or this, your other voice,
> This whisper along the lines
> At night, like a dry wind,
> Like conscience, always collect.

In a second Vaughn-poem, his villanelle to the "Memory of the Unknown Poet," Justice sums up the appetites, and failures, characterizing the poète maudit's lifework: "It was his story. It would always be his story. / It followed him; it overtook him finally— / The boredom, and the horror, and the glory."[774] Here, Justice notes that, toward the end of Vaughn's life, when "the boots were brutalizing him in the alley," "he was not yet sorry." He calls to mind "the fiery / Hypnotic eye and the raised voice blazing with poetry," a blaze that is spiritual rather than actual, an inexhaustible potential that "signif[ies] magnificently." But all Vaughn can do, Justice concludes, is *signify* poethood, via another's poems. He remains without convertible achievement, a cache even of symbolic capital, beyond the social credit he draws on, from the friends who've stuck with him.

In his final lyric on Vaughn, following immediately upon the villanelle in *The Sunset Maker* and titled "Hell," Justice returns to the poète maudit;[775] he is in the underworld now, sorting through the events of his journey on earth. It begs reproduction in full:

> "After so many years of pursuing the ideal
> I came home. But I had caught sight of it.
> You see it sometimes in the blue-silver wake
> Of island schooners, bound for Anegada, say.
> And it takes other forms. I saw it flickering once
> In torches by the railroad tracks in Medellin.
> When I was very young I thought that love would come
> And seize and take me south and I would see the rose;
> And that all ambiguities we knew would merge

[774] CP 213.

[775] CP 214, 281. See also Mark Jarman, "In Memory of Orpheus: Three Elegies by Donald Justice," *A Poetry Criticism Reader*, esp. 36, and JH 145.

Like orchids on a word. Say this:
I sought the immortal word."
So saying he went on
To join those who preceded him;
and there were those that followed.

Justice reframes not only some of Vaughn's preoccupations—Anegada—but two important features of his own corpus, and of his wife's.[776] The "merging of all ambiguities" echoes the close of "There is a gold light," in which Justice seeks out work of self-constructing value in the face of total bureaucracy (as in Chapter 3). Vaughn, for his part, desires something different—a writerly field in which textual polysemy no longer rules, and a kind of master text—a code that breaks all codes—is possible and legible. Even more tellingly, Justice ascribes to Vaughn what Jean Ross attributes to Searcy, the deceased poet-professor of "The Dark Forces." That writer sought "the imperishable" in life, compared to than Vaughn's "immortal" word. But in both cases, the creator-figure depends upon the succor, and financial support, of friends and lovers, to fly beyond the confines of mundane life. Searcy destroys himself with drinking, and Vaughn with a more expansive set of destructive behaviors, both foolhardy and aggrandizing. But they want poetry to mean enormously, to signify immensely; they can settle, finally, for nothing less, even as they realize their creative limitations. Searcy achieves not imperishability but "goodness," as the narrator damns it. And Vaughn achieves something less material, though perhaps still lasting. His is a ghostly afterlife as Justician anti-figure: one for whom others care, for he cannot not attend to, let alone save, his own person and career.

Importantly, Donald wasn't the only Justice to write on Vaughn. In a 2017 *Yale Review* essay, Jean adds to the little file on this most enigmatic of artists. Vaughn and Justice met, she says, as undergraduates at the University of Miami, in the 1940s. Even then, Vaughn "was a mythmaker, with too much pride and too rich an imagination to leave the commonplace past unembellished."[777]

[776] Jean Ross Justice, "The Unknown Poet," *The Yale Review*, 105.4, Fall 2017, 60-9, 63.

[777] Ibid. 61.

They found themselves in a worrying, maybe an impossible, position. Whenever Bob would fall into a new scrape, or require money or health care (mental or physical), he would, eventually, reach out to Don.[778] And Don, bound by an oft-cited loyalty to his old friends, would send money, or at least accept Bob's telephone call ("always collect").[779] With Vaughn as with the poets Don edited, Jean was, effectively, a meta-manager. She looked after her husband, so that he might take up the affairs, or the literary remains, of others. Don captured whatever wisps of legacy these obliviated poets created in text. He arranged their poems into proper editions, and slipped their lines into his own verses, as homage and remembrance. They have their (slim) archives, and their place in his. But Jean feared posing herself between Don and Bob.[780] And she admitted, long before Don did, that Bob didn't bother to look after himself.[781] Whereas Justice might choose to care for others, when he had the time and space, Jean was always already caring—for Don, and indirectly for the men whose careers Don organized posthumously. Only when this carework (and meta-carework) were done—when Don's career was done—could Jean un-pause the writerly trajectory she'd prepared for since college.

Part Six: Poet-Careers at Present—Self-Care as Soulcraft

Justice's obliviated poets thus return us to Jean's writings, her career, and the circumstances of its (all-too-brief) flowering. Although Ross Justice placed a few stories in little magazines in the 1980s and '90s, and identified as a writer throughout her adult life, she did not assemble and publish a book until 2008, when *The End of a Good Party and Other Stories* appeared. At this point, Don had been

[778] "Unknown" 66-7.

[779] CP 132. Gioia has argued for Don's loyalty, in private correspondence.

[780] "Unknown" 69.

[781] Ibid.

dead for three years. The start of Jean's public career therefore coincides not only with the cessation of her carework (for Don and his career), but with the beginnings of the careers of younger poets now active on the scene, schematized both as "New York" and as "very online," the latter promulgated via Twitter and Instagram.[782]

It's helpful, too, to situate Don's and Jean's later lives within the American political-historical context, from which they seem alien, perhaps because of their shared interest in nostalgic recollection. When Don died, in August, 2004, the disasters of the George W. Bush presidency were being reported: stalemate and quagmire in Afghanistan and Iraq (the "forever wars"); a year later, the botched relief-response to Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans. Soon after publication of *The End of a Good Party*, the global fallout from the financial shock of the Great Recession was apparent. And by Jean's death, in 2015, the political rise of real estate developer and reality television star Donald J. Trump was a national fixation. As even this (necessarily truncated) history of the last two decades shows, Jean and Don were among the last of their type, in the ostensibly progressive world of university creative writing and mainstream poetry publishing: a couple with a clear creative hierarchy, wherein a woman helps in a man's work before she focuses on her own. In this final section, holding Don and Jean's dynamic in mind, I analyze two poets making their names during a new period, when care relations have changed substantially, at least in poetic circles. These writers, like Jean, must navigate the dual problematic of career and care. But they do so in a vastly different way, according to the emergent material circumstances into which they've been thrown.[783] Like Ross

[782] Ariana Reines's career begins with *The Cow* (New York: Fence, 2006), a crackling debut when she was only in her mid-twenties.

[783] To be sure, I don't mean to imply that heteropatriarchy has evaporated in contemporary verse. Rather, as I'll demonstrate, self-care increasingly overlays already-existing (if shifting) gender and care relations. Self-care is now the star according to which poets orient themselves, as opposed to other-directed models more prevalent in the middle of the twentieth century.

Justice and the obliviated poets, resilient writers, in unstable times, thematize in their work their unique care relations, and career potential.

To put it succinctly: where Jean cared for Don, I understand poets today to be caring for, serving as primary advocates for, themselves. Even as families, friends, and institutions support younger writers, auto-promotion, and auto-support, become the perceived engines for career success. The term of art is self-care. And as it's gained pop-cultural prominence (especially on social media platforms), it's strengthened in explanatory power. Self-care, today, may describe grooming habits, psychological and physical wellness practices, travel goals, and financial strategies. Most broadly, it signifies the temporary privileging of individual projects of comforting or self-fashioning over collective obligations—often in the hopes that the former make the latter possible.[784] To use its accustomed vocabulary of credit and debit,[785] self-care is a novel form of emotional *investment*, by which poets (in a destabilized, precarious economic field) become auto-responsible for their needs: creative and affective, material and spiritual.[786]

The debate over self-care has been pitched, including its conceptual use-value and moral dimensions. And though the term is a staple of advertisements, blog posts, tweets, and thinkpieces,

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[784] For a useful general-interest introduction, see André Spicer, "'Self-care': how a radical feminist idea was stripped of politics for the mass market," *The Guardian*, Aug. 21, 2019, online, n.p. Spicer writes that "[s]elf-care is a remarkably flexible term. It includes nearly any activity people use to calm, heal and preserve themselves in the face of adversity. Some common forms of self-care include getting enough sleep, eating well, physical exercise, meditating and doing things you like such as watching an 80s teen film. Other suggestions for self-care include tracking your menstrual cycle, having date nights with yourself, doing craft activities such as crochet, learning the art of saying no, and 'consciously unfollowing' people on social media" (n.p.).

[785] "Emotional investment" has been applied to pre-20th-century literatures, too; the financial systems on which these metaphors rely did, of course, exist for centuries before Lorde's and Foucault's writings. See Barbara Korte, "On Heroes and Hero Worship: Regimes of Emotional Investment in Mid-Victorian Popular Magazines," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 49.2, Summer 2016, 181-201, esp. 182.

[786] See Spicer, op. cit.; and Jordan Kisner, "The Politics of Conspicuous Displays of Self-Care," *The New Yorker* online, Mar. 14, 2017, online, n.p. Kisner traces the idea back even further, to the 19th century in America, although I find those usages mostly distinct from the Lorde-Foucault model I describe, above. It should be noted, too, that "self-care" in medicine predates the Lorde-Foucault definition. See Lowell S. Levin, Alfred H. Katz, and Erik Holst, *Self-Care: Lay Initiatives in Health* (New York: Prodist, 1979): "'a process whereby a layperson functions on his/her own behalf in health promotion and prevention and in disease detection and treatment at the level of the primary health resource in the health care system'" (11).

it derives from at least two bodies of work in critical theory, dating back decades; many point to poet and essayist Audre Lorde as a popularizer of the concept in its current usage.[787] In an oft-quoted passage from "A Burst of Light," she argues:"[c]aring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."[788] And throughout this essay-diary, Lorde combines descriptions of homeopathic treatments, and experiments in self-hypnosis, with an awareness of the social fragility, and illegibility, of Black and Brown lives. As a consequence, Lorde argues for self-care as a radically reparative social practice. It is a propaedeutic labor, which allows the endangered political subject to advocate for safety and security, against the forces of ambient white supremacy that foreground white comfort.[789] The more activists amplify self-care, the more socially valuable the lives of people of color, and others in marginalized communities, become.[790] Thus self-care, per Lorde, merely begins with the individual. She insists, further, that a community of fully-valued, self-actualized subjects can, and will, fight longer, harder, and more effectively against the racist, colonialist structures that devalue non-white subjects: their sense-experiences, feelings, and memories.[791] On a complementary note, in his wide-ranging *History of Sexuality* (volume 3), French sociologist Michel Foucault understands self-care as a stage in the sexual practices of Roman antiquity. This model encompasses the (perhaps all-too-obvious) ideas of self-care as masturbation, alongside those ways subjects maintain feelings of wellbeing toward their own

[787] Cf. Spicer and Kisner.

[788] Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca: Firebrand, 1988), 131.

[789] Cf. the author's definition of racism, as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death," in R. W. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* loc. 549.

[790] Lorde 131-4.

[791] See, for more on this topic, "On Anger and the Black Female Body," an interview with Kandis Williams, in *All of Me: Stories of Love, Anger, and the Female Body*, ed. Dani Burlison (Oakland: PM, 2019), 15-22.

bodies.[792] In both Lorde and Foucault, then, self-care foregrounds auto-supporting selves that resist the wraparound regimes of biomanagement.[793] And though dispiriting, it's undeniable that, since the 1970s, biomanagement techniques, in the public and private sectors, have become nimbler, self-correcting, and more complete. For advocates of self-care, this makes the practice more important today than ever before.

But as with so many anti-state, anti-market, and anti-capital practices, self-care in the neoliberal dispensation has also become a watchword for state, market, and pro-capital actors, who hope to cash in on selves caring for selves.[794] The ease with which radical self-care can slip into market-based self-branding, in a network of attention, is well-documented.[795] On this transformation, self-care becomes an experience, like wellness, that the economic agent offers himself as a palliative, when work is no longer stable and opportunity curtailed. Selves that care become selves that "hack," raising their personal productivity through ever-increasing reliance on metaphors of mechanization, psychic programming, and potential human bugginess.[796] Consequently, a social and artistic subject, in 2020, can encounter self-care either as an anti-hegemonic political strategy, or as a hyper-capitalized mandate for new spending, in a total economy of consumer choice. Just as Jean, Don, and the obliviated poets thematized their careers and programs of care, so too, I contend, do writers of the current era. To demonstrate, I highlight the

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[792] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 17, 20.

[793] See Gioirgio Agamben, "The Politicization of Life" and "Biopolitics and the Rights of Man," in *Biopolitcs: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke UP, 2013), 145-60.

[794] See Spicer and Kisner, both n.p. Discussions of current economic precarity are vast. See, for background, Christopher Nealon's chapter "Bubble and Crash: Poetry in Late-Late-Capitalism," *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 140-66; and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

[795] Some have begun to use the term in poetry criticism. See as one example Arild Michel Bakken, "Textual Self-Branding: The Rhetorical Ethos in Mallarmé's *Divigations*," *Authorship*, 1.1, Fall 2011, 1-14, esp. 14.

[796] Anna Wiener depicts this worldview ably, in *Uncanny Valley* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020).

work of two poets of the past decade, Chen Chen and Ariana Reines, who follow paths of self-fashioning, under the signs of precarious career and self-care.

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Both Chen and Reines have achieved rapid success—measured in social media follows, by coverage of their books online and in print journals, and via the awards economy of fellowships and prizes. Chen's first (and to date only) full-length book of poetry—*When I Grow Up I Want to be a List of Further Possibilities*—was published by Rochester's BOA Editions in 2017. National Book Award finalist Jericho Brown selected it for the A. Poulin, Jr., Poetry Prize.[797] Throughout the collection, Chen investigates a strange, self-described feature of his maturation: that, in trying to achieve a stable career, and to placate his professionally-minded family, he sees himself becoming, instead, just "a list of further possibilities." Brown, in his introduction, writes that the poet "believes the world to be a malleable place." In response, Chen wonders how malleable a person—an artist—he wishes to be.

In "Self-Portrait as So Much Potential," the collection's opener, Chen muses that he's

> [d]reaming of one day being as fearless as a mango.
> As friendly as a tomato.
> [...]
> I am not the heterosexual neat freak my mother raised me to be.
> I am a gay sipper, & my mother has placed what's left of her hope on my brothers.
> She wants them to gulp up the world, spit out solid degrees, responsible
> grandchildren ready to gobble.
> They will be better than mangoes, my brothers.
> Though I have trouble imagining what that could be.[798]

Here, Chen rues his mother's homophobia—her belief that, because the poet cannot have biological children with a woman, he cannot become a whole person, as his straight-identifying brothers can. The poet cathects with the mango, a fruit he believes to be uncompromisingly itself. Yet his

[797] Chen Chen, When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities (Rochester: BOA, 2017).

[798] Chen 13.

brothers will be "better than mangoes"; they will achieve in high-status professions, raise their families, and continue the procreative carousel Chen's mother values above all else. Chen leaves the poem knowing he cannot become his siblings—people with predictable paychecks, gender-conforming ideas and behaviors. But he's not found how he wants to be. The rest of the book tries to answer this question.

In "I'm not a religious person but," Chen meets with an angel, who's not so different from the poet. The messenger, it turns out, is also an "unpaid intern," "proficient in fetching coffee" and "sending super vague emails."[799] But Chen quickly overwhelms it, leaving it speechless. He befriends God instead, Who's approachable enough, even if He's not always "a good listener."[800] They play backgammon, and Chen jokes about his irreligiosity, homosexuality, and preference for Harry Potter over the Bible. Although the poet gets no answer, from God or angel, when he asks "about the afterlife" and "existence," he does his own bit of storytelling before the Divine Being:

> ... I tried to confuse God by saying I am
> a made-up dinosaur & a real dinosaur & who knows maybe
> I love you, but then God ended up relating to me. God said I am
> a good dinosaur but also sort of evil & sometimes loving no one.
> It rained & we stayed inside.

Chen becomes his most "relatable," in this sequence, when he's at his most whimsical. He's both human and "dinosaur," "made-up" and "real," and the God who comforts him behaves like a quiet, friendly companion: someone with whom Chen can play, when the weather outside is poor. Far from greeting God or the angel in anguish, Chen delights in their presence. He self-fashions, tries out a mode of self-description, to see what they'll say. He doesn't fear their judgment. "I miss them," he concludes, "Like creatures I made up or found in a book."

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[799] Chen 17.

[800] Compare to O'Hara's "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island," *Collected Poems*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: California UP, 1995), 306ff.

In "Summer Was Forever," Chen dramatizes a choice, between capitulation to his parents' demands and insistence on his private desires.[801] His mother and father ask that he find a professional career ("doctor, married to a lawyer"), but Chen dreams only of "the local paper boy on his route." His romantic longing, staged when he is also young, full of possibility, conjoins with his longing for the boy's permanently pre-professional freedom—in his leisurely, part-time job, out of a mid-century comic strip. Chen ends the poem in a fugue: endless summertime, neglect of responsibility, and mutual comfort. "Our work would be simple," he writes, "Our kissing would rhyme / with cardiac arrest. I would have a magician's hair, full of sleeves & saws ..."

Chen wants to be a mango, a dinosaur, a magician, not a doctor, a lawyer, a husband to a wife. The surface of these lyrics belies their contention: that the poet's self-assertion is primary, and that Chen, more than anything, wants to be a poet when he grows up. Indeed, he's always already *been* a poet. And the entertainment of fictive, fantastical possibilities, he argues, is the signal obligation of the creative writer. It's not only how he cares for himself; it's the lifeblood of his art. But the poet is caught between the self-creating demands of his practice and the filial demands he's not quite able to shake. In "Self-Portrait With & Without," He carries with him his "[m]other's mother's worry" and earns "an A in English," even as he supports his "youngest brother who wants to go to an art school."[802] He's reminded that he doesn't have "a driver's license" or "citizenship," and that, years before, his father "had to move away, / to the only job he could find, on the other side of the state." Chen recalls, as a child, feeling his persistent "otherness" among white classmates, removed as they are from violence and material want, holding "yet another bake sale for Honduras." By contrast, in "Talented Human Beings," he laments that "[e]very day I am asked to care about white people, / especially if they've been kidnapped overseas / or are experiencing marital problems

[801] Chen 19.

[802] Ibid. 25.

in New England." "American lives" (which are for the corporate media white lives) "are in danger," as are "American libidos." But Chen finds at least a short-lived companionship in videos of the "Japanese gay pornstar" Koh Masaki, "with his exquisite scruff, highly / responsive nipples, tireless hips gold & glistening." Like Chen, Masaki is an accomplished practitioner of an art of little perceived social value. And like Chen, Masaki's work depends on the labor of his fellow performers, who are "not-as-well-paid / but also very talented human beings."[803]

For Chen thinks of poetry-making as not merely a self-creative and expressive act. It's also a set of symbolic relations, of capital conversions within a field. Chen knows, in other words, that all public poets today must make their careers themselves; their self-care is not only a palliative, but also a strategy for sustainable success. He expands on this idea, and on his career-oriented jealousies, in "Ode to My Envy":

> Every day I get
> increasingly envious of my friend who dresses so smartly.
>
> Of my friend who's more political. Of my friend who says,
> *Oh, that's good enough, why am I stressing out?* & means it
> & stops stressing & is happy. I'm envious of my friend who's
> envious of me because he actually wants something I have.
>
> I'm envious of those who learn Life Lessons from their envy. ...[804]

Chen covets his friends' personal style and social commitments. But most importantly, he covets their attitude toward jealousy itself: as a source of teachable moments, wherein the coveting subject recalibrates his desires, heightens his aims—or decides he doesn't need to strain for something beyond his reach. Of his compositional practices, in "Poem,"[805] Chen writes that he's unable to do anything useful; he eats "starches" in his small apartment "in the same / band tee four days in a

[803] Ibid. 34.

[804] Ibid. 39.

[805] Ibid. 52-4.

row." But he allows the reader, finally, into the poem, to provide counterevidence for Chen's genuine productivity: "But what / about your lover, your recent career luck," to which Chen answers, "don't you know / I hate the words 'career' and 'lover." Chen winds up the poem discussing his romantic partner, Jeffrey, on whom he feels he can rely for emotional comfort. Chen describes the difficulty Jeffrey experiences as he cares for his mother (ill from cancer), and notes that he's also called his mother recently. Though their relationship is fraught—his parents still disapprove of his creative career and intimate life—Chen maintains it. He asks plaintively and innocuously, of her garden, "if she's planted / any more eggplants."

Chen summarizes his attitudes toward self-care and career most succinctly in "In This Economy,"[806] when he argues that creators today share (of necessity) an "acute magpie syndrome." They do what they can, when they can, to make space and opportunity for their art. They are their own best representatives. For them, "'just a hobby' is the strongest / industry"; joining with them, he exclaims that "we work overtime at our reverie." Despite the complexities, and material anxieties, of the life he's chosen, Chen relishes the poetry grind. "My weakness," he says, "is loving this economy." In the title poem, Chen wants to be "a season from the planet / of planet-sized storms"—a creative force—and a pillar of support for his extended family. And he wants to be "close ... / to everything that is close to" his boyfriend Jeffrey. More than simply caring for Jeffrey, Chen hopes to install himself as an ally of Jeffrey's self-care—as Jeffrey has made himself an ally of Chen's.[807]

Chen's poems thus weave a web of preoccupations. Throughout *Further Possibilities*, "career" remains fraught, including as it does both substantial institutional validation of his writing (in a PhD program; at Kundiman) and the perceived disappointments even his poetic successes create for his

[806] Ibid. 62-3.

[807] Ibid. 70-1.

parents.[808] For Chen, poetic career itself is a further possibility, a set of unending demands on his imaginative energies. He loves the game, but it eats at him. To finish a manuscript, secure a scholarship, advocate for his verse—that is the carework of the poetic self, the job of any serious writer in the social-media age. And indeed, Chen is an active user of Twitter and Instagram. These platforms allow him to promote the ways he cares for himself, and to amplify the accumulations of symbolic, social, and financial capital of which a poetic career is built. When Chen is frustrated by self-branding and self-marketing, as he often is, he plows it back into the poems he writes, the lines he tweets and photos he posts. He understands, as well as any contemporary poet, the mechanisms by which the uplift of PoC and LGBTQ voices can become, in itself, "good business." He knows that his work might be used, within universities and across writerly institutions, as proof of those organizations' inclusivity.[809] But he chooses to remain in the game, exposing its vicissitudes and carving out, for himself and his chosen family, a space for comfort and mutual concern. His weakness, as he explains, is loving the economy; but he won't stop loving himself, too.

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Since the first decade of the 2000s, poet-performer Ariana Reines has achieved notoriety, first in coterie circles in New York City, and then in general-interest publications nationally.[810] Her socially committed, multimedia practice calls attention to, and undermines, the dynamics of self-care and neoliberal career, in a manner distinct from Chen's.[811] Whereas Chen ultimately trusts the institutions

[808] Chen received an MFA from Syracuse and PhD from Texas Tech, and his CV is impressive. See https://www.chenchenwrites.com/longbio.

[809] For a time, Chen pinned the following sentiment at the top of his Twitter page: "my poems are braver than I am // but I am constantly trying to catch up" (Jan. 24, 2018). Chen posts ideas on poetics, on the work (and revision) he's doing, and on the poets with whom he spends time, informally or at institutional events. See @chenchenwrites.

[810] See, as one example, Hannah Aizenman, "The Apocalyptic Visions of Ariana Reines," *The New Yorker* online, Oct. 23, 2019, online, n.p.

[811] For a deep analysis of Reines's gender politics, see Chelsea Rebekah Grimmer, "Reading Against the Absent Referent: Bare Life, Gender, and *The Cow*," *Pacific Coast Philology*, 51.1, 2016, 67-84.

he critiques, Reines insists, more than most poets of the present, on a self-directed, if still financially sustainable life in poetry, on the creator's own terms and to the extent allowable. In short, she hates the economy. And her poetry explains this hatred, while offering possibilities she wants to take up—not in the future, but now.

Reines's poetry, in its shorter and near-epic forms, engages in a continuous project, one with cycling, interpenetrating topoi. Among these are sexuality (hetero- and queer, its transactional and/or transgressive aspects); "sanity" and mental illness, with an emphasis on her semi-estranged mother's mental state; social media; collisions of theoretical and "popular" texts, including television shows and genre films; astrology, witchcraft, and the occult; and intersections with the practices of the global visual-art economy. Her corpus is expansive, and one might begin in a great many places. But two lyrics, for our purposes here, are illuminating: "All the Single Ladies" and "We Can Do It," both from her 2011 collection *Mercury*.[812] The former is a quatrain:

> Squirting adaptogens into vodka
> Pouring vodka over green juice
> Smoking crack after yoga
> Swallowing vitamins with wine."

And the latter provides, for the unnamed reader, some measure of consolation; I reproduce it in full:

> Wherever you are
> If you even open this
> By your light
> You can keep it
> By the bed for your head
> And arms to weigh heavy
> On moulting white clouds
>
> A raft on a plate
> In the molten sea
> Can close your house and
> Quit you for it. You really
> Can stop lying to yourself.

[812] Ariana Reines, *Mercury* (New York/Albany: Fence, 2011), 10, 14.

I know to suffer
Alone is not an innovation.
You know this one
Too. And to divine
Wisdom in a purl
Of blood takes art
In this open world
You know.

It takes art.

And you have it.

"All the Single Ladies" is Reines at her most apothegmatic, and charmingly insouciant. A satire of wellness culture, the poem disparages the idea of uncoupled women really "having it all," "being everything" for themselves. (Her critique of Beyoncé's 2008 pop anthem is well taken.) The speaker lists increasingly deranged self-care practices, from oil infusions and the drinking of "green juice," to the orthorexic theater of yogic health, joined to the illicit, body-destructive act of smoking crack cocaine. The final line is an advancement of sorts, a radical reimagining of pleasure-beverage as wellness potion. When paired with chemical nutrition, wine becomes, for the satirist, a real meal, something good for the subject. Not exactly medicine, or booze, or nourishment, wine-with-vitamins is the absurd limit-case of wellness life: a medicine that does nothing for you; a drink you're supposed to savor, tinged with the metallic aftertaste of a few big pills. The poem collapses bodily and psychic imperatives of wellness, arguing that these joys are merely recast obligations. *Be skinny, be fun, be well. Take care of yourself. Treat yourself.* No one, Reines implies, would choose these behaviors freely; she finds them fundamentally alienating, bizarre, insipid. We do them, she argues, because we think we have to—because we've been marketed to, forced to capitulate.

"We Can Do It," for its part, reinforces and subverts personal boosterism, as embedded in the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama, and in a suite of corporate pump-up slogans.[813] The poem also continues the tradition of lines addressed to the reader, on first opening a book; the poet offers these words to one subject, privately, as if whispering in her ear.[814] And indeed, she works through a series of beatific, gently surreal images, before landing on a flat corrective: "[y]ou really can stop lying to yourself." The final three stanzas amount to a reformulation of the Romantic prerogative: to fight one's suffering—and to insist on art-making as self-invention—are the same activity, in the end. It's not enough to suffer, to be wounded: Reines believes that almost everyone, especially among marginalized communities, experiences this pain daily. The "art" derives, first, from the proper attitude toward this suffering. Art, in this formulation, simply is opposition to the status quo. It cannot be otherwise. Because the reader has picked up Reines's text, and turned it over, she has expressed an initial willingness to oppose the mechanisms that delight in, profit from her suffering. And she has the art, the power, to change herself.

For Reines believes in the transformative power of language—and she does so without irony. Her satire she reserves for corporate language, for parodies of self-invention that are really slogans for brand promotion. In her books (and this is, for her, the pivotal compositional unit, whether a single, bound volume or a section within one), Reines wants nothing less than the reconstruction of self-expression in a field of degraded language. This requires an unstinting look at the lies people tell themselves, as economic actors and as partners in intimate relationships. The long lyric *Coeur de Lion*, another of Reines's most popular works, illustrates a relationship between the

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[813] Of course, "Yes, we can" was Obama's message (along with "hope" and "change") in 2008. Less readily remembered is Nike's "I can" campaign. See "Nike just does it—changes its slogan, that is," *The Associated Press*, *The Deseret News*, Dec. 31, 1997, online, https://www.deseret.com/1997/12/31/19354411/nike-just-does-it-changes-its-slogan-that-is, n.p.

[814] Reines's poem is found on the back cover of *Mercury*; I'm grateful to Dave Gorin for his insight. For a version of this poem-type, though not for the reader so much as for the volume itself, see Anne Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book," *The Complete Works* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 177ff.

poet-protagonist and "Jake," a self-involved novelist and poet himself. Both characters are committed to other people, who flit in and out of the poem; both are students in a graduate program at NYU. They enjoy, for a time, a passionate, physical connection, along with reading together and talking about books.[815] But the affair falters after she hacks into Jake's email, finding his messages to Emily, who works in an art gallery, in the same Manhattan building as Reines. The protagonist realizes the effort she's expended, in creating a Jake of the mind, whose novels are more interesting, and companionship more edifying, than the Jake of lived experience. The text is, almost by definition, confessional, nonfictional: the details of intimate interaction laid bare for the unseen reader. But the relationship, as Reines constructs it, is actually a series of textual layers—emails, books on theory, Symbolist poems and boring, descriptive novels. Jake has left them at her apartment; she says he can pick them up whenever he has time.[816] The poet refuses to conclude anything about the relationship or its "healthiness." She lived in it, and now she's moved past it. But *Coeur de Lion* is also a companion to Reines's more abstracted lyric endeavors, which build a non-narrative, fluctuating and oft-interrupted picture of the self. For the poet, the facts of autobiography lie side-by-side with the demands of rigorous, experimental practice. The honest writer engages in both, and is reducible to neither. Rigorous, boundary-pushing practice dovetails, in Reines, with care for the self—an attunement to the body, to the sensorium and emotional world.

Reines' most recent collection, *A Sand Book*, includes hundreds of pages of lyric poetry, written (and sometimes published) over a period of seven years.[817] And "A Partial History," reprinted in *Poetry* magazine, serves as a critical prologue to the project.[818] "Long after I stopped

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[815] Ariana Reines, *Coeur de Lion* (New York/Albany: Fence, 2011). Hereafter CdL.

[816] CdL 95.

[817] *A Sand Book* (Portland: Tin House, 2019). Hereafter ASB.

[818] "A Partial History," *Poetry*, May 2019; see also ASB 5-11.

participating," Reines declares, "those images pursued me." She is speaking, it's revealed, of the pernicious, self-aggrandizing (and self-censoring) imperatives of social media. As the poem progresses, the psychic costs of these virtual events seems clear:

> We were lost in a language of images.
> It was growing difficult to speak. Yet talk
> Was everywhere. Some of us still sought
> To dominate one another intellectually
> Others physically; still others psychically or some
> Of all of the above, everything seeming to congeal
> Into bad versions of sports by other means
> And sports by that time was the only metaphor
> Left that could be acceptably applied to anything.
> The images gave us no rest yet failed over
> And over despite the immensity
> Of their realism to describe the world as we really
> Knew it, and worse, as it knew us

Refusing to name the social media platforms explicitly, Reines abstracts her critique, and marvels at the capacity of phones, and wrap-around screen-culture, to amplify the vanities and cruelties of art-making. Like "A Partial History," *A Sand Book* in toto is self-consciously excessive. Its lyrics catalogue the superabundances the poet must make sense of: erumpent experience, which she doesn't want to limit; (other-described) "excretions" issuing from her body, which she can choose to stanch, or conceal, if she pleases.[819] Reines joins these performatively "extra" passages with others of ascetic or muted experience, offered as counterpoint.[820] The poet here breaks—in the French-modernist tradition of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarme, and Lautréamont—the structures of a splenetic society. The writer thus becomes an artist of giving-over and of refusal: a hunger artist for whom self-care is both a strategy for survival and an unconscionable, market-driven indulgence.

[819] See ASB 102. See also Grimmer and Aizenman, op. cit.

[820] Ibid. 232.

The intertwining of these impulses is evident at the close of *A Sand Book*, in a section called *Mosaic*. And the set-up for this piece is at least as fascinating as the text proper.[821] She describes a museum performance she co-choreographed, called *Mortal Kombat*: a form of "fake tai chi," for which she'd been practicing in the fall of 2014.[822] After a training session, Reines has a mystical experience on the streets of lower Manhattan. She explains that she was filled with warmth, that she becomes aware, also, of the "horn" on her head and "witch tits" on her body. A voice speaks to her, and she records its apothegms in a notebook, which she'd had ready-to-hand:

> REALITY IS PERCEPTIBLE; PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THEIR TALENTS // THE SUFFERING OF WOMAN IS THE TRUE STORY OF THE UNIVERSE // THE DIFFERENCE IS MEANT TO BE COMEDY // DIFFERENCE IS A TOY // WHEN FACED WITH EVIL / LEARN ITS SECRET // THE TIME OF SPECTACLE WILL PASS // TECHNOLOGY IS FOR COMMUNICATION // TECHNOLOGY EVOLVED SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION // ALL ITS OTHER FORMS ARE BYPRODUCTS // EVERYTHING HAS A NATURE / FIND OUT YOURS.[823]

By this last packet of transmitted, occult "data," Reines has returned to the sentiments of "We Can Do It." In *Mosaic*, she mixes vatic pronouncement with the steadying reassurances of self-help. Within the reader-subject, she asserts, is the power to become whatever she wants to be. One need only find out.[824]

Reines's vision is complex; she settles for no easy answers, and her poetics are best described as thoroughly dialectical. In the work, any engagement with a poet's or artist's market produces a complementary revulsion at the marketing of art. Any demand for personal intimacy is met with a consequent assertion of self-grounding. We've thus traveled far from Donald Justice and his lyrics,

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[821] ASB 359-63.

[822] Ibid.

[823] Ibid. 365-96.

[824] See also Ashbery, "Two Scenes," JACP1 3.

from Jean Ross Justice and her stories of cisheteronormative, other-directed care. But differences of affect, of style—though impressive—cannot obscure the imperatives of career and care (in whatever form) undergirding the Justices' work, and the obliviated poets', and Chen's and Reines's. To varying degrees, Chen and Reines want to be poets in the world and outside the world. They hope to retain a core of self-sustaining artistic identity, however they describe it. But they also require, and actively solicit, the aid of career-boosting awards, grants, and fellowships. And when others read and reproduce the words of the poet, she can't help feeling gratified. In "Beef Bacon Chicken and Nuts,"[825] Reines writes:

> These are bad
> Times. Everybody says so.
>
> Everybody knows. Collapse
> Of the age of the virtuoso
> Somebody's history told in hairs
> The words between the lines
>
> That are not there.

Before pivoting,

> ... We lay
>
> In bed and the birds got loud
> Somebody made a meme with lines
> Of mine and said so in the putting
> Forward of oneself via self-loathing
>
> We've all been using. Even the ones
> Who do it best make me sick
> Alive to it
>
> But I'm still hungry.

She might not "love the economy," as Chen asserts, but she's "hungry" for the work. When Reines's poem is transformed into meme-text, she is at once pleased and horrified. She is popular, sure, but

[825] ASB 172-3.

even her specialized language—the writing without which, as she says, she cannot live—is transmissible as a piece of data, as flotsam for another's feed.[826]

Reines's corpus insists on the impossibility of a dependable poetic career, in a world of total precarity—of cash, of love, of mood. She obsesses over, and disdains, those institutional opportunities for which she positions herself; she performs her distinction from careerist "pobiz" operators,[827] then uses this performance as a higher-order meta-distinction. Her work is a sign of her unimpeachable artistry, which she believes, at the same time, to be impossible, a placative fiction, in a venal, market-constricted world.

Reines also offers freelance astrology consultations, which are explicable in utopian and in material terms.[828] On the one hand, her readings allow persons, of all backgrounds, to express themselves fully, in a non-judgmental, non-bureaucratic space. On the other, they are a strategy, a side-hustle, by which Reines insures she has money for her poetic practice.

But this is not to say her clients aren't in on the endeavor. They want to support Reines; they want to be entertained, and to hear a prophesy as actual and necessary as a work of art.[829] The reading Reines produces, during an astrological consultation, is a text to believe in, not despite but because of its constructedness. Her critique of neoliberal, white supremacist patriarchy is, as we've seen, a critique of poetry-as-industry, operating within a field of other arts industries, with their

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[826] Dan Chiasson makes a similar point, about Tommy Pico's work, in "Tommy Pico Filibusters Mortality with Poetry," *The New Yorker*, January 13, 2020, online, n.p. Chiasson is astute about the valences of "feed" (and about social media generally) in that text, passim.

[827] For more on this theme, see Jim Berhle's satirical "24/7 Relentless Careerism," *The Poetry Foundation*, from a talk at the Poetry Project, Jan. 25, 2010, online. n.p.

[828] See http://lazyeyehaver.com/. See also the recent Alex Dimitrov and Dorothea Lasky, *Astro Poets: Your Guides to the Zodiac* (New York: Flatiron, 2019).

[829] See Frank Guan, "How She Got Over: On Ariana Reines," *n+1 online*, Apr. 30, 2015, online, n.p. "Her books possess both the density of real filth and violence and the dreamlike purity of dedicated needed to discover the root of filth and violence. ... I don't always enjoy them and I'm not supposed to. But there are keener pleasures than enjoyment, pleasures that inspire the exertion needed to feel them, and these she offers in abundance." For a rigorous interview, see Rebecca Tamás, *The White Review*, July 2019, online, n.p.

imperatives, funding mechanisms, and hierarchies of prestige. But her writing does not end with this critique. The critique does not impede her creation. Instead, Reines begins with it; she depends upon it. And she insists, above all, on an expansive creative engagement, a kind of capital-P Poetry. It's a project in self- and community cultivation; in reading and writing; in astrology and performance. These actions are poetic actions. They are imperfect, and partial, because all solutions are. But they're also the best means available, now, for solving the problems a career in poetry creates.

Epilogue: Becalmed and Pure

At the end of *Oblivion*, Justice appends selections from a notebook, which he's titled, poignantly, "O Clouds All Afternoon Becalmed and Pure." The phrase comes from a stray couplet of his:

> O attic solitudes! O clouds
> All afternoon becalmed and ~~pure!~~ / near[830]

Among other snippets—a "skit" for the Faust-legend; a play starring "Lorca in California"—he includes a fragment from his never-completed prose narrative, on the composer Eugene Bestor:

> In early middle age Eugene takes on a pupil different from the others—more talented. Other pupils strange in all the usual ways—wild eyes, wild habits, etc.—but the new pupil is strange in being so ordinary, except for his exceptional musical gifts. He seems as much interested in going into the family business (laundries?) as into music. And this bourgeois youth is so much more talented than the others that Eugene is both baffled and amused. Finally, the young man turns down a first-rate scholarship—and after a while Eugene sees him no more—or only perhaps at an occasional concert or recital, with his family—eventually with his wife and child. The former pupil seems quite happy, free of any regret. But Eugene himself cannot escape a feeling of deep regret whenever he encounters his former pupil.[831]

Bestor wants his best student to become a pianist. He wants him to have a career. But the young man, somehow, remains unmoved by a life of art. He doesn't need the scholarship. He marries, has a child, and looks back at his studies—looks on at the concert before him—with absolute calm. Bestor taught him everything he knew, introduced him to the glories of the canon. The young man could have been part of the tradition himself. He could have trained, at the renowned institution, with peers of similar promise. He could have become a professional maker of art. But he didn't, and he doesn't mind; indeed, he's happier this way. Yet Bestor agonizes on his behalf. It could have been different.

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[830] O 129.

[831] Ibid. 129-30, dated Feb. 15, 1984.

"Why must I like it," Justice says, "when they tell me my stories are 'well written'? Of course they are! Would that this were not what they found to say about them, all the same. This ugly little piece of jargon seems to have become a code word for dull. Worse of course would be to hear that they were 'well crafted.'"[832]

I don't intend to read everything into one couplet, never published on its own; but its partial erasure is powerful to me. Solitudes of the attic: they produce the poems, the *Collected* in the hands, and its network of associations, histories, conflicts. The poet has reached a reasonable place for stopping—or has he lost his train of thought? Clouds outside, they move in their way and symbolize nothing. Are they like art: soothing and untainted? Or are they like art: soothing and close to us?

Does Justice write poems to send them to the clouds, away from human care? Or does he bring the clouds down, onto the page, into the poem—images of something beyond, now caught up in the life we're leading? Elsewhere, Justice sees a book of Chekhov's. "I realized," he writes, "how glad I was that this man had lived. And that I did right to be glad." He asks, with genuine curiosity, and not a little bitterness, "Of what writers now could that honestly and simply be said?"[833]

[832] Ibid. 134-5.

[833] Ibid. 131.

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