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**SECRET HISTORIES/IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS: TOWARD A
HEMISPHERIC POETICS OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY LONG POEMS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree in

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Juliana Leslie

September 2013

The Dissertation of Juliana Leslie is
approved:

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Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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2013

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ABSTRACT

Juliana Leslie

Secret Histories/Impossible Objects: Toward a Hemispheric Poetics of Twentieth-Century Long Poems

This dissertation offers a comparative study of Anglo-American and Latin-American long poems written in the twentieth century and analyzes how these works remap the emergent geographical, historical, and spatial realities of late modernity. The long poems I investigate include works that respond to disaster, war, and other forms of large-scale social transformation, such as David Jones' *In Parenthesis*, which records the author's experience fighting in the trenches in World War I, and Jose Pacheco's "Las Ruinas de México," which responds to the 1985 Mexico City earthquake that brought the city close to ruins in a context already defined by the ruins of colonial conquest.

I argue that poems since the first decades of modernism have engaged with complicated notions of time framed by disaster, crisis, and change. I thus consider how these poems meet the demands of various historical problems in late modernity by grafting together materials from different time periods and traditions, by relying on the resources of local geographies and natural histories, and by exaggerating difference and asymmetry as spatio-temporal forces that rearrange the discrete categories of literary history and national belonging. The texts I consider—David Jones' *In Parenthesis* (1937), Cesar Vallejo's *España, aparta de mi este calíz* (1937),

H.D.'s *Trilogy* (1944), William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* (1946-1958), Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* (1938), Gabriela Mistral's *Poema de Chile* (1967), Jose Pacheco's "Las Ruinas de México" (1986), and Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* (1965)—compose a heterogeneous archive that does not cohere within a single tradition associated with either modernist or avant-garde aesthetics or with the long poem. Rather than situate these texts in linear relation or according to a linguistic or national tradition, I group them according to shared themes or topoi, such that the particular discursive interventions in the poems provide the larger organizing principle for interpretation. The topics I consider are war, specifically the modes of modern warfare that emerge in three different historical sites in the first half of the twentieth century: World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II; the emergence of the industrial as a potentially dehumanizing or alienating feature of capitalist development; and the role of violence in everyday life, particularly the role violence plays in extending beneath and defining but also in threatening the preservation of the coherence of the everyday. By grouping poems within these thematic contexts such as war and industrialization rather than according to language, period, or national tradition, I explore the potential of this framework to open new contexts—material, phenomenological, cultural—for reading, interpretation, and engagement.

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Michael Labenz has supported me, listened to me, read portions of this dissertation, given me advice, nagged me, asked me questions, and put up with this work as a part of our everyday life for many years. This dissertation is dedicated to Mike and to my teachers. Thank you.

Introduction: A New Mind

The same shoes will fit whoever climbs
without trails to his body
& whoever descends to the form of his soul!
Entwining one another the mutes will speak, the
paralyzed will walk!
The blind, upon coming back, will see
& throbbing the deaf will hear!
The ignorant will be wise, the wise will be ignorant!
Kisses will be given that you could not give!
Only death will die! The ant
will bring little pieces of bread to the elephant chained
to his brutal gentleness; the aborted children
will be born again perfect, special,
& all men will work,
all men will beget,
all men will understand!

—César Vallejo
España aparta de mí este cáliz

Without invention nothing is well spaced,
unless the mind change, unless
the stars are new measured, according
to their relative positions, the
line will not change, the necessity
will not matriculate: unless there is
a new mind there cannot be a new
line, the old will go on
repeating itself with recurring
deadliness: without invention
nothing lies under the witch-hazel
bush, the alder does not grow from among
the hummocks margining the all
but spent channel of the old swale,
the small foot-prints
of the mice under the overhanging
tufts of the bunch-grass will not
appear: without invention the line
will never again take on its ancient
divisions when the word, a supple word,
lived in it, crumbled now to chalk.

—William Carlos Williams
Paterson

I.

These selections from César Vallejo's *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* and William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* feature some of the shared concerns that emerge in long poems written in the twentieth century, features that help dramatize the way many cultural, political, and spiritual concerns of this period in history fostered new modes of awareness, engagement, and action. For example, Vallejo's *España* offers an extended homage and elegy for the Republican volunteers that fought on behalf of the elected government during the Spanish Civil War, and thus evokes an almost occult mode of ritual invocation or remembering, an effort to bridge the gap between the living and the dead or the material and the divine. Though perhaps no less ritual in its modes of signification, Williams's project in *Paterson* seeks to invent and communicate a specifically American literary tradition that emerges out of archival, natural, geographical, and experiential sources and materials of the New World, specifically, in this case, of Paterson, New Jersey. In both cases, the poems become sources of cultural and ritual memory enabled by poetic processes of figuration, citation, association, and collage, the effects of which provoke new modes of historical and cultural awareness.

Although the styles and thematic concerns of these two poems are different and worth maintaining in comparison, I find in them a shared desire to redefine and measure anew the historical materials that enable (or disable) modes of composition. Both trace a new relation to knowledge, to writing, and to work that relocates the processes and products of the mind (cognition, figuration) within the body's

experience of space, and both seem to thus evoke a spatial imaginary that eclipses or evades a unidirectional “line” that runs from Europe to the New World. Imagining a New World that resists the snares of inherited tradition thus requires forms of begetting, inventing, working, and remembering the dead, the mute, the particular, and the material relations that exist outside of the speaker’s inherited circumference. For Vallejo, an inherited tradition offers silence and dismemberment, features of a colonial history that wrest bodies apart from their material potentials. Paul Bové makes a similar observation about Williams’s desire in *Paterson* to “to de-code or interpret the falls of unintelligible language we, as Americans, inherit from Europe and...from a metaphysical tradition whose reifications have usurped all language and made it unavailable for the representation of a non-metaphysical world” (585). The non-metaphysical and material worlds in these poems emerge out of war and industrialization, processes that become potentially redemptive yet still violently traumatic. In both works, poetic epistemologies of making enable a potential, albeit tenuous unification across the disparate and scattered materials of history; they structurally reimagine the pressures of cultural inheritance as sources of agency. In her study of Williams’s *In the American Grain*, Vera Kutzinski calls this process “unreading,” whereby Anglo-American canonical texts are “unread” and thus displaced from their positions of privilege within the literary imagination (39). For Williams, this process of invention enables the emergence of a “new line” or lines of correspondence that link the “foot-prints” of the poem with the “bunch grass” and the “witch-hazel” of *Paterson*’s industrial palimpsest, thus a reader must negotiate the

sedimented layers of cultural and natural history that coexist within the same dynamic articulation. What Kutzinski points out in her work on Williams' "New World" writing is how this method of composition allows a newly conceived nexus of relations between texts, knowledge, and experience to emerge. In this field of New World particulars, change and invention are necessary in the mind if literature is to be "well-spaced," that is, if literary relations are to be composed in alignment with the lived particulars of historical experience distinct from the influence of European hegemony.

While Vallejo works in a somewhat more heroic and oracular mode than Williams, at least on the surface, the possibility of a "new line" of "perfect, spatial" relation in Vallejo's composition likewise offers the bodies of the republican fighters a similar kind of awareness that releases both the volunteer and the poet from the gaze of colonial modernity. In this way, the event of the Spanish Civil War reroutes the historical experience of empire and conquest by realigning the geopolitical relations between Latin America and its colonial origins. Julio Ortega suggests, as a result, that *España* assumes the voice of a discursive event, which belongs to the collective voice of the volunteers in their figurative status as the "unburied," as those who oscillate between present and past, between the living and the dying (*La teoría poética* 75). The section I include above offers a series of figural reversals that attempt to redeem various kinds of historical traumas by bestowing wisdom to the ignorant, hearing to the deaf, and new life to "aborted children." In the heroic and orphic space of the poem, these mute figures become a source of potential synthesis, a

material excess or heterogeneity that gains intelligibility once the narrative of conquest has been “unread.” Vallejo’s modernism thus does not showcase an ideal, cosmopolitan center of cultural production that begins in Europe and ends at the periphery in Latin America. The “unburied” embodies a more contingent possibility that neither relegates the peripheries of modernism to its status as a failed or inferior copy of a cultural ideal nor projects exemplary values of progress and development onto these peripheries and their particulars. Like the potential of Williams’ “well-spaced” literary tradition, becoming “unburied” forces a similar kind of geographical remapping.

This dissertation focuses on the possibilities of these shared concerns that emerge in long poems, particularly those written in the 30s, 40s and later, which become, I will argue, instruments of perception and cognition that expand the limits not only of the long poem, and of poetry more generally, but also of historiography and the possibilities for historical awareness. Many long poems like *Paterson* and *España* devote their efforts to the problems of history, to the tensions between different practices of historical representation, and to the capacity of poetic modes of figuration to intervene in historical processes such that a certain kind of fullness or synthesis across time and space overwhelms the perceived fragmentation or incompleteness of present conditions. By comparing Williams’s and Vallejo’s figures of historical undoing, I also want to suggest that long poems embody a postcolonial or hemispheric mode of knowledge that exposes an awareness of the uneven durations of history, community, and the self that are constitutive of subjects of

modernity. Whereas many narratives of modernity emphasize the subordinate position occupied by peripheral cultures and nations, long poems expose another, more dynamic relation between these “parts,” so to speak, that do not easily add up to a whole. As I will continue to argue in this introduction, long poems often share a desire to forge a “new line” of relations that measures another history (or histories), which in turn de-centers European influence and conceptualizations of modernism and modernity. These poems thus communicate stressful relationships with the residue of conquest and imperialism, or, as Walter D. Mignolo calls it, “the constitutive and dark side of modernity” (78). A comparative study of Anglo-American and Latin-American long poems engenders a new understanding of this shared conceptual terrain, and enables readers to consider how these works, even those that might seem to be neatly situated within a European sphere of influence such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, for example, help to remap the geographical, historical, and spatial realities of modernity. I explore the potential of this framework to open new contexts—material, historical, cultural—for reading, interpretation and engagement.

In the rest of this introduction, I offer a set of methodological, theoretical and practical paradigms that organize this dissertation, which offers a comparative study of Anglo-American and Latin-American long poems from a number of disparate historical, geographic and cultural contexts. The texts I consider—David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* (1937), Cesar Vallejo’s *España, aparta de mi este caliz* (1937), H.D.’s *Trilogy* (1944), William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson* (1946-1958), Muriel Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* (1938), Gabriela Mistral’s *Poema de Chile* (1967), Jose

Pacheco's "Las Ruinas de México" (1986), and Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* (1965)—compose a heterogeneous archive that does not cohere within a single tradition associated with either modernist or avant-garde aesthetics or with the long poem. Rather than situate these texts in linear relation or according to a linguistic or national tradition, I group them according to shared themes or topoi, such that the particular discursive interventions in the poems provide the larger organizing principle for interpretation. The topics I consider are war, specifically the modes of modern warfare that emerge in three different historical sites in the first half of the twentieth century: World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II; the emergence of the industrial as a potentially dehumanizing or alienating feature of capitalist development; and the role of violence in everyday life, particularly the role violence plays in extending beneath and defining but also in threatening the preservation of the coherence of the everyday. Although each text I consider is diverse and particular in its own way, by grouping them together according to these concerns, I demonstrate how they attempt to figure or make sense of shared patterns of experience and perceptual habits that emerge within moments of catastrophe, disaster, and large-scale social transformation. Each poem becomes a kind of rhetorical staging of the problem of understanding historical reality and an artefactual rendering of the shape of experience, thus providing a lens that helps to render traumatic or sublimely complex experiences negotiable and perceptible. In this way, long poems can concretize the multiple valences of experience within a single—though still complex—compositional space.

I consider the history and development of modernist and avant-garde long poems in Anglo-American and Latin-American writing and outline the long poem's relationship with other long forms such as the epic and the novel in the history of literature.¹ There have been many recent attempts to conjoin Latin-American and Anglo-American literary histories into a more unified yet still comparative approach that brings together both histories under a single hemispheric rubric. I join this conversation and use as a framing/comparing device the formal features of long poems as a way to recontextualize historical themes of conquest and development. I ask, how do poetic processes of figuration and poetic ways of negotiating the limits of perception engage these specific material problems that define modernity? I thus consider how poems offer different and more complex models of belonging to or understanding the effects of modernity, and I place different authors and their works in conversation in order to expand and revise some of the more conventional ways of thinking about the long poem as an elite modernist genre. For example, in this introduction, I consider the model of the long poem offered by Eliot and Pound, whose works helped to elevate the status of the long poem as a mode of historical consciousness, alongside Federico García Lorca, whose poem *Poeta en Nueva York* invites questions regarding the status of the New World as a constitutive feature of the geospatial imaginary in which long poems participate. My point is to consider the

¹ It is important to mention the difference between the term modernism, which designates mostly Anglo-American works written in the first four to five decades of the twentieth century and the term vanguardias, used in the Latin-American context to refer to those avant-garde texts written by Latin American authors contemporaneous with English-language modernism. Modernismo in the Latin-American context refers to an earlier period of poetic production contemporaneous with the late Victorian and Symbolist movements.

role that many other works play in introducing issues that continue to be integral features of the writing of long poems or which might provide a lens to recontextualize a productively open, diverse, and complex literary archive.

II. From Old World Epic to New World Long Forms

The poems I consider in this dissertation engage with the tradition of classical epic in a variety of significant ways, most notably given the larger context of colonial conflict and global expansion that extends beneath each of these poems in explicit and inexplicit ways. Nevertheless, contemporary critics of twentieth-century long poems rightfully trace some distance between traditional epic and the digressive, experimental, and revisionary forms that exemplify the formal parameters of twentieth-century long poems. In *Forms of Expansion*, Lynn Keller resists the designation epic for strategic reasons, suggesting that it can be more useful not to favor one particular genre over another. As a heuristic device, epic can draw our attention to many but not all aspects and capacities of long poems. Hence, Keller calls for an “inclusive definition” of the long poem and regards, as such, the epic to be a more “exclusive definition” dominated by masculine themes and protagonists (4). Keller’s method is similar to Joseph Conte’s in *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry*, which offers a flexible typology of postmodern forms that resists systemization but nonetheless tries to account for the range of styles, practices, and habits of postmodern forms. Conte’s typology includes sequences and procedural forms and their subsets, such as infinite and finite serial poems. These postmodern

iterations lack what Conte suggests is what most notably defines epic: “a complete portrait of the culture” (37). In his study of postmodern long forms, Brian McHale has thus argued that one of the inevitable tasks of a poet who writes a long poem is to “build ruins” and to evoke the text itself as a ruin, as a world “poised between being and nonbeing” (15). Such conditions expose the way an emphasis on process replaces traditional concerns over meaning or the potential for the work to fit into extant literary systems. Postmodern variations dramatize the relation between part and whole, staging the problem of offering “complete” epic poems that unify their parts in a world where the possibility of achieving continuity and wholeness has diminished. Hemispheric long poems, as I will demonstrate, dramatize and aggravate these displacements between part and whole, offering this formal problem as a way to intervene in and rewrite the complex histories of colonial modernity.

Nevertheless, modernist and avant-garde long poems wear the family resemblance to epic in notable ways, particularly when they address historical problems such as conquest and when they try to surmount the problem of death and dying in the contexts of total war and industrialization. Although the worlds that Pound, Vallejo, and Rukeyser wrote within did not offer any facile conception of wholeness, their poems, along with other contemporaneous works, are “characteristically concerned with ‘centering,’ bringing diverse materials into a synthesis” (Conte 37). Many modernist and avant-garde epics reach towards something like a temporal horizon or a world of possible outcomes and effects, which the poems themselves can make manifest. In retrospect, they fail to do so, but where

the discrepancy between world and composition transpires is where we might think about the kinds of epic conditions that early twentieth-century long poems adumbrate both formally and thematically. Thus I draw a connection between these two related forms—epic and long poem—in order to emphasize how the poems I consider here retain a sense for the epic in terms of the larger conditions that prevail in the writing of long poems and in the historical problems that they treat.

Epic poetry is not a static or timeless genre that has remained unchanged throughout the course of history. As Michael André Bernstein points out, epic only achieved its elevated status long after the classical period (12). Aristotle famously rejects epic in favor of tragedy, because tragedy “can attain the ‘end’ . . . with less space and time and fewer words, and it has a tighter unity” (Goodman 121). Epic for Aristotle was thus already too expansive and too inappropriate. It exceeded the limits of perception. Yet contemporary critics often reject epic for exactly the opposite reason, noting that it offers too much closure and synthesis to adequately represent present conditions. Even so, even during the Renaissance, when it was most favored and imitated, Bernstein further clarifies, there was “little unanimity of judgment out of which a strict definition of the epic might have evolved” (12). For my purpose, there are important characteristics of long poems devolved from classical epics that I want to consider more closely. Moreover, I am interested in those characteristics that allow epics to belong to new world and hemispheric contexts. Even more so, I take seriously the problem that epic presented to Aristotle, and suggest that perhaps modernist and avant-garde long poems have finally lived up to this description. These

poems often aggravate their own ability to end well and encounter the frequent problem of mapping out a modest amount of time and space to solve their problems.

Historically, epics consolidated community or national identity by providing a record of experience that could bind community members together or by offering a narrative of transcendence that united the material with the divine. C.M. Bowra provides a succinct and helpful definition of epic along these lines:

An epic poem is by common consent a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance or come from a life of action, especially violent action such as war. It gives special pleasure because its events and persons enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the dignity of nobility of man. (qtd. in Fitz, 49)

Bowra's description infers why epic conventions may no longer provide a useful framework for thinking about expansive experimental form. Yet his description also suggests that "common consent" has allowed the formal designation epic to be identified with narrative exploits and actions belonging to representative figures that define important cultural achievements. These figures embody important traits such as ingenuity, cunning, decisiveness, strength, and endurance. They represent, for their communities, what is generally worthy about being human.

More specifically, epic heroes such as Odysseus undergo exhaustive and geographically expansive journeys that intimate spatial, temporal and cosmic transformation. This expansiveness is an important feature of epic that differentiates it from other poetic forms such as lyric and tragedy, because epic fills out the details, narrates a complex background of events and descriptions, provides names and lists of all the actors (both living and dead) and their actions, and, in the end, establishes a

framework for the epic hero who, as Thomas Greene asserts, “encounters a new sort of resistance and reaches the limitations of his being” (14). Interestingly, Greene adds, epic heroes also eventually devolve and become less godly and more fallible (18).² Achilles is the son of Gods but Odysseus is not. Odysseus thus approaches mortal conditions more acutely, and *The Odyssey* is emblematic of how epic narrative “is a series of adjustments between the hero’s capacities and his limitations” (T. Greene 16). Hence, the structure of epic, as both Thomas Greene and Paul Goodman note, is expansive and episodic. It must reach the horizon of possible actions but also represent those actions as tests and limitations. These exploits, as Goodman also tells us, define epic heroes as characters with fixed natures: “The epic hero is thus always a double role: the person (with his virtue) and the representative of the group to whom the exploit is important. In either of these roles there may be a frailty laying him open to dangers and reversals” (123). In this way, epic can thus provide opportunities to reaffirm or redraw cultural and territorial limits via the figure of the hero.

In the context of empire and conquest, epic poems negotiate these features as emergent historical problems, thus renovating the heroic values that solidify communities and nations within this new, more troubling thematic. In his study, *Rediscovering The New World*, Earl Fitz suggests that

² C.M. Bowra also offers a similar analysis of the difference between these two epics, suggesting that epic evolves away from the divine: “Between the Iliad and the Odyssey there is a noticeable difference of temper. The Iliad celebrates heroic strength, but the Odyssey celebrates wit and cunning” (18). Thus, “Odysseus triumphs over a meaner world because he is in every way a better man than those who try to dispossess him” (Bowra 18).

epic was particularly well suited to the portrayal of the conquest and colonization of the New World. Both the bloody and violent clash of cultures that the conquest occasioned and the subsequent rise of the American nations lent themselves to retelling via the epic form. But just as the struggle for control of the Americas involved different types and degrees of conflict, so too did the numerous American epics come to differ in subject matter, mode of treatment, and style. (48)

New World epics, such as John Barlow's *The Columbiad* (1807)³ provide narratives of cultural foundations that glorify figures such as Columbus, and they "offer a glimpse into the complex and lengthy process through which a culture gains... a sense of unity and identity" (49). While New World epics in particular evince more fraught relations with their European ancestors,⁴ so to speak, these poems similarly represent the desire to provide coherence, to narrate the greatness of the new world, and to catalog as many details and phenomena as possible in the new world that testify to this greatness. It would seem that colonization and conquest thus provide even more of a reason, given the history of violence and genocide that accompanied conquest, to account for the actions of a culture and its "heroes."

In modernist long poems, epic longings often betray their own structural failures rather than their successes, thus prefiguring postmodernism's critique of metadiscourse and the loss of certain forms of historical agency predicated on the movement of time towards greater progress and development. In this way, not only do texts become ruins but also the practice of reading itself becomes a process of

³ *The Columbiad*, writes Fitz, "is an epic account of the founding and settling of the New World," which features both North American and South American history as well as the histories of "French and English Canada" and thus adopts a proto-hemispheric approach (52-53). Barlow's poem was influenced by Voltaire's *Essay on Epic Poetry* and by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's *The Araucaniad* (1569, 1578, 1589), "the national epic of Chile," also discussed in Voltaire's piece (Fitz 50).

⁴ Fitz explains that relying on Voltaire's *Essay on Epic Poetry* "would have lent credibility to [Barlow's] own belief that a modern epic need not adhere strictly to neoclassical rules" (52).

evoking the ruins of modernity and of the self. As a result, literary criticism on long poems often focuses on whether or not such forms can achieve the status of epic and to what extent an individual epic fails to achieve the vision it longs to effectuate. But the relationship between long poems and the historical purpose of epic remains an open question. One of the crucial pivots here seems to be the way long poems are both composed and received by individual readers and writers. In his study on the long poem in *La Otra Voz*, Octavio Paz suggests that “poemas extensos” cannot function like traditional epics primarily because they are “largo para nosotros” but “no para su época” (22). Thus long poems must be regarded *as* long, they must qualitatively feel long, and they must challenge a reader’s capacity to endure in time something of the magnitude of Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General* or what Bob Perelman calls the “life-writing” of Zukofsky’s “A” and Pound’s *The Cantos*. Trying to interpret or accommodate the sublimity of endless, sedimented layers of textuality displaces the traditional object of epic longing, and we experience epics in their length and their extensity as a challenge to our limited points of view as post-Enlightenment private subjects. Moreover, to write an epic poem, as Bob Perelman suggests, is “to live in epic conditions” and to live in epic conditions, he continues, “is to live beyond the limits of the self,” to place the self at the edge of difficult and often impossible expectations (36).

This emphasis on process transforms writing from ornament into practice, thus pointing our attention to a significant feature of modernist practice: its use of technique to externalize subjectivity as an effect of writing. In *Obdurate Brilliance*,

Peter Baker suggests that the process of writing long poems externalizes the subjectivity of the writer, establishing structures for ethical action rather than structures for feeling. He writes:

My model of exteriority claims that modernist and postmodern poets are in fact seeking to achieve the level of ethicity present in the successful epic poems of the past but in the absence of a traditional epic hero and without centering on their own internal feelings or experiences. (2)

The internal, private voice of a lyric subject is not only turned inside out but also renovated and exposed to its embeddedness in the world as a staging ground for ethical and intersubjective acts. Thus it is the lyric's own negation of its historicity that occupies the space of the epic, in this case, the communal and the public. In this way, Michael André Bernstein, shape "the world-view of succeeding ages, so that, in the words of the tale, past exempla and present needs find a continuous and unbroken meeting ground" (9). This thesis leads Bernstein to maintain the designation epic despite the historical differences in content and form, because it enables an understanding of the epic role the long poem plays for writers like Pound as well as Pablo Neruda who were interested in establishing new myths—and new forms for those myths—that could speak to the concerns of the age.

What I want to emphasize here by bringing up the epic origins of the poems that I consider is how these works also take on the imperative to define the limits of cultural and national belonging but without the certainty that these poems can legitimate one's cultural heritage. What makes the long poems I encounter specifically hemispheric is the way they engage the complex relations between world and composition that becomes not only a consequence of a world turned upside down

by conquest but also a site of reinvention in long poems that can critique histories of colonization. Within a North American context, the politics of form also reveals the various ways writers and intellectuals in the United States tried to find appropriate structures for literary texts that could express the gestalt of a uniquely American experience. This drive for a kind of pragmatic authenticity motivates Williams' notion of "a new line" as a necessary conduit for an embodiment of truth but has its roots in Puritanism. Roy Harvey Pearce's *The Continuity of American Poetry*, for example, offers a theory of the development of American poetics, tracing the genealogy of American literature from its Puritan origins through Whitman, Williams, and other modernists, and he focuses specifically on the antinomian and pragmatic desires of poetry across multiple generations of American writers who take up the task of writing in forms that have no foundational or providential value. Pearce writes:

In one sense, then, the history of American poetry is the history of an impulse towards antinomianism: an antinomianism which in the nineteenth century and after seemed to be the last refuge of man in a world he was by then willing, or daring, to admit he himself had made and was therefore obliged to make over. (41)

Puritan writing introduces anxiety over the origin of form, over its purpose and its effects, since the act of making a work according to Puritan ideology had no bearing on individual redemption. It gave them a sense of emergent individuality that was embodied by the work itself but only harnessed in the romantic period by Emerson and Whitman (Pearce 41). The long poems that emerge in the American context thus exhibit, Pearce argues, the writers' freedom to manipulate form that would serve no

purpose other than a pragmatic one. Whitman's *Song of Myself* is romantic in this sense, "because there is movement" but no form, and because "it is essential to the meaning of the poem that the movement be unique; for the movement derives from the motion of the protagonist's sensibility" (Pearce 73). In *New World Poetics*, George B. Handley defines this sensibility as a "post-lapsarian Adamic impulse" concerned with the forces exerted not only by culture but also by nature (5). To be Adamic in a postlapsarian mode, the writer must be attuned to the way "natural history and human history are mutually metonymic of each other, thus suggesting that nature/culture is neither a sharp binary nor a facile equation" (Handley 5).

In *Victorian and Modernist Poetics*, Carol Christ argues that many modernist poets' interests in these kinds of historiographic practices began in the Victorian period and it spurred Victorian poets in particular to renovate the privilege given to voice in the Romantic period as an instrument of revolutionary potential. "The Romantics imposed upon themselves and their successors the burden of originality. In assimilating poetics to the rhetoric of revolution and in making personal authenticity the test value for poetry, they encouraged the sacrifice of the comforts tradition could offer" (Christ 150). For the Victorians, however, the modulations of a subjective voice that give rise to a notion of organic form are not adequate to the Victorian task of attempting to represent the structures and patterns in history. A Victorian critique of romanticism in poems such as Browning's *Sordello*, of critical importance to Pound, and Tennyson's *Maud* and *In Memoriam*, employs techniques that place their speaking subjects at right angles to the poem, undermining the romantic notion of the

voice's capacity to provide unmediated expression. According to M.L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall in *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, for example, tried to "evoke the keenest, most open realization possible," but *Maud*, to the contrary, offers "a narrative-dramatic frame to justify [its] real structure" (17). The Victorians negotiated the burden of voice by developing strategies such as the dramatic monologue in order to distance the speaking subject and its desires from the structure and overall continuity of the poem itself: "The idea of a persona enables them to maintain a fluid and shifting relationship both between the specificity of the historical and personal situation which the poem presents and the generality to which it aspires" (Christ 32). The careful positioning of persona and the use of form could mitigate this burden and allow the poet greater access to the textures of history and his or her place in it.

The Latin-American context similarly complicates and multiplies sites of influences for avant-garde writers, placing the "cosmopolitan" tendencies of vanguardistas such as Vallejo and Vicente Huidobro, for example, within a larger network of meanings that cross the local with the global, and the cosmopolitan with the regional. In *The Modern Culture of Latin America* Jean Franco argues that a central problem in Latin-American history is the dearth of original voices and forms, thus motivating the problem of "finding forms in which to express American experience" (18). Writers "felt themselves a part of Western culture and wished to work within its tradition" but were also limited by the effects of colonization and the enormous disparities between the few educated elites who were often considered

outsiders and the majority of the indigenous and mestizo populations (18). “The artist was thus in a difficult position between the pull of Europe and the needs of his native culture” (Franco 15). This tension in the identity politics of Latin America has defined its cultural production to a certain extent, making it difficult to witness the more complex ways Latin American artists participated in the construction of new forms and discourses of globalization. Consider, for example, *Martin Fierro*, the epic poem of gaucho life in Argentina written by José Hernández, which adopts the form of popular ballad poetry in order to attack the “Europeanized government of Buenos Aires for destroying the traditional way of life of the gaucho” (Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America* 18). By working in a form that incorporated Argentinian imagery and language accessible to the gauchos themselves, Hernández offered a text concerned with the newly emergent discourses of global, national, and local identities. Primarily concerned with creating a form that could communicate social protest, Hernández developed imagery based on local experiences and helped to enable the emergence of regional literatures in Latin America.

At the cusp of the vanguard movement, Nicaraguan Ruben Darío’s poetic production also offers an opportunity to consider the various channels of influence that manifest in the poetics of the long poem. As the example of *Martin Fierro* perhaps demonstrates, Latin-America, like most parts of the world, developed in response to globalization in uneven ways. In *Gathering of Voices*, Mike Gonzalez and David Treece suggest that this uneven development produces in Latin-America an experience of frustration, powerlessness, and loss:

Powerless to affect or control matters, the liberation of the productive forces in the metropolis yielded only new forms of alienation on the periphery. Far from generating that sense of harnessing the enormous powers of nature to human purposes, modernity produced only a greater feeling of impotence and helplessness. (1)

Within this context, the Modernista writers such as Darío expressed dissatisfaction with the forces of modernity that took hold in Latin America, but they also rejected all “things Spanish” and embraced as models or artistic possibility ancient Greek influences as well as French symbolist aesthetic practices (Treece and Gonzalez 2). Modernistas rejected the possibilities offered by modernization and cultural transformation, often cultivating a sense of loss and despair that could be shared as cultural inheritance. In this way, their writing was implicitly a critique, but it did not function, as avant-garde writing did, to actively rework the surfaces of reality by embracing the forces of change through formal technique and invention. The case of Ruben Darío’s absorption of a non-Christian European classicism in particular, presents, for scholars of Latin-American literature, an acute paradox that embodies this process of an uneven modernity (Gonzalez and Treece 8). More recent scholarship on hemispheric and geopolitical modernisms, many of which influence my study, reject this paradox, asserting instead that the Latin-American acceptance of European culture as a site of tradition and learning has more to do with the flexible and mixed nature of literary production and with imaginative writing’s ability to cross time zones and geographies with less antagonism. I embrace this possibility but also understand how, in the context of the development of modernity in Latin-America at the cusp of the twentieth-century, that Modernista writing could also have represented

the Latin-American context as one of lack rather than one of cultural riches or mutual influence. Nevertheless, Darío's writing complicates this matrix. He wanted, in particular, to update the Spanish language so writers could accommodate the range of experiences and complications offered them in modernity. Although he accomplished this by introducing French verse forms and rhythms into Spanish metrics, he was not interested in eschewing the potential for a Latin-American literary tradition but rather in creating it (Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America* 26, Gonzalez and Treece 9). Reacting against both unchecked imperialist expansion from the United States as well as the entrenched and repressive values of Catholicism, Darío's poetry offers an awareness of the "disorder of the universe, the injustice in society, the subversion of values and a general lack of harmony" (Darío, quoted in Gonzalez and Treece 11). In light of this argument, it makes sense to think of the complicated presence of European influence in Latin-America not only as a paradox that undermines arguments about identity politics in Latin-America but also as the site of literary modernity's opening in both Latin-America and Europe as a hemispheric process.

This brings me to a discussion of another influence on long poems that might not seem as obvious: the novel. In his introduction to *Tale of the Tribe*, Michael André Bernstein begins his discussion of modernist epics by defining them in comparison with the novel. He invokes Georg Lukács's argument in *The Theory of the Novel* that considers the novel to be the paradigmatic form of the modern period, given its capacity to encompass "the extensive totality of life" even though the meaning of such a totality is no longer immanent (Lukács, quoted in M. Bernstein, 1).

For Lukács, a lack of immanence—of something like a life-world that shapes the contours of experience without interruption—fosters the emergence and differentiation of literary forms. Out of this differentiation emerges the novel as the form best able to capture the experience of “transcendental homelessness” that characterizes modernity, but it also, Lukács argues, and it seeks to restore immanence by offering narratives that allow protagonists to recognize their place and purpose in the world. Modern epic in the guise of the novel thus seeks the occluded fullness of life: “The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life” (Lukács 60). The novel is capable of embodying the forces that isolate individuals from the fullness of their existence. In *Tale of the Tribe*, Bernstein’s purpose is thus not to critique Lukács in favor of the virtues of poetry but to consider how poetry managed to acquire a diminished status in culture, no longer capable of making immanent the meaning of experience in modernity.⁵ Yet what Lukács seems to imply is that epic is not a form so much as it is a principle or a drive that shapes a work as it agitates between alienation and integration, between the limits of the self and extensive totality of the world and its history. Hence the forms of discursive transposition that seem endemic to the novel can also characterize the volatile, mixed essences of long poems. That is, if the novel is capable of incorporating all other generic, formal, and stylistic dispositions, then perhaps the long poem thus incorporates these tensions

⁵ Lukács does discuss lyric poetry but as a form that can ignore the world of convention and create a “protean mythology...set apart from duration” (63). Lyric offers the time of no time, unlike the novel, whose time is of the world and which can therefore embody the temporal process of alienation and integration characteristic of experience in modernity.

characteristic of the novel while also transposing those tensions in the more relaxed and more dynamic coordinates of poetic making.

Why is it helpful to consider the long poem as a type of novel? Or more specifically, why consider the long poem as another instantiation of epic in an epic field that also includes various types of novels. One could just as easily suggest that the novel is a type of long poem, or that both are types of historical epics as opposed to metaphysical epics. Or one could suggest that novels are poems written in prose form, or that long poems are really, as Edgar Allen Poe famously argued, just strings of lyric poems and not really epic in the traditional sense. To a certain extent, deciding on a type or form that best characterizes a work is a matter of perception, which, in many cases, can limit the circulation or understanding of a work's purpose. Nevertheless, I think the particular long poems I consider in this dissertation position themselves between the self and history in those ways that Lukács finds typical of the novel. The tensions between the self and its horizons motivate many of the compositional strategies and historical problems that emerge in these works, which offer structures that creatively struggle to incorporate the fragments of perception and experience into more flexible, allegorical registers. For example, David Jones's *In Parenthesis* makes use of lyric and epic storytellers and points of view at various points in the narrative in order to manipulate different species of time (internal durations of time, for example, and external movement towards a dénouement), which thus keeps the work churning vertiginously toward its anticipated final scene—the battle of the Somme. *In Parenthesis*'s fluid narrative structure also evokes a sense

of the collective historical consciousness that guides the text and which provides a greater and more complex response to mass warfare once the battle commences. The narrative and discursive structures in H.D.'s novel *Palimpsest* and Williams's collection experimental essays *In the American Grain* provide similar responses to the complexities of history; their novelistic desires frame long poems in interesting ways. The way epic functions in these texts is partly thus to frame the reader's perception and to multiply possible solutions or responses to present problems.

The connection between the novel and the epic is also important in the Latin-American context, where novels have more often become the site for radical experiments with voice, character, narrative, and history. This connection to Latin-American experiments with form (and the political circumstances that provoke those experiments) persuades me to discuss the long poem in this way. Franco Moretti's argument in *Modern Epic* provides a counterpoint to Lukács's argument. For Moretti, modern epic novels are "world texts" that embody the nature of a world system in a state of disrepair and they imagine that disrepair as a condition of a new kind of totality, a newly calibrated totality that cannot return to a previous state of integration. Moretti witnesses a kind of entropy in epic forms that cannot seek integration and repair. More specifically, a world text emerges out of peripheral locations and non-contemporaneous presents that interrupt the hegemony of world time. These texts thus spatialize the temporality of epics, showing how the emergent cultures in these peripheries transpose temporal problems into spatial relations. Epic temporality has thus become a geopolitical concern, "polyphony... interwoven with the geography of

the world system,” and “the epic dimension... identified with synchronic breadth” (Moretti 237). Epic spatiality accounts for a sense of the world that no longer stakes its future on claims of transcendence, totality or wholeness. The search for a spatial or temporal totality is replaced by a spatio-temporal heterogeneity whose center of gravity has left Europe (Moretti 233).

This framework helps to explain the centrifugal tendencies of long poems that push the center of gravity away from Europe and towards the New World. Moretti’s argument also helps to explain the flourishing of experimental novels in Latin-America in the twentieth century, novels such as José Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso* and Julio Cortazar’s *Rayuela*, whose neo-Baroque epistemologies often have more in common with the efforts of the long poem than they do with social realism. As Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría suggests, the manifestation of baroque aesthetic practice in Latin America is a constitutive feature of social life: “The plurality of New World cultures, its being-in-the-making as something not quite achieved, of something heterogeneous and incomplete, is expressed in the Baroque ” (198-99). Quasi-metaphysical, self-referential and endlessly playful, these texts’ perceptions of reality achieve a capacious lens. What Echevarría witnesses in this neo-Baroque aesthetic does not simply resist the forces of colonization but also participates in their renegotiation, demonstrating that the presence of the New World in the European imagination since the conquest had unsettled conceptions of history and time, fragmenting perceptions of a unified world.

III. Poetic Historiography: The Literary Shapes of Experience

The arguments I outline above provide a background for privileging poetic making as a modality of knowledge that helps to explain how products of the imagination can become features of social life. Although modernism is often regarded as a retreat from social life that divests artistic creation of its political and historical character, the texts I consider extend themselves in the world, accentuating and intensifying the experience of being human as a material process. Long poems in particular offer an opportunity to witness how composition, how processes of making, are forms of interaction with the world that become versions of reality as significant as other modes of knowledge such as science and history. Poetry moreover, as Heidegger has argued, disposes the process of knowledge making *as* process, as inflected by the textures and pressures of phenomenological experience and thus also by the evanescence of those pressures. In long poems, these processes coordinate the internal and external textures of the work; they coordinate the *durée* of the poem as it searches for the appropriate way to expose and/or express the complications of experience. In his writing on poetics, Heidegger establishes the primacy of the poetic work in this way, as a process that discloses the truth of being. “To be a work,” Heidegger writes, “is to set up a world” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 43). Heidegger regards the poem not only as that which worlds and thus produces a new disposition of being in relation to world, but also as that which reveals or exposes the logics of worlding itself, of how worlds or social institutions dispose themselves as sensible and existential. Poetry, as an unadulterated form of language—at least for

Heidegger—returns language to its primary function as metaphor, as that which discloses as “bare expression” the worlding capacity of language, “the movement giving wave” (“Language in the Poem” 161). In this sense, a poem in its barest evocation becomes an aperture that clears and redistributes a new historical world.

I cite some of Heidegger’s formulations here, because I think the way Heidegger privileges poetry is a useful place to begin an understanding of the meta-historical activities of long poems that assume a degree of agency in the making of cultural knowledge. Poems such as Williams’ *Paterson* and Gabriela Mistral’s *Poema de Chile*, engage in a process of worlding in poems whose material landscapes (on the page and in the world) are defined, destroyed and made again within the spatio-temporal resources of the poem itself. Paul Bové, for example, uses Heidegger to analyze *Paterson*’s destructive impulse to return language to the moment when it can make new the limits of experience, when it can deform and destroy in order to renew. Each of these poems in their own way approaches the spaces and temporalities of modernity—war, industry, ruins—as spaces in the mind, constituted as epistemological limits and as sources of agency that reroute the fragments of experience. In this context, long poems thus provide more complex embodiments of historical reality that do not depend on a chronological or causal understanding of historical events. These events—or topoi—are emergent structures of experience that organize affects, thoughts, relations, habits, and patterns of experience, delimiting perception and the formation of social institutions.

My understanding of this relationship between poetry and history is also informed by Enlightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history in *The New Science* and by contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben's argument about the epistemological status of poetry in *Stanzas*. Both have demonstrated in different ways how the poetic is a primary event in language that shapes discourses about experience, thus establishing the sensible ground and framework for the development of cultural and political institutions. In *The New Science*, Vico argues that the mythic and poetic origins of culture similarly dispose a topos or place that organizes sensory experience and social relations between subjects (166). All knowledge begins in poetic thinking, because, as Vico states, "man makes himself the measure of all things" (60). All knowledge has its roots in figuration, in the process of making sense of and figuring out the contours, the limits, and the nature of reality. As such, Vico's poetic vision of reality privileges the role figurative language plays not only in shaping knowledge about the world but also in establishing social relations and institutions that delimit a subject's access to reality.

Agamben also argues for the epistemological significance of the topos as the origin of knowledge, an argument that calls into question or exposes the failure of the Western edifice of culture. Like Vico, Agamben's theory undermines the status of knowledge by placing emphasis on the poetic as an originary event in language. For Agamben, the topos, or place of the poem is embodied in the movements of a poem's stanzas. A stanza (Italian for room) only provides a phantasm of knowledge, an unknowable place, which in turn constitutes a "spatial model symbolic of human

culture” (Agamben xviii). Hence, poetry constitutes a “topology of the unreal” that “is, at the same time, a topology of culture” (26). There are only forms of making, Agamben implies, that become versions of reality. Long poems in their epic attitude attempt to map versions of reality inclined towards revealing this fluid and dynamic procedure of cultural poesis that undermines the doxa of inherited registers of thinking and doing. While some works certainly try to instantiate new doxa or new institutions that can take over the world or even the cosmos, what I see in these works is a productive kind of failure, an ethos of destruction that has become more constitutive of poetry and of knowledge in the twentieth-century than the possibility for redemption.

Hayden White also acknowledges this important relation between literary and critical, or historical writing when he posits: “historical documents are not less opaque than the texts studied by the literary critic. Nor is the world those documents figure more accessible” (89). The writing of history into a chronology with temporally discrete events requires a narrative practice dependent on figurative language, on uses of language that undermine the empirical status of history and realistic representation. Although White emphasizes narrative tropes in his analysis and my own study privileges forms that move beyond classic narrativity, White’s argument, along with Agamben’s and Vico’s, nevertheless has significant consequences for understanding the relationship between literature and knowledge and for helping to understand the way long poems in particular might index both formally and thematically the complex epistemological failures and metamorphoses

that define the twentieth century. By actively reworking and redispersing patterns of representation, these long poems thus offer a kind of historiography of the artefactual dimension of experience.

IV. Three Case Studies: Pound, Lorca, and Paz

Within the context of World War I's untenable devastation long poems offered opportunities to negotiate and overcome the felt gaps and historical traumas that many modernists and vanguardistas considered to be impediments to creativity, mobility, and synthesis. Notions of temporality, history, and myth in particular became points of departure and sites of invention and revision for many writers in the early twentieth-century as they sought to make sense of world-historical events such as war that threatened the coherence of a world system now undergoing radical transformation. For many, these transformations suggested the significance of the past as a source of renewal and regeneration. In this way, the long poem's positive and creative efforts to synchronize time and the self with its history provide a bridge that closes the gap between the relative durations of history, community and the self that seem constitutive of historical and individual subjects. Whereas nature had been a source of inspiration and redemption for romantic poets and the form of the poem therefore capable of embodying an ontological fullness, history becomes a similar source of fullness and possibility for many Anglo-American modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Eliot's and Pound's desires to write "poems including history," or modernist epics, betrayed their dissatisfaction with the present that limited access

to “the hidden dynamic of world history” (Surette 36). *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* were products of this dissatisfaction that shared a desire to “escape” the New World for the values offered by European literary traditions. As James Longenbach points out in *Modernist Poetics of History*, both Pound and Eliot longed for a sense of history that immersion within a more traditional context could offer, and they believed that “a healthy relationship with the past [was] essential for the highest quality of life and literature in the present” (11). Although critics have long pointed out the problematic way these poets’ methods rely on the presence of “the rightly inclined reader” (Baker 79) who can access the poems’ public presentation of values as a total system, Eliot’s and Pound’s elevation of the poem as an instrument of metahistorical awareness does not completely articulate this new role that poetry can play in rendering history coherent. Rather, the “poem including history” transposes historical referent into a ritual invocation that not only, as Longenbach points out, offers a sense of the past but also a “sense of the sense” of the past. Pound and Eliot “were occupied not only with the actual recollection of the past but with the process and methodology of that recollection” (Longenbach 12). The long poem including history becomes a space where historical remnants and details can dispose their significance to the present and the formal instrument or method that enables this redistribution of history’s constitutive presence within modernity. Longenbach stresses the importance of Pound’s and Eliot’s revision of historical practices that recognize the way history itself is a medium of cognition and experience.

The kinds of historical perception offered in the long poem reject nineteenth-century models of history that emphasize the linear and progressive development of human subjects over time (Longenbach 26). Both Eliot and Pound represented history not as a discrete time line of empirically verifiable objects and events but rather as energy, movement and momentum made manifest by “artistic intuition rather than scientific categorization” (Longenbach 26). For example, in *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound writes, “We do NOT know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our time” (60). In his study of the occult origins of modernist aesthetic experiment, *The Birth of Modernism*, Leon Surette offers a useful example. He finds significant Pound’s reliance on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as a model of figural and cultural transformation wherein the specific function of palingenesis, or “backward birth,” provokes a generative moment of human potential. Pound writes, “I assert a great treasure of verity exists for mankind in Ovid and in the subject matter of Ovid’s long poem, and that only in this form could it be registered” (*Guide to Kulchur* 299). The formal transformations from human into animal in *Metamorphoses* re-enact, for Pound, a process of reintegration that moves the subject of history into larger horizons of continuity with historical and spiritual processes. The poetics of embodiment in Ovid’s long poem, as Pound calls it, rely on moments of figurative transformation that “return” humanity and human potential to its generative sources by sublating the ego’s anthropomorphic drive. Not just an analogue that helps to explain Pound’s own

poetics of borrowing and return, palingenesis is part of Pound's poetics, a process of looking backwards that reconfigures the peripheries of consciousness, moving the modern subject into wider horizons and unveiling immanent yet occluded aspects of experience. In this way, the poet, as Surette suggests, becomes the self-authorized initiate of an occult system of knowledge that persists outside of institutionalized knowledge. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot likewise conceives of history as a dynamic process of energy exchange or transformation wherein the poet is a catalyst that continuously recalibrates the textures and lines of history by way of present actions and understandings. My point in bringing up these examples is to illustrate how the particulars of the past of historical experience for Pound and Eliot were best communicated in the form of a long poem, precisely because poems can offer as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* implies, embodied acts of awareness that transform experience.

In retrospect, Pound's and Eliot's models of history at first appear problematic as well as untenable given the kinds of historical events that transpire after the advent of modernism. Unlike other practitioners of the long poem that I will discuss in this study, Pound's vision was motivated by a desire to have the poem do the work of critique as a public presentation of values. But Pound's work is not regarded for having succeeded in redeeming the fragmentation of modernity but rather for fostering the kinds of formal experiments that push cultural assumptions and foundations to their limits. In an essay on Pound in *Poetic License* Marjorie Perloff suggests, for example, that Pound's collage method has become a more

influential force in postmodern and contemporary experimentation than Pound's self-authorized capacity to unify history. Nevertheless, I want to argue, it is important to understand how these early poems helped to elevate the status of the long poem as an aesthetic as well as a cultural and a historical medium, and it is important to consider how the ritual procedures that attempt to accommodate visionary experience in these poems might produce more than mere rhetorical effects.

The *longue durée* of the long poem in the twentieth century attests to this form's capacity to provide a means of expression for articulating reactions to and making perceptible the kinds of world-historical transformations and traumatic events that define late modernity. Within this understanding, the long poem's historiographic interventions often attempt to "restore the spirit of humanism" rather than critique it (Longenbach 104). But some poets and literary figures tended in their praxis and in their thematic concerns to critique, or at least interrupt this desire to think of the long poem as a vehicle for the restoration of European values. "Against the Old World," writes Robert Duncan in *The H.D. Book*, and against "the cult of Europe." (145). Other critical itineraries reroute the trajectory of the long poem away from its European orientation and towards its constitutive peripheries where experiences of exile and displacement are not only more palpable but also significant sources of meaning that help to shape the effects of this genre. Consider as an example the figure of Federico García Lorca, whose long poem, *Poeta en Nueva York*, offers a complicated paradigm of belonging that undermines the conventional pattern of privilege and mobility found in Pound's, H.D.'s, and Eliot's "return" to the centers of

literary tradition. Although *Poeta en Nueva York* maintains an ambivalent relationship with the landscapes of the New World and in particular with New York, critical moments of disidentification underscore the long poem's expansive and combinatory derangement of world systems. In this way, if Pound's and Eliot's poems catalyze and reveal aspects of human potential that remain dormant within modernity's historical dispensations, then perhaps Lorca's poem thematizes an even more radical sense of displacement as a pre-condition for the long poem's hemispheric negotiations.

In his essay, "A Poetics of Non-Encounter," Carl Good argues that Lorca traveled to New York under the pretense of mutual cultural exchange, but in response Lorca found the industrial landscape of North America dehumanizing. His poetic remaking of this experience places him at right angles to many of the dominant narratives of modernist cosmopolitanism.⁶ Unlike Williams, for example, who embraces technology as a regenerative source for the invention of forms, Lorca's poem evokes a greater sense of nostalgia for a classical past located in the registers of song more than in the machinery of the poem itself. However, the attendant

⁶ Good's essay takes as its point of departure Phillip Levine's poem, "On the Meeting of García Lorca and Hart Crane," which describes a failed meeting between Lorca and Hart Crane and the horror experienced by their translator who appears to have been underwhelmed—and somehow traumatized—by their encounter. Good considers Lorca's failure to connect with Crane during their single meeting to participate in a topology of "non-encounter" in the history of North America's literary relations with its peripheries. Good's point, I think, is that as readers we witness the palpable evidence, the effects of this failure in the logics of literary studies that remain constrained by national and linguistic boundaries. That is, to wish for, in the subjunctive, the telos of an encounter between Lorca and Crane, is to wish for another history, and to create the possibility for "unreading" dominant narratives of literary tradition. The translator can thus be read as a figure for the critic left groping after a sense of how this meeting could have influenced Lorca's writing. Nevertheless, even though Lorca's meeting with Crane does not appear in *Poeta en Nueva York* as content, the overt homosexual themes and desires in "Oda a Walt Whitman," for example, leave a residue of another sort.

atmosphere of pain and isolation is only one of many modes Lorca employs in *Poeta*. Often this atmosphere and the overwhelming sense of despair are accompanied by an active desire for transformation, which the poems provide. Many poems, for example, seek out potentially transformative places such as rooftops or times of day such as dusk in order to effectuate a more dynamic relationship with New York and to communicate with the city beyond its capitalist machinery. These liminal times and spaces constitute a complicated social practice or experience of the city's geography that skirts its normative behaviors. "Oda a Walt Whitman," for example, is, according to John K. Walsh, "perhaps the most...significant modern poem about homosexualities" (257). This focus adds an important dimension to the sense of dislocation, to the topoi of edges and riverbanks, and to the liminal temporalities of dusk and sunset that invoke a spatial practice of queer ambivalence. Paul Julian Smith argues that this ambivalence pushes against the sense of "exhaustion" that characterizes Lorca studies and the desire to fix Lorca as the unofficial national poet of Spain.⁷ The oppositions that often structure the text between Spain and the New World, between life and death, between surrealism and classicism, and between the capitalist white culture of New York and the African-American night-life of Harlem

⁷ Smith relies on Freud's theory of ambivalence to map Lorca's complicated experience of New York City as a source of both pain and pleasure. The importance of ambivalence, according to Smith, "is that it refuses the resolution of the dichotomy [between opposing desires or terms] through either inclination (the opting for one term over another) or equilibrium (the dialectical synthesis of two terms). Thus in ambivalence affirmation and negation (love and hate, activity and passivity) are simultaneous and inseparable" (170). Smith considers ambivalence an "appropriate model" for a critical relationship to the sense of dislocation in Lorca's text that will not accommodate theories of Lorca's Spanish identity and subsequent displeasure with New York. One must apply a flexible "double-vision" to accommodate the different yearnings in *Poeta* and in order not to privilege one version of Lorca over another.

is thus “not dualistic but dynamic” (Smith 170). In the terms of this dissertation, the dynamic structures of figuration within the text indicate a more radical sense of the spatio-temporal realities that shape experience, a sense of dislocation that engenders the imagination. Lorca’s poem “Oda a Walt Whitman,” for example, enacts transformation by providing the artefactual space where Walt Whitman can coexist in the same space and time as a ruined New York landscape. In an almost typological reading of Whitman, Lorca interprets the wasteland in New York’s industrial ruins as the fragment that his own poem redeems. The figure of Whitman provides the source of illumination that makes possible the poem’s particular disposition and homosexual orientation. This redemption is not completely imaginary, because, as an important piece of gay history, the poem also incorporates Lorca as part of that history, making him one of its material agents.

Poeta en Nueva York represents an anomaly that many critics find uncharacteristic of the mostly Andalusian themes one can find in Lorca’s work, but because it so uncharacteristic in this way, it offers an opportunity to critique the persistent nationalism that defines much of literary studies. Heather Pratt, for example, opens her essay on *Poeta en Nueva York* critiquing the notion that Lorca produced his most authentic work in Spain (248). This suggestion, Pratt implies, positions Lorca as “símbolo y cifra de todo lo español,” thus leaving little room for *Poeta en Nueva York* to play a role in defining Lorca’s praxis (Manuel Durán, quoted in H. Pratt 248). But Pratt’s purpose is to focus on the recurrent topos of displacement in *Poeta* as emblematic of all of Lorca’s work and not just as an anomaly that characterizes his

physical exile. The movement between surrealism and classicism in his writing and the evocation of older, folk forms of cultural expression such as duende, for example, point to a confluence of influences.

Nathaniel Mackey considers Lorca's position between the Old and the New World and between different valences of cultural belonging, indicative of a new global orientation that privileges mixture and dissonance. Mackey writes:

It is interesting that Lorca makes the Old World-New World connection, a black connection, a connection between duende, black song in Spain, canted moro, and black song in Cuba... Lorca is relevant to new American possibilities, to an American newness that is about mix, the meeting of different cultural styles and predispositions. He was interested in Old World predecessor mixes like those in Andalusia, whose further inflections in the Americas he recognized and embraced. (*Paracritical Hinge* 183)

Within the New World context Mackey describes, the esoteric values associated with duende and cante moro continue to resonate not as a source of lost coherence but as present actions that structure the ambivalent nature of experience. Deep song and duende were not easy for Lorca to define, and, in fact, as Mackey writes, "he doesn't so much define duende as grope after, wrestle with it, evoke it through strain, insist on struggle" (*Paracritical Hinge* 183). In "Deep Song," for example, Lorca writes, "Deep song is imbued with the mysterious color of primordial ages.... deep song is a stammer, a wavering emission of the voice, a marvelous buccal undulation that smashes the resonant cells of our tempered scale" (*In Search of Duende* 3). In "Play and Theory of Duende," he further defines the relation between cante moro, or deep song, and duende: "All arts are capable of duende, but where it finds greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance, and spoken poetry, for these arts require a living body to

interpret them, being forms that are born, die, and open their contours against an exact present” (*In Search of Duende* 54). In aphoristic phrases, Lorca slowly allows the spirit and principle of duende to emerge as a condition of the body’s finitude, of its historicity that manifests in the mutable, changeable rhythms of experience. In song rather than speech, in the past rather than in the present, Lorca figures duende as that which takes over the duration of the individual voice, inflecting it with another time period and with the pressures of the dead, and disposing it to something active in the language that dissolves the individual ego. Understood another way, duende behaves like the ambivalence in Lorca’s spatial queering of New York that resists the “exact present” of the city’s contours. Duende’s cross-cultural and hemispheric reach thus behaves like H.D.’s palimpsests or like the mute stones of the Incas in Neruda’s *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu*: they are figures and artefacts of human agency that can no longer communicate the totality of their cause but instead, and as a result, provoke the generative labor of cultural and cognitive dissonance. Mackey’s argument also implies that Lorca’s affinity for African-American and Afro-Cuban culture allows Lorca to triangulate the unilateral position of North American hegemony. The inflections of duende in the New World infer a spatial mapping of a secret history. The consciousness of duende does not move within official networks of exchange but in the inflections of memory, spirit, affect, rhythm, and desire, those material and immaterial forces that poetry in particular can sustain.

Octavio Paz is another figure whose avant-garde praxis resists coherence in favor of prismatic routes and refractions. For example, as a former Mexican

ambassador to India, Paz embodies a mode of avant-garde belonging that situates him in an expansive spatial imaginary such that his work privileges a real and imagined lateral movement from one colonial “periphery” to another. Paz wrote extensively about India and its literary, religious and cultural traditions in a way that informed not only his understanding of world literature and politics but also his conceptualizations of poetic form and his theorizations of time and modernity.⁸ A late long poem *Blanco* (1966), for example, attempts to enact the avant-garde praxis of “simultaneism” along with the principle of tantric art. Paz writes in *La Otra Voz*:

El simultaneísmo—a veces llamado cubismo poético—fue otra manifestación, a veces brutal y casi siempre eficaz, del principio cardinal de la poesía romántica y simbolista: la analogía. El poema es una totalidad movida—conmovida—por la acción complementaria de la afinidad y la oposición entre las partes.
(48-49)

[Simultaneism—sometimes called poetic cubism—was another manifestation, sometimes crude and almost always forceful, of the cardinal principle of romantic poetry and symbolism: the analogy. The poem is a total movement—a disturbance—through the complementary action of affinity and the opposition between parts.]

Simultaneism names an avant-garde tendency perhaps already familiar to readers, but Paz understands its significance against a larger background and within a context that renegotiates its origin. According to Robert Cantú, “Paz contends that simultaneism was an art that favored world classicisms other than the Greco-Roman resulting in concrete expressions in poetry, cinema, and painting” (56). The point of simultaneism

⁸ These works include *Conjunctions and Disjunctions*, a collection of essays on tantra and surrealism, among other topics, and *The Monkey Grammarian*, a meditation on the origins of language. He also wrote a preface on Tantra that accompanied a Tantric art exhibition held in Paris in 1970 and then later in Mexico City, which Paz himself helped to organize. This collection of art has been recently republished although without Paz’s introduction. See Franck André Jamme, *Tantra Song*. New York: Siglio, 2011.

was to produce a perception of arrangements that accented their spatiality and contiguity thus diminishing the temporal elapse between parts. This technique could thus establish harmony between parts in a visual field. Paz composed *Blanco* with these principles in mind as he attempted to map the values of simultaneity in a temporal medium. In doing so Paz also adopts some aspects of tantric art in his effort to represent discrete opposites as coextensive unities.⁹ *Blanco* must be apprehended spatially as a geography of the self's immersion into and awareness of its constituent parts. Here is an example from the text:

entera en cada parte te repartes *las espirales transfiguraciones*
 tu cuerpo son los cuerpos del instante *es cuerpo el tiempo el mundo*
 visto tocado desvanecido *pensamiento sin cuerpo el cuerpo imaginario*

contemplada por mis oídos	<i>Horizonte de musica tendida</i>
olida por mis ojos	<i>Puente colgante del color al aroma</i>
acariciada por mi olfato	<i>Olor desnudez en las manos del aire</i>
(188)	

[in each part of you you give yourself whole *spirals transfiguraciones*
 the bodies of the instant are your body *time is body world is body*
 seen touched vanished *bodiless thought the imaginary body*

contemplated by my hearing	<i>Expanding horizon of music</i>
tasted by my eyes	<i>Hanging bridge from colour to aroma</i>
caressed by my scent	<i>Odour nakedness in the hands of air]</i>
(189)	

⁹ Tantra is understood to be a spiritual practice rather than a philosophical or academic discipline. It elevates and intensifies rather than suppresses the phenomena of experience as a path to liberation. The spatial arrangements of Tantric art, writes Franck André Jamme, “rejects speculation” and recommends “action, direct experience” (99). As such, surrealism and tantra are often discussed as similar kinds of practices that can liberate the body from conventional habits of mind. Paz found many affinities between tantra and Andre Breton’s surrealist practice, for example and he writes about Breton in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions*. However, I would suggest that Westernized notions of tantra overly associate it with sexual acts and thus with the liberating potential in particular of the female body. According to Bharati, quoted in Jason Wilson’s study of Octavio Paz, “Tantras ‘are not collections of manuals on sex’ but ‘doctrinal texts on spiritual emancipation.’” (133). See Jason Wilson, *Octavio Paz, a study of his poetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.

Moving between single columns and double columns of text, the spacing and lineation of the work multiplies the reading angles and asks to be read beyond one dimension.¹⁰ Blanco is not completely a tantric poem, Wilson suggests: “The form and typography of the poem owe much to Mallarme but little else to Tantra, except perhaps for the fusing and separating of the left and right hand columns with the central, single lined column” (139). Although perhaps not strictly tantric in its behavior, *Blanco* does initiate a reading practice that can become a meditative and experiential engagement of the whole body with more subtle dimensions of experience.

One could also map simultaneism onto the real coordinates of Paz’s biography and onto the capacious, international lens he brought to his appreciation and understanding of world literary traditions. By identifying himself with an adopted or second home (India), Paz underscores the vexed role that “home” plays as a topos in early twentieth-century writing, given that many writers either willfully or by other less privileged means experienced forms of cultural and geographical mobility, exile, and displacement. But he also suggests that human identity is, in its parts, both here and not here, before and after, inside (the self) and outside (in the world). Paz’s version of modernity is thus prismatic, constituted by ruptures in time and space that enable creative movements across real and imagined forms of experience.

¹⁰ The original publication of *Blanco* could not be reproduced or supported by a conventional book format, but as Julia Kushigian suggests, this format better represented the aspects of simultaneism that Paz yoked together with Tantra. She writes, “In the original, boxed edition the poem is read as it is unfolded, so that space and time disperse with the fixed image, calling the reader in to the decipher the mandala” (81). See Julia Kushigian, *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy*.

V. A Hemispheric Poetics of the Long Poem

In my study, I have used the terms hemispheric and New World thus far in order to define a field of material relations these texts help to compose and in order to position my work within an emergent field of modernist studies that aims to redefine the temporal and spatial maps of modernism. By looking across three continents, two languages (and even more dialects and regional differences), and multiple national boundaries, my comparative framework provides access to the kinds of historical, cultural, and temporal burdens that underscore the writing of long poems. Enlarging the context of my analysis to include the tradition of long poems written in Latin America expands the role literary modernism plays in responding to modernity, an argument that can de-emphasize narratives of progress and development, which position Latin America as merely a source of materials or inspiration but not as constitutive of literary traditions or discourses about modernity. Placed alongside Latin-American texts, certain desires in Anglo-American texts can also achieve a different focus, wherein the values of modernity are refracted, or “provincialized” in order to loosen the kinds of narratives often associated with canonical modernism.¹¹

For example, as I suggested, I consider how a closer look at Federico García Lorca as a hemispheric New World writer usefully critiques notions of literary privilege

¹¹ I use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument in *Provincializing Europe* that the values of temporal progress associated with modernity depend on an uneven and unilateral relation between European cosmopolitan modernity and its peripheries. To provincialize Europe is thus to insist on the multilateral and non-contemporaneous presents that compose the global system of modernity. Insisting on this practice requires a new set of materials for study: literary, religious, imaginative, and mythical, for example, which shift the gaze away from narratives of development. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton UP, 2007.

associated with writers such as H.D., Pound and Eliot. One narrative of the modernist long poem might emphasize their “return” to Europe and how such a return is thematized in their poems’ invocation of pre-American and pre-capitalist figures and desires.¹² But another narrative might emphasize the kind of reverse return thematized in Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York*. This “reverse return” does not simply reroute the site of an origin into another locale but critiques the accessibility and possibility of return in the first place. To reverse or invert the dynamic of a return provides a discursive intervention that critiques the logic of origins. In a New World context, this critique is imperative, and for Lorca, it offers a hermeneutics of time and space that accommodates the flexible desires of emergent subjectivities vis-à-vis historical change.

While it might be true that Lorca and his New World writing do not really fit within the framework I’ve established, my point is not to make texts fit but to aggregate these works in new relations that reveal unconventional or anachronistic associations. A good model for this practice is Nathaniel Mackey’s *Discrepant Engagement*, a study of twentieth-century cross-cultural poetic practices that considers Charles Olson and Robert Duncan in the same breath as Wilson Harris and Kamau Brathwaite. Mackey’s study enhances connections and counterpoints among a

¹² I would argue that even the invocation of Greek, Medieval, pre-Columbian, and other mythological figures within modernist and avant-garde texts likewise “provincializes” the forward, progressive orientation of modernism, sometimes deliberately as in Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General*, which tries to offer a coherent narrative of Latin-American history as a discourse independent of European influence, and sometimes, perhaps by accident, as in the case offered by Pound’s *The Cantos*, which reveals complicated desires for the resources of different cultural traditions such as colonial America and Hellenic Greece. Modernism and modernity, as Octavio Paz has suggested, are thus perhaps more accurately understood as sites of crisis and conflict between the new and old, between “la tradición y la ruptura.”

range of texts, and his method embraces the open forms and musical propensities within the texts themselves. By thus making “categorization creak,” he pushes association into places that make texts less accessible, thus implying that some cultural meanings can often only be communicated through methods that resist epistemological closure and correspondence (*Discrepant Engagement* 21).

These kinds of flexible groupings in literary studies evince a need to remake the disciplinary terrain such that new aspects, attitudes and capacities are brought to light, not only to reimagine the discursive potential of imaginative works but also to give the study of literature a new purpose. After all, as Wai Chee Dimock writes in *Through Other Continents*, “American authors have made of point of engaging” material that extends beyond the boundaries of the short life-span of the humanities into “written records going back five or six thousand years, and oral, musical, and visual material going back further” (6). Dimock draws our attention to how difficult it is to historicize literary texts and forms given their propensity to produce echoes and repetitions across multiple centuries, leap over (and often bypass) national and linguistic boundaries, and keep the voices, visions and desires of the dead alive. Dimock’s method is to consider the multiple “resonances” that echo across the non-standard time of literary texts. She thus shares Kutzinski’s desire to refract the mirror of American literature and calls for the use of other terms and methods that capture the complex movements of meaning across the arbitrary boundaries of nations. Kutzinski uses the term “New World” in her study of Williams, José Guillén and Jay Wright, whereas Dimock “propose[s] a new term—‘deep time’—to capture”, as she

suggests, “a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations” (3-4). American literature thus “emerges with a much longer history than one might think (Dimock 4).¹³ By expanding the scale of time that subtends the movement of meaning in texts, Dimock opens up the associative dimension of literature beyond the boundaries of the nation and the human, offering a newly renovated purpose for reading literature as a reflection of what extends beyond the limits of the self.

Dimock’s writing accompanies a recent surge in comparative frameworks in literary studies that emphasize more complex spatio-temporal affinities.¹⁴ These notions of time access more subtle, perhaps “unmanifest” capacities in texts, and they try to provoke, by extension, similar capacities in the material relations between human agents. A case study useful to my own framework is offered by Justin Read in *Modern Poetics and Hemispheric American Cultural Studies*, which takes the

¹³ For example, in the chapter, “The Planetary Dead: Margaret Fuller, Ancient Egypt, Italian Revolution,” Dimock develops a theory of “large-scale causation, based on remote agency, unforeseen effects, action at a distance” (53). A larger and more sublime route of causation makes possible, for example, the emergence of a feminist identity within a time scale that includes both the living and the dead. What this means is that the political designation “woman” has to be understood as “durational,” as the effect of long-term macro changes in populations that resonate beyond the limited political time-scale of the modern individual. Changing the scale to think in terms of numbers and probability rather than individuals alters the framework for considering the effects of causation and creates “posthumous kinship” with the dead. Dimock speaks of “statistical offspring” rather than biological offspring. Feminist exceptions such as Margaret Fuller are thus not exceptions or anomalies (as they would appear in a smaller-scale rendering of the time of the individual) but are statistical probabilities. They are types or kinds that can reappear given the right conditions. When the dead are considered along with the living in this way, “the center of gravity” of civilization is thus no longer Western and no longer modern (59).

¹⁴ See, for example Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism and Synthetic Vernacular Writing*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010; Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms* (Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2004); and Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2009). For a useful overview of these recent trends in modernist studies see Susan Stanford Friedman, “Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies.” *Modernism/Modernity* 17.3 (2010): 471-499 and Andres Huyssen, “Geographies of modernism in a globalizing world.” *Geographies of Modernism*. Eds. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker. New York: Routledge, 2004.

process-oriented nature of twentieth-century poems as a ground for understanding a process-oriented world-system based in fluid hemispheric relations. Hemispheric thinking, as a result, allows the critic to access the process-oriented nature of poems as an effect of the changing dynamic of world relations. As a result of these conditions, Read's study puts pressure on the supposed authenticity and exceptional nature of American identity, suggesting that American literature props up American identity as an institutional fiction masking the colonial processes underpinning American historical consciousness. Thus, as "contextual process[es]" poems can provide special access to American culture as a "modern, historical process" (xxiv). He thus reads texts for the ways they "disrupt the common sphere of Americanism," showing how different poetic works (Williams's *Spring and All*, for example) participate in the fictional negotiations of American identity and, in particular, in practices of migration and translation that undermine the coherence of an organic American self (Read xxviii). Read suggests in his close reading of *Spring and All* that the self emerges out of a process of "dynamic differentiation" that is "far from heroic, nor even organic" (3).

In *Transatlantic Translations* Julio Ortega similarly argues that the "invention of America," predicated on an organic "newness" of the New World, was in fact "perceived in terms of the already conceived, the different [was] constituted by what was already known, and the unnamed seen through what had been already read" (9). While Read works horizontally through avant-garde texts across two hemispheres, Ortega works vertically through time, looking at texts from the Spanish Renaissance

and the conquest to more recent Latin-American examples that reflect the same discursive preoccupations. Ortega does so in order to constellate an archive of writing constitutive of Latin-American cultural signifiers, and his point is to understand the newness of the “American marvelous” as a discursive production dependent on extant European cultural ideas whose objects of desire were the products (resources and ideologies) of New World abundance (*Transatlantic Translations* 9). Latin-American cultural production is thus a “transatlantic” process, as are the discourses of abundance, poverty, isolation, and resistance that have characterized debates about Latin-American identity since the conquest. Read and Ortega rely on the discursive possibilities offered in literary texts precisely because they offer access to the processes of identity-making that constitute the fictions of social institutions. These frameworks suggest the importance of looking beyond national and historical boundaries in order to understand how the forces at work in texts can more adequately explain the complicated processes similarly at work in social and political relations.

Considered within the larger context of the geopolitical transformations that define the twentieth century, these compositional processes and historical questions suggest the way in which the coherence of the world system becomes untenable, unable to account for emergent social, economic and political realities. New models of historical understanding must accommodate the discrepant experience of living within the complications wrought by empire, scientific and technological revolutions, and war. Thus it makes sense not only to consider the role that Eliot’s and Pound’s

poems may have played in increasing the sense of fragmentation of experience but also to consider this process as an inherently post-colonial response to world-historical transformations in conceptions of space and time. In the Latin-American context George Yúdice calls this process the “carnivalization of modernity” (73). Yúdice’s discussion focuses in particular on trends on Latin American aesthetics that privilege the marvelous, the fantastic and the surreal, trends that signify Latin America’s negotiation with imperialism and European hegemony.

I want to borrow Yúdice’s framework in order to account for the activities of the long poem and to build an argument about the hemispheric poetics expressed within both Anglo-American and Latin-American forms. These arguments substantiate the notion that cultural practices in the Americas emerges out of a critical rather than merely receptive relationship with European influence. Indeed, while it might make sense to consider the role Anglo-American modernism played in influencing the production of Latin-American long poems, Latin American’s engagement with long poems as a vehicle of cultural reintegration and critique is not so easily explained. The simultaneous emergence of these long poems in disparate contexts suggests the necessity of employing a different understanding of the relationship between literary production and historical influence such that literary form emerges according to a different set of cultural logics than the models of time in modernity might imply. Yúdice’s intervention will thus help to establish a framework for understanding the relationship between these formal aesthetic experiments and the histories of modernity they attempt to rewrite. My point will be to expand the

framework for considering the long poem's relationship to modernity by understanding its original reinvention of history not only as a critique of modernity but also as a critique of European colonialism.

One of Yúdice's important arguments is his consideration of "the imperialist crisis" as a defining condition that made possible the emergence of avant-garde cultures in the early twentieth century. Yúdice remaps Perry Anderson's analysis of the conditions that shape the possibility of avant-garde experiments by adding a fourth circumstance. Not only does this circumstance account for Latin-American peripheries when conceptualizing the limits of the avant-garde but it also reframes European avant-gardes within a post-colonial context. Anderson's three conditions, or "decisive coordinates" that shape modernism include, "...the codification of a highly formalized academicism in the visual and other arts, which itself was institutionalized within official regimes of states and society"; "the still incipient, hence essentially novel, emergence within these societies of the key technologies or inventions of the second industrial revolution"; and "the imaginative proximity of social revolution" (104). These three constitutive features provoke a reconceptualization of the possibilities for life in modernity in the twentieth century and provide subjects of modernity with the means to reshape the limits of their social, political and cultural lives. Yet Yúdice also considers the "imperialist crisis" to be another significant feature of social life that undermines or makes possible a reconsideration of the values of modernity, a process, Yúdice clarifies, that does not inevitably unfold from the institutionalization of art in bourgeois society but rather helps to promote "a

diversity of particular symbolic responses to an historical conjuncture of social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances” (63). What emerges is an “unsynthesized heterogeneity” of symbolic responses and forms that cannot be “explained by any single factor” (Yúdice 64). Fernando Rosenberg also explains:

Latin American...vanguardism must not be read as a part of a single line of [European] progress that only belatedly catches up with Latin America. Neither can it be considered native offspring, a new attempt to unveil a local nucleus of identity that remained untouched by, or that at least decelerated, the wave of modernization or that selectively and cogently consumed its products. Instead, I invite the reader to recognize the modernity of Latin American avant-gardes as enunciations from and about a global, simultaneous dynamic. This concern with positionality implies that the division between margins and centers, although unavoidable, is always in the making, continually reformulated, reinforced, and contested.... (16)

Rosenberg articulates a common criticism of theories of Latin-American vanguard practices that consider them to be peripheral or alternative modernities that supplement their European points of influence. In this framework Latin America is positioned merely as a source of materials or inspiration but not as constitutive of literary traditions or discourses about modernity. Gwen Kirkpatrick similarly suggests that within the “context of global modernity, the Latin American case can only be seen as deficient, since its particular processes of modernisation are not viewed as paradigmatic but as marginal, uneven, or even failed copies of the paradigm” (181). Situating texts within a narrative that privileges the progress not only of political life but also of aesthetic and cultural forms thus fails to account for the ways in which avant-garde and modernist texts interrupt patterns of representation and provoke new models of interpretation and experience that do not assume the values of development as their precondition.

Yúdice, like Rosenberg and Kirkpatrick, envisions these avant-gardes as part of a dynamic simultaneity of cultural practices. The particular textures and formal experiments offered in long poems as different as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, for example, and Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor*, can thus be read against this larger, more expansive and more heterological background that accounts for multiple and simultaneous conditions of possibility in disparate geographic and linguistic contexts. The emergence of these formal practices thus makes possible, Yúdice continues, a sense that "[Latin America's] own ontology is always unfinalized" (64). The carnivalization of modernity exposes the always unfinished character of social life not only in modernity's peripheries but also in its centers.

By invoking Yúdice's argument, I want to suggest that these long forms emerge as exemplary mediums of innovation during this historical moment that make possible the expression of material heterogeneity and incompleteness. In light of this argument, one cannot claim the presence of a single modernity but of many modernities or, perhaps even more accurately, what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls "noncontemporaneous" presents. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty has argued for the importance of reading for the simultaneity of these "noncontemporaneous" presents within post-colonial contexts that interrupt the hegemony of European secular modernity and which account for the persistence of perhaps more poetic modes of knowing that help to shape conceptions of everyday life and social relations. Chakrabarty's use of the term noncontemporaneous also helps us to distinguish a conception of modernity in its discontinuous and fractured forms across all

geopolitical terrains, including Europe, as opposed to the notion of alternative or peripheral modernisms that I discuss. His argument can thus help frame discussions of poetic works that thematize modes of historical consciousness or historiographic writing, which reach beyond the linear temporalities of modernity.

Chapter One: The Shape of War

In this chapter, I explore three poems that, by engaging the complexity of war as both a force of violent destruction and a force of possibility, attempt to give war a perceptual unity that more adequately embodies these contradictions. I consider three texts: David Jones' *In Parenthesis*, which provides an intense and hallucinatory description of the author's experience fighting in the trenches in World War I; César Vallejo's *España, aparta de mí este caliz*, which offers an extended homage and elegy for the Republican volunteers that fought on behalf of the elected government during the Spanish Civil War; and H.D.'s *Trilogy*, which interprets the apocalyptic ruins of the London Blitz during World War II as a potential site of cultural and artistic renewal. Each of these poems exposes a tragic dimension of history but also tries to imagine war as a site of redemption and innovation. Each text also takes as a point of departure and a poetic framing device, a specific technology or mode of war (trench warfare, civil war, and aerial bombing) and refigures them as textual conditions and potential sites of social relation that can overcome disenchantment, fragmentation and stasis.

In Jones's *In Parenthesis*, for example, the claustrophobic experience fighting in the trenches provides a framework to recreate the past and its vast, seemingly long-lost resources that reach into the present. Loss of perspective, agency, and identity within the trenches reorganizes the orders of perception, yielding a text that moves both vertically and horizontally through war's chaos. Vallejo's *España* makes use of the event of civil war between the Republicans and the fascists as an opportunity to

explore the civic and civil qualities of poetic naming. While the fascists deployed total war tactics that ultimately defeated the elected Republican government, Vallejo's poem represents a different experience of war from the point of view of the brigades of volunteers who put aside minor partisan differences in order to effect historical change. And H.D.'s *Trilogy* takes its cues from the blitz. Aerial bombing radically altered London's urban profile, but H.D.'s poetic rendering of the blitz sees beyond the façade of ruination in order to facilitate a palimpsestic pattern of meaning. All three poems make use of the poetic resources of language to rewrite history and to access the past, thus also offering visionary reworkings of the death and destruction wrought by total war.

These long poems are also engaged in hemispheric remodeling and rewriting as they interact discursively with the spatial and temporal coordinates of colonial modernity. My point is that war both participates in (or reveals itself as the inevitable outcome of) this legacy of conquest and border crossing but also gives permission to each author to interact with war as a form of cultural revision. In each poem, war is thus represented as a kind of watershed moment that permits its author to revise, expand, and rescale the limits of time, space, history, and geography. This tendency is most obvious in Vallejo's *España, aparta de mí este caliz*, which rewrites the colonial relationship between Spain and the New World. Vallejo, like other Latin-American poets and writers, such as Pablo Neruda, experienced the event of war as a way to revise Latin-America's subservient relationship with its colonial "stepmother." In fact, the Spanish Civil War became an international event that offered this potential to

revise the expectations of colonial modernity. Brigades of volunteers, from party-line communists to starry-eyed poets, flocked to Spain to defend the elected Republican government, thus for a time fending off Franco's forces and opening a suspended moment where relations of collectivity could be imagined. For its part, Vallejo's sequence of lyric poems in *España* invokes, names, and memorializes many of the fallen as well as the cities and regions that were "taken" and symbolically renamed by the fascists. In this sense, Vallejo's poem aggregates a different, unofficial history of the war, poetically naming its parts and its events according to the decolonial scope of Spain's civil war. Perhaps the total war tactics of Franco and his Italian and German supporters were officially given permission to control and define Spain, but in the context of Vallejo's poem, a more poetic mode of civil and civic belonging unfolds as a result of the hemispheric relations it envisions.

H.D.'s and David Jones's poems also revise, albeit in a more subtle way, the hemispheric coordinates that define modernity. My argument is that these poems also, not only by dint of being modernist long poems but also because they take on the scale of experience invoked by the catastrophic event of war, engage a hemispherically defined world of flexible peripheries and alliances. More specifically, Jones's *In Parenthesis* resuscitates lost literary particulars from Welsh and Arthurian symbolic systems, giving these meanings new force and continuity. H.D.'s *Trilogy* similarly excavates the resources of the past in order to redefine the scale of experience during the blitz. In this way, geographical, literary and historical peripheries are equally constitutive of the formal problems each poem represents.

Both poems may invest their symbolic energies in different regions of “Western” civilization, but both poems also interact with history as if it were a spatially coordinated domain, capable of being redrafted with new borders, territories, and limits. Overall, war gives permission to each author to reassign meaning to the past, and to participate in the past as a public rather than domestic or private domain. For British citizens in particular, World War I violently recalibrated their provincial attitude and forced them to consider Britain’s global, international position. In fact, one could argue that the poets who responded to these wars were more aware of their hemispheric meanings before these new global arrangements had become part of the larger cultural and political frame of reference for Britain. As Marina MacKay argues, despite the scale of death experienced by ordinary citizens in the aftermath of World War I, culturally and politically Britain did not catch up to this reality until World War II.¹⁵ But in a way, both H.D.’s and Jones’s poems become aware of the public, international and hemispheric potential of these wars and they make use of digressive, nonteleological forms of writing in the long poem to revise more culturally conservative or instrumental forms of belonging (9).

¹⁵ MacKay writes: “But what the Great War initiated, the Second World War realized. Britain’s political culture finally caught up with its interwar avant-garde, and this closing gap means that there’s a historical moment at which the polemical conflation of poetry and protest, literary and political dissent, ceases to ring true” (9). To offer an example, Francisco J. Romero Salvadó points out in his study on the Spanish Civil War that the British, along with France and the United States but for different reasons, refused to provide aid to the Republicans. Salvadó notes that General Franco was, to a certain extent, viewed by the British as a “good, prudent and conservative officer” who represented law and order (65). Moreover, Britain maintained neutrality in order to avoid any perceived allegiance with left wing factions, including the communists and anarchists, who had rallied together to form the Popular Front (Salvadó 65). Salvadó further clarifies that France, worried about displeasing the British, also withheld aid (63). The countries that provided aid to the Republicans were Russia and México.

I.

In a 1969 interview with George Bowering and Robert Hogg, Robert Duncan briefly discusses H.D.'s poem *The Walls Do Not Fall* in terms of its affinity with Marxist and Freudian hermeneutics. Duncan is interested in exploring the poem's desire to forge a composite of images or relations that unites the past with the present, between the past of Hellenic Greece, for example, and the present moment of World War II in H.D.'s London. In staging a palimpsest between layers of historical and personal meaning, H.D.'s poem, according to Duncan, fosters a process of interpreting the surfaces of the present for traces of past meanings and secret yet necessary truths. Hence Duncan's interest in couching the terms of the poem's process within the language of concealment and revelation typical of Marxist and Freudian discourse:

I was reading *The Walls Do Not Fall* when it was coming out in *Life and Letters Today*, so that would be 1942 or so, 42 or 43; and also by the time (in the late 1930s) when I got to college, Freud was fascinating, and in New York most of the people I knew were in the process of psycho-analysis; so by my 20s the essential idea that words not only mean—but then again what we are doing means something else. Now also this is in the period of Marxism, which is exactly the same as Freudianism in this regard. In Marx you don't just look at what's happening in history, you ask what does it mean.... The contribution of Marx to history is that there are no meaningless, or merely economic events; all events are meaningful through and in every layer... (5)

Duncan's comments respond specifically to lines in *The Walls Do Not Fall* that infer a need to practice looking beneath the unreality of the present in order to unlock necessary secrets: "but if you do not understand what words say,/how can you expect to pass judgment/on what words conceal?/" (1983, 517). For H.D. words say—they have an effect and create a surface—and they also conceal—they hide an occluded

history of forces that subtend the dynamics of experience, dynamics that often belong only to particular subjects. The generative force of the secret that must be unlocked and interpreted appears over and over again in H.D.'s work, and in this work it manifests in particular a capacity to respond in kind, as an equivalent, to the logics of war. H.D. argues on behalf of the hidden and the occult, celebrating, in particular, the private, secret spaces of the body that can deflect and dilute historical forces of annihilation. For H.D., multiple forms of bodily engagement such as reading, writing, and, ultimately, translating, compose the ritual space necessary to transpose the logics of instrumental reason into a new system.

By sweeping together the registers of Marxist interpretation and psychoanalysis, Duncan thus sees H.D. working in this vein to understand the secret histories of experience that, once revealed, can effectuate the integration of a subject into a larger and more purposive historical process. H.D.'s long poem becomes the formal palimpsest that yokes together disparate time periods in a composite space, and the palimpsest more generally for H.D. becomes a form of cultural work, a syncretic model of time that facilitates holistic understanding and a feeling for one's place in the movements of history. In this way, H.D. understood history less as a total system, perhaps, and more as a confluence of actions, registers of thinking and feeling, habits of mind, rhythms, and traces of influence that lay hidden in the pockets of the past, waiting to be revealed by the right initiate.

Although partly commenting on the spirit of his own moment and thus his own poetics and writings on war, Duncan's musings allow us a way to think about the

role poetry, or writing more generally, played for H.D. Spurred to experience World War II as a possible source of redemption rather than dissolution, H.D. actively engaged with the logics of war during the London blitz in order to initiate personal and historical metamorphosis. Even within the smallest and most enclosed of spaces, like the hermetically sealed worlds-within-worlds embodied by the oysters, clam shells, and mollusks that appear in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, a poet-initiate such as H.D. could unleash a dynamic vision of reality. Moreover, this vision would enable H.D. to experience the world and history free from cultural limitations. In her study *The Geometries of Modernism*, Miranda Hickman suggests, for example, that H.D.'s writing oscillates between a material realm of experience that limits her movement as a socially gendered body and a geometric realm that inscribes an ideal body free of social restraints. I suggest, therefore, that *Trilogy*, like David Jones's *In Parenthesis* and César Vallejo's *España, aparta de mi este calíz*, the other texts I consider in this chapter, locates itself between horizontal and vertical axes of figuration, wherein the horizontal embodies material or earthly limitations (and possibilities), and the vertical represents the emergence out of these earthly limitations into the monumental and the epic. These motivations emerge out of a desire to design poetic spaces of cultural preservation and belonging as much as they respond to the subject's becoming aware of their marginality vis-à-vis historical problems. In this context, *Trilogy* implies that linguistic and literary experiment issue from traumatic experience, and the "geometric body" offers an idealized model of spatio-temporal perfection, a place where the hidden can manifest its enunciative force. Resurrection motivates the vertical

movement of each text as it intensifies the levels of figuration, reaching back in time to link the present with other similarly transformative moments of violence and ruin.

In this chapter I will thus consider the role three long poems play in constructing poetic responses to war not only by resisting the logics of mass death and total destruction through different strategies of figuration but also by absorbing the war itself as a mode of perception. These works confront the discursive impressions of war and reflect how processes of thinking and life patterns change in the midst of these new distributions of space and history. I discuss how each of these poems provides a way to make sense of the event of war, and each poem gives war a shape or a perceptual unity that allows it to become thinkable and workable.

Moreover, each text also takes as a point of departure a specific technology or mode of war (trench warfare, civil war, and aerial bombing) and refigures these techniques as textual conditions and potential sites of social relation. I argue that H.D.'s *Trilogy*, David Jones' *In Parenthesis* and César Vallejo's *España aparta de mí este calíz* play a role in shaping a modern consciousness of war as simultaneously creative and destructive forces of reorganization. These poems invent strategies that synchronize individual experiences with the larger movements of time and history, and they employ violent rhetorics of metamorphosis, revolution and apocalypse that push language into discursive frontiers. My purpose is to consider poems whose rhythms are influenced by the procedures, techniques, and particular durations endemic to each war, and I consider how structures of figuration and patterns of representation contain and redistribute this experience. For example, although David Jones

published *In Parenthesis* almost twenty years after World War I had ended, his text provides an intense and hallucinatory re-enactment of fighting in the trenches. The pacing of Jones' text and the layering of voices, dialects, sounds, figures and styles attempts to embody what must have been a tedious, desperate, and claustrophobic experience. Vallejo composed the lyric cycle collected in *España* as the Spanish Civil War unfolded and thus it records the flux of sensation, anticipation, hope and resignation that defined the *durée* of the War and its influence on the cultural imagination. This poem imagines the fruits of Republican success in the form of friendship and community, and it figures the streets, landscapes, and citizens of Spain as topoi for the poem's spatial imaginary and its celebration of civil war as a potential form of unalienated labor. H.D.'s *Trilogy* reads the apocalyptic ruins of London during the blitz as openings in time that heal the fragments of the present. The walls and streets of London become hieroglyphs, emergent signs that collapse the stretch of time limiting H.D.'s access to the fullness of the past and its occluded traditions. Each of these texts thus imagines war as an occasion for experiment, for pushing language beyond routine forms of equivalence.

II. Total War, Total Poetry

In retrospect, the quality of expectation and redemption that colors *Trilogy*, the heroic anticipation of triumph and international community that buoys *España*, and the belief in the value of myth as a generative and constitutive force in *In Parenthesis* may seem to belong to a more naïve moment. Reading one of these

works might be similar to trying to reconstruct a medieval Provençal sestina or a Greek fragment. The words are there as marks on the page, the words “say something,” as H.D. tells us, but the meaning, the feeling for the emergent content, has been lost. The visionary escapes into the quotidian; the forces of redemption passed over for less sublime states of being. As a result, it is interesting to consider, from the point of the view of the 21st century, the kind of writing in these poems that takes, or seems to take, at face value, the possibility that writing, in a fundamental sense, *does* something by influencing the contours of experience and effecting changes in consciousness. But these texts do not exhibit the sense of lateness or “no-longer-newness” that many critics have argued underpins writing from the interwar period through World War II. Marina MacKay locates a similar kind of discrepancy between T.S. Eliot’s early and late long poems, *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, respectively. *The Waste Land* is turbulent and confused and seeks to inaugurate a beginning, whereas *Four Quartets* searches for qualities of closure and stillness and seeks to anticipate an ending. The latter poem speculates, as MacKay argues, “continually about what it would mean to make a good end” (1). Hence, this poem allegorizes the “end” of modernism just as it allegorizes the end of the poet’s own *oeuvre*. In his discussion of the “homecoming of the avant-garde poet” in the Latin-American context Fernando Rosenberg turns his attention towards the rhetorical potential of texts to introduce new forms of critical consciousness that complicate rather than uphold the correspondence between text, vision, and world. “The dismissal of emancipatory aspirations” in the later writings of vanguardistas

attenuates their homecoming from Europe and return to native languages and local sites of attachment (Rosenberg 136). This homecoming marks the avant-garde as a kind of degraded failure, and late modernism in Latin America is thus characterized by a turn towards the local and the colloquial.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell locates the seeds of many of the changes I describe above in World War I, arguing that an “abridged hope” diluted the spirit and the expectation for fulfillment as the arbitrary logics of war slowly overcame expectations for success. The scale of mass war in World War I and the aftermath of cultural shock that reverberated on many levels initiated an era of “political and social cognition” defined by irony (*The Great War* 35). Irony thus became a primary vehicle for communicating the aftershocks of a war that lasted beyond its temporal limits. It ushered in a climate of total war epitomized by the Republican Army’s unnecessary loss to the Nationalist’s during the Spanish Civil War. By the time World War II had started, the aspirations of early modernist and vanguard writing were found lacking, because the worlds these texts sought to materialize had not. The possibilities for experiment had been replaced by less redemptive worlds of trenches and gas attacks, of faceless and arbitrary slaughter, and eventually, of the atom bomb, all of which helped to usher in a cold war culture defined by “predictability, technology, and bureaucracy” (*Wartime* 26). Paul Saint-Amour tells us, for example, that World War I produced an important shift from war as contained struggle “toward ‘total war,’ ...in its turn from aristocratic pageantry and honor codes to technological, depersonalized, even democratized killing” (354).

Unlike other types of war and warfare throughout history, modern total wars and their technologies of suppression and annihilation come to be defined by temporal and spatial boundlessness that alters the limits of social life and human relations. Though less malevolent than the atom bomb, aerial photography, for example, overwhelms the vitality of “individual organicism,” forcing “bodies [to] recede” and become mere “data points in the emerging statistical epistemes that were cognate with the aerial perspective” (Saint-Amour 352). The technologies employed for aerial reconnaissance and data collection also threatened the “ancien scopic régime” of Cartesian perspective in painting and visual culture, creating a world that was suddenly much more connected and simultaneous but also that much more unstable (Saint-Amour 354).

In *Spirit in Ashes*, Edith Wyschogrod explains the stakes of total war in a different way. In her analysis, total war is a type of death-event particular to technological societies that includes “expatriation of populations, man-made famine, the effects of chemical defoliation, and so on” (Wyschogrod 52). These are “death-derived events” that perpetuate forms of genocide and extermination, thus radically altering futural expectations for entire communities and the scale of social life: “the phenomenon of mass death makes vividly present the possibility of the foreclosure of all experience by destroying countless living beings together with the structure which makes human experience possible” (Wyschogrod 13). The extreme rationality of total war, the record keeping, bureaucratization and management of death establish a new set of limits for social relations that threatens the life world and the authenticity

paradigm present in other generations. Technologies of mass death and social control precipitate this fall into the death world, whereby the life world that provides the ground of presence must now accommodate the death event and the sublimity of scale this event achieves. Within this context, relations that bring individuals together to form social bonds are strained, and, perhaps as many scholars of modernist literature imply, full of irony and detachment, even seeming to be written from the point of view of the hegemony of the death world and the null space of presence it creates. As Lawrence Surrutte implies in *The Birth of Modernism*, we have thus inherited a version of modernism that produces rhetorical effects and places emphasis on technique without visionary change, a modernism that, as MacKay further contends, offers strategies for reading but shies away from determining forms of engagement.

What I have sketched is somewhat of a generalization, but my point is that the three poems I consider here maintain a spirit of possibility, a desire to make something out of nothing and to rewrite the surfaces of reality. The authors I write about actively cultivated the possibilities of historical transformation and regarded the event of war in particular as a turning point, rather than merely a “fall,” that could productively threaten the commonsense of cultural expectations. To a certain extent, the omnipresence of total war engenders this contradiction between writing that values its worldly engagement and writing that betrays and reveals the fallible operations of those stakes. Cynicism, detachment, and alienation become more authentic forms of relation in the face of this total bureaucratization of experience. But in contrast to this evasion, the long poems I consider regard themselves as

visionary mediums, and war itself as a radical force that dilates and expands the present. Though it might be that the force of these total wars is the logical extension of the values of instrumental progress and reason these poems attempt to overcome, in a dialectical sense these wars also provide resources for the mind and experience. The logic of a type of war that defies the limits of perception and time and which unearths secrets of the past (sometimes literally), gives special permission to the poet to perform her own acts of plunder and her own strategies of signification, “to melt down and integrate,” as H.D. writes in *Trilogy*, the materials of the world in order to rebuild.

III.

The rhythms of language and description enabled by poetry provide a place to begin to understand how poems reflect the pressures of events like war, pressures that manifest within the textures, patterns and sounds of poems. Poetry, Christopher Nealon explores in a recent interview (“Poetry & Politics Roundtable”) with Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, “is a sensitive barometer of the present.” As potential barometers, poems register and measure the pressures of experience and everyday life that ordinary discourse, what Susan Stewart calls the “supersensual” does not as fully capture. Patterns of sound in poems, represented on the page and rehearsed in the ear, compose moments full of stress, tension, conjunction, agreement, harmony and dissonance that limn experience. Poems are thus “great monuments of perception,” Fussell writes at the beginning of *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (3). Fussell’s text

focuses in particular on the effects of meter, on the organizations of poetic rhythm and how it intensifies and exaggerates ordinary speech. Meter is primary in poetic form; it helps to organize other features of poems such as lineation and rhyme, which themselves simply embody “meter writ large” (*Poetic Meter* 5). Fussell’s distinctions are not as interesting as his implications: that the phenomena of language, its rhythms, undulations, breaks and flows, its repetitions of patterns at the level of sound rather than meaning, are fundamental to how poems mean. Meter can produce interesting effects in language that are subsemantic, and which help to extend and protract the implication of meaning across a text or even across multiple texts by many authors. Moreover, meter, or sound more generally, makes poetry physical: when spoken it exists in space as shapes, rhythms, and patterns that connect “with the rhythmic quality of our total experience as the similarly alternating and recurring phenomena of breathing [or] walking” (*Poetic Meter* 5). Poetry captures and transforms into figures and patterns these phenomena of daily life, allowing them to become a record of what Wallace Stevens has called “the pressure of reality” (20). For Stevens these pressures measure the trace of epistemological change:

These are the things I had in mind when I spoke of the pressure of reality, a pressure great enough and prolonged enough to bring about the end of one era in the history of the imagination and, if so, then great enough to bring about the beginning of another. (22)

Hence, for Stevens there is something violent involved in the interaction between poetry and the “total experience,” to use Fussell’s phrase, of a body’s involvement with the world. The poem is the concretization of this violence that acts on and transforms the sounds of human experience. A poem is like a shock absorber, a place

where the disharmony of the world's push and pull achieves fullness in its contradictions. As Susan Stewart suggests, "As a figure of *spoken* sound, the poem produces effects of transformation in sound; it does not fix the terms of utterance; it becomes in itself a living, breathing, phenomenon" (92, emphasis in the original). For Fussell, the poem's complex and ritualized shape is less evidence for the violence or dissonance at work in the world and evidence instead of a tendency to formalize aspects of experience in order to make them artefactual and therefore memorable: "meter objectifies [a] poem and impels it towards a significant formality and even ritualism" (*Poetic Meter* 12).

One of Fussell's useful examples is Henry Reed's "Naming of Parts" (1942), a poem that translates the event of World War II into a catalogue of discretely knowable actions and parts but with an underpinning of loss. Reed writes in the second and third stanzas:

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,
Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger. (49)

Fussell suggests that Reed's use of repetition transforms "creatures of nature into creatures of art" (*Poetic Meter* 13). Soldiers, within these moments of intensified

experience and relation (to each other and to their own lives), speak with extra stress and repetition. Thus the structures of their everyday lives are constituted through artifice, through the event of war as a form of artifice. In these two stanzas of Reed's long poem, a careful manipulation of repetition and enjambment create contradictory sensations of disease and comfort. The speaker knows the parts he names, and he seems to communicate this knowledge to someone who is likely to need this information. Hence he speaks with the commonsense intonation of someone performing a duty. And yet the enjambment in the first line exaggerates the echo of "this" without its referent across the poem. At the moment where the poem could provide context and location, it pauses, creating a crisis in both place and in meaning. The return of elevated and romantic diction at the end of each of these stanzas likewise pushes the poem away from its technical, discursive use, as if the speaker could no longer bear the monotony of naming and thus identifying his own role as a "part" in a larger machine. And yet reality returns, so to speak, at the end with the repetition of the line, "which we have not got." The function of subtle echoes that stretch across jagged line breaks and the visual effect of indentation in the stanzas embodies the flux of existence that oscillates between the monotony of war (and the monotony of waiting, training, and learning) and the shocks and ruptures that induce transformation.

Fussell implies that poems can body forth the world in ways that achieve greater complexity and intensify the difficult yet often ecstatic process of making meaning. Hope Mirrlees's poem *Paris: A Poem* provides another helpful example.

This work seems to draw its energy directly from war, and it offers a charged, chaotic vision of experience that makes the unities of meaning virtually inaccessible. One could say that *Paris* offers pure experience, fragments of radically altered perception. The speaker, a *flâneuse*, flouts decorum and decency in order to capture a material heterogeneity of perception evoked by war. Distinct boundaries between different kinds of speech, text, and other discursive elements are flattened and disappear. Visually it comes across as noise, as a chimera made of particulars and pieces of language from different systems, which invade the tenuous architecture of the poem. At times Mirrlees seems to be describing the homeostasis of objects in routine, contiguous space:

Of ivory paper-knives, a lion carved on the handle,
Lysistrata had one, but the workmanship of these is
Empire...

Of...

I see the Arc de Triomphe
Square and shadowy like Julius Ceasar's dreams:
Scorn the laws of solid geometry,
Step boldly into the wall of the Salle Caillebotte
And on and on...(4-5)

But there are enough clues in this section to suggest subtle miscues in experience. The speaker steps “boldly into the wall” after scorning “the laws of solid geometry.” The jagged line breaks also embody a phenomenology of experience. The objects of description lose their proper place just as the speaker loses her footing, “and on and on.” Attuned to the vagaries of perception, the lines in Mirrlees’s poem appear and

disappear, at times forming a tight column of words in rigid attention and at other times dissolving into the margins of the page and thus the peripheries of perception.

Or consider this example from Vallejo's *España*, which Michelle Clayton suggests invoke the physicality of utterance and, by extension, the brutalities and absurdities of experience in the midst of war. In these stanzas from the poem, "He Used to Write in the Air with His Big Toe..." Vallejo privileges turbulent speech sounds beyond the semantic and also places within the poetic frame those parts and bits of the body and its brute existence that are usually pushed aside in favor of the sublime. There is something noisy and alive in this poem:

Solía escribir con su dedo grande an el aire:
"¡Viban los compañeros! Pedro Rojas,"
de Miranda de Ebro, padre y hombre,
marido y hombre, ferroviario y hombre,
padre y más hombre, Pedro y sus dos muertes.

[...]

¡Viban los compañeros
a la cabcerca de su aire escrito!
¡Viban con esta b del buitre en las entrañas
de Pedro y de Rojas, del héroe y del mártir! (*España* 28)

[He used to write with his big finger in the air:
"Love live all combanions! Pedro Rojas,"
from Miranda de Ebro, father & man,
husband & man, railroad worker & man,
father & more man. Pedro & his two deaths.

(...)

"Long live all combanions
at the head of his written air!"
Let them live with this buzzard b in Pedro's & Rojas'
--the hero & the martyr's—guts! (29)]

In her reading of this poem, Michelle Clayton emphasizes the link here between the poem's celebration of base matter (appendages and guts) and Vallejo's tendency in all his writing, especially in *Trilce*, to perform what Bataille calls a "process of metaphorical displacement" (121).¹⁶ Clayton writes, "Parts deemed unworthy of representation, in other words, tend to be excised from poems, from the discourse of love...", but Bataille recalls a space for these forgotten yet still significant parts and pieces in his discourse on base matter that locates a poem's inspiration in more earthly processes (Clayton 121). Situated next to other poems that offer more heroic and ecstatic visions of war, fighting, and brotherhood, this poem at the beginning takes a comic approach to the absurd realities of a violent existence. The difficult edges of Vallejo's neologisms and respellings (*viban* instead of *vivan*) help to redistribute the pressure of war into the bits and pieces of words and their sounds and into the comic, crass attitude of the poem's content about an elegy composed by an appendage rather than by inspiration and bravery. These "degraded body parts" and forgotten appendages of the dead and dying exert their force, and the poem thus records the body's heterological movements and shifts, its emotions, depressions and excitement (Clayton 123). In this way, as Clayton suggests, "history enters into Vallejo's poems less as a *grand récit* than its minor narratives—the specific forms of suffering and need, but also of pleasure and desire, experienced by anonymous

¹⁶ In her reading of the poem Michelle Clayton emphasizes that "grande dedo" can be translated as either big toe or big finger, thus the poem is more ambivalent about the body part that composes the elegy.

passersby and poets in the interwar years” (197). The body’s flux and efflux are written into history as texture, rhythm, and pressure.

IV. “The cratered earth” and “newly enlarged loophole:” David Jones’s *In Parenthesis*

One of the main questions asked by scholars of David Jones’s poem *In Parenthesis* is whether or not the poem is too heroic and if it values the traditions and heroic actions of the past too much in order to escape the blunt reality of war. More specifically, does it depict a moment in time that valorizes the past without irony or does it participate in the sense of despair that Fussell considers emblematic of war literature in the twentieth century? Indeed, Fussell does critique Jones’s mythologizing, suggesting that Jones “flees” from the literal experience of war and hides in the heroic measures of a history no longer commensurate with the present. Thus Jones’s use of literary allusion is too epic, traditional, and naïve; and because it evades the sense of failure and loss that defines other poems about war, Fussell contends, it tries too hard to understand war in “traditional terms.” Fussell’s argument is that war must be understood in non-traditional terms, or according to the new tradition of ironic disenchantment. Thus *In Parenthesis*’s resurrection of the past, of Arthurian legends and allusions from the British canon, is “excessively formal and doctrinal” (*The Great War* 153). *In Parenthesis*, like *Trilogy*, attaches the past to the present as a necessary and constituent force, and it takes a long view of war that does not, as Fussell would have it, see the Great War as anathema to tradition.

Other scholars are less critical of the heroic measures used in the text to defend against mundane and faceless violence. Vincent Sherry, for example, suggests that Fussell misreads the heroic elements and the use of allusion. The question for Sherry is whether or not Jones can embrace heroic elements without glorifying the “military experience” (375). Bernard Bergonzi likewise critiques the “modern convention of the anti-heroic,” believing that the use of myth in modernism and the “mythic method” does not embody a world already “rooted in a system of public and shared beliefs” but rather is used “as a means of restoring contact with the past, of temporarily living and feeling in terms of vanished systems and value” (199-200). Bergonzi’s basic approach is to qualify the notion of myth with the needs of the present, and to consider, as I discuss in my introduction, how fragmentation and “transcendental homelessness” foster a different sense of the sublimity of the past and its latent forces. Thus the text brings us closer to the literal that lurks beyond the surface, closer to the felt details of living in the trenches and thus of being trained to see “into the eye of the buttercup” with a foreshortened perspective (*In Parenthesis* 142). The text’s peculiar composite of forms, styles, and allusions thus allows Jones to consider how soldiers had “become knit with the texture of the country-side, so germane to the stuff about, so moulded by, made proper to, the spatial environment dictated by a stationary war” (*In Parenthesis* 91). In the course of the war, these subjects become proper to “[t]he cratered earth” and “the newly enlarged loophole,” openings in space that enable the entrance of esoteric meanings and actions (*In Parenthesis* 97-99).

Other debates about the text focus on its generic nature, which lurks between poetry and prose, between prosaic descriptions of people and events and more lyric moments of ritual intensity. Janet Powers Gemmill relies on a loose notion of “narrative” to define what generally *is* a narrative but which also contains pictorial and poetic elements that do not so much compete with the narrative but complement and multiply the more prosaic elements. For Gemmill, the designation narrative easily corresponds to its novelistic and epic tendencies and to its desire to condense the events of the war into a purposive space (311). In my analysis, the work hovers somewhere between these categories. It makes use of them in a more loosely knit space and retains the difference of each as modes that contribute to a complex vision of personhood and community.

Although it is the most prosaic of the long poems I discuss in this chapter and in the dissertation overall, like *Trilogy* or *Paterson* or “Las Ruinas de México,” it negotiates the problems of history by invoking the historicity and materiality of experience as conditions of writing. The formal “betweening” thus stands in for many kinds of ambivalence: between lyric and epic, heroic and post-heroic, the present and the past, before the Somme and after the Somme. Even the title suggests a lack of closure and a prevailing sense that war produced an interval in space and time where the potential meaning of the text is suspended and then multiplied. In his preface, Jones describes his text as if it had been “written in a kind of space between” (*In Parenthesis* xv). This betweenness, neither here nor there, not in the present, not in the past, not in England, not in France, allows the figuration to stretch between

temporalities and locales and to speak with the dead. The dead thus create an occult space or fugitive reserve of experience that pushes against total destruction; they share textual and figurative space with the living. Even more so, Jones tells us, “the war itself was a parenthesis—how glad we thought we were to step outside its brackets at the end of ’18—and also because our type of existence here is altogether in parenthesis” (*In Parenthesis* xv). Jones implies that the pause of war conferred a formal pause in the operation of nations, of individuals, of communities and of everyday life, and it rewrote the coordinates of reality, instantiating a new sense of the space-time of the world. It was a pause wherein soldiers like Jones became both agents and patients of their experiences, and for Jones the pause of war induced a literary recomposition of reality.

Throughout the build-up of the narrative, Jones’s poem anticipates the battle of the Somme, a months-long contest that Paul Fussell considers to be a great moment of epic failure, a primal scene of loss that heralded the beginning of the anti-heroic and ironic disenchantment of twentieth-century writing. According to Fussell and other scholars, this battle was a significant turning point, a moment when the reality of the war as a faceless and “stationary event,” to use Jones’s phrase, became real. One problem Allyson Booth describes, for example, was the difficulty of assembling men into organized lines and units in a battle fought by the machine gun (89). The ideal of the line used in earlier wars as a method of containing and distributing power was no longer effective. Battlefields during World War I “were difficult not only to see in their entirety but even to grasp conceptually” (Booth 88).

During the Somme in particular, Booth describes, the technique of advancing waves of soldiers onto no-man's land failed specifically because this technique was orchestrated from behind the lines, away from the front, and separated by a "considerable distance" from the slaughter (91). The trench experience also brought soldiers uncannily close to the dead and the dying: "Trench soldiers in the Great War inhabited worlds constructed, literally, of corpses. Dead men at the front blended with the mud and duckboard landscape, emerging through the surface of the ground and through the dirt floor" (Booth 51). In this context, it was impossible to draw boundaries or experience them as somehow meaningful to one's sense of self and place in the world. In the "troglodyte world" of the trenches, as Fussell calls it, the unity of the self caved in to other demands, sometimes to the mire and degradation of war and death and sometimes to a larger collective consciousness of other soldiers, their histories and the shared terrain of the British literary, mythical and religious tradition.

The somewhat coherent narrative of *In Parenthesis* follows the arrival of the main narrator Private Ball to France and weaves in and out of his perspective and those of others as Ball and his company trek closer to the front lines and closer to the battle of the Somme. Throughout the text, Jones describes the trenches and the claustrophobic conditions with extreme detail and attention as if foreshortening his perspective to see these details close-up. The effect is somewhat traumatic, and, indeed, one of the consequences of bodily trauma is a loss of perspective and sense of depth:

Slime-glisten on the churnings up, fractured earth pilings, heaped on, heaped up waste; overturned far throwings; tottering perpendiculars lean and sway; more leper-trees pitted, rownspeyked out of nature, cut off in their sap-rising. Saturate, littered, rusted coiling, metallic rustlings, thin ribbon-metal chafing—rasp low for some tension freed; by rat, or wind, disturbed. Smooth-rippled discs gleamed, where gaping craters, their brimming waters, made mirror for the sky procession—bear up before the moon incongruous souvenirs. Margarine tins sail derelict, where little eddies quivered, wind caught, their sharp-jagged twisted lids wrenched back. (*In Parenthesis* 39)

This passage provides a naturalized description of immediate experience and an effort to faithfully document all that passes within a field of vision and within the limits of the narrator's perception. The intensity of description invokes levels of experience beyond surface habits and preconceptions and pulls into the limits of writing previously unrecorded minutiae and their effects. Piling on phrase after phrase and thus seeming to build up the earth that blocks perception, this writing tries to embody in dense, impacted sentences the equally difficult experience of living in the trenches, piled on top of bodies both living and dead. "Gaping craters" share space with "margarine tins" and their "twisted lids." The writing is thus inspired by the efflux and movement of the earth, by those degraded parts and discarded bits that are normally eclipsed in favor of inspired writing.

This kind of writing is typical of one of the many ways Jones' text incorporates what Booth calls the "shift into concreteness" that characterizes the "soldier's vocabulary" (6). The representational strategy of description allows Jones to see with the body, so to speak, and to body forth an impression of war that evades the abstractions used to defend it on the home front. Although Jones's language does retain some of the elevated and heroic pitch that qualifies descriptions of epic battles

in the past, his use of description in the section above and throughout the text embodies qualities of war conveyed not through signification but through rhythm, tone, and movement. As Lyn Hejinian suggests in her essay, “The Person and Description,” a work of art is a manifestation of phenomenological experience (201). Hejinian, interested in where the self becomes plural and thus an agent of materiality during the act of writing, contributes an important point that acts of descriptive writing allow the subject or the person more generally to emerge as part of the world: “The person, in this view, is a mobile (and mobilized) reference point, or, to put it another way, subjectivity is not an entity but a dynamic. There is no self undefiled by experience, no self unmediated in the perceptual situation; instead there is a world and the person is in it” (203). In *In Parenthesis*, Jones qualifies the perceptual situation as a fact of war. The “tottering perpendiculars” delineate a spatial flux that depends on an agent of perception to organize and unify them, yet this particular speaker is extended within this flux and overwhelmed by it. This spatial vocabulary frames war as a discursive event that redistributes the coordinates of movement and experience.

Perhaps much of Jones’s descriptive precision comes from his experience as a painter. As John Cooper suggests, “it would be easy to say that Jones’s descriptive talent proceeds from his training as a painter and a graphic artist” (303). But perhaps the visual element is also a “necessity determined by the war itself” and by the material interruption of the war into the habits and order of existence (Cooper 304).

Frequently Jones's descriptions open a horizontal plane of experience that condenses and multiplies points of orientation:

The stall-flares' play defines or shades: in the flecked shadow warm cast half lights trace an ample excellent, strings of penny pearls, and jostled grace:
. . . they're two-a-penny, they're orl ripe, they're fresh as daisies
dearie. . .and push the barrow home, taking the short-cut, by Jamaica level.
Certainly they sat curbed, trussed-up, immobile, as men who consider the Nature of Being. Each reflected in the opaque water, each from the oozy margin, and searching comfortward, his weighted feet drew out; as cats by April conduits, mew-up fastidious paws. (*In Parenthesis* 69)

Jones updates the myth of narcissus here to fit the context of war, suggesting that the soldiers can only see their faces reflected back in the "opaque water" and the "oozy margin" where they are dispersed into a horizontal medium. The ideal of self-reflection, of logos, is impossible in this space where boundaries and bodies are composed in "jostled grace." There are too many "flecked shadow warm cast high lights" that distort the unities of Cartesian perspective, disabling even a reader's desire to find herself reflected in the text. What becomes visible in this description is ambient movement, the aural equivalent of white noise rather than the "Nature of Being."

Jones's patterns of representation blend and fold figures and scenes, creating a blur in time and space that draws attention to the horizontal dimension of experience. But Gemmill also suggests that Jones frequently coordinates intensely descriptive scenes with more lyric uses of language in order to prepare the text to open a ritual space. Bergonzi similarly notes that Jones ritualizes language, using it in elevated ways that transform ordinary speech events into purposive, mythic intensifications. Jones thus calls on the many resources of language to sift through the fragments of

experience and often allows description to clear a path for ritual. In the following passage, Jones, for example, seems to court a desire for language to produce correspondence through flexibility:

The immediate, the nowness, the pressure of sudden, modifying circumstance—and retribution following swift one disregard; some certain, malignant opposing, brought intelligibility and effectiveness to the used formulae of command; the liturgy of their going-up assumed a primitive creativeness, an apostolic actuality, a correspondence with the object, a flexibility. (*In Parenthesis* 28)

There is an intensification of attention here that tries to widen the moment of writing in order to capture the elusive and ineffable qualities of “nowness.” Jones’s description also bespeaks an implicit awareness of the coordinates of modern warfare that extend into social space and social relations. “The pressure of sudden, modifying circumstance,” belongs to the pressure of a war machine that overwhelms and redistributes experience. If modern warfare is total warfare and if total warfare is a mode of combat that leaks into the ordinary and the everyday, it blurs the boundaries between life and death, between any number of static discretions that were once the tacit supports for existence. While the passage attempts to capture and protect a quality of experience that may belong to a part of consciousness immune to warfare, it also demonstrates how consciousness radically changes in the “oozy margin” of war’s modern apparatus.

The paragraph immediately following the preceding likewise achieves a more acute recognition of the mechanism of warfare’s spatial expansion.

Back past the white board at the juncture of the ditches, the gossamer swaying camouflage to drape the night-lit sky. The bombardier was whistling at his work on No. 1. Night-lines twinkle above the glistening vegetable damp: men

standing illusive in the dark light above some systemed task, transilient, regularly spaced, at kept intervals, their feet firm stanced apart, their upper bodies to and fro... slid live, kindly, fingers (*In Parenthesis* 29)

In this passage, the spatial presence or nowness of experience is also the nowness of marching into the unknown and of being “regularly spaced, at kept intervals.” The qualities of time change into painful and elongated moments within the conscripted space of war, and the quality of experience thus belongs to a spatial arrangement that subdues time and verges on the bureaucratic. As Edith Wyschogrod suggests, “the aim of World War I was for each side to deprive the enemy of its army” (56). The effects of total war introduce the threat of a faceless enemy not only to annihilate it, but also, significantly, to deprive the present of the richness of a possible future by virtue of marking all persons as possible enemies. Thus total war, war that extends its logic into the spatial coordinates of lived experience and into the richness of life, disposes the present as a scene of constant threat from inside and outside, a space in which the present, the now, becomes the primary measure of experience. Hence, there can only be a bounded “now,” this moment in time and maybe the next, as long as one is still alive.

Jones’s description also reveals that this feeling of “nowness” without a traceable future emerges from a quality of ignorance rather than from epiphany and grace. As Allyson Booth tells us, the failure of the battle of the Somme was partly due to the ineffectual command of General Haig, who kept himself far from the realities of war, and partly due to the scope of the war itself: “The magnitude, the violence, and the intensity of World War I made impossible the adoption of a position from

which anything like “factuality” might have been delineated” (Booth 87). A lack of facts and a lack of control thus defined every “command” that arrived from a distance. Does, then, the “primitive creativeness” that Jones gives to war belong to the generals and commanders, to the architects and legislators of war, or to the soldiers themselves, death’s mercenaries and proletariat? The view of war enabled by this small aperture captures the murky difficulty of assigning blame and responsibility during war.

I have shown how Jones represents the present as an elongated scene of heightened sensation and of terror, but he also relinquishes this terror to other types of experience wherein the concentrated effects of nowness reach their apex and must achieve a different quality. The lineated section that follows offers a different use of language and is indicative of this long poem’s tendency to oscillate between styles, modes, and points of view. By this time, night has fallen, and the soldiers have stopped marching and are attempting to rest. Hence the speech and perception of the soldiers softens, it would seem, by the intensification of experience:

Good night Mick.
may Barbara
bless the bed that you go to
and keep
her partial suffrages against his evening hate.
Good night Parrott
good night Bess.
Good night good night—buck up—he gets nasty later.
Good night, bon swores ‘Waladr. Nos dawch. Jac-y-dandi.
Night night. (*In Parenthesis* 29)

Two different kinds of language are used in these two sections, the one following from what the other seems to enable. Absorption in an object through the “nowness” of description yields an intensity of experience and widens perception, providing a

sense of the larger perimeter of consciousness that moves the narrator into a more collective space. The naming and invocation of different individuals is by turns liturgical and intimate, apostolic and conversational, and it seems as if the previous section's attempt to delineate correspondence opened a space in time, that could accommodate a more gentle and intimate use of language shared between soldiers. Jones frequently moves between modes in this way, and between the mythic language of the past and the quotidian language of the soldier, in order to relate different kinds of experience. Gemmill suggests that Jones shifts tones and points of view in order to accommodate the different needs of an epic space and to communicate the different rhythms and tones of war (315). In the space of one page the voice will stretch from the collective experience of marching up a hill towards battle to a lyric invocation that celebrates traditional poetic values and which seems to issue from a more old-fashioned notion of inspiration.

The tedium of routine offers the potential to ritualize everything, from mud to guns to soldiers to the entire scope of war and its effects. Boredom is transformed into a new kind of knowledge, and the spaces opened by war offer the chance to rename and re-differentiate experience. In this particular scene, the rain softens and cleanses the outlines of the objects of war and gives them an aura this important aura of poetic transfiguration:

The rain stopped.
She drives swift and immaculate out over, free of these obscuring waters; frets
their fringes splendid.
A silver hurrying to silver this waste
silver for bolt-shoulders
silver for butt-heel-irons

silver beams search the interstices, play for breech-blocks underneath the counterfeiting bower-sway; make-believe a silver scar with drenched tree-wound; silver-trace a festooned slack; faery-bright a filigree with gooseberries and picket-irons—grace this mauled earth—
transfigure out infirmity—
shine on us.
I want you to play with
and the stars as well.
Received,
curtained where her cloud captors
pursue her bright
pursue her darkly
detain her— (*In Parenthesis* 35).

The end of the rain and the emergence of the moon enable a species of transfiguration, of play and pursuit with the particulars of things that are perceptible during moonlight and starlight rather than daylight. The silver moonlight occludes the machinery of war. Darkness produces the fringe of stars and the filigree of trees. Interstices open and enable make-believe. Darkness can also hide the sight if not the stench of the dead and enables sky-awareness, which, as Fussell suggests, became a mode of attention for soldiers relegated to experiencing space and landscape halfway inside the earth (*The Great War* 55). Sky-awareness and related practices like star-gazing return the narrator here to a primary experience of poiesis, of making, and of naming the unknown.

The particular scene I described above provides a glimpse of Jones's practice, which privileges the experience of poiesis as a mode of being in relation to the past, present, and the future. In pursuit of something enchanted, something beyond the mud and the mundane, Jones allows language to flirt with nonsense and to play with naming the world. What gets named is both vital—it is the beginning of something—

and gratuitous, that is, it does not offer anything instrumental or purposive beyond its material pressure and the grace of its presence. In his essay, “Art and Sacrament,” Jones examines the importance of this notion of poetry—and of art more generally—as a gratuitous moment of sign-making and sign-doing: “it is intransitivity and gratuitousness in man’s art that marks man’s uniqueness; not merely that he makes things, nor yet that those things have beauty” (149). Compared to the transitive and instrumental nature of works made by other types of animals, including “the spider’s web and honeycomb,” art does not display any evidence of being useful (“Art and Sacrament” 149). This definition of being useful may be somewhat restricted, but his larger point is about art works and, more specifically, the processes and means that lead to their making. These processes include choices, Jones implies, and they involves the realms of the material and the mundane, or, one could infer from a later point in his piece, from the facts of history and civilization that present themselves at particular moments as “contractual problem[s]” for the artist (“Art and Sacrament” 154). Yet art, Jones continues, is also sacramental. It is not the perfection of the mark, the work, the sign, or the thing that Jones privileges, but the making itself, which elevates the sign as sacrament. “A sign,” Jones writes, “must be significant of something, hence of some ‘reality’, so of something ‘good’, so of something that is ‘sacred.’ That is why I think that the notion of sign implies the sacred” (“Art and Sacrament” 157). In an unrestricted application of the concept of the sacred, Jones suggests that the sacramental properties of art help to form religious meaning the way “germ-cells” help to form nature (“Art and Sacrament” 159). That is, art infers

presence: “Insofar as form is brought into being there is reality” (“Art and Sacrament” 159). The perfection of form is irrelevant; the impression art leaves behind, whether it is from a trace of “red ochre” on a cave wall or from the elaborate design of apses and vestibules in a cathedral, is more important, because it infers the pressure of human existence.

Kathleen Henderson Staudt summarizes the implications of Jones’s poetics when she argues that Jones’s writing draws our attention to “Western culture and history as an ‘order of signs’ (28). Staudt further clarifies that Jones’s sign-systems depend on “human action, both historical and artistic, for its perpetuation” (28). She continues, “Jones’s poetics rest not on cultural analysis but on his belief that sign-making is a fundamental human impulse, and that this basic quality of human nature is expressed in the works of poets and artists (29).” Although post-structuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida have critiqued this notion of the metaphysics of presence, *In Parenthesis* may point to another possibility. In “White Mythology” and elsewhere, Derrida has convincingly argued that the sign-system of Western philosophy and metaphysics depends on this logic of presence for its continuity. But whereas Derrida emphasizes the status of Western metaphysics as a species of differ^{ance} that depends on metaphor and thus defers presence, Jones’s *In Parenthesis* explores the processes of sign-making rather than the ordering effects of signs as such. *In Parenthesis* examines the methods by which an artist/thinker might search for signs to sustain existence but by design those methods are also convoluted and counterfactual. The typological structures of meaning that pervade Jones’s writing do

reinforce a sense of tradition, but not without simultaneously revealing the operations and mechanisms that support meaning-making. When the details of everyday life unravel as they do in war, the structures of myth-making reveal themselves more profoundly. If a sense of self was once a given before war, it is, according to Jones, no longer tenable. To preserve the continuity of experience requires reaching into wider chasms. While some of Jones's critics, such as Fussell, accuse him of thus perpetuating a regressive belief in the continuity and wholeness of the past, his poetics in practice are, Staudt argues, more radical, more digressive, and more flexible. For Jones, working with the poem as an artifact and a sign-system helps to put the poem in conversation with supramaterial or virtual realms beyond those immediately divisible by the given and the useful. What emerges from Jones's text is an intense form of play, a ritual engagement with earthly materials as sacred investments, as places where experience can be rewritten. To yearn backwards and to recall in this respect is to enable "a direct confrontation between reality and visionary imagination" (Robichaud 9). Hence it is possible to understand Jones's nostalgia for the past as a much more radical act of linguistic experiment. The past becomes much more flexible, remote sites of lost presence available to the imagination as material to manipulate and reinvent.

The examples I have described thus far deal mostly with the mix of poetry and prose that Jones employs, and I have tried to show how Jones specifically uses different resources of language and signification to engage different kinds of responses to war, some of which might be cathartic and some less so. As Dilworth

suggests, this is poetry as “language used to maximum potential,” poetry used to maximize experience. The desire to create continuity pushes Jones to rehearse these outmoded poetic forms that would seem to have no currency if not for the way Jones renders them meaningful in the context of disaster where they seem most prescient, perhaps because disaster can erase hierarchies and stage the mutable essence of seemingly stable and timeless objects. Calling on historical fragments to shore up the self against the present thus exposes the historicity of agency and of the body. As such, Jones invokes vertical relations across the layers of history in order to condense and multiply the effects of the self as an historical agent. Consider, as an example, Dai Greatcoat’s boast in Part 4, at exactly the mid-point of the text. The larger poem recalls this form in order to cull from the past uses of language that might provide some kind of an answer or which might provide an explanation for why the events of the present moment appear to be so inexplicable and untenable.

Dai’s boast is a poem within a poem located at the nexus of several events both historical (the battle of the Somme) and supernatural (the appearance of the Queen of the Wood), which places the boast somewhere between the real and the visionary, or the ordinary and the remarkable. The boast itself has a temporal quality that reveals the text’s sense and use of the past as a reservoir of agency, image, and memory. As such it seems to function like a hinge that forces time to move from the immediate experience of the trenches and into the largesse of the past as if through the eye of a needle. The form the boast takes in Jones’s text develops a perception of time through the repetition of events and actions.

The medieval tradition of the boast presents a unique challenge for contemporary readers unfamiliar with these forms that express heroic, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Within Jones's poem, using the boast helps to develop Welsh literary culture, to celebrate Wales "as a more ancient culture than England," and, furthermore, to revel in the potential for obscure and personal meanings to be brought forth by this celebration (Alldritt 96). If Welsh culture provides direct passage to a more heroic past, then the poem can serve, like Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* or, to reference a less obvious point of comparison, Neruda's *Canto General*, to name and describe the conditions that make possible the writing of the present poem. The "I" that speaks in the boast is always multiple but it may also, as a result, provide a medium of self-reflection for the author who can redeem his soldiery and become, like Dai, "the perennial, archetypal soldier" (Alldritt 96). Thomas Dilworth also suggests that Dai's boast "recounts a largely military tradition that broadens as it deepens, very quickly becoming that of the entire West" (108). Nevertheless, this boast, as Dilworth also explains, may personify a tradition of heroic military action, but is not, in fact, performed by a warrior figure but rather by a bard who speaks in elevated, elegiac tones (108). While a military boast usually serves the purpose of delineating the commencement of battle, within the poem, it becomes a site of dialogic engagement where a flux of signs and voices converge. If total war, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, dispenses with the ritual, pomp, and circumstance that historically defines war, then perhaps Jones seeks to redefine war according to its historical meanings. Performing a boast as a discursive

event would establish this possibility, and I would argue that, given the eminently literary and innovative disposition of Jones's writing, he seeks to recapitulate a sphere of discourse belonging to a lost epoch, a sphere that lies dormant in the present moment.

In the following section, the fluidity and digressive quality of this writing infers this possibility. Moreover, the use of repetition, as I alluded to earlier, infers a speculative materiality, a domain of reality the list form can disclose within a flexible, disjunctive space. Jones writes in the opening of the boast:

My fathers were with the Black Prinse of Wales
at the passion of
the blind Bohemian king.
They served in these fields,
it is in the histories that you can read it, Corporal—boys
Gower, they were—it is writ down—yes.
Wot about Methuselum, Taffy?
I was with Abel when his brother found him,
under the green tree.
I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
I was the spear in Balin's hand
that made waste King Pellam's land.
I took the smooth stones of the brook,
I was with Saul
playing before him.
I saw him armed like Derfel Gatheren.
I saw the fox-run fire
consuming in the wheat lands;" (*In Parenthesis* 79-80)

This boast runs on for several pages, and the "I" who speak condenses within that rhetorical gesture a range of meanings, idioms and references, a kind of built environment, enabling a faculty of perception belonging to the self as a discursive resource for expression. The repetitions (I was; I took; I saw) from line to line furthermore enliven and strengthen the self who speaks, forcing this self into a space

of maximal compression. This self that emerges in the poem and in the war is a historical event, a condensation in time of different discursive possibilities. The “I” who speaks in the present of the text thus “remembers” the rhetorical capacity enabled by this vocal gesture in previous iterations and the vocal possibilities furthermore sedimented by the echo of Wales in the “fields” and “wheatlands” of Northern France. Dai’s recollection and comparison of the Welsh landscape with France maps over the war’s alien terrain, and this typological similarity links the narrator to a more expansive domain of real and metaphorical meanings. The performance of the boast joins the voice to a range of past voices and acts that form a field of human agency. This “I” becomes one model of a structure for action, just as the collective consciousness of the soldiers living side by side in the trenches is another.

The boast is full of allusions and references. It calls on a range of source material as inspiration but also as discursive territory. I’m not sure whether Jones wants his readers to follow each and every allusion to its source and hiding place or if the influx of names of people and places is, instead, more likely to produce a sense of fullness and texture rather than discrete avenues to particular meanings. Jones provides extensive notes at the back of the text, but they do not necessarily serve to uncomplicated interpretation. Rather they seem to extend the sign-system of the text into a larger apparatus, invoking complexities beyond the proper boundaries of the poem. Consider another example:

I served Longinus that Dux bat-blind and bent;
the Dandy Xth are my regiment;

who diced
Crown and Mud-hook
under the Tree,
whose Five Sufficient Blossoms
yield for us.

I kept the boding raven
from the Dish.

With my long pilum
I beat the crow
from that heavy bough.

But I held the tunics of these—
I watched the work the terrible embroidery that He put
on.

I heard there, sighing for the Feet so shod.
I saw cock-robin gain
his rosy breast.

I heard Him cry:

Apples ben ripe in my gardayne

I saw Him die. (*In Parenthesis* 83)

Typographical marks and jagged line breaks produce discordance and disjunction, in one way drawing attention to the bare materiality of the poem and in another to the origin of the poem's larger ritual activities in those material events. Among these marks, capitalized words and phrases such as "Five Sufficient Blossoms," "Dish," and "Feet" seem to carry extra status, but there is no "cause," so to speak, that contextualizes these choices. Most likely "Dish" refers to the Grail and the Grail legend that influences this poem and other long poems, including some of the Victorian, pre-Raphaelite, and Medieval works that serve as source material for Jones's text. Jones's footnote, which appends the last line of this portion, references a Roman legion, "the Xth Fretensis," which was, Jones, writes, "said to have furnished the escort party at the execution of Our Lord" (*In Parenthesis* 210). Moreover, Joes continues in the footnote: "It will also be remembered that the Standard Bearer of this

Legion distinguished himself at the landing of Caesar's first expedition into Kent (Caesar, Commentaries, book iv, ch. 25). So that it has in legend double associations for us" (*In Parenthesis* 210). Like all the footnotes, this one is both helpful and not helpful. It establishes an extratextual military association that expands the text's ground of meaning. But how many readers are likely to be familiar with this reference, and to what extent is familiarity with classical Roman culture helpful to readers when the sense of the reference itself, its mark on the page, does enough work to pull the text in manifold directions? Over thirty pages of footnotes, some lengthier than others, bury the text in a labyrinth of association and meaning that complicates John Ball's as well as the reader's own subjectivity. Along with these footnotes, the text also includes other "supports" that facilitate intersubjectivity, including epigrams, illustrations, and numerous title pages. This paratextual apparatus strengthens the reserve of meaning, and even if a reader is not capable of following each reference into its hiding space, it leaves impressions and indentations, lines of force that implicate its presence. They leave a residue of agency and work, of actions and decisions, exactly that which the voice describes in its lengthy boasting. The catalogue of actions and their continuous repetition invokes this materiality culled from forms of historical agency and carves out, as I implied earlier, a reserve of meaning, a space that resists the necropolitics of total war.

In the large amount of inferred meaning that David Jones allows these textual associations, fragments, and references to carry, he establishes a sense of the significance of the past over the present, and thus makes use of the kinds of images

that Gilles Deleuze might call “peaks of the present” and “sheets of the past.”¹⁷ Although the first half of Jones’s poem is devoted in large part to constructing spatial representations of experience in order to show how these coordinates are managed and contained within the context of war, the second half of the poem following from the boast subordinates space, as Deleuze suggests, to temporal logics. Movement occurs in a temporal frame, across other axes beyond the present. In this way, Jones relies on a similar understanding of time as a condition of experience that can be accessed through relations between images (rather than the content in images) wherein space must submit to time. Although it is H.D. who relies heavily on the modes and forms of representation enabled by cinema to extrapolate visions of the past that project new realities onto the present, Jones as well makes use of time in a flexible sense to map alternative realities onto the present and to represent the axes of the past that interact in the images he constructs. These time-images project new relations between the parts that compose a no longer continuous present. They include, for Deleuze, sheets of the past and peaks of the present. For Deleuze,

¹⁷ Deleuze’s formulations helpfully shed light on not only the way time functions in *In Parenthesis* but also on the way a sense of time invades the overall limits of meaning the text can accommodate. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze is concerned with the specific properties of cinematic images and the novelty of their relations. In a similar way, Jones’s representations of the past allow time to be flexible, and to move in several directions at once in a more virtual and subjective domain similar to memory. A similar kind of malleability in the cinematic medium prompts Deleuze to catalogue and analyze several types of images that foreground different temporal constructions such as time crystals, sheets of the past, and peaks of the present. This leads Deleuze to describe the cinematic medium as something that gives “rise to a seeing function” (19). Unlike the movement-image, which involves the viewer in actions that privilege space, the time-image draws awareness to structures of perception that order temporality. The scale of the visible changes to “imply a beyond of movement” that can only be “grasped and thought in another type of image” (23). The scale of the movement of the time image involves revelation, epiphany, and peak experiences, forces that open up the image to larger consequences beyond the contiguous domain of everyday life.

drawing on Bergson's notion of duration, the present is dependent on the past that recedes away from it, instantiating a "pre-existence" for every new present that forms. The present appears only as "the most contracted degree of the past" whereas the past, Deleuze writes:

appears, in contrast, as the coexistence of the circles which are more less dilated or contracted, each of which contains everything at the same and the present of which is the extreme limit (the smallest circuit that contains all the past). Between the past as pre-existence in general and the present as infinitely contracted past there are, therefore, all the circles of the past constituting so many stretched or shrunk *regions*, *strata*, and *sheets*: each region with its own characteristics, its 'tones', its 'aspects', its singularities', its 'shining points' and its dominant' themes. (98-99)

These sheets of the past exist in virtual relation to the present, in a domain of virtual images, memories and recollections, which complicate the threshold of the present and subjecting it to new meanings. The force of recall and epiphany that resists the tyranny of the present in Jones's poem requires this new status of the temporal image and its sequences. For example, it becomes a primary vehicle for representing movement between levels or valences of the collective consciousness shared among the infantrymen. This collective consciousness is not an image of space or only of a shared present, but is a territory composed of multiple inflections reaching from different zones of the past. These images establish a prehistory of the present, as it were, without which there would be no spatial extension to inhabit.

In Jones's poem, the epic attains this status of the virtual, and in fact, the modernist long poems I consider in this chapter offer the valences and convolutions of cultural memory as a type of epic condition, which maintains the potential for epiphany. The character of epic recollections offered by the boast, for example, exists

within this virtual dimension, circulating as images that endow the present moment with a sense of its being more than the sum of its parts. It forms an ecology of presence full of contingencies and shades of meaning. Utterances well up from the past, tinged with the heroic and the epic, and endowed with significance from English and Welsh literary traditions that Jones layers as material and metaphorical sediment within the trenches, function not as history but also as the domain of the possible, as routes that trace non-linear fragments of experience. Moreover, Jones can condense the pressure of the past within the collective sphere of the infantrymen. This collective consciousness is made possible by virtue of shared “sheets” and “regions,” and these regions become part of the felt experience of being in the context of the pressure and claustrophobia. Density and proximity yield this radically altered frame for perception, which in turn yields a more a fluent sense of time. Thus, the past is both singular, belonging to individual points of view, and collective, belonging to the group of men who occupy each other’s borders and who, in concert with each other as infantrymen, shape a new version of the present.

V. “Los Insepultos”: César Vallejo’s *España, aparta de mí este caliz*

In comparison to *In Parenthesis*, which relies on a structure of representation that enables recall and remembering, César Vallejo’s *España, aparta de mí este caliz* courts the arrival of the future as a threshold for experience. That is, if the past in Jones’s writing helps to differentiate the contours of the present, the future possibility of Republican success in the Spanish Civil War becomes a similar kind of pre-condition that shapes the present. The poem’s tone is thus hopeful, heroic,

anticipatory, and eschatological, and its figuration centers on the material body of the republican militiaman as a locus of inspiration and potentiality. His quest within the ambit of the sequence is to achieve redemption in multiple forms—to fight on behalf of and to preserve the democratically elected Republican government during the advent of fascism in Europe, to rewrite the unilateral relationship between Spain and Latin-America that began with the conquest, and to provoke the unalienated labor of the volunteers, journalists, writers, and international participants that rallied to fight Franco and the threats to socialism and democracy that Franco symbolized. The figure of the militiaman within this expanded frame of reference becomes a kind of post-colonial agent, a volunteer, a worker, and a redeemer, and the text generously confuses several competing historical and symbolic narratives, giving the body of the republican fighter access to multiple meanings without discursive limitations. For example:

Liberador ceñido de grilletes
sin cuyo esfuerzo hasta hoy continuaría sin asas la extension,
vagarían acéfalos los clavos,
antiguo, lento, Colorado, el día,
¡nuestros amados cascos, insepultos! (*España* 6)

[Liberator wrapped in shackles,
without whose labor extension would still be without handles,
the nails would wander headless,
the day, ancient, slow, reddish,
our beloved helmets, unburied! (7)]

Vallejo borrows from two narratives—a narrative of dialectical reversal that enables the revolution of unalienated labor is coupled with a Christian narrative of resurrection embodied by the figure of the unburied. The image of the nails thus

carries a double meaning as a symbol of labor and as a symbol of death and sacrifice. Here the poem behaves allegorically, yoking together multiple meanings in a single image and pointing elsewhere beyond the surface to link the material with the ideal. Labor and resurrection unite the nails with the head, the horizontal with the vertical, the earth with the divine. In the tradition of allegory, Vallejo's convoluted and overdetermined images do not emphasize one narrative or meaning over another, but feature play and heterogeneity between the parts. As Michelle Clayton suggests in her careful reading of Vallejo's poetics, the constellation of meanings and partial meanings in these "knotty" images is never quite homogenous but instead tries to provoke a more baroque regime of meaning that complicates reality and perception (228-9). These images favor their own heterogeneity, mixing up as much as unifying discursive patterns of meaning.

Such unification is a tall order for a poem, an impossible object to be sure, even for a writer like Vallejo who willfully abandoned many features of his earlier experimental style in order to, as George Lambie suggests, "synthesize his artistic and political formation in his final work" (177). But Vallejo's desire in this poem to confuse these incongruent thematic and rhetorical strains bespeaks a desire to cope with the larger political and cultural transformations unfolding around him, in Spain, in Europe, and in Latin America. Moreover, as William Rowe and other critics have argued, Vallejo's writing complicates temporal thresholds, revising or rejecting models of time that limit experience, including a colonial model of typological time that reduces heterogeneity to a single narrative of progress and development. *Trilce*,

for example, which Vallejo primarily composed while in jail in Peru, emphasizes temporal displacement and loss, but in *España* Vallejo privileges qualities of eschatological redemption that take on a post-colonial valence of ideological critique.

In my discussion of Vallejo's poem I want to focus on two specific strains of representation that attend to and negotiate the problems I describe above. On the one hand, I am interested in how the poem figures the status of the dead, or the unburied, "los insepultos" and the emergence of the dead throughout the sequence as a material force that attenuates and "invades" the poem and its structures of representation. Although Vallejo's writing in *España* is less experimental and possibly less difficult for many readers than his earlier writing, offering fewer neologisms and fewer oblique, associative patterns of imagery, when *España* does rely on these features, and when it brings the degraded and fragmented body into the ambit of the poem's heroic attitude, it is often to feature the unburied as an unlikely source of poetic inspiration. While the dead are frequent topics and themes treated by laments and elegies and certainly occupy an elevated status within the history of lyric forms, "los insepultos" are more visceral, material, and corporeal remainders of war that refuse to disappear. They are capable of "unburying" and rearranging other discrete forms and ideas, including discourses, ideologies, and traditions. The poem I discuss earlier in this chapter that celebrates the dying body of Pedro Rojas, demonstrates in one way how Vallejo turns to these ordinary, material and unavoidable circumstances in order to revise the orientation of epic poetry away from the ideal and towards fragments of experience and forms of life, which include death. While necrotic body parts and

pieces of language float and drift through the poem, a quest for redemption equally becomes a quest for basic survival. As a discursive force, the dead literally turn the world upside and enable a species of historical perception that seeks to articulate what lies beneath the heroic artifice of official historical narratives.

On the other hand, and as I have already suggested, Vallejo relies on two meta-narratives of ideality to characterize and evaluate these dead, using the ground of the dead, so to speak, as a figure to synthesize multiple histories and desires, including a desire to redeem the “labor” of the corpse/militiaman and reverse the historical meaning of its death with Christological values of resurrection. Marxist revolution and Christian resurrection might seem incommensurate, but Vallejo implies a typological similarity between these forms of time when trying to account for the apocalyptic tide of numberless dead. Although Marx may have considered religious beliefs and practices symptomatic of underlying economic conditions, Jean Franco suggests that Vallejo turned to the dispensational language of Christianity and its traditions of “public oratory and of the sermon” in order to compose a collective space that would strategically move “beyond individualism” (*César Vallejo* 244). Confronted by the scope of the war and the number of dead who sacrificed their lives for a greater, more civic cause, Vallejo made discursive use of these two systems of meaning in order to compose a third space, an unfinished yet celebratory opening in time and history that repurposes the status of the dead. Each narrative provides a means to rename the past and potentially re-evaluate the failures of history. At least within the scope of the poem, resurrection and liberation are both forms of revision

that interrupt a mechanical model of time and introduce qualities of eventuality and futurity into the scope of total war. Although total war in the way that Wyschogrod describes it is not coterminous with imperialist expansion, Vallejo yokes these historical patterns together, representing in the figure of the militiaman how two histories might be reversed in one body.

What distinguishes *España* not only from Vallejo's earlier writing but also from other poems and texts written about the Spanish Civil War and from the kinds of poems about war that Fussell, for example, finds particularly emblematic of twentieth-century disenchantment, is the poem's desire to achieve correspondence between symbolic acts of naming that sustain the dead and the historical meaning of the Spanish Civil War as it unfolded.¹⁸ Naming becomes a technique the poem embraces to fuse the symbolic with the material. It names discursively as the war unfolds in the streets and neighborhoods of the Spanish cities and landscapes where battles were fought, and it names symbolically as the war comes to accrue greater significance within the context of a world—to borrow Jean Franco's image of the crisis—teetering on a “razor's edge on one side of which was the possibility of human progress and on the other total regression to the childhood of humanity” (*César Vallejo* 223). Despite the complexity of the political situation that unfolded before and after the war, and which likely provide any number of ways to consider the Spanish Civil War not only as a watershed event but also as part of larger and uneven

¹⁸ Pablo Neruda's *España en el Corazón* is another notable Spanish Civil War poem written during the course of the war and published during the war by the Republicans so that it could circulate among and inspire the volunteers. It also registers extreme differences in tone and sentiment, seeming to capture the rise and fall of attitudes and sense of anticipation like Vallejo's poem.

transformations in world politics, Vallejo also subscribed to the image of the war in the way many did as an “international event with multiple repercussions beyond the Spanish boundaries” (Rangel 145). He composed a poem that, from within the limits of the war’s minutiae, sought to understand the totality of consequences it could render.

In their critical studies, both William Rowe and Franco describe how Vallejo composed his sequence of poems as the war happened in “real time”, translating the events, battles, and specifics of the war into the poem’s material referents. Vallejo, Franco writes, “eagerly sought every bit of news from the front,” and recorded this news as part of the poem’s content and texture (*César Vallejo* 227). He was obsessed “with the day-to-day course of the war” and composed works that dwelled on “each of the battlefronts of 1937—Madrid, the Ebro, Extremadura, the Basque country, Málaga, Bilbao, and Teruel” (*César Vallejo* 227). Though Vallejo was primarily a correspondent and journalist writing in France at the time, Franco makes an interesting point that *España* can be considered a type of documentary poem. *España* does not, like Williams’s *Paterson*, for example, graft together disparate materials and lay bare the visible seams of writing as a mode of production, but Franco’s point is that Vallejo records all aspects and corners of the war: accidental deaths, anonymous bodies, found objects, and ordinary human beings caught in the cross-fire of war’s complicated apparatus. Rowe makes a similar comment about Vallejo’s method of using “materiales para sus poemas de informes y documenteos auténticos, de cuentos, poemas y dichos del frente...” [materials for his poems from authentic

records and reports, from stories, poems and facts from the front] (80). Vallejo's writing frequently turns towards these metonymic fragments of death and dying, as in "Himno a los Voluntarios de la Republica," which moves between expressing and recording the "passions" excited by the war and other observations that dampen this excitement with more mundane details:

Porque en España matan, otros matan
al niño, a su juguete que se para,
a la madre Rosenda esplendorosa,
al Viejo Adán que hablaba en alta voz con su caballo
y al perro que dormía en la escalera. (*España* 10)

[Because they kill in Spain, others kill
the child, his toy that stops moving,
radiant mother Rosenda,
old Adam who talked out loud with his horse,
& the dog that slept on the stairs. (11)]

A large portion of this poem that opens *España* is very much like a hymn: elevated, ecstatic, and passionate about the war and what it represents. Its energies are directed towards the possibility of the war's success, and its structural and figurative movements are propulsive and convulsive, moving forward and expiring in the same rapid breaths: "quiebro contra tu rapidez de doble filo/mi pequeñez en traje de grandeza!" / ["I swirl my tininess, costumed in greatness, against your double-edged speed!"] (*España* 2-3). But there are moments, as in the longer stanza above, where a flatter and more descriptive tone of voice records the deaths of ordinary people along with the fact that the Spanish Civil War involved the untimely deaths of numerous civilians, including volunteers who had been, before the war, farmers and family members, but who transformed (both figuratively and materially) during the war into

volunteers and martyrs. Both poem and war elevate their status but also memorialize them as ordinary and anonymous “folk” who embody types of wartime behavior.

This “horizontal” ethos is also reflected in Vallejo’s prose piece, “The Responsibility of the Writer,” which Vallejo delivered in Madrid at the Second International Writers Conference. It assumes that the purpose and scope of writing must match the discursive potential of war to predict the “horizontal union of the intellectual and the people, the breakdown of the barriers between spirit and matter” (Vallejo, qtd. in Franco, *César Vallejo* 229). Although Vallejo did not spend his life being in any way vehemently Catholic nor did he rigidly adhere to the tenets of Marxism, it is possible to see how these strains begin to come together for Vallejo in his writing, not because, as Martín Hopenhayn has pointed out, “a people with a Christian soul” in Latin-America easily absorbed an image of popular revolution as “eschatological feeling,” but rather because Vallejo’s poetics depended on mixing and confusing signs and meanings from different discursive systems (15). Thus *España* presents the events of war in horizontal arrangements as disunified, unrealized, and unfinished moments in time that elongate the present in relation to the future.

In *Trilce*, Vallejo weighs and measures space, counts the atoms of time that divide experience, and delineates a harsh vernacular reality in the face of neocolonial forms of oppression. In *España*, Vallejo measures the symbolic effects of war and records its moods and modes. Sometimes these moods belong to the various characters and figures that Vallejo finds emblematic of war’s horizontal extremes,

and sometimes they belong to the operations of the war machine itself, as in the following poem, which records the sensation of terror and suspense that can expand and define space when fighting has momentarily paused:

Varios días el aire, compañeros,
muchos días el viento cambia de aire,
el terreno, de filo,
de nivel el fusil republicano.
Varios días España está española.

Varios días el mal
moviliza sus órbitas, se abstiene,
paraliza sus ojos escuchándolos.
Varios días orando con sudor desnudo,
los milicianos cuélganse del hombre.
Varios días, el mundo, camaradas,
el mundo está español hasta la muerte.

Varios días ha muerto aquí el disparo (*España 44*)

[For several days the air, companions,
for many days the wind changes air,
the ground, its edge,
its level, the Loyalist rifle.
For several days Spain looks Spanish.

For several days evil
mobilizes its orbits, abstains,
paralyzes its eyes listening to them.
For several days, praying with naked sweat,
the civilian-fighters hang from man.
For several days, the world, comrades,
the world looks Spanish unto death.

For several days the shooting here has died (45)]

These lines concern the atmosphere that attenuates war in the moments that unfold and spread out between conflicts, when the speed of war slows down in the middle of disaster, when the wind is felt enough to know its difference from air, and when

waiting becomes a category of experience as much as fighting and surviving. Dated November 5, 1937, this poem was likely written following the fall of Gijón in Northern Spain in October 1937. The end of the poem reiterates this fall, and symbolically refuses to retreat:

Varios días, Gijón;
muchos días, Gijón;
mucho tiempo, Gijón;
mucha tierra, Gijón;
mucho hombre, Gijón;
y mucho dios, Gijón, (*España* 44)

[For several days, Gijón;
for many days, Gijón;
for much time, Gijón;
for much land, Gijón;
for much man, Gijón;
& for much God, Gijón; (45)]

Vallejo chants the name of the city, as if to prevent its final collapse, as if repeating the name can suspend time or allow Gijón to restore its coherence. His orphic dedication here seeks to name and restore these places and to repair the fragmented relationship between the parts of Spain severed by the fascists. Like Rafael Alberti's poem, "Madrid-Otoño," Vallejo's sequence is an extended apostrophe that names and eulogizes Spain. Alberti's poem apostrophizes the city of Madrid during the long months of battle in 1936 and 1937 that sought control of the city and thus symbolic control over the rest of Spain. Salvador Fajardo identifies a key component of Alberti's apostrophe that also appears in Vallejo's poem and which concerns the circuit of meaning between poem and situation, or the poem and its material

referent—the landscape and the city. This “vocative situation” establishes the following:

First, the I-thou axis establishes “ciudad” as a sentient being, as another subject, and will define a series of relations between two-subjects: poet-city. At another level of reading, however, the invoked city appears as a mirror image of the poet’s spirit, and the poem’s apostrophic form reveals another strand in its composition: it serves to establish the poet’s identity as singer of the city’s plight. (122)

Like Alberti, Vallejo takes on the burden of the city’s suffering and “the communicative gesture of apostrophe” within the tenuous civic relation between poem, land, city, and poet that dissolves under the technological gaze of the fascists.

The poem above appears in the sequence just after another poem written also after a battle, “Cortejo tras la Toma del Bilbao”/“Cortege after the Capture of Bilbao,” dated just two months earlier and ostensibly composed following the week-long battle in Bilbao in June 1937. Both poems as well as another, “Invierno en la batalla de Teruel”/ “Winter during the battle for Teruel,” concern Franco’s assault on Northern Spain when the nationalists aimed their superior fire power at this more isolated, less populated region and at the Basque country. These battles, and the poems, come to embody the difference between the civil war fought by the Republicans and the total war tactics deployed by the fascists. On the one hand, as Jean Franco notes, the Spanish Civil War “was the first large-scale modern war to involve the civilian population” (*César Vallejo* 245). Hence we see this population both willingly but also inadvertently caught up in the events of war, ill-prepared for its consequences. On the other hand, the fascists, in comparison, deployed military strategies that eventually

overpowered and annihilated these civilians. Francisco J. Romero Salvadó writes in his study:

The Nationalist offensive [in Northern Spain] was far from brilliant but it did confirm the effectiveness of a strategy of slow but consistent advances based on the systematic and relentless use of superior firepower. Resistance was finally broken by continuous terror-bombing as never previously seen in Europe. Unchallenged in the skies, the [German] Condor Legion tested the technique of mass bombardment of cities. (148)

Assisted by German air power, Franco's assault on towns and territories such as those eulogized in Vallejo's poems was devastating and represented the striking difference between the capabilities and tactics embraced by each side. These details are somewhat lost within the poems themselves, but not the sense that multiple forms or definitions of war compete to name the parts and figures that enter Vallejo's poems. What Vallejo's poem suggests, as a result, is the reach of total war into the discursive worlds of civilian everyday life such that, as Salvadó pointed out, the war became a civil war between Europeans and thus symbolic of much more than just a provincial skirmish between two different political parties. Moreover, Helen Graham argues that as a war that was fought on multiple fronts, the Spanish Civil War also unleashed "a series of culture wars: urban culture and cosmopolitan lifestyle versus rural tradition; secular against religious; authoritarianism against liberal political cultures" to name just a few (2). In this larger context, the power of language to name and the power to control the means to name becomes of paramount significance. Vallejo's poem explores this fervent desire to exercise control over the symbolic limits of the war and thus to control the outcome of the war itself.

Michelle Clayton's close readings of many of Vallejo's Paris poems, which include those collected in the *España* sequence and another posthumously published collection, *Poemas humanos*, point out his tendency to produce lists and to name parts and pieces that seek unification and coherence:

The play with parts that structures or destructures so many of the *Poemas humanos* is to some extent a continuation of the earlier poetry's focus on fragmented language and bodies. Parts here, however, jostle not only against one another, but against an overarching principle of organization; if the poems of *Trilce* focused on friction between the elements, the objects and figures that appear in the later poems are for the most part discrete, set apart, holding their own place, even when the social panorama they depict is far more crowded. (228).

These works compose a jumble of signs and figures from different semiotic spaces, body parts and objects, and other disaggregated pieces of reality that cause confusion, signifying the collapse of tacit understandings that underpin social belonging.

Vallejo's sequence spatially coordinates events and signifiers formerly disconnected by temporal limits, using the event of the civil war as a precipitating factor to revise common sense arrangements of material experience. Some of these meanings are borrowed from Catholic and Marxist forms of resurrection and self-knowledge, but the poems' strategies of signification in a more general sense multiply relations between formerly discontinuous pieces and parts of history. What results is not an endless present or infinite admixture of forms, but something more temporally radical and apocalyptic wherein certain symbols breach divisions of experience and unify different forms of time, perhaps passing into what Northrop Frye has called the "anagogic phase" of literary criticism. In Frye's account, the anagogic is the most paradigmatic level of meaning within allegory, uniting an historical event with the

moment when writing takes on the force of and, by extension, contains nature. “When we pass into anagogy,” Frye writes, “nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained” (119). Thus: “Anagogically, then, the symbol is a monad, all symbols being united in a single infinite and eternal verbal symbol which is, as *dianoia*, the Logos, and as *mythos*, total creative act” (Frye 121). It may make sense to think of *España* as such, given the way the text multiplies time and space and also seeks, almost paradoxically, to unite the valences of human action and belief in the various figures it presents, including, most notably, the figure of the corpse, which becomes a conduit that unifies the material with the divine across a horizontal plain of experience. Frye’s point is to suggest that constructions of anagogic space within literary forms seek to embody the processes offered by more divine forces, which may be nature or God. Within this context of *España*’s apocalyptic reversals of the status quo, civil war precipitates this transformation specifically as an act of naming and constructing reality from below rather than from above.

In *Seeing Things Hidden*, Malcolm Bull offers a useful discussion about apocalyptic structures of meaning that bears a resemblance to Vallejo’s poetics and provides a framework for understanding the larger implications of his poetics. Bull argues that the limits of knowledge are constructed based on cognitive and perceptual access to phenomena within a visual field. We know things in the way that we see things and so the process of revelation—of gaining knowledge—depends on the way the visual field structures our access to ideas and phenomena. These structures also inform the process of cultural differentiation that produces taboo and sacrifice, which

are versions of the “undifferentiated” and which must be excluded, to use Julia Kristeva’s terms, from the boundaries of the subject. Apocalypse also negotiates the undifferentiated, but as a force of incorporation rather than exclusion that “may also go on to reveal a new system, a new millennium that operates on principles different from those of the old. Apocalyptic texts often describe a process in which undifferentiated chaos is the prelude to a new order” (Bull 79). The apocalyptic can thus reveal and incorporate what had before been taboo, and also, depending on the nature of the apocalypse—a scientific revolution or a war, for example—demystify the nature of what constitutes taboo and sacrifice. Apocalypse permits the revelation and return of “excluded undifferentiation,” a negotiation of the limits of historical action.

William Rowe likens the text’s revolutionary desires to Walter Benjamin’s messianic vision in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and considers apocalyptic as a form of historical perception. In this context, the civic quality of war disposes another experience of time similar to, as Rowe suggests, Benjamin’s figure for revolutionary or historical time in *Theses*. In the section that Rowe finds germane to Vallejo’s poetics, Benjamin writes:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable. (257)

In this formulation, amazement is the beginning of messianic time. It is a potential category of historical awareness, the beginning of an awareness of what has become untenable. Being amazed at living “still” in a state of emergency evinces an emergent consciousness of subjective duration in the face of persistent mechanization. In an essay on poetry and total war, Mary Favret, writing about another poem’s use of the word “still,” notes a marked insistence in this word in the poem under discussion that “permits a singular form of historical perception, one that teeters between the adjectival and the adverbial, between... ‘the natural life of events’ ...and their ‘relationship to eventuality’” (1553). Eventuality qualifies the status of the historical present important to Benjamin’s model of messianic time that issues from the unfinished status of events. For Benjamin, ‘the natural life of events’ must not become routine but must be experienced in relation to their eventuality.¹⁹ In a providential context of Christian revelation, eventuality is dispensational. It threatens and promises God’s wrath and judgment. In Benjamin’s historical materialist formulation, eventuality differentiates a perception of time as unfinished, particularly in the face of routine, atomized and bureaucratic models of history. This image of time is an unsustainable model of history that has, for Benjamin, become normative,

¹⁹ Malcolm Bull helpfully clarifies that Benjamin regarded historical time as distinct from progressive time, the latter of which is the time of the succession of events that renders the present continuously unfinished and catastrophic: “Against the conception of the future as a ‘progression through a homogenous, empty time’ in which progress and catastrophe, civilisation and barbarism, are forever perpetrated in the ineradicable suffering of the toiling masses, Benjamin juxtaposes another conception of history—not an eschatology in which the future is foreclosed by eternity, but a political messianism in which the revolutionary classes make the continuum of history explode” (150). Making “time stop” is Benjamin’s imperative in order to transfer power “to those who are enslaved by time’s continuation” (Bull 159).

but “the current amazement” announces a breach and a renewed sense of possibility. In less apocalyptic terms, Benjamin infers that history and historical processes must be understood as lived events that unfold within and condition subjects and their actions. History must be defined as this sense of eventuality and the quality of anticipation that resists the “withdrawal of a foreseeable future as a perspective for figuring the aspirations of the present” (Harootunian 473).

In his discussion, Rowe considers how *España*, as a result, tries to collapse rather than exploit the limits of time as a representative and differentiating force. In other words, *España* dispenses with the limits of time entirely, allowing different meanings of religious and revolutionary becoming to interact in the same figure:

El método de Vallejo consiste en tomar el momento singular como generador del tiempo, es decir, la duración que es tiempo vivido, tiempo-posibilidad, antes que inscribirlo dentro de una temporalidad continua. . . . una temporalidad alternativa en la cual al acontecimiento ha de ser siempre formado de Nuevo, no consignado al museo. (81)

[Vallejo’s method consists in making the singular moment a generator of time, that is, a duration of lived time, time-possibility, before inscribing it inside a continuous temporality. . . . an alternative temporality in which the event must always be new and not consigned to a museum.]

Rowe’s description borrows from concepts of historical materialism, and his argument is that Vallejo represents a model of time and community within this sphere of the historical present as—to borrow from Bull’s locution—a living mixture of experience. He also points out Benjamin’s argument that historical awareness defamiliarizes subjects from reified social expectations. Historical events do not belong to the periods or temporal contexts that seem to shape them. History is composed of these discrepant events and objects that pull awareness into multiple

directions at once. As such, historical subjects are outsiders, interlopers, wanderers—like Vallejo and H.D.—and other types of figures, perhaps soldiers, who do not identify with the contents of their present moments. This sense of dislocation in particular gives Vallejo access to more prismatic and more apocalyptic historical relationships between different parts of time.

Consider as an example of the above, the passage I discussed early in my introduction, in which Vallejo performs a series of reversals or revelations similar to those Bull describes. In the opening poem, “Himno a los voluntarios de la República,” Vallejo imagines a space where an alternative set of human relations is made possible by the violent diremption of civil war. The civic nature of this particular war thus reveals a new, undifferentiated essence, so to speak, in the body politic. What follows is a different section from the poem:

Se amarán todos los hombres
y comerán tomados de las puntas de vuestros pañuelos tristes
y beberán en nombre
de vuestras gargantas infaustas!
Descansarán andando al pie de esta carrera,
sollozarán pensando en vuestras órbitas, venturosos
serán y al son
de vuestro atroz retorno, florecido, innato,
ajustarán mañana sus quehaceras, sus figuras soñadas y cantadas.

Unos mismos zapatos irán bien al que asciende
sin vías a su cuerpo
y al que baja hasta la forma de su alma!
Entrelazándose hablarán los mudos, los tullidos andarán! (*España* 8)

[All men will love each other
& they will eat holding the ends of your sad handkerchiefs
& they will drink in the name
of your ill-fated throats!
They will rest walking at the foot of this track,

they will sob thinking about your orbits, fortunate
they will be & to the sound
of your atrocious, burgeoned, inborn return,
tomorrow they will adjust their chores, the figures they've dream &
sung!

The same shoes will fit whoever climbs
without trails to his body
& whoever descends to the form of his soul!
Entwining one another the mutes will speak, the paralyzed will walk!
(9)]

These images of becoming made possible by civil war invade the time of ordinary circumstance and routine experience, and they proffer new thresholds for the objects and orientations that compose civic relation.

Critics and readers of *España* have focused on this revolutionary quality of its symbolic imaginary, noting in particular the way Vallejo employs these Marxist and Christian strains of meaning to fuse (and confuse) the kinds of temporal perfection each tradition offers as a model of human becoming. George Lambie suggests, for example, “from a Marxist perspective one detects...not a dominance of the myth of Christianity or its rejection but its incorporation into a totally human project” (191). Antonio Gómez-López Quiñones also acknowledges a generative tension between these two strains of meaning and suggests that Vallejo does not renounce the potential meaning of the resurrection as a model of human agency within the context of revolution despite its socialist undertones. To the contrary, the epiphanic force of returning from the dead within the context of war provides this occasion to restore coherence to the fragments of labor and history and to establish unity among

combatants as volunteers and friends and not as workers. Gómez-López Quiñones writes:

El combatiente se redime en la lucha colectiva y encuentra su eternidad en el espíritu universal de todos los hombres. Por un parte, hay en Vallejo un claro apoyo a una ideología que batalla por construir una sociedad socialista, pero también hay en este libro una preocupación hondísima por la muerte y una visión, escasamente materialista, de lo que significa una revolución y una guerra entre clases. (63-63)

[The combatant is redeemed in the collective fight and encounters his eternity in the universal spirit of brotherhood. On the one hand, Vallejo clearly supports an ideological fight to construct a socialist society, but on the other hand, in this book, there is a deep preoccupation with death and a vision, somewhat materialist, of the meaning of revolution and the war between the classes.]

Gómez-López Quiñones suggests that Vallejo imagines the Spanish Civil War as a scene of resurrection wherein the volunteer discovers his Eden in the unity of brotherhood. This contradiction, however, makes sense within the scope of the poem, given that the figure of the militiaman comes to embody and fuse together a multitude of meanings and relays between these meanings. The figure of the militiaman turns between two worlds—the living and the dying—as representative domains of human experience, and embodies the status of a neologism, a metaphor that fuses together distinct realities or meanings in a single yet still heterogeneous space.

The Spanish Civil War represented a turning point in the history of Latin-American geo-political relations with Spain, and Vallejo's poem negotiates this historical rubicon through the figure of the unburied. In *España*, Vallejo's tone and imagery intensify around this possibility that success in the war could redefine and redress historical failures that manifested during and after conquest. Latin-American

relations with Spain were constrained by this history, defined, on the one hand, by religious conservatives and elites who sought to maintain cultural ties with Spain, and, on the other hand, more oppositionally by those who were committed to independence and decolonization. As Fredrick B. Pike writes:

For Spanish-American liberals, in contrast, Spain had been—in Bolívar’s unforgettable phrase,—“the stepmother,” destroyer of noble Indian civilizations, oppressor of mixed-blood populations that followed, and source of all those features that allegedly kept the Spanish American republics in a state of perpetual backwardness and humiliation. For these people, the Mother Country represented a long, dark medieval night perpetually threatening to descend once more, whether in the form of peninsular reconquest, conservative political hegemony, or home-grown clericalism. (xii)

Pike clarifies that such oppositions, of course, can become oversimplifications, but his argument implies that the subsequent conflict over Spain’s identity during the Spanish Civil War offered Latin-Americans a similar chance to redraw cultural and hemispheric lines of their own. Spain, it appeared, was attempting to come to terms with its own complicated history and the “crisis of 1930” revealed, according to Pike, Spain’s participation in the international division of labor (xiii). While some Latin-Americans may have become fearful of losing an important point of reference and source of cultural legitimacy in the form of Spain as motherland, other Latin-Americans, such as Vallejo, welcomed the opportunity to redefine Spain and its relationship with the New World. It is important to read Vallejo’s poem within this context, as an effort to symbolically and discursively join forces with the Spanish citizens willing to fight on behalf of a new image of Spain.

Vallejo’s early poetry, particularly *Trilce*, paints a much more bleak landscape, a landscape of alienation and social isolation. Whereas Vallejo’s figures in *España*

are combatants, volunteers and ordinary citizens who join forces with a larger collective entity in the making, the central figure of *Trilce*'s sequence of poems is an orphan, a figure without access to a future who regards many common features of bourgeois society, such as marriage and family, to be instruments of colonial oppression. Vallejo's extremely fragmented voice in these poems bears little resemblance to the voice of collectivity and belonging in *España*, yet it is also clear that the structure of meaning in the Spanish Civil War poem borrows from and builds on this earlier mode that emphasizes heterogeneity and fragmentation. Just about any poem from *Trilce* will serve as an example:

Cual mi explicación.
Esto me lacera de tempranía.

Esa manera de caminar por los trapecios.

Esos corajosos brutos como postizos.

Esa goma que pega el azogue al adentro.

Esas posaderas sentadas para arriba.

Ese no puede ser, sido.

Absurdo.

Demencia.

Pero he venido de Trujillo a Lima.
Pero gano un sueldo de cinco soles. (30)

[As for my explanation.
This lacerates me with earliness.

That way of traveling through trapezes.

Those fitful beasts like toupees.

That rubber that sticks the quicksilver inside.

Those buttocks seated upward.

That cannot be, been.

Absurd.

Dementa.

But I have come from Trujillo to Lima.
But I earn a wage of five soles.]

Vallejo's language in this poem exemplifies the violent acrobatics that subject language to new perceptive arrangements, alienating the voice from its ordinary habits and expressions. Vallejo's neologisms, associative patterns of meaning, and strange, alienating imagery bear no relation to a world of common sense or inhabited meaning.

As Clayton Eshleman writes

The world of *Trilce* is a strange world, full of boundaries and spikes, where every liberating impulse is frustrated between the four walls of the cell, in the prisons of obsessive memory, in the labyrinths of sensation, in the pure immediacy of existence where reality is fragmented, absurd, unintelligible.
(xvii)

The voice that expresses this language belongs to a newly emergent world of partial meanings and partial investments. It belongs as if to an orphan, or to an isolated and estranged figure left at ground zero to fend alone and to make meaning without the support of an inherited framework. Yet Vallejo's compatriot, the influential Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui, persuasively argues that Vallejo's poetry also

contributes an indigenous perspective, and his violent experiments with language underscore this important oppositional attitude:

Hay en Vallejo un americanismo genuino y esencial; no un americanismo descriptivo o localista. Vallejo no recurre al folklore. La palabra quechua, el giro vernáculo no se injertan artificiosamente en su lenguaje; son en él producto espontáneo, célula propia, elemento orgánico. Se podría decir que Vallejo no elige sus vocablos. Su autoctonismo no es deliberado. (281-2)

[There is in Vallejo a genuine Americanism; not a local or descriptive Americanism. Vallejo does not exploit folklore. Quechua words and popular expressions are not artificially introduced into his language; they are spontaneous and an integral part of his writing. One could say that Vallejo does not choose his words. He is not deliberately autochthonous.]

Here Mariátegui stresses the unique contribution of Vallejo's poetics and its ability to create a non-European framework for modernist experiment. As such, Vallejo is able to introduce a more disjunctive sense of radical otherness in his work, given the way in which the poems present the various competing aspects of his identity without coherence. Mariátegui also suggests that these features are given in the language he uses but are not intentional or coherent uses of language meant to produce a particular point of view one could label "authentic" or "indigenous." The alienated and orphaned voice in *Trilce* likewise adopts this perspective, and one could argue that Vallejo transfers this perspective into the figure of the unburied in *España*, despite the latter poem's unabashed representation of historical and hemispheric collectivity. In *Trilce* the unburied is unhinged and unmoored; in *España*, this figure begins to locate and critique sources of cultural alienation, using the mismatched and misaligned parts of the world to create a new, decolonial imaginary.

VI. “plunder, O poet”: H.D.’s *Trilogy*

In *Trilogy* H.D. is not a soldier in the conventional sense. She is not a conscripted infantryman mired in the trenches or a volunteer engaged on the front lines of a civil war. In a way, H.D.’s experience of World War II is defined by a matrix of personal desires and ambitions, familial pathologies, and the private map of her own imagination, all of which helped to provoke a process of self-initiation, of personal rescue and resurrection. But she nevertheless occupies the status of a soldier in both material and mystical ways; she plunders, pillages, and loots, crosses boundaries, appropriates resources, and emerges transformed. Her long poem, *Trilogy*, is a record and a map of these processes that help H.D. to compose models of intersubjectivity out of private, subjective spaces. The war years, Elizabeth Willis argues, were fertile for H.D., and “she would emerge from London’s post-war ruins having shed one identity... and forged quite another as a prolific, almost maximalist, international poet of intense intellectual ambition and historical scope” (82). As Joseph Riddel furthermore argues, “war trauma haunted [H.D.] throughout her life” and informed the scope and gravity of much of the themes in her writing (456). On the one hand, World War I traumatized and “crushed” H.D., as Barbara Guest explains in her biography, but, on the other hand, the advent of World War II provoked a different challenge, an opportunity to re-initiate herself according to her own terms (253). She thus conceived of World War II as an opportunity to reorganize her poetic ambitions according to the scope of “total war,” and responded with a “total poem” in kind.

To be sure, *Trilogy*, as Sarah H.S. Graham has argued, should neither be understood as the uncomplicated equivalent of war nor as the uncomplicated synthesis of myth, politics, and history that her male counterparts attempted to construe (162). Graham is concerned with “an approach to *Trilogy* that keeps the war center-stage at all times, that reads the poem as a key component of the ‘war poetic’ that H.D. began to develop during the First World War” (162). H.D.’s fraught relationship with poetry as a male-centered domain is ground enough, perhaps, to frame her texts in a different way and to also see them as critiques and evasions of the explicit theme of war. Graham in particular points to *Trilogy*’s publication history as evidence of H.D.’s hesitation (162). She remarks that H.D. published *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the first part of *Trilogy*, before she began writing or, perhaps, even before she considered writing additional sections. Furthermore, as Graham suggests, H.D. may only have been spurred to write additional sections after *Walls* received favorable reviews, including one by Osbert Sitwell, to whom she dedicates *Tribute to Angels*. For Graham, this publication history evinces H.D.’s hesitation to fully embark on the grand project of composing a total poem, and she takes issue with interpretations of *Trilogy* that would thus claim it to be a “clear embodiment” of war that do not also consider the subtle layers of meaning and word play the text carefully orchestrates and which evade a “total meaning.” *Trilogy*, for example, is a poem that wants to engage with the effects and consequences of war on its own terms, that is, according to the coordinates, patterns, personal myths, desires, and expectations of its author. It takes a “long-term view about life,” writes one reviewer, and its “rarefied

atmosphere” offers an escape, more importantly, from the “punk we have to listen to from politicians and broadcasters on new world reconstruction” (Pais). H.D.’s war in *Trilogy* is thus extensive. It elongates and dilates time, and its long view of war does, indeed, offer an escape from the short view that characterizes war as an event with consequences that must be managed. *Trilogy* associates war with much different themes and processes and treats its own revisionary mythmaking as a necessary antidote to war when war is understood merely as a struggle over national boundaries and resources. Critics such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman have also argued that *Trilogy* in this context provides a gendered critique of war as a male-authored or even “nation-authored” kind of text. It seeks a space within the shapes and stories of war that can belong to H.D.’s personality and psyche, and which can renew the ecology of her own contradictions and spatio-temporal location within alienating historical patterns.

The three sections of *Trilogy* include *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute To Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*. Each third is composed of forty-three sections and each section is written uniformly in couplets with the exception of the first poems of *Walls*, which is written in tercets. As if to abandon the terza rima of earlier epics, H.D. moves into the airy register of elegy, allowing the lyrics to breathe and to move more quickly. But this quickness also belies the dense hermeticism of its figures and symbols, and the poems thus seem to barely contain the associations that range freely between present day London and ancient Egypt, between the ruins of bombed out buildings and ancient Pompeii, which, H.D. adds, “has nothing to teach us” (*Trilogy*

510). *Walls* begins in this ruined space, in present day London, attempting to cope “with a new bewilderment” (*Trilogy* 510). The affect is thus modern and full of “malaise and embarrassment” from “dragging the forlorn/husk of self after us” (*Trilogy* 521). But much of the poem is also novel, playful, and strange as it slowly begins to excavate the layers of the past revealed literally and metaphorically by the constant presence of aerial bombing.

Throughout *Trilogy*, H.D. depends on the guiding structure of the palimpsest to facilitate and maintain a model of belonging as a layered story of complication, erasure and revision. As in her novel *Palimpsest*, H.D. composes *Trilogy* in three interrelated yet distinct parts and uses this layered structure to reveal syncretic meanings and uneven temporal communities. *Trilogy* infers that war entails multiple and contradictory operations, and as a controlling device and conceptual framework, the palimpsest allows the poem to contain these contradictions without resolving them. In this way, the palimpsest supports a conceptual and metaphorical understanding of history equivalent to the formal composition of palimpsests, which were, as Sarah Dillon explains in her study, *The Palimpsest*, “paleographic oddities of concern only to those researching and publishing ancient manuscripts” prior to the Victorian period (1). However, by the time H.D. was writing *Trilogy*, palimpsests had become “the palimpsest” as the scientific study of palimpsests in the Victorian period were not only able to yield their secrets more efficiently but also provoke a conceptual use of the palimpsest as a model for understanding historical patterns. As Dillon suggests, “the concept of the palimpsest marks the beginning of a consistent

process of metaphorization from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day” (1). H.D. borrows from both: from the conceptual use of the palimpsest that facilitates an open, flexible, and interdisciplinary relationship with the past, and from the literal form of the palimpsest as a document that has been erased and written over with new text. Both concept and medium allow H.D. to interact with war as a discursive space, hence her quest to establish a long view of war as a story that can expand and make room for private associations. There are thus many types of palimpsests in H.D.’s text: palimpsests on the level of the sign that allow H.D. to transpose meaning from one system to another and palimpsests on a larger scale that allow H.D. to witness the disaster of World War II as part of a larger and potentially generative pattern that expands beyond the limits of instrumental reason. One can see why H.D. would find the palimpsest an appealing form in which to explore the limits of historical understanding. Its allure for H.D. lies in its ability to bring together unusual symbols and figures from different points in time and to make them extend and belong together within a discursive space that resists scientific and cultural fundamentalisms. H.D.’s point, of course, is that they do belong together and they do, as a result, provoke more attentive and sensitive forms of knowledge. For H.D., the palimpsest more generally becomes a form of cultural work, a syncretic model of time that facilitates holistic understanding and a feeling for one’s place in the movements of history.

Sarah Dillon provides other helpful information in her study of palimpsests and also discusses H.D.’s novel, *Palimpsest*, as a case that borrows from and

metaphorizes many of the formal and textual features of historical palimpsests. Quoting from the Oxford English Dictionary, Dillon tells us that a palimpsest is “a parchment or other writing-material written upon twice, the original having been erased or rubbed out to make place for the second: a manuscript in which a later writing is written over an effaced earlier writing” (11-12). Furthermore, the most compelling and provocative feature of a palimpsest that makes it a palimpsest is the “imperfect erasure” of the original text (12). The “ghostly trace” left behind enables the palimpsest to be engaged with as such and compels forms of reading that privilege the invisible or illegible layers of text in more symbolic ways. In other words, imagine a time period in which literary history expands as a multifold, in which the texts available for consumption seem to multiply exponentially, and in which the rise of colonial expansion around the globe permits the Western imagination to gaze across unlimited boundaries and thresholds. This context, a time when access to the past and to its fragments became a technological possibility, made an impression on H.D. and compelled some of her most ambitious and globally oriented writing.

Critics disagree on exactly how H.D. employed the palimpsest as a conceptual framework. Does it allow her to critically engage with patriarchal culture and offer newly revised female versions of male-centered myths? Or does the palimpsest allow H.D. to complicate her relationship with these so-called male myths and demonstrate their dependency on androgynous and/or feminine components? Susan Gubar’s argument, for example, is that H.D.’s use of the palimpsest critically enables repressed meanings to disclose their potential beneath superimposed content. H.D., in

Gubar's thesis, "presents herself as an outsider who must express her views from a consciously female perspective" and who reworks male myths into female-centered revisions (197). When the speakers in *Walls*, *Tribute*, and *Flowering* encounter or invoke figures like Christ, Hermes, and Osiris, or when the speaker in *Flowering* tells the story of the birth of Christ from the point of view of Mary Magdala, even though it is "not on record," H.D. enters history as one of its occluded subjects and takes up the perspective of other similarly occluded figures. Mary Magdala, Gubar argues, is thus like H.D. herself, an interloper known for her fallibility more than her grace. H.D., Gubar continues, chooses to tell this story in order to "testify to an event known by everyone but as yet unrecorded," and as a result, it becomes a more studied narrative (211). In other parts of her poems, the writing swings wildly between different zones in time; "I have gone forward,/I have gone backward,/I have gone onward from bronze and iron,/into the Golden Age" (*Trilogy* 584), but when telling the story of Mary, Gubar tells us, H.D. slows down her tempo:

after two sequences of poems progressing by allusive associations, complex networks of imagery, and repetitive, almost liturgical invocations, the final book of the *Trilogy* embodies the emergence of the poet's sustained voice in a story—if not of her own making—of her own perspective. (211)

Writing *Walls* and *Tribute* would thus seem to have prepared H.D. to circumvent inherited traditions and take on the discursive voice of historical narrative with greater critical force. Telling the story of the birth of Christ from the "un-maidenly" Mary Magdala's point of view allows H.D. to understand the nature of resurrection from a female perspective:

So the first—it is written,

will be the twisted or the tortured individuals,
out of line, out of step with world so-called progress;
the first to receive the promise was a thief;
the first actually to witness His life-after-death,
was an unbalanced, neurotic woman,
who was naturally reviled for having left home
and not caring for house-work...or was that Mary of Bethany?
in any case—as to this other Mary
and what she did, everyone knows,
but it is not on record
[...]
In any case, she struck an uncanny bargain
(or so some say) with an Arab,
a stranger in the market-place; (*Trilogy* 586-87)

Here we see how Mary's story is couched in the language of suggestion ("some say") and implication ("it is not on record") rather than truth and fact. H.D. values these methods of poetic rather than narrative storytelling, and relies on their pressures to rehearse unofficial yet still tenable alternatives. These strategies also allow the text to imply the palimpsest as the underlying structure that composes meaning but only invisibly.

Another section of the poem rehearses the above refrain "some say," and the poem takes on the qualities of hearsay, rumor, and myth:

Some say she slipped out and got away,
some say he followed her and found her,

some say he never found her
but sent a messenger after her

with the alabaster jar;
some say he himself was a Magician; (*Trilogy* 592)

As with the above example, the narrative strategies of this section include suggestion, reversal, and confusion, as opposed to plot, character development, or resolution. In this case, the characters are over-rehearsed mythological types that in fact, must be “undeveloped” in order to be renewed, and the plot—the mythic remnants that form contemporary consciousness—must be read backwards if it can return conscious meaning to other sites. As Mary spends time “deftly un-weaving” her own hair, so also does H.D. unweave the knots and braids of her own historical imagination. This process is made possible by the palimpsest as the poem’s conceptual framework. For example, the narrative willfully confuses Mary Magdala with another biblical Mary (of Bethany), who may be the same Mary under consideration, but whose story (under a different name) will have to be revealed another time or, perhaps, in another poem. This kind of lateral gesture nevertheless overimplicates the text and reveals one of the poem’s central concerns to construct more composite images of time that make room for suggestion rather than fact. For a similar purpose, the events of the birth and death of Christ are told in reverse, from beginning to end, from apocalypse to Genesis. Although the story begins with Mary visiting Kaspar, a merchant who is later revealed to be an alchemist and another outsider like Mary, it is Kaspar’s point of view that ultimately becomes important. His purpose is to heal the rift in biblical time that misreads Mary as an unpredictable and unmaidenly interloper. Kaspar, Gubar argues, interprets Mary like a palimpsest, and retains the identity of the Virgin

Mary as the erased text that lies dormant and occluded under the more fallible figure of Mary Magdala.

What Gubar implies in her reading of this section of the final poem of *Trilogy* is that H.D. chooses not to “find or make a language of her own” (200). H.D. combines extant material in multiple forms and from multiple contexts (including archaeology, cinema, religion, mythology, and literature) and then seeks a way to co-exist inside that material by offering her own version of the same story. As a result, H.D.’s signs always play with double meanings of explicit and inexplicit content. Thus, Mary Magdalene is also Mary of Bethany and H.D. is also both of them, tapping into source material and recovering lost associations. A psychoanalytic reading of H.D.’s writing might trace meaning in this way, such that the form of the palimpsest enables the revelation of repressed content and, as Gubar continues, “encoded revisions of male myths” (197). Indeed, H.D. borrows from psychoanalytical techniques of interpretation, such as free association, and incorporates experiences from her own analysis with Freud as source material for her poems and other writings, but she also resisted some of the logics of psychoanalysis. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman point out in their essay on H.D.’s poem, “The Master,” Freud attempted to dissuade H.D. from regarding herself as a prophet with visionary powers: “In her dreams and visions, she was the Prophetess who would reunite the divided truths of religion, art, and medicine to bring meaning to the world drifting disastrously toward another war” (418). Holding on to such visions was anathema to the self-healing process of psychoanalysis, and

H.D., DuPlessis and Friedman argue, “was disturbed that Freud could not accept the immortality of the soul, that in general his rationalist perspective blinded him to the spiritual realities she found embedded in dreams, religious vision, occult traditions, and art” (DuPlessis and Friedman 418). In comparison to the disciplined and measured practice of psychoanalysis that focuses attention on private pathologies, H.D.’s cultural work was undisciplined and vast in scope, seeking the effects of desublimation on both personal and historical levels. For, H.D., psychoanalysis only enabled one species of revelation. Other prosthetics were required, including the palimpsest that enabled a more fluid and positive relay between invisible and visible realms.

Sarah Dillon also critiques psychoanalytic interpretations of H.D.’s work, believing them to privilege the unmanifest content of the psyche over the manifest and conscious meanings available on the surface: “this practice risks ignoring or disregarding the overlying script of texts, as well as the complex relationality of the different narratives which constitute their fabric” (Dillon 102). Whereas Gubar emphasizes the importance of a symbol’s double-meanings for H.D., particularly so that H.D. can resist history and remain recalcitrant in its presence, Dillon’s point is that H.D.’s writing complicates the movement between the layers of a palimpsest, and does not favor one over the other nor place the two layers in opposition. Dillon also implies that psychoanalytic methods of desublimation are not necessarily cognate with the activities of palimpsests, yet it is clear from the confluence of the two in

H.D.'s work that H.D. found both models useful forms of historical perception. In turn, there may be a way to think both forms together.

H.D.'s own thoughts on her writing process may be useful here, given that she willfully and liberally borrowed from multiple traditions and forms of scholarship in order to construct a personal epistemological system that could resist the tyranny of more official forms of knowledge. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. writes:

Certain words and lines of Attic choruses, any scrap of da Vinci's drawings, the Delphic charioteer, have a definite, hypnotic effect on me. They are straight, clear entrances, to me, to over-world consciousness. But my line of approach, my sign-posts, are not your sign-posts. My sign-posts are not yours, but if I blaze my own trail, it my help to give you confidence and urge you to get out of the murky, dead, old, thousand-times explored old world, the dead world of overworked emotions and thoughts. (24)

Earlier in *Notes* H.D. develops a schema in which artistic consciousness emerges out of the unification of what may be called three perceptive states: body, mind, and over-mind. Importantly, these states do not neatly correspond to Freud's concepts of id, ego, and super-ego, although they correspond closely enough to be read as a critique of its limited formulation. The passage I include above intimates why H.D. conceives of a schema distinct from Freud's and in which a mind-body connection could play a role in developing visionary consciousness. H.D. clears a space for her own particular "sign-posts" as she calls them, paths to over-mind understanding that link individual consciousness with larger patterns. H.D.'s sites of influence and sources of inspiration are manifold and not always contiguous. They compose a map of invitations ("sign-posts") that can be layered over other cultural maps, and, although the many figures, signs, meanings, and events that compose *Trilogy* are, in fact, often disunified and

difficult to trace, they offer a spatial—and thus potentially public—representation of private consciousness. Whereas psychoanalysis is a more personal process in which repressed meaning is revealed to the self, a palimpsestic form of interpretation provokes a double revelation in both private and public spaces. Personal revelation must effectuate a visionary rift in historical meaning, and if it does not, at least for H.D., what is the point? As Robert Duncan writes in the *H.D. Book*, H.D. wants “to be confused with Sappho and Helen” and composes texts in which this intimate confusion and blur between subjects can occur. “H.D.’s poetic persona is no longer discrete,” writes Duncan (105). H.D. articulates a similar sentiment towards the end of *Walls*:

my mind (yours),
your way of thought (mine),

each has its own peculiar intricate map,
threads weave over and under

[...]

but my mind (yours)
has its peculiar ego-centric

personal approach
to the eternal realities,

and differs from every other
in minute particulars, (*Trilogy* 539-40)

These lines suggest how much H.D. relied on an image of time and, by extension, on an image of the self as a map of threads that lead into peculiar and “minute particulars.”

These structures allow H.D. to negotiate regimes of traditional knowledge not by following the official path that leads to mastery, but rather by finding alternate routes through palimpsests, for example, or through figures like Hermes and Mary Magdala who appear as topological openings (or, perhaps, hyperlinks) within the palimpsest. While it might seem that H.D. is, like Pound or her own father, showcasing her learned dominion over the past, or looting the past, as it were, what the techniques of *Trilogy* imply is that H.D.'s palimpsest attempts to unravel the discrete self. The formation of the self, as Julia Kristeva has shown, is a discursive process made legible by textual spaces and by the effect of historical meanings writ large across multiple iterations. Although the texts in a palimpsest "bear no necessary relation to each other" as phenotext and genotext do and are thus not intertextual in the way that Kristeva describes, the fantasy of the palimpsest nevertheless invites H.D. to think differently about patterns of meaning as diffuse, indiscrete, and interpenetrating movements of text that facilitate critical intervention (Dillon 86). This fantasy of the palimpsest—like the logics of a film or of a dream—allows H.D. to evade normative epistemologies and ineffectual categories that do not sufficiently account for her relationship with history. This model of authorship revises a novice's relationship with tradition and thus, in a sense, allows her to access a realm of prefiguration much like a genotype that is not delimited by authority or filiation but rather by a matrix of indeterminate and flexible movements between past, present, and future that collapse the appearance of these categories as such.

A genotext, Kristeva emphasizes, is a process that produces textuality within the symbolic as well as “the advent of the symbolic” itself (86). Conceived in part as an embodied space of drives and energies out of which texts emerge, the genotext “can thus be seen as language’s underlying foundation” (Kristeva 87). Phenotexts are “split up and divided” (Kristeva 87). They are objects that become “irreducible to the semiotic process that works through the genotext,” but a “genotext, on the other hand, is a process; it moves through zones that have relative and transitory borders” (Kristeva 87). In this conception, the genotext also facilitates topological relations between zones of the past that are not delimited by historical boundaries and which can, for H.D. and for other modernists, provide revised forms of authorship. H.D. links different spaces within the layers of the palimpsest in order to identify the topoi where her own matrix of identifications coheres. In doing so, her method bends the phenotype backward into the mesh of the genotype and pulls the genotype forward into the present and, perhaps, facing the future.

In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak describes a similar process of teleopoiesis that she borrows from Derrida in order to argue on behalf of imaginative writing’s necessary “time-lags” that structure collectivities. Her text concerns the critical positions available to readers when they choose to engage with texts *as* readers and thus receive the discourse of a text as a necessary constituent projected into the text’s future:

Derrida brings the rich notion of teleopoiesis...into play many times in his book. That is indeed one of the shocks to the idea of belonging, to affect the distant in a poiesis—an imaginative making—without guarantees, and thus, by definitive predication, reverse its value. (Spivak 31)

Spivak uses the term “affect” rather than “effect” decisively in order to demonstrate how texts can discursively produce affective futures. H.D. recognizes this process in her poetic rendering of Mary Magadala as a type of affective text that makes possible—and delimits—a range of meanings H.D. herself performs. H.D. recognizes the mythical gaze of Mara Magdala in her own present, and she thus reads backward into the past and her own prehistory to locate her genotext. In this way, teleopoiesis is not a realm of figuration but a practice of writing against the present and with the future. As genotext and phenotext relate, so do text and reader as constituent parts.

Trilogy implies that structures of revelation are discursive processes that implicate imaginary understandings and configurations of public space. The palimpsest offers a spatial model appropriate to this process as it helps to expose tacit forms of knowledge that become vulnerable and thus made available to rearrangement during war. In this way, the form of the palimpsest allows H.D. to suggest associations between disparate parts of material reality, and to make an argument about the metamorphic nature of war that permits appropriation, border crossing, and other destructive acts of cultural rearrangement. Rather than simply critique this violence, H.D. also embraces it. In the opening triplet from *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. reveals a palimpsestic transformation in material reality:

An incident here and there
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square. (*Trilogy* 509)

H.D. includes a factual meaning of the war here and alludes to how the war machine made use of railroad tracks to manufacture and supply guns. She also points our

attention to the subtle metamorphosis that subtends the operations of war, which writes a new text out of older cultural signifiers, moving content from one form to another. In her reading of these lines, Sarah H.S. Graham also points out how the rail lines represent boundaries and connections that help to contain the limits of domestic spaces without which “there is nothing to stop the outside encroaching upon the inside” (6). But once the rails give way to guns and the tidy enclosures of town squares and their domestic uses give way to the speed, pressure, and global reach of total war, these boundaries are no longer constitutive of social space. The palimpsest, the implied shape of both war and text, contains the historical and global meanings H.D. reaches for. In turn, H.D. imposes the spatial imagery of London’s ruins onto the shape of the town square, forcing the latter to accommodate the former. This is also the plan of the text: to navigate the metamorphic possibilities of war that act on and influence material reality, and which also, for H.D., act on and influence her own material existence and consciousness.

The structure of the palimpsest supports this spatial representation of the blitz. Even as bombs rain down vertically on London, this vertical dimension extends horizontally and opens the city up to the air and to more ethereal domains. Vertical and horizontal blend together as the underworld invades the heavens and vice versa. The inside is now outside: “we pass on//to another cellar/to another sliced wall/where poor utensils show/like rare objects in a museum:” (*Trilogy* 510). How odd that bodies can move between cellars and that utensils are framed and hung like paintings while paintings, no doubt, are now scattered and bent like utensils. The ordinary

perceptual regime of domestic space gives way to chaos, similarly disaggregated like the Paris streets and museums in Mirrlees's *Paris: A Poem*. H.D. writes:

there, as here, ruin opens
the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:

the shrine lies open to the sky,
the rain falls, here, there
sand drifts; eternity endures:

ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to air,

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspirations stalks us
through gloom: (*Trilogy* 509-10)

H.D. maps the effects of the blitz: the roof is open to air; perhaps a living room or drawing room metamorphoses into a temple; sand drifts into the city; and buildings and homes with their gaping holes can no longer protect a private world from public disaster. In a later section, H.D. provides an image of inspiration as an opening in space, as if this newly ruined and devastated London could provoke an invitation to experience other thresholds:

Now it appears very clear
that the Holy Ghost,

childhood's mysterious enigma,
is the Dream;

that way of inspiration
is always open,

and open to everyone;
it acts as go-between, interpreter,

it explains symbols of the past
in to-day's imagery,

it merges the distant future
with most distant antiquity (*Trilogy* 526)

Trilogy is a map of thresholds, of openings, suggestions, and intimations, and not, despite what these lines imply, of anything “very clear.” What is clear is the poem’s desire to build off the ruins of London and make use of devastation in a positive sense. Thus literal openings become clearings in space and time, and holes and gaps become “go-betweens,” sites of interpretation where “symbols of the past” merge with the “distant future.” Though the various narrators in *Trilogy* regularly “sense their own limit,” just as the “oyster, clam, mollusc” does, they are also “unintimidated by multiplicity” (*Trilogy* 513-515). H.D. spends time describing these relationships between parts and their wholes, between, for example, the finitude of a “limited orbit” and the potential for its “magnified beauty” that will connect with “ancient rubrics” of the past. H.D. rehearses different valences of inspiration as a poetic act, and experiments with passive and active modes of writing that war offers as a threshold experience.

In her study, *The Geometry of Modernism*, Miranda Hickman argues that H.D. explores some of the values akin to the spatial and geometric imaginary initiated by modernists such as Wyndham Lewis, who exhorted a model of artistic consciousness that was anything but passive. Lewis’s vorticism favored “an active, incisive stance,” and an aggressive relationship with form that likely influenced H.D.’s understanding of what it meant to cultivate a visionary consciousness (Hickman 193). In rejecting

the “cloud-like” forms of the expressionists and the receptive posture of other fin-de-siecle aesthetes, Lewis also rejected, Hickman argues, the passive stance adopted by followers of the occult. In *Notes on Thought and Vision* readers can see how H.D. arrives at a slightly different, more subtly feminine model of embodied relation to artistic creation than the one offered by vorticism’s angles and arguments. H.D. cultivates her occult awareness neither as a passive medium nor as a master of time and space, but, to borrow from the symbology of her poem, as a figure more like Hermes, whose relationship with time and space is perhaps very vorticist but also more flexible. As a spatial model of temporal relation, H.D.’s palimpsest figures Hermes as one of its demi-gods; he is a trickster, a poet and a thief who represents values of inspiration and innovation that are active, open-ended, and generative. While visionary knowledge involves becoming “receptive” to the unknown and the remote, it also involves, Hickman argues and H.D. implies in her writing, strategies of discipline and creative intervention.

H.D. spends time in the second part of *Trilogy*, *Tribute to Angels*, collaborating with the figure of Hermes in order to revise the arguments and confusion that plagued her in *The Walls Do Not Fall*. Hickman writes that H.D. “oscillates between disdain and envy with regard to traditional ways of knowing” and “confesses to... moments of self-doubt” when trying to explore or make use of ruins and of the past as sources of self-knowledge (228). H.D. wrestles with these ruins and with giving herself permission to appropriate them as scenes of enchantment. *Tribute*

to Angels opens with an invocation to Hermes that represents how H.D. begins to come to terms with her favored techniques of appropriation and looking backward:

Hermes Trismegistus
is patron of alchemists;

his province is thought,
inventive, artful and curious;

his metal is quicksilver,
his clients, orators, thieves and poets;

steal then, O orator,
plunder, O poet, (*Trilogy* 547)

Hermes represents the values of manipulation and intervention that H.D. needs to open the palimpsest and begin her process of self-initiation. Hermes is also, like Kaspar, a pre-biblical figure that retains vestiges of lost memory, meanings unavailable to contemporary consciousness but which may be found in the words that remain from the past and the oblique associations they provoke. These domains of meaning include alchemy and poetry, and one of the images that best conveys the status of these outsider forms of wisdom is that of “a broken mirror” along with other images that connote prismatic rather than mimetic relations:

In the field-furrow
the rain-water

showed splintered edge
as of a broken mirror, (*Trilogy* 553).

The above is one example of a style of imagery that privileges the broken and splintered awareness offered by ruins. This geometric image entails some of what Hickman describes as the “sharply delineated” and “forceful” (5) style of Vorticist

aesthetics but also entails—as a contrary but also as a complement—the “rain-water” that softens these edges into furrows. The image of the broken mirror mediates between—in hermetical fashion—epistemologies that offer compelling invitations to revise experience. A broken mirror cannot reflect very well, but it can refract and this image of refraction provides another model of time and space that accommodates H.D.’s revised version of personhood. For H.D., artistic processes mediate between receptive states of becoming and aggressive articulations of transformation. Whereas the tendency of some of her male counterparts may have been to overemphasize the transformative and the violent, H.D. remains ambivalent, calling on Hermes and the values of the secret to remain recalcitrant and creative at the same time.

VI. No-Man’s Land

I would like to close this chapter by briefly exploring how the status and presence of the dead in these poems forces awareness of hemispheric relations. All three poems achieve this hemispheric perspective because they must find ways to negotiate the status of the dead as a newly emergent epic condition, which overwhelms and dissolves the narrow boundaries of nation and language. All three poets explore and communicate with the past in order to rescale the boundaries of the present and thus to reject the arbitrary limits offered by colonial modernity. In each case, the dead are a force that helps to recalibrate in figural and symbolic ways what it means to belong linguistically, nationally, and culturally to different and contradictory historical communities.

David Jones's *In Parenthesis* relies on the density and richness of literary history in order to revise his experience in the trenches. Images of the dead in past iterations from the heroic tradition provide continuity within the extremely fragmented and hallucinatory space of the trenches. The representations in the text belong to this parenthesis, a no-man's land of experience, and Jones's writing implies that literature in general is like a no-man's land, a space that agitates between myth and reality. This blur gives him permission to occupy multiple times and straddle multiple borders simultaneously, just as H.D. and Vallejo also occupy the blur in time and space that war instantiates. In one description of no-man's land, Jones writes:

And so till midnight and into the ebb-time when the spirit slips lightly from sick men and when it's like no-man's-land between yesterday and tomorrow and material things are but barely integrated and loosely tacked together, at the hour Aunt Woodman dies and Leslie's Uncle Bartholemew, and Miss Woolly and Mrs. Evans and anybody you ever heard of all these here lying begin to die on both parties. (*In Parenthesis* 181)

In this construction, no-man's-land becomes a space "between yesterday and tomorrow" where the dead suffocate the living and crush the precise outlines of "material things." No-man's-land is a land occupied by the dead and the almost-dead that co-exist simultaneously and evolve through each other. It is also a border space between more official entities, between the living and the dying, for example, or between France and England. This no-man's land also prepares the ground for magical appearances of non-phenomenological entities, such as The Queen of the Woods, who shows up a few pages later with "cut bright boughs of various flowering" (*In Parenthesis* 185). In this final scene, The Queen of the Woods offers flowers to each of the soldiers strewn across the battlefield in the woods and transforms this no-

man's land into a sacred space, ritualizing the soldiers' untimely deaths and giving them a symbolically epic burial.

If *The Queen of the Woods* can violate physical boundaries and natural laws by appearing to Jones at the end of his text, so too can other boundaries be redrawn which change how we conceptualize the past and how we access the past from the vantage point of the present. The overwhelming and suffocating presence of the dead in these texts necessitates this force of revision, which enables these between-spaces to emerge where the living can communicate more freely with the dead. In this way, Jones's temporal parenthesis also opens a spatial parenthesis in the midst of war, which provides a corollary to the kind of spatial rearrangement that Vallejo's poem more explicitly represents. For Vallejo, the unburied of the Spanish Civil War are reframed within a de-colonial imaginary that articulates Spain and Latin-America's shared histories. For Jones, the unburied of World War I are reframed mythically and linked to the richness of the past, giving Jones access to external and internal peripheries.

All three poems imply that being between in no-man's-land is a permanent condition of being human. R. Radhakrishnan makes a similar argument in his recent book, *History, the Human, and the World Between*. I want to use Radhakrishnan's concept of "betweenness" to conclude this chapter, and to argue for the hemispheric poetics of these war poems. Radhakrishnan writes:

To put it simply, the only place in which the human subject dwells is between. Sure enough, there are several between: between ontology and epistemology, between self and other, between the one and the many, between identity and difference, between nature and culture, between the ethical and the political,

between subjectivity and objectivity, between the historic and the quotidian, between temporality and historicity, between the anthropocentric and the planetary, between self-subjectification and alterior interpellation. In other words, take away the cartography of betweenness, and along with it vanishes the human subject. (8)

Betweenness is the ground on which human experience makes worlds, undoes worlds, and attempts to rebuild them. Even epic poetry, as Thomas Greene argues, registers betweenness, because “in any exact sense a pure epic has never been written” (9).²⁰

Betweenness also maps, as Radhakrishnan implies, planetary relations that resist closure and embrace digression and refraction. I would argue that for the three writers I discuss here, Jones, Vallejo, and H.D., the presence of the dead that emerge during war begins this negotiation with betweenness, and even though each poem maintains a mythic element that reaches beyond the provisional and evanescent, each poem also demonstrates the material and phenomenological conditions that provoke mythic longing. In turn, these material conditions, the conditions represented by the dead, exert this revisionary force and help each author to see past their boundaries and into larger, more expansive, hemispheric frameworks.

²⁰ Thomas Greene argues that the human concerns of epic heroes mark their difference from earlier shamanistic or mythic literature: “The epic is the poem which replaces divine worship with humanistic awe, awe for the act which is prodigious but yet human” (14). Moreover, in epic, the hero “encounters a new sort of resistance and reaches the limitations of his being. He is denied something, particularly those things which would render him a god. He acquires an austerity which is particularly human” (T. Greene 14). For more discussion on the relationship between long poems and epic, see the introduction to this dissertation.

Chapter Two: Industrial Palimpsests and Open Questions

In the opening to *Call Me Ishmael*, Charles Olson writes, "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America," thus arguing that space and spatial experience takes precedence in the American cultural imagination over time (17). Whereas temporal narratives, such as classical epic, may favor different types of fulfillment and redemption, spatial narratives, or spatial poetics, I should say, tend to thematically feature a "return" to more earthly and material lines of influence. These influences include, as I will demonstrate, the kinds of hemispheric patterns of refraction that I consider endemic to the form of the long poem. What this chapter thus emphasizes are poems that dramatize more explicitly a spatial or hemispheric structure of representation. More specifically, I consider poems that negotiate and cope with the effects of industrialization as a feature of colonial modernity. Because processes of industrialization, development and progress radically alter landscapes and geographies, they draw attention to the way that space and land interact with and influence experience. Thus I consider three poems that represent the spatial and geographic effects of industrialization in three different contexts. I compare three works, Gabriela Mistral's *Poema de Chile*, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*, and Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* and explore how these works represent the emergence of industrialization as a cultural institution that transforms the limits of experience just as significantly as war.

Two of the poems that I focus on, *Paterson* and *The Book of the Dead*, represent the industrial Northeast of the United States and use documentary forms of

collage and montage to map the effects of industrialization on the imagination. Documentary forms of art and representation became popular in the wake of the Great Depression as an effort to preserve cultural experience and cultural details that seemed most particularly threatened by economic instability. Nevertheless, in an effort to represent the lives of those most marginalized by industrialization, these documentary techniques of collage and montage also participate in changing the contours of reality by emphasizing the historicity and contingency of their forms. Compared to these two works, Mistral's *Poema de Chile* appears more traditionally lyric, but it is no less radical in its effort to map the Chilean landscape within the context of a history of colonization and development. This long sequence of poems represents the effects of industrialization on the periphery, making evident the way that industrialization produced different consequences for colonized subjects. Nevertheless, one can see how all three poems represent marginalized experiences. My comparison thus illuminates "the international division of labor" that Eduardo Galeano argues makes Latin-American countries in particular dependent on first world economic policies. As I will demonstrate, the figures and agents that drift through these poems are all dependent on economic, social, and political ideologies that have little or nothing to do with the actual realities of their lives.

In order to represent what I name above as the "actual realities of their lives" these poems offer spatial representations that map experience in relation to geography and landscape. All three of these poems reflect arguments posited by critics such as Fernando Rosenberg and Roland Greene who demonstrate how Latin American

poems in particular emphasize spatial fictions and “pay more attention to lyric versions of space and geography” in order to come to terms with the predicament of the influence of European humanist culture (R. Greene 196). In the Latin American context, Greene posits, narratives that de-emphasize an uneven and unilateral relationship between Latin America and Europe allow a material emphasis on space and landscape to emerge. These spatial poetics are featured formally in the way the long poems offer parts and sequences that spatialize temporal narrative, but they also incorporate descriptions and details that extend the poems into material, earthly habitations. In *Poema de Chile*, for example, lyric descriptions of space announce important historical differences and uneven relations between the centers of cultural production and their peripheries. This poem favors the periphery and the uninhabited and rural regions of Chile, and it develops agency for its speakers apart from more urbane and global sites of cultural production. Williams and Rukeyser also engage similar contradictory forces and attempt to represent historical specifics that cannot be generalized according to a universal framework. In this way, the poems map hemispheric experience, even when they seem most focused on the detail, the document, and the description. Williams’s body of writing, particularly in *Paterson*, reflects his desire to forge a distinctively American idiom of particulars endemic to American geography and culture. Rukeyser’s documentary text maps experience in the liminal and economically depressed environment of West Virginia, and Mistral describes the diverse landscapes, regions, and zones that form the Chilean landscape, thus displacing and refracting more official notions of national belonging. In all three

poems, official narratives of modernity that favor newness, speed, progress, and development are passed over in order to emphasize different, slower vantage points on the edges of history, time, and culture.

I.

I ended Chapter One in the ruins left behind by war and the metaphorical ruins of a social reality that had become untenable given the scale of catastrophe and death realized during the advent of total war. Within this context, the types of ruins that emerged in the wake of war led to a crisis of European values, giving rise to an awareness of ruination, loss, and decay as conditions of social life. Modernist and avant-garde poems that treat war and its aftermath thus “historicize ruins,” figuring them in a number of critical and culturally self-reflexive ways (Rangel 4). Although ruins can engender sentimental reactions in their voyeurs who “de-historicize” the past, ruins may also awaken states of awareness, critique, and revolution. No longer static and empty, the provocative ruins of time can fill many shapes and harbor many possibilities. In this chapter, I consider these possibilities and explore different types of real and metaphorical ruins that are produced, revealed and influenced by forms of industrial development: the ruins of landscapes, the ruins of human lives, the ruins of social values, and the forms of ruination and decay in geological contexts that alter the scope of history and community. Most important to my discussion is the way these ruins leave their mark in both ecological and social contexts, thus offering the blurred space between nature and culture as a site of epic possibility.

In her analysis of poems that historicize ruins in urban spaces ravaged by war and time, Rangel helpfully distinguishes between these different types of ruins—as process or as thing?—in order to clarify the critical status that ruins occupy in the twentieth-century imagination, particularly in poems such as Pablo Neruda’s *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, both of which make critical use of ruins and ruination. In these poems, the consequences of war give special access to seeing, experiencing, and making use of many types of ruins, not only ruins that emerge cataclysmically in the aftermath of aerial bombings, for example, but also those that emerge vis-à-vis slower processes of decay, entropy and erosion.²¹ Although both Eliot and Neruda attempted to restore a sense of the past that could support civilization and make it intelligible within the present, the poems I discuss in this chapter more forcefully critique this possibility. Because I focus on industrialization and the way forms of progress within industrialized and developing

²¹ For example, although Neruda may have been spurred to compose *Macchu Picchu* following the Republican defeat in the Spanish Civil War, the poem turns its attention to the Latin-American cultural landscape and navigates two different rocky terrains: the “lost” ruins of the Incan civilization, Macchu Picchu, and the metaphorical ruins of the international community founded during the Spanish Civil War. In this poem, a world-historical crisis provokes a newly historicized reading of geography, national identity, and place. In *The Waste Land*, the ruins of World War I similarly make room for a renovated view of London’s “stony rubbish” and layers of environmental and social decay. Although Eliot laments the mire and muck that civilization has become, this mire gives access to the past as a site of excavation. He elevates the status of the long poem as a mode of historical awareness bringing these zones together in the present, and he, like Neruda, envisions renewal within the context of cultural and geological erosion. In other words, war both creates and reveals ruin. War produces ruins in the form of bombed-out buildings and the husks of men and women left traumatized by these events, but war also reveals ruins that lay submerged beneath and which also support the mirage of civilization. *The Waste Land* and *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* are two examples of poems that teeter between these different kinds of ruins: the ruins of war that can seem to alter the course of history in a split second and slower forms of ruination that unfold at the boundaries between civilization and nature. Moreover, I would add, from the point of view of the long poem and the model of time-awareness imagined within its limits, there is no clear difference between cultural and environmental decay. Changes in history and culture “communicate” with the environment and vice versa, leading to more complex forms of time and temporal awareness.

societies alter the scope of the individual and its communities, I emphasize how these poems might draw attention to and embody slower processes of time and ruination either explicitly or implicitly. In her analysis of modern ruins and the cities that shape and are shaped by ruins, Rangel helpfully clarifies another meaning of ruins:

Poems on ruins explore the decayed parts of the city: its destroyed monuments and buildings, its wreckage, and its remains. The Latin verb *ruo*, “to rush or fall,” initially meant that ruin was a movement, the process of collapse. Through time, the word *ruin* also came to signify the result of the destructive motion, the remains of a historical past. (5)

This distinction in the etymology of ruins underscores two ways to think of ruins as product and as process. Ruins are objects that belong to the past, but ruination is also a process that, whether internally or externally, forces decay, erosion, and entropy both spatially and temporally. In a similar way, I draw a distinction between the ruins that accumulate traumatically and suddenly during war and the ruins of industrial landscapes—created by scenes of waste, abandonment, exploitation, appropriation, and resource extraction—that may interact more slowly with the imagination and with the environment. These ruins are produced at a slower speed, and the forms of life they administer less recognizable as scenes of ruination. These forms may, indeed, provide shelter and those shelters may engender communities, forms of social reproduction, and other temporalities not circumscribed by the values of progress and development.

The poems under consideration—Gabriela Mistral’s *Poema de Chile*, William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson*, and Muriel Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* confront the effects of industrialization and modernity in these slower modes. That is, these poems

attempt to neutralize, stabilize, or otherwise slow down, temper and mellow the speed of modernity and the directionality of industrial development by showcasing how ruins have become part of the landscape of modernity. These poems provide, to put it another way, parasymphathetic rather than symphathetic²² responses to industrialization, and they implement paraperceptual²³ modes of attention—walking, documenting, taking pictures, writing—in order to gain access to the effects of progress and development in different geographic spaces and from more oblique angles. Although I use these concepts symphathetic and parasymphathetic in a more metaphorical sense to account for how they represent and interact with modernity, it is also possible to understand how nervous system responses within the body may register the effects of industrialized forms of labor and modes of production that can alter social relations. In a more parasymphathetic mode, then, these poems slow down the rapid pace of technological change and inhabit or explore spaces of ruination as a result.

²² In “layman’s” terms, the symphathetic and parasymphathetic nervous systems are two complementary parts of the nervous system, each of which controls heart rate and energy expenditure. The body uses the symphathetic nervous system when the body works hard and the heart rate accelerates. When the body stops working hard, the parasymphathetic nervous system helps the heart rate to slow down and achieve equilibrium. What is interesting to me is that when a person is walking, he or she engages both the symphathetic and parasymphathetic components in equal measure. I use these terms more or less metaphorically in order to think about the different rhythms of the poems I explore, some of which are more explosive and some, more meditative. In his book, *The Nervous System*, Michael Taussig offers a way to think less metaphorically about how bodies may react to experiencing life under siege or in constant states of “Benjaminian” emergency, as in some of the Latin American police states of the 70s when bodies were subject to constant surveillance and disappearance.

²³ Clark Lunberry use this term in his discussion of Williams’ *Paterson* and *Paterson*’s affinities with Robert Smithson’s site-specific earth installations. Lunberry argues that both artists’ deploy paraperceptive strategies for seeing and experiencing modes of time beyond the limits of human perception. In this way, the temporally and spatially determined activities of walking, seeing, smelling, and hearing that are found in *Paterson* and *Poema de Chile*, are analogously linked to the formal properties of documentary poetics. Documentary procedures rely on the camera, the cut, the splice, and the juxtaposition of fragments, to name a few procedures, in order to provide a different medium in which to experience and inhabit historical objects and truths. Also interesting is the way the latter procedures can produce ruins out of different forms such as lyric poems and court testimony, whereas the former, more mobile prosthetic arrangements can bear witness to ruins.

To be more specific, in *Poema de Chile*, Gabriela Mistral's speaker is a walker who travels the length of Chile in order to cull and recall from this country's margins the specifics of Chilean geography and natural history. Like most of Latin-America following the conquest, Chile participated in the early stages of modernity as a provider of natural resources, land, and free labor. Mining and agriculture altered the landscape, and, although the explicit terms of this history are absent in Mistral's text, her poeticized rendition of Chile's natural terrain and its diversity infers a critique of colonial modernity. Its parasymphetic ambulatory mode permits more digressive gestures that skirt cities and other centers of cultural production typically definitive of modernity. Her speaker encounters the damaged and ruined landscape of Chile and resurrects it, so to speak, by describing it, exploring it, and responding to its diversity.

To provide a frame of reference, I would argue that the forces of representation in Vallejo's *España* may be more sympathetically matched with the values of modernity and with its energies, rhythms, and movements. Its force of critique comes from its willingness to embrace some of the utopian values of progress and social action also associated with modernity. Thus its momentum is often, as I argued, future-oriented. In contrast, *Poema de Chile*'s flight from modernity and industrialization represents the body's habits of movement in order to temper the figuration of the poem in favor of reflection and meditation. In *Paterson*, walking also provides opportunities for the speaker to reflect, gaze, interact, and revise in poetically motivated ways with the environment that remains threatened and

transformed by patterns of industrialization. Images of ruination and decay in the landscape, in the river, and in the aging body of *Paterson*'s mobile speaker reflect this larger context. In *Paterson* and in Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, compositional techniques such as documentary collage allow each poem to revise and re-present historical materials, augmenting the time-space orientation of more conventional historiographic forms, most notably in order to resurrect the dead and dying forms that surround their living speakers. The poems in turn promote these ambulatory and documentary modes of engaging with time, history, and the environment, in order to elongate the scale of historical experience that modernity seems to disallow. As a result, the deconstructive tendencies in the poems I consider assert critical relationships with modernization and modernity, and they participate in a process that contests modernity's frameworks and methodologies even while also making use of its more enabling resources.

II. Modernity and Slow Time

Modernity is often associated with values of newness, vitality, energy, speed, and youth. In some renditions, modernity marches forward, relentlessly and voraciously in search of new experiences and new possibilities. As Gwen Kirkpatrick argues in her study on the Latin-American avant-garde, this narrative "implies ties to an Enlightenment subjectivity—individual ability, creativity, freedom, liberty, and problem-solving through reason" (181). Thus modernity promises endless resources for experience such as revolution, invention, self-definition, and consumption, and the time of these events depends on novelty and newness, on a threshold that often

devalues the past and its traditions. As Marshall Berman explains, these new frameworks for experience are understood in both celebratory and traumatic terms: “[to] be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (15). While Berman understands this trauma in aesthetic and cultural terms, focusing on the contradictions that give rise to artistic and social experiment, Kirkpatrick and other critics, including Perry Anderson, focus on the neo-colonial economic conditions that support this ideal of progress, and which perpetuate divisions between the margin and the center or, read another way, between those who provide the resources from which others benefit and those who benefit from this division of labor as full citizens of modernity. Anderson, for example, notes Berman’s methodological tendency to associate modernity with this experience of consumption enabled by modernization, thus “radically excluding the people who produce [modernization] and are produced by it” (99).

These tensions between privation and excess, between the old and the new, between “abstract universality and American specificity,” as Kirkpatrick writes, are felt more profoundly within the Latin American context. Octavio Paz’s account of the temporality of modernity in *Hijos del Limo* (*Children of the Mire*) begins with this dialectical understanding of modernity’s contradictions. For Paz, “la tradición de la ruptura” (a critical oxymoron for Paz) is marked by difference, heterogeneity, hybridity, contact, and conflict; thus “tradición” relies on its dialectical and

constitutive opposite “ruptura,” or the new, in order to perpetuate a domain of the traditional that remains separate from and vulnerable to modernity’s violent transformations. Paz’s argument also implies that modernity depends on this colonial mapping of time. An international division of labor between the old and the new, between the developed and the not-yet-developed, is essential to understanding the global coordinates of the twentieth century, as the traditional, the provincial, the underdeveloped, and the strategically underutilized third world sites of primitive accumulation support development, progress, and the illusion of modernity elsewhere in global centers of cultural production.

In order to achieve perspectives outside this dominant framework, some critics have experimented with different concepts that favor the peripheral, the horizontal, and the marginal. They do so in order to retain the spirit of renewal that modernity makes possible and to understand how these sites actively produce discourses that shape modernity’s values even as they are also assigned to become modernity’s other. In some cases, these critiques debate the supersession of modernity by postmodernity. The problem with this narrative, they argue, is that cultures and communities left disenfranchised by structural underdevelopment no longer have access to models of time that support revolution or integration.²⁴ My

²⁴ For example, in his essay, “Contradictory Modernities,” Nestor García Canclini chooses to frame modernity in terms of its openness, and he calls for an “open modernity” that retains values of democratization, emancipation, and renewal. In his account, an “open modernity” is an “uncertain movement,” that, like postmodernity, puts some of modernity’s norms on hold but also refuses to affirm that the time of possibility is completely over. When regarded from the point of view of more supposedly “peripheral” or still economically underdeveloped locations, modernity tells a different story. García-Canclini considers the way that capitalism and globalization exert their forces in places that remain “semi-integrated” (49). García-Canclini argues forcefully that processes of globalization

point in bringing up these arguments is to demonstrate how methodologies that become dependent on a typological model of linear time will have difficulty accounting for Latin-America's contribution to the avant-garde. I propose that it is necessary to widen and open the time-scale used to evaluate cultural work, particularly considering how the three poets under consideration in this chapter have attempted to do just that.

In order to reach spaces beyond the boundaries of the nation, these poems frequently invoke what Fernand Braudel calls a more “ponderous history whose time cannot be measured by any of our long-established instruments” (12). Wai Chee Dimock's study, *Through Other Continents*, reintroduces Braudel's concept of the *longue durée* as a way to critique and move beyond the narrow frame of reference provided by periodizing and studying national literatures. Dimock's concept of deep time rescales the civilizational framework that Braudel's *longue durée* entails. Braudel's contribution is nevertheless a useful place to begin thinking about the methodological instruments and forms of measurement that writers use to conceptualize models of time. For example, Braudel calls attention to the role that

and modernity require an uneven division of labor, which arrests development in certain locations, leaving communities to experience the benefits of modernity—or modernization more specifically—in uneven ways. This dynamic, Fernando Rosenberg argues, must be understood as the prerequisite for modernist and avant-garde experiments with time and space. He suggests that “what seems to count in peripheral modernism is the assessment of what is at stake globally when these peripheries are what remain behind (33). In Rosenberg's analysis, Latin-American avant-garde writing critiques methodological assumptions about Latin-America's peripheral status, offering models of time that, to return to García-Canclini's concept, demonstrate how modernity was and still is an open project. Modernist and avant-garde writing that explores the conflicted experiences of belonging and exile reflect this larger context and historicize the aesthetic tensions at work in avant-garde writing. In this way, the Latin-American avant-garde practices could never mimic the European avant-garde. To the contrary, they forcefully indicate “what is at stake globally” for all writers and artists during this time period.

“instruments” play in measuring scales of historical time, thus also calling our attention to the importance that perception plays in establishing limits for historical understanding. Instruments may be historiographic methodologies that, for Braudel, focus too narrowly on national boundaries, or these instruments may be apparatuses, such as the camera, that extend and expand the limits of seeing and cognition. Indeed, the relationship between what the camera can “record” and what historical documents can accurately represent becomes an important point of departure in Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead*.

Braudel critiques patterns of historical understanding that promote a limited view of human identity and human culture, a view, he implies, that remains in sympathy with the values of economic progress. In order to reach “new vistas of work to be done” (15) Braudel further implies that the rhythms of these historical methods do not capture the “reality of a slow-paced history of civilizations, a history of their depths, of the characteristics of their structure and layout” (12). The space-time model of historical understanding that Braudel supports achieves a depth, a magnitude, and a rhythm beyond the pace of the individual. Social time, Braudel continues, “moves at a thousand different paces” (12), including some which do not appear to move at all. To become an historian of the *longue durée* discourages choosing one history—of the United States, for example—to the exclusion of others. This perspective invokes a more epic time scale, a scale in which there is no difference between the short duration of the rise and fall of industrialization and the imperceptible duration of geological time. This “scale enlargement,” suggests Dimock, “changes our very sense

of the connectedness among human beings” (5). In short, both Braudel and Dimock imply, it is a species problem that dissolves more arbitrary forms of association, including the nation and the individual.

Braudel’s basic methodology, he implies, is to “bring things together” (25). This emphasis, I argue, invites a somatic understanding of history and provides a way to consider the effects of other forms of life and other patterns and rhythms that interact with human perception. Whereas processes of decay and change may threaten the “time-scale” of the economically motivated individual or the nation state, these processes may engender forms of historical and environmental consciousness that disarticulate and relocate subjects and subjectivity in revised contexts. By emphasizing rhythms and tempos that may be, in this case, slower and imperceptible, Braudel, like Henri Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis*, provides a phenomenology of historical time and attempts to return the body’s experiences of space and time to philosophical and historical discourses. Lefebvre is less concerned with the *longue durée* that Braudel conceives and more interested in understanding the forms of repetition and habits of life that structure experience in the context of capitalism, but each argument understands the constitutive interaction between micro and macro scales of experience, time and space. In particular, Lefebvre emphasizes how social time is formed out of overlapping and contradictory rhythms, speeds, and patterns that include “polyrhythmia, eurythmia, and arrhythmia” (16). Lefebvre’s purpose is to critique the dominance of capital as a primary rhythm of social life and he catalogs and describes various types of bodily rhythms and collective patterns (in cities, for

example) that more accurately capture the contradictions of social life. Lefebvre writes:

Social times disclose diverse, contradictory possibilities: delays and early arrivals, reappearances (repetitions) of an (apparently) rich past, and revolutions that brusquely introduce a new content and sometimes change the form of society. Historical times slow down or speed up, advance or regress, look forward or backward. (14)

Like Braudel's analysis, which entails a methodological revision of the time-scale brought to bear on human interaction, Lefebvre describes rhythms and counter rhythms that overlap and compose social experience. The violent rhythms of revolution and catastrophe provoke one scale of experience, the tempo of education and learning provokes another more mundane valence of everyday life, and perhaps the scale of the rhythms of time that subtend Braudel's notion of the *longue durée* "superimpose themselves" on other patterns and places (30).

Important within this understanding of time and space are rhythms of decay and entropy, features of ruins and ruination that often exceed perception but overlap with and inform other, perhaps more perceptible patterns. For example, in an essay that examines important connections between Robert Smithson and William Carlos Williams, Clark Lunberry notes Williams's interest in representing the duration of environmental processes that interact with and inform human duration, hence his interest in exploring processes of ruination and decay that industrialized and post-industrialized landscapes make visible. In this sense, as many critics have argued, Williams's *Paterson* embodies both the process and product of human experience and its surroundings. Moreover, he represents in his process-oriented writing how these

experiences and their contexts are constantly subject to decay from within and from without. Perhaps because Williams wrote *Paterson* towards the end of his life and while he was ill, or perhaps because the poem explores various forms of long-term decay and transformation that compose *Paterson*, it exhibits an awareness of death as a condition of existence. That is, as Paul Bové notes, Williams's poem registers—at least implicitly—the Heideggerian notion that “in the world man dwells under dying” (qtd. in Bové 583). Moreover, *Paterson* registers an environmental awareness of decay as the enabling condition for all earthly forms and processes and it historicizes that awareness in a critique of American industrial life. As Lunberry argues, both Smithson and Williams create and examine forms of “entropic dispersion” in their works—Smithson in his earthworks and Williams in his descriptions of the Passaic Falls. Erosion, dispersion, entropy and other forms of geological metamorphosis interact in William's work and he explores the limits of communication against this expanded time-scale. Of course, Williams continuously tries within the five books of *Paterson* to embody this time-scale, but what *Paterson* eventually communicates is the threshold of communication and the sight lines and vistas that open and close human perception. Lunberry suggests that Williams and Smithson make use of forms of “paraperception or prosthetic seeing,” which include seeing, walking, writing, photography, and sculpture, that offer “oblique access” to *Paterson*'s “dimensional absence” (636). These paraperceptive forms trace erosion, flow, decay, and other modalities of ruination. They try to capture the effects of longer durations of time and experience.

III. The Spatial Poetics of the Long Poem

The poems that I consider in this chapter thus attempt in various ways to cope with the effects of industrialization and the dehumanizing imperatives of capitalism, by considering, on the one hand, how industrialization alters the scope of the imagination, and, on the other hand, how these effects interact with natural, environmental, and pastoral categories of experience that belong to the history of lyric poetry. That is, how do these poems attempt to represent processes of industrialization by means of figures of temporal possibility, vernacular knowledge, and lyric perception? These poems borrow from the resources made available by previous long poems and quest poems, resources that include collage, allusion, and citation, and join these sources with representations of ecological spaces that are, on the one hand, changed by textual forms of appropriation, and also, on the other hand, given the chance to inform the epic scope of the long poem. That is, from the point of view these works imagine, there is no difference between the cultural and natural histories they present. In their frameworks that deepen and elongate time, these poems blur differences between the economic, social, aesthetic, and environmental processes, and the natural and cultural histories they describe belong to the long poem's capacity to transpose historical problems into formal experiments.

Poema de Chile's opening poem, "Hallazgo," provides a good place to start exploring the overlapping concerns that unite these three texts. Although *Poema de Chile* employs many different forms and tones, including short, descriptive lyrics and longer, more discursive poems, this entire sequence shares a single speaker who has

returned from the dead as a ghost to travel the length of Chile from North to South. During the course of her journey the speaker encounters and travels with two companions—an indigenous boy and a Chilean deer. Both animal and child become familiars for the speaker and their shared journey establishes a dialogic relationship that shapes the larger structure and direction of the poem. In this opening poem, the speaker first meets her future companions and the encounter catalyzes some of the important themes that frame the entire sequence. First of all, the title, “Hallazgo,” implies both discovery and recovery. The speaker discovers the geography and natural history of Chile as she returns and travels its length, and through these acts of discovery she also recovers lost parts of her social memory. This double journey allows the speaker to experience Chile as a novelty, that is, as pure poetic experiment, and also as part of a lost tradition of specific cultural knowledge. In the first stanza, Mistral writes:

Bajé por espacio y aires
y más aires, descendiendo
sin llamado y con llamada
por la fuerza del deseo,
y a más que yo caminaba
era el descender más recto
y era mi gozo más vivo
y mi adivinar más cierto,
y arriba como la flecha
éste mi segundo cuerpo
en el punto en que comienzan
Patria y Madre que me dieron. (7)

[I came down through space and air
and more air, descending
without calling, but being called
by the force of desire
and the more I walked

the straighter was my descent
and the greater my joy
and my search more certain,
and like an arrow I land
this my second body
at the point where they begin,
Fatherland and Mother Earth I was given.^{25]}

Like Neruda's speaker at the beginning of *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, Vicente Huidobro's parachuter that falls to earth in *Altazor*, or the many speakers in epic poems past and present who find themselves descending to their respective underworlds as part of metaphysical and historical transformations, Mistral's speaker also falls to earth and begins to recover lost parts of herself and her history. This voluminous descent expands the air, opening a material space that allows the speaker to inhabit a "second body," which provides pleasure and transformation. Moreover, the speaker returns only by the force of her desire to return. Other epic journeys may begin by means of external provocation, such as a call to war or divine intervention, but Mistral's journey is internally motivated and inspired and her internal forms of awareness define the outer limits of the territory where she wanders.

In this poem and elsewhere, Mistral employs verbs of searching, divining, exploring, and moving through locations (*caminar*, *adivinar*, *buscar*, *mirar*, *encontrar*, *cruzar*) in order to qualify the perceptive state of discovery that opens the poem and to invite the subtle particulars of the landscape to intervene in this threshold experience. These different qualities of perception shape the poem's openness and

²⁵ "Madre" could be translated as either mother or, in this context, mother earth. In reference to "patria," which means fatherland and not father, I chose to translate "madre" as mother earth in order to reference this larger meaning.

allow the speaker to enter a more receptive position, capable of hallucinating the presence of the indigenous boy and the deer that become her companions.

Somewhere between history and fantasy, between the corporeal and the divine, the ghostly presence of this speaker begins to name a more dynamic environment wherein the particulars of her mind interact with the landscape and vice versa.

Perhaps like the orphic voice that names the fallen cities in Vallejo's *España*, Mistral's fantasma similarly names and personifies the landscape, turning mountains, stones, fields, and rivers into animate forms that can speak back to and engage with the speaker.

This search for dialogue and company with both animate and non-animate forms motivates many of the poems, and in particular this desire motivates the speaker's search for the other in the form of the indigenous child who can complement her identity. Her attempt to create a collectivity with him and with the animal bespeaks a larger desire to form a sociable and sustainable space within the presence of the effects of colonization, industrialization, and technological progress. After meeting with the young boy, who more or less appears out of nowhere and thus occupies his own semi-mystical status, the speaker engages him directly and confronts him with the purpose of their potential journey:

Son muy tristes, mi chiquito,
las rutas sin compañero:
parecen largo bostezo,
jugarretas de hombre ebrio.
Preguntadas no responden
al extraviado ni al ciego. (8)

[They are very sad, my little boy,

those routes without a companion:
like a long yawn,
drunk men's dirty tricks.
Unanswered questions
to the lost or the blind]

The speaker employs the diminutive (*mi chiquito*) when engaging her imaginary son, and this form of address establishes a specifically pedagogical as well as dialogic relationship between the two of them. In a sense, the speaker gives the boy an ultimatum: either he can accompany her and together they can form a small community, a sociable and livable space that supports both of them, or they can remain isolated, like mute and blind loners. The figure of the drunk and his dirty tricks speaks volumes by invoking a popular image of social alienation and thus a frame of reference for understanding the cultural and global stakes of their journey. She regards their potential voyage as a metaphorical antidote to the notion that Latin-America has become a place of failed development and failed integration.²⁶ In this context, companionship between the ghost, the boy, and the deer, who appear like romantic mirages from the past, prefigures an important shift in Latin-American

²⁶ As I will show later in my analysis of this text, in the context of colonial forms of appropriation, Latin-American countries experienced few opportunities to develop industrial economies in the way that North American communities did. Eduardo Galeano points out that colonial policies of structural underdevelopment negatively transformed ways of life for indigenous communities in particular, as forms of primitive accumulation made them dependent on the colonial system for survival. Furthermore, as many Latin-American cultural critics such as Martín Hopenhaym maintain, this division of labor has changed little since independence. In *No Apocalypse/No Integration*, Hopenhaym articulates how development policies and visions of progress failed in Latin America, given the way they perpetuated the colonial division of labor that maintained Latin America as a space available to extract resources. In many places, Mistral's poem prefigures the need for labor and agrarian reform that will allow the land to be utilized properly and the indigenous populations to form sustainable economies. Hopenhaym's argument is that in the current context, in "vast sectors of the population, the gap between expectations for consumption and the impossibility of filling them is an ever widening one" (6).

politics that incorporates indigenous epistemologies. As Lidia Neghme-Echeverría argues:

el niño indígena simboliza las nuevas generaciones americanas en las que queda puesta toda la confianza en el futuro histórico de la nación y el continente. El interés por los niños y el indigenismo de Mistral son en este caso evidentes y se expresan sin ambages. (554)

[the indigenous child symbolizes the new generation of Americans who are confident about the future history of the nation and the continent. Mistral's interest in children and indigeneity in this case is obvious and to the point.]

Neghme-Echeverría in part refers to Mistral's background as an educator and as someone who worked not only for the Chilean government but also in other countries including Mexico to develop educational policies that supported indigenous concerns. Much of her writing celebrated and elevated the status of indigenous peoples, often at the expense of other minorities in Latin-America whom she regarded in less romantic ways. Writing and working contemporaneously with figures such as José Vasconcelos and Alfonso Reyes, Mistral developed textual projects that negotiated and represented versions of Latin-American identity, some of which focused on the future status of Latin-American mestizaje as an image of cultural hybridity that would bring together the nation state.²⁷ Some of these ideologies are problematic, particularly when having recourse to an indigenous past as an idealized origin excludes the indigenous peoples who continue to work, live, and evolve in the present. Although her poetry should never be considered coterminous with these projects, her romantic fidelity to Chile,

²⁷ In *Queer Mother for the Nation*, Licia Fiol-Matta maintains that mestizaje is not “a spontaneous racial mixing dictated by movements and contacts between peoples but a state-sponsored and managed phenomenon” (7). Moreover, it is possible that Mistral transposed this concept of mestizaje from México, where she worked and lived, and interpreted Chilean cultural politics in this framework.

its natural history, and its indigenous populations is everywhere evident in *Poema de Chile*. It will be necessary to see where her lyricism might evolve beyond invoking the topos of a pastoralized Indigenous past and where it could offer a more complex image and argument on behalf of the present conditions of Chilean culture.

Poema de Chile's attention to geography, botany, and other types of local knowledge offers one context in which to explore the politics of her text, particularly considering the way she redefines the spaces of lyric utterance within the shifting environmental contexts of the trio's journey. Not only does the dialogic encounter between the two historicize their journey, the poem also explores the potential offered by landscape, geography and space to endow language with a new emphasis on material relations between objects, events, and beings. One of the effects of the poem is to give a voice to a ruined landscape, and to resurrect—at least metaphorically—its corpse. The space of the lyric provides this imaginative domain in which to encounter and recover the ruins of previous belief systems and communities. Moreover, in its form as a walking poem, the structure of the journey inhabits an earthbound domain, a space that allows the speaker access to these lost parts of Chilean culture. Thus what Roland Greene calls a “materialist lyric” in his discussion of Neruda's *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, also appears here. This material emphasis verges with geographically enabled axes of movement rather than with the temporal burdens that determine traditional lyric's metaphysical structure of meaning (R. Greene 2006). Although her walking poem also borrows from epic motifs of the quest and does not completely repudiate mystical possibilities, it seems appropriate that the material environment of

Chile would emerge in Mistral's *Poema de Chile* as a category of experience constitutive of the self, its movements, and its history. As Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates in her comparison of Neruda's and Mistral's epic invocations of Latin America, Neruda's perspective in *Canto General* always remains at least somewhat aerial and continental. His bird's eye view stays aloft, particularly when he ascends to Macchu Picchu's sublime heights, but Mistral's speaker lands squarely on the earth and remains there.

Compared to Williams' *Paterson* or Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead*, both of which utilize more distinctly modernist forms of collage and documentary techniques, *Poema de Chile* seems romantic and the poems more formally lyric. Yet all three poems share a desire to bring ecological meanings and contexts into the realm of the lyric and they dramatize how poetic language can provide resources that do so. In his Heideggerian reading of *Paterson*, Paul Bové reflects on the role perception plays in the organization of *Paterson*'s jumble of parts, and he looks specifically at "Sunday in the Park"—also a kind of walking poem—to demonstrate Williams' interest in gathering poetic materials that can become a dwelling place for human beings. *Paterson*, Bové writes, is "a *gathering* built as a dwelling for man" (583). Moreover, "this is not nihilism nor despair, but a recognition that in the world man dwells under dying" (583). Hence Williams sets himself the task of making language new according to the particulars, things, and processes endemic to a landscape that does not mimic "the falls of unintelligible language, we, as Americans, inherit from Europe" (Bové 585). Williams writes in order to approximate the daily mire

crossed by other habits of mind and body that are, as Williams implies, more concrete. The speaker likewise tries to place “himself among others” in this concrete, material matrix. These others are “paced by their dogs,” treading the “same stones”, “laughing, calling.” The speaking voice immerses himself in these movements and tries to become indistinguishable from them, indexing a world of processes among which human duration is but one mode that interacts with a complex of other interactions, modes, and durations. As Octavio Paz writes, “Williams’s point of departure is not things but sensations,” and not pure sensation, which “would result in chaos,” but rather sensations “turned into verbal objects” (“William Carlos Williams” 15-16). In a conclusion that echoes Heidegger, Paz furthermore suggests that Williams’s writing explores the literary nature of experience and thus speaks to the imagination, “[seeking] to make the world habitable” (“William Carlos Williams” 24). Like Mistral, Williams’s poem searches for the sociable and livable arrangements that more accurately reflect the mutable conditions of human existence.

Composed of many discordant and competing layers that behave like a geographic landscape, Williams’s *Paterson* grafts together the historical, archival and personal documents and experiences that constitute the public record of the city and which become the influences that generate the text. Reflecting Williams’s desire to create a language particular to the idiom of local experience, his work thus stages the difficulty of using language to capture lives in transformation, and the collocation of multiple documents, objects and things both linguistic and otherwise from many disparate sources further dramatizes the effort of the poem to embody dynamic

processes of life. One of the ways Williams represents this process is also through the trope of walking, a movement through space and time that becomes an apt metaphor for poetic innovation. As Jacques Rancière has suggested in an argument about William Wordsworth's poetic practice, walking and wandering expose the voice to a horizon of somatic potentialities that undermine and decompose the self, transforming "thought into the sensory experience of the community" (Ranciere 44). For Williams, walking becomes a mode of sensory engagement and a discursive event that links the poetic voice in a larger network of spatial and geographic affiliations. Moreover, it invokes a sensorium implicitly aware of displacement and ruination.

Anne Mikkelsen also describes how Paterson's formal and conceptual structures of organization represent *Paterson*, the text, and Paterson, the city, as a "site of 'digestion,' both bodily and intellectual, a locus in which the reader may 'read/and digest'" (605-6). Williams experiments with the composition of the civic body, with what it contains and what it is allowed to contain. Perhaps an implicit critique of Pound's ideogrammatic method, *Paterson's* digestive processes actively incorporate filth and excess into the body politic and critique structures that attempt to suppress dirt and filth from the nation's boundaries. Mikkelsen writes: "As William's poetry reveals, individuals associated with dirt in modern American society, such as women or people of color, cannot be excised from a national narrative, such as pastoral, without destroying the greater body that is the nation" (605). Thus Williams' formal method dramatizes the presence of excess and impurity in its documentary structure, and, like Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, attempts to

recover voices that problematize and critique the ideals of American civic life. These poems feature multiple forms and types of documents such as letters, interviews, and newspaper articles. Juxtaposed alongside a range of poetic forms, including idylls in *Paterson* and elegies in *The Book of the Dead*, textual impurities reframe poetry's discursive and conceptual limits.

Comparing Williams to Rukeyser allows us to see how compositional techniques such as collage and documentation might perform the same kind of effect as Mistral's ambulatory perspective. Just as walking allows Mistral's speaker to measure different effects of the environment at a slower pace, documentary techniques provide ways to measure social life at right angles to the tempo of industrial progress. The underlying argument put forth by documentary methods in these poems is that they can renovate traditional poetic perspectives and the models of time and history these perspectives infer. What gets to have a voice and how are central themes in all three of these long poems. What I will call the romantic realism of Mistral's poem is comparable to the realist—or naturalist—documentary techniques in Rukeyser's and William's works, both of which represent voices and realities that expand the national boundaries of American life. In many ways, each poem attempts to see, resurrect, and live with the dying and the dead. These are both real bodies and imagined figures that contaminate and undermine images of national coherence. In *Poema de Chile*, this challenge to the nation state is often allegorical. The poem borrows from classical epic and Christian traditions in order to resurrect the metaphorical dead within the landscape and from the speaker's own dead body

and fading memories. Nevertheless, as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, her “engagement with Chile in the poem is not played out in any of the fraternal imaginings [Benedict] Anderson identifies with nationalism” (69). Using allegory can thus be seen to politically motivate the text to resist a unified or rational meaning of the nation.

In Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead*, the need to represent and recall the dead is pressing, given the grim subject matter the poem negotiates,²⁸ but Mistral also incorporates a mythological level of meaning that informs the activist dimension of the text. Conceptually framing her own long poem as a book of the dead allows readers to consider her text in a similar way, as one constructed by the living to accompany the dead into the afterlife. Her own documentary becomes a similar kind of instrument that names and then accompanies the dying, giving them a meaningful death befitting national subjects. In this context, documentary practice magically aligns materials in order to reverse historical failures. This feature associates her work with other writers like H.D. and T.S. Eliot, who both rely on the occult in order to negotiate the past and its hidden possibilities. While Rukeyser’s contexts include her participation in the Spanish Civil War²⁹ and association with the Popular Front, she was also influenced by high modernist techniques. Michael Davidson argues: “it is against the backdrop of the [Depression] era’s photojournalism and investigative

²⁸ Extended discussions of the historical event and context that Rukeyser’s poem concerns are offered in numerous analyses of this poem. See Thurston, Kalaidjian, Goodman, and Davidson.

²⁹ Rukeyser wrote a semi-autobiographical novel about her experience travelling with U.S. athletes to The People’s Olympiad, an alternative Olympics meant to protest the official Olympics taking place in Germany, days before and during the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. This once lost novel, *Savage Coast*, was recently discovered and offers an important contribution to the archive of Spanish Civil War literature.

reporting that *The Book of the Dead* must be read, fusing as it does techniques of modernist pastiche and montage with partisan reportage and editing” (140). But Rukeyser’s movement through and engagement with public experience also enables the poem to cull from the past and to speak with the dead. Perhaps like the figure of the walker, the documentary figure of the camera becomes a perceptive instrument or a prosthetic that revises and stretches perceptual arrangements, giving access to the dead, the lost, and the overlooked as a necessary and definitive feature of part of public space.

In these contexts, the pastoral is also an implied mode of representation that undergoes revision. Mikkelsen notes that Williams introduces “a radical reincarnation of the pastoral mode” (601). In previous iterations of the pastoral, this mode isolates idyllic spaces closed off from the bustle of industrial life and thus also from the precarious working-class existence of the types of characters that Rukeyser and Williams describe. In these poems, the pastoral does not represent an elevated or more pure space that belongs to the past but is mapped as a set of relations in a “genre of ambivalence, indeterminacy, and filth” (Mikkelsen 613). Considered in relation to the indigenous politics articulated by *Poema de Chile*, this argument offers a way to consider the co-existence of indigeneity as a constitutive feature of modernity. The geopolitics of pastoral are similarly represented in Rukeyser’s poem “George Robinson: Blues,” which maps the context of Gauley Bridge in terms of racial politics:

Gauley Bridge is a good town for Negroes, they let us stand around, they let us stand

around on the sidewalks if we're black or brown.
Vanetta's over the trestle, and that's our town.

The hill makes breathing slow, slow breathing after you row the river,
and the graveyard's on the hill, cold in the springtime blow,
the graveyard's up on high, and the town is down below.

Did you ever bury thirty-five men in a place in back of your house,
thirty-five tunnel workers the doctors didn't attend,
died in the tunnel camps, under rocks, everywhere, world without end. (84)

In long prosaic lines reminiscent of Whitman but containing fewer inclusive and ecstatic multitudes, Rukeyser records the racial segregation that defines Gauley Bridge, a town over the river from Vanetta, where the African-Americans ostensibly reside and build their communities. Rukeyser maps these relations in a larger network, defining the community in terms of spatial and geographical lines of implied influence. These plots and signs include the trestle that links Gauley to Vanetta, the tunnel that goes underground and which is crossed by a river and the trestle bridge, a graveyard high on a hill, and the “back of your house” turned into a graveyard, which transforms the supposed serenity of a rural cornfield into an underworld “without end.”³⁰ In this map, Rukeyser takes note of the way that private spaces are always already publicly plotted by forms of social segregation and, ultimately, social death. Her point is to articulate a civic space that includes and is constituted by these peripheral members and their ways of living and dying. Moreover, although there is little reminiscent of the pastoral here, the topos of hill, river, and springtime intimate a layer of idyllic meaning written over by the “tunnel camps” and the “tunnel workers

³⁰ Rukeyser alludes to the practice of burying some of the victims of Silicosis poisoning in unmarked graves in a local cornfield. Another poem, “The Cornfield”, also focuses on this part of the history more directly.

the doctors didn't attend." Racial and class stratification revise the meaning of pastoral images, producing a map of experiences akin to Williams's representation of working class life that cannot be disavowed when accounting for the complex identity of a civic population. These pastoral spaces emerge as claustrophobic scenes of containment and social pressure, becoming one with the death world defined by the "tunnel camps." That is, a "world without end" is not an idyllic space or a final resting place but a socially defined limitation occupied by the lives of those who can be economically cut off from citizenship and consumption.

Rukeyser imagines a space defined ideologically by history and social expectations and discursively by the laborers who struggle to understand and name their experiences and the precarious quality of their lives. Given the way Rukeyser also maps these competing values within a larger geographic and environmental context, and the way that both Williams and Mistral also engage with environmental meanings, I use the concept of the industrial palimpsest as a framing device to interpret these poems, the different rhythms and ways of life they conceive, and the larger historical patterns with which they contend. While the Northeast experienced the effects of industrialization differently than Chile, these two geographic spaces participate in a larger palimpsest of overlapping meanings, wherein the forces that shape one location—Gauley Bridge, for example—may also infer a different kind of meaning or relationship in another place, such as the Atacama desert or, more realistically, in nearby locations in Chile that were mined and which provided

resources for development in the Northeast.³¹ These meanings are both material and virtual, defined by memories, meanings, habits of mind, and historical patterns. In developing his notion of an urban palimpsest in *Present Pasts*, Andreas Huyssen conceives of urban space as a heterogeneous accumulation of the traces of myths, history, everyday life, ideological forces, and material experiences. Within an urban palimpsest, memory and memory traces remain significant as patterns that shape and give texture to experience: “the strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses, and heterotopias” (Huyssen 7). An urban palimpsest helps to account for interrelations of memory with other forms of historical representation and identity formation that compose quasi-textual places such as cities. I employ a similar notion of the industrial palimpsest to likewise account for the agglomeration of textures, patterns, and movements that define industrial and pastoral spaces and their interrelations. Moreover, an industrial palimpsest includes slow tempos of ruination and decay, buildings and social spaces left abandoned and willfully ruined, and the liminal sites that emerge where rural and urban patterns interact. As I conceive this framework, the three poems together form a larger, hemispheric palimpsest. Mistral’s poem may pick up and improvise the rhythm of the walker who skirts the city in favor of farms and orchards as forms of sustenance, while Williams picks up another more frenetic rhythm closer to the city

³¹ A novel that exemplifies this argument might be César Vallejo’s *El Tungsteno* (1931), which concerns an indigenous population in Peru who were essentially conscripted to work in tungsten mines. Although the temporality that shapes this indigenous community allowed them, to a certain extent, to work at their leisure and to show up late, for example, or not at all, these miners were still subject to the will of the foreign capitalists. See Vallejo, César. *El Tungsteno/Paco Yunque*. Buenos Aires: Stock Cero, 2007.

and in conversation with the city's detritus. The rhythms in Rukeyser's poem belong to laborers, lawyers, family members, and bureaucrats, whose uses of language trace contradictory versions of an emergent historical reality. Important within this concept is how geography can differentiate experience and how the imaginary and real ruins that evolve within geographic spaces likewise provoke transformations, changes in consciousness, and the possibility for renewal. All three poems explore the meeting point between these virtual and material spaces.

IV. Walking Poems: The Tempo of De-Colonial Critique

Poema de Chile

In *Poema de Chile*, Gabriela Mistral explores and resurrects specific details and local knowledge about the many zones, regions, flora, and fauna that compose the geological contours and complex national textures of Chile. Her writing inhabits and enlivens the landscape, and the overall purpose of this poemario (book of poems) is to record the particulars of Chile's geography, which stretches from the hot desert in the Atacama in the north to the bracing cold and no less barren and windswept territory of Patagonia in the south. Although Mistral does occasionally invoke Chile as "la Patria," she is less concerned with Chile's status as a nation state and more so with poeticizing Chile's natural history and its "microsites" of social reproduction (Pratt 69). Her poems in the early part of the text explore the northern landscape, including the Valle de Elqui where Mistral grew up, and the orchards, farmlands and other agrarian and rural spaces that were misappropriated by colonists, foreign capitalists,

and other types of absent owners that controlled but did not have an intimate connection with the land or its people. This region is where Mistral first meets her companions, and together they travel south, avoiding cities, remaining only temporarily in houses, and eventually making their way along the spine of the Andes and towards Patagonia. Within the symbolic boundaries of the poem, it is impossible to tell how long this walking journey would take or whether it is meant to be at all linear. Chile is two thousand and six-hundred miles long, roughly three times the length of California, and walking its length would seem an impossible task. The poem is thus informed by the imaginative projection of Chile as an epic space, as an epic condition dictated by its exhaustive length and challenging terrain. Across two-hundred forty-four pages and seventy-seven poems, Mistral intimates the range, diversity, and complexity of Chile's cultural and natural histories.

Formally and conceptually, *Poema de Chile* is a walking poem, a poem of drift and observation and everyday life. Structural linearity is implied by virtue of Chile's length, which stretches down the Pacific Coast and hugs the Andes only a short distance inland, but the poetic version of this journey wanders and meanders.³² In this way, *Poema* is not only a poem about a walk and thus about the narrator's journey across the variable terrain and diverse ecosystems of Chile but also a poem that uses the unpredictable structures made available during a walk to inform its

³² *Poema de Chile* was edited and published posthumously many years after Mistral died, and its editor, Doris Dana, compiled and arranged the poems in the present order. It is impossible to know exactly how Mistral would have arranged the poems or if the order would have also invoked a more literal journey from North to South. Since the sequence is composed of single poems, a reader could read "around in" the collection and thus experience the geography differently. Sequentiality is implied because of its geographical referent, but its length and scope may be encountered in many, perhaps more improvisatory ways.

patterns of figuration. Moreover, the means to walk gives the speaker special access to the landscape and to many otherwise imperceptible and inchoate features of this material environment. By writing a walking poem, Mistral can also link her personal quest to memorialize Chile with a long tradition of epic journeys, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, that feature expansive and exhaustive journeys of redemption and self-definition. As Santiago Daydí-Tolson writes,

Walking was for [Mistral] a means to learn about this world and to communicate with it; it was also a vital representation of human life as symbolized in the proverbial road of the traditional Christian allegory of *homo viator*, man the traveler. For Mistral, walking is a recurring motif that acquires particular significance in her book about her long walk along her country. (132)

Daydí-Tolson infers that Mistral invokes a mystical and allegorical tradition of using walking to represent other forms of discovery and redemption. Thus two narratives and two ways of walking intertwine. On the one hand, Mistral's poem resembles Wordsworth's romantic dedication to make walking, as Rebecca Solnit argues in *Wanderlust*, "a means of composition" (113). In doing so, the poem maps an emergent vernacular reality, which defines and extends the parameters of the lyric voice. It romantically invokes the environment, which means, as Jacques Rancière argues in his writing on Wordsworth, that it engenders a form of radical subjectivity defined by material rather than metaphysical limitations. "Nature has dethroned the king," writes Rancière, "by suppressing his place, his point-of-view—nature in the double sense that will establish, for the new age, the core of politics in sensory experience" (17). Solnit maintains Rousseau as an important precursor for Wordsworth in this development of a subject who does not regard nature as a place of

original sin but as a source of companionship and a utopian reminder of human origins. Nature here is a political category of experience, representing the emergence of a new sensibility that turns human awareness towards material reality and material conditions of existence. Inward journeys of personal edification can become externalized as forms of activism and resistance, suggests Solnit, as if the internal search for redemption found its objective correlative in a material environment of uncertain relations. Walking poems written in this vein not only take walking as their subject matter, they also, as Ron Padgett suggests, “reflect the way the mind works during [a] walk” (201). These romantic versions of walking inform Mistral’s text, particularly given the way she celebrates and cares for the landscape’s diverse meanings. This context for experience provides the means to critique colonial modernity and to provoke, in turn, a decolonial imaginary in regional, local, and vernacular spaces. That is, the tempo of walking engenders the tempo of critique.

On the other hand, a more mystical or metaphysical version of walking as a form of pilgrimage takes shape in *Poema de Chile*. An obvious comparison in the Christian tradition might be *Pilgrim’s Progress* or, in the epic tradition, *The Divine Comedy*. In both cases, the trope of walking allegorizes a search for more elevated meanings. These exhaustive journeys transport their figures beyond human limits into divine, unearthly spaces. Walkers thus often require guides, figures who impart essential knowledge and companionship and who help to form sociable and dialogical limits for what might otherwise be an alienating experience. In *Poema de Chile*, Mistral’s speaker is both earthly and divine and she occupies the status of guide and

traveler equally. She is earthbound but also a ghost, and her quest for redemption involves relearning and recovering the landscape she had forgotten. Thus Mistral combines these two structures of meaning—one asserting a new sensibility of place and geography as constituent features of a political voice, the other asserting the topos of wandering as a permanent condition that runs beneath human experience. In the decolonial imaginary of Mistral’s poem, both versions make sense as influential sources and formal, underscoring multiple meanings for the journey.

The structure of the walk in this poem mirrors its concerns with local forms of knowledge and language that Mistral recovers. Throughout the poem, Mistral employs colloquial phrases and words particular to Chile as well as indigenous Mapuche words³³ that invoke the specificity of the territory and which also help Mistral to identify and communicate with her intended audience. Just as Dante wrote in the vernacular Italian to make his epic journey more accessible to his own compatriots,³⁴ Mistral culls from regional uses of language to make the text available

³³ In her editing, Doris Dana helpfully identifies many of these phrases and words. For example, in the poem, “Cordillera,” Mistral writes, “entre Dios y nosotros/existe en Pillán de fuego” [between God and us/exists Pillán on fire] (125). Dana tells us in the note that Pillán “es uno de los dioses de los indigenes” [is one of the indigenous Gods] (125). Other poems similarly position these references, specifically naming objects and things that would be accessible to a Chilean audience. “Flores,” which I explore in detail in my analysis, includes words and phrases such as “Topa-topa” and “Huilli,” which are both Mapuche names for indigenous plants (102).

³⁴ In an early example of literary criticism, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante also explores the value of writing in the vernacular Italian and further explores the forms of writing and speech that should be used in developing an “illustrious vernacular.” He wrote the text while in exile, and the “underlying structure of exile,” suggests Marianne Shapiro, informs the text’s argument (3). She writes that he “espoused the creation of a unified national state of Italy” before there was one (2). This frame of reference could provide another way to think about Mistral’s *Poema de Chile*, which Mistral wrote while living outside of and thus remembering her homeland from a distance. Matthew Hart’s recent study, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular*, provides another framework. Hart explores the use of “demotic Englishes” and other types of vernacular and vulgar language in modernist writing that could provide a helpful of reference for

as a source of knowledge, like a natural history, for her fellow Chileans. For this reason, Mistral also incorporates folklore as subject matter in many of her poems, perhaps intending to elevate their status as lyric material or to link the elevated status of the lyric with uses of language that name and identify reality. Moreover, by writing in the form of the romancero³⁵, Mistral enframes the content of her poems as popular wisdom and familiar knowledge and not as part of a strictly aesthetic project that romanticizes the landscape. For example, in “Flores,” a longer poem that features extensive dialogue between the two speakers, the mother teaches the boy about different herbs and flowers and what they could mean within the local imaginary:

Voy a decirte lo que
con la pobre menta pasa,
también con la hierbabuena
e igual con lo mejorana.

--¿Qué les pasa, mama, di?

--Que ellas huelen todo el año
y las rosas una semana,
y tanto que pavonean
de u garbo y de su gracia... (96)

[I am going to tell you what
what happens with poor mint
and also with peppermint
and equally with marjoram.

--What happens to them, mama?

--That they smell all year

Mistral's use of language to critique national identity (2). See Shapiro, Marianne. *De Vulgari Eloquentia, Dante's Book of Exile*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1990, and Hart, Matthew. *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

³⁵ The romancero is an old but popular Spanish ballad form, written in short six syllable lines, which originated before the baroque.

and the roses one week
as much as they flaunt
their elegance and grace...]

In this brief section, the mother's discourse reveals what she favors (herbs such as peppermint and marjoram) and what she disdains (roses), because, she implies, roses must waste their smell in order to flaunt their grace. In the symbolic logic at work here, roses are cultivated and herbs are wild. Moreover, grace, which might be traditionally linked to the beauty of roses, is elsewhere defined in this sequence as something more ephemeral, something that leaves behind traces and atmospheric changes but is difficult to capture. Compared to the hardy herbs, which last all year, roses are cultured and irrelevant. They might look beautiful, arranged and aestheticized, but when held up as a mirror for civilization, they can only reflect back its most useless and degraded components. In place of roses, the speaker finds herbs not only useful and long-lasting but also a feature of her own identity when imagined as part of a collectivity.

Within this context, *Poema de Chile* recovers a geographical openness that allows the landscape, culture and history of Chile to emerge within the medium of language. This openness complicates the speakers' relationship with the environment and compromises the traditional situation of the lyric voice. In these poems, the speaker is frequently caught off-guard by atmospheric shifts in the landscape, and the larger context of the environment becomes a part of the voice. Consider, as an example, the following short lyric, "Mancha de Trebol" (Clover Patch.)

Un silbo del Aconcagua
me alcanza y lleva de nuevo.

Hay un alto trebolar
con tactos de terciopelo
en donde me espera, rota,
y parada como en cerco
la ronda que comenzamos
entre la tierra y el cielo.

Si voy, entro y doy la mano,
se pone a girar de nuevo;
pero aquél que a voceaba
voz ya no da, que está yerto. (83)

[A whistle from the Aconcagua
catches me and carries me again.
There is a lofty field of clover
velvet to the touch
where it waits for me, broken,
and paused, as if enclosed:
the round we began
between Earth and Heaven.

If I go, I enter and give my hand.
Again, it begins to whirl
but the one who shouted it,
no longer gives his voice.
He is motionless.]

As in many poems in this sequence, the speaker is caught and carried by something external in the environment, by a breeze, a sound, or a similar type of gesture, which acts to divert the voice and attempts to transform it. In the logic offered by the poem, the Aconcagua takes over the arrangement and distribution of meaning, informing the rhythms that transpire within its ambit. The Aconcagua is the tallest summit in the Andes and, for that matter, within the Western Hemisphere, thus the poem juxtaposes two different species of reflection, the sublime, represented by the mountain peak itself, with something more akin to the pastoral. The previous poem in the sequence, “Monte Aconcagua,” tries to approach the condition of the sublime, and explores how

confronting the peak may erase one's fear of death: "Yo he visto, yo he visto/mi monte Aconcagua//y desde que le vimos/la muerte no nos mata" [I have seen/I have seen/my mountain Aconcagua/and since we saw it/death does not kill us] (79). As a result it provokes more complex, baroque images: "La sombra grave y dulce/ rueda como medalla" [The grave shadow and sweet wheel like a medallion] (79). In "Mancha de Trebol," however, Mistral isolates and explores a smaller, more diminutive space belonging to the smaller and more diminutive time scale of the clover itself. Like Shelley's speaker in "Mont Blanc," Mistral's speaker in "Monte Aconcagua" confronts the sublimity of the blank, unpersonified face of the mountain. In "Mancha de Trebol," the speaker behaves more like Wordsworth confronting his daffodils, and willingly gets lost within the minutiae of nature's gestures. In "Mancha," it is difficult to tell where the speaker begins and the landscape ends. It isn't sublimity the speaker is after but immersion and disappearance.

Although only intimated, there is also no guarantee the speaker here is a human being. The perceptive awareness offered by the voice is not identical with the language of the speaker but is its complement. Thus the clover, unlike other natural features in the sequence, is not anthropomorphized but rather zoomorphized, as it were. Palingenesis, or "reverse birth" is the metamorphic process of figuration Pound deploys in *The Cantos* in order to link his poem with older meanings and to reverse the evolution of human consciousness away from fragmentation. Something similar may be happening in Mistral's poem, if not in the entire sequence. Although other poems in *Poema de Chile* do anthropomorphize nature, this particular lyric enables

the speaker to devolve, to move away from the discrete boundaries of human existence and into more complex thresholds, toward sounds and gestures that carry the speaker away. Roland Greene has also suggested that lyric sequences since Petrarch—including Pound’s *The Cantos*—offer a discursive space to narrate, construct, and differentiate the self. Perhaps “Manchas de Trebol” represents how lyric discourse might also belong to non-human speakers and might be dependent on multiple patterns and categories of experience beyond the human for expression. The sound of the whistle and the soft velvet that compel her voice in the first stanza may inaugurate a species of reintegration that moves the speaker into larger horizons of continuity with environmental processes.

In “Manchas de Trebol” Mistral celebrates the living dynamic that exists within nature, and she uses poetic figuration to evoke these subtleties. Moreover, Mistral deliberately avoids the boundaries of cities and prefers the culture and modes of production available in nature. Cities are rarely evoked in the sequence, and when they are, as in the poem, “Valparaíso,” they are represented almost entirely in negative terms as an absence and as a place to leave:

Se pierda Valparaíso
guiñando con sus veleros
y barcos empavesados
que llaman a que embarquemos;
pero no cuentan sirenas
con estos aventureros (69)

[Valparaíso gets lost
winking with its ships
and dressed boats
that call to embark
but sirens do not sing

to these adventurers]

Impatient with its subject, this poem ends as quickly as it begins, as if the city had little to offer by way of poetic description. In her analysis, Marcela Prado writes:

Valparaíso, está entre brumas. Se nombra perdido bajo nieblas y embarcaciones de masculinos navegantes que no aceptan sirenas, es decir, tráfugas, aventureras, transgresoras de cuerpo y espacio. En la estructura del poemario, el gran puerto es una bruma, casi una página en blanco. (177)

[Valparaíso, is among sea mists. It's defined by fog and the ships of masculine sailors who refuse sirens, that is, defectors, adventurers, and transgressors of body and space. In the structure of the poem, the great port is sea mist, almost like a white page.]

Mistral portrays Valparaíso as an empty place, a wasteland, so to speak. Its passengers and voyagers represent a failure to communicate not only with the speaker but also with the mythic sirens that metaphorically represent the possibility of adventure, transgression, and escape. This representation, as Prado remarks, reinforces Mistral's speaker's identification "con su país de origen... a la nivel de naturaleza...[y] en el que la viajera reconoce y se reconoce" [with her country of origin at the level of nature...[and] in that which she recognizes and recovers in herself](176). It is also significant that Mistral identifies "tráfugas, aventureras, transgresoras de cuerpo y espacio" as specifically female figures who often, in the course of some epics, cause harm to male heroes. Rachel Blau DuPlessis has suggested that "[women] poets invent revisionary myths in the attempt to forge an anticolonial mythopoesis, an attack on cultural hegemony as it is, which necessarily has included a vision of gender" (*Writing Beyond the Ending* 107). Like one of DuPlessis's case studies, H.D., Mistral identifies with the fallibility of female figures

from male-centered myths, figures like Dido or Eve or the sirens who cause trouble, derail epic plans to build nations, and wreak havoc for male heroes. This identification allows Mistral to evade the values of war, aggression, conquest, and domination often associated with the epic. DuPlessis writes:

Myth may provide a charter for certain kinds of institutional authority by excluding stories that tell the “wrong” tale from the canon; by cementing or palliating contradictions; by assimilating the narrative of a conquered peoples to the myths of a conquering nation. In short, making a critical mythopoesis goes against the grain of a major function of myth: the affirmation of dominant culture. Thus we can see why a critical mythic act, aware of the political implications of narrative, might cross over into a “liberated” mythopoesis—the claim that one or another group is the privileged site of noncolonial consciousness. (*Writing Beyond the Ending* 107)

Mistral’s attention to the land and her method providing it—an open-ended walk—may offer a version of this noncolonial mythopoesis. As Mary Louise Pratt also confirms, Mistral “opts entirely out of a long-standing heroic tradition of patriotic poetry that celebrates official history, singing the glories of battles, generals, sons in service of the motherland, and the like” (66). In one sense, she has no choice to opt out, because, as a ghost, she has no home to return to. She is not tied to an official narrative that defines the quest and the possible direction her life must take. Thus Mistral’s speaker courts the values the sirens represent. They are the demi-goddesses, so to speak, that represent the status of her precarious existence.

Mistral’s choice to write almost exclusively about nature has as much to do with the status of her main figures, who by necessity must behave like vagabonds, as it does with the larger desire to incorporate ecology and geography into a narrative of American identity. To a certain extent, the speaker and her companions have to avoid

cities, because they are outsiders, a fantasm, on the one hand, and an indigenous child, on the other. In their world, they hop fences, steal from orchards, take only what they need and tread lightly and carefully where they go. These actions trace a revised form of agency that depends on the unpredictable patterns of the seasons, the wilderness, and the geography. They practice these techniques—with the mother teaching the son as they go—because it is their means of imparting knowledge and sustaining their companionship. Marcela Prado writes:

En el espacio de la cultura su cuerpo desaparece; en la naturaleza, en cambio, se mueve todo sentidos entre hierbas, animales, piedras. No se trata de una hiper proyeccion del “yo”, ni de un idealización de la naturaleza al modo romántico, sino más bien de una crítica a la cultura. No se trata de presentar la naturaleza como modelo e espacio para la mujer, sino de legitimizar un modo de conocimiento alternativo. (181)

[In cultural space, her body disappears; in nature, on the other hand, it moves among herbs, animals, and stones, and their meanings. It is not concerned with protecting the “I” or an idealization of a romantic version of nature without also becoming a critique of culture. It is not concerned with presenting nature as a model and space for women, without also legitimizing a mode of alternative knowledge.]

Prado underlines the central concern of the text’s romantic disposition to name the landscape as an implicit critique of colonial knowledge. The lyric voice extends itself among the parts of the environment, not idealizing them so much as critiquing the possibility of their absence from other discourses. As a result, the voice disarticulates itself from urban cities, from sea-ports, and other centers of industrial production and global commerce.

Even though the poems’ dominant modes often appear to be romantic and descriptive, Mistral levels this subtle critique against the geopolitics of development

and industrialization. Perhaps one way she achieves this aim is by disarticulating the meaning of modernity from the values of cultural production associated with urban centers of industrial progress and rearticulating them within agrarian and rural spaces. In another poem, “Manzanos,” Mistral writes from the perspective of a more utopian space in which the pastoral topoi of the poem, an apple orchard, becomes a symbol of rejuvenation and revolution. The opening stanza begins by articulating a romantic perspective wherein the apples themselves represent goodness, femininity, and grace:

La manzana como niña
se columpia en lo escondido
y su olor, de dulce y manso,
no arrebató los sentidos.
Huele a gracia y a bondad
cual la menta y el tomillo.
De o dulce que comienza
para en mejilla de niño,
y juran los forasteros
que ella es lo mejor que hubimos.

Nos retiene todavía
el manzanar alto y fino,
sera que se da con gusto
al que lo abaja sin ruido
y no le rompe la rama
ni lo agita y ataranta,
porque defiende los nidos. (109)

[Apples, like young girls
rock in secret places,
and their scent, sweet and gentle,
captivates our senses.
They smell of grace and goodness,
as mint does, and thyme.
Their initial sweetness
stays on a child’s cheek,
and outsiders swear
they’re the best thing we had.

A fine tall apple orchard
still gives us pause:
it yields its fruit willingly
to those who pick gently
without breaking its branches
or roughly shaking them,
as they protect birds' nests.]

We can see Mistral's tendencies here. This deceptively simple comparison yokes the femininity and grace of girls together with the sweetness of apples, but Mistral also evokes—and perhaps perpetuates—the tendency to figure Latin America as a symbol of renewal and opportunity for foreigners, tourists, colonists, and the like. This myth perpetuated the image of the new world and its natural resources as a virgin territory, waiting to be despoiled by various means. In this economy, the apples represent largesse and possibility, an excess of meanings written onto the new world as an equally verdant site of new beginnings far away from Old World problems. In a sense, part of what engenders this view is the manifest abundance of new forms and species that never existed in the European imagination prior to conquest. Julio Ortega argues:

The European gaze, from Columbus to Hegel, has repeatedly looked upon the objects of America in astonishment and surprise. Time and again, this capacity for surprise reworked the meaning of the catalogues of species: it also reformulated the function of subjects. (*Transatlantic Translations* 53)

Ortega's argument shows how Mistral may also recapitulate discourses of Latin-American discovery, naming, and identification. The supposedly natural and organic shape of the apple becomes an object over-written by multiple possibilities. But Ortega does not imply that Mistral and other Latin American writers are therefore subject to old world forms of knowledge and have no recourse to their own forms of agency, possibility, or resistance. What he suggests is that:

writing found a new beginning in the New World. The world was mobilized as writing and man as reader, and this conjunction would articulate the project of America as a place privileged by the fertility of signs and the promises that could be read there” (*Transatlantic Translations* 52).

Mistral’s poetic natural history dramatizes Ortega’s argument. It becomes a performance of the landscape and of the process of naming that identifies both subject (the speaker) and object (nature) in the same discursive operation. Mistral invokes the particulars, mute signs and subtle shifts in the environment as a discursive field that can redeem the speaker and also give the landscape a voice. That the apple can come to represent an abundance of meaning, along with the meaning of abundance, only underscores Ortega’s position that writing took on a special force in the context of the new world.

In Mistral’s world of signs, the apple tree is important not only because the apples function as an organic symbol of largesse and growth, but also, and by extension, as a model of sustainability and agrarian reform. They represent the future as an emergent political category for “la unificación interna del pueblo”/“the internal unification of the town” (Negheme-Echeverria 557). In the closing stanzas of the poem, Mistral and her adopted son discuss the status of the orchard and what it means that the apples do not belong to Chileans or, more specifically, to those who work the land and care for the apples:

--¿Sabes tú? Los extranjeros
nos disputan lo que hubimos
pero cubren de alabanzas
la manzana que les dimos.
Plántalas en cuanto crezcas,
no estarás arrepentido.

--Mamá, repite otra vez
aquello, aquello que has dicho
que vamos a tener todas
sí, sí, huerta, o huertecillo.
Pero tanto tiempo dicen
eso mismo y no ha venido. (109-10)

[“Do you know what? Outsiders
rob us of all that was ours
but have nothing but praise
for the apples we gave them.
Plant them as soon as you grow:
you will never regret it.”

“Mama, tell me once more
that thing, that thing you said,
that we are all going to have—
yes, yes—an orchard, big or small.
But they’ve been saying the same
for so long, and nothing happens.”]

By the end of the poem, the speaker affirms for her son and for her audience that the orchard, a symbol of agrarian and communitarian belonging, will come: “Cree ahora a quien lo dice/la huerta viene en camino” [Believe it now when they tell you/ the orchard is on its way] (110). This moment reflects the poems’ political disposition, but wavers between two forms of temporality, one that defers agency in favor of a promise (the orchard *will* come) and one that can affirm subjectivity as a radical extension of a romantic sensibility. This moment also exemplifies the two different ways in which walking supplies the voice with agency. The poem’s figures are productively caught between the pilgrimage, which seeks an immaterial ending, and the romantic walk, which offers nature as a wild complement to the mind’s improvisations.

In her commentary on “Manzanos,” Negheme-Echevarría links this symbolism with an indigenous perspective, suggesting that the apple trees represent both the need and the potential for agrarian reform, which would allow indigenous communities that work the land to become self-sufficient. The poem alludes to “extranjeros,” or foreigners and absent owners, who appropriate land and misuse resources and labor in order to serve capitalist development in distant locations such as Europe and the United States. The figures of excess and scarcity in this context also negotiate the contradictions between center and periphery that defines modernity’s uneven developments and divisions of labor. This international division of labor supports development and industrialization particularly in the northeastern United States and northern Europe while strategically implementing and supporting structural underdevelopment in Latin America in order to force dependency on remote centers of production.³⁶ According to Galeano, this historical pattern is partly due to Latin-America’s mercantile relationship with Spain during the colonial period, but it also continued post-independence as the *encomienda* system was easily

³⁶ Eduardo Galeano describes “two opposite systems of internal colonization,” which “reveal one of the most important differences between U.S. and Latin American development models” (131-32). He continues: “In fact, back in the colonial beginnings, north and south had already generated very different societies with different aims. The *Mayflower* pilgrims did not cross the sea to obtain legendary treasures; they came mainly to establish themselves with their families and to reproduce in the New World the system of life and work they had practiced in Europe. They were not soldiers of fortune but pioneers; they came not to conquer but to colonize, and their colonies were settlements... One might say that the thirteen colonies had the fortune of bad fortune. Their history shows the great importance of not being born important. For the north of America had no gold or silver, no Indian civilizations with dense concentrations of people already organized for work, no fabulously fertile tropical soil on the coastal fringe. It was an area where both nature and history had been miserly: both metals and the slave labor to wrest it from the ground were missing... The situation in the Antilles and the mainland Spanish-Portuguese colonies was quite different. Tropical lands produced sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo, turpentine; a small Caribbean island had more economic importance for England than the thirteen colonies that would become the United States” (132-33).

substituted for the quasi-feudal haciendas and latifundios, which were, argues Galeano, “a dauntless bastion of backwardness” that allowed Latin-American countries to continue to function as “appendages” for European economic development (57).

Although poems such as “Manzanos” appear to segregate and differentiate domains of Chilean culture and development, thus mapping the cognitive dissonance a traveler might feel while encountering disparate regions of Chilean geography, what Mistral also attempts to allegorize is the difference between cities and campesinos in order to understand this larger role that Chile plays in the world system. The agrarian system that Mistral implicates in this poem was in dire need of reform in order to make better use of the land and to promote sustainable development according to the needs of the local communities. Mistral critiques the directionality of neo-colonial forms of expansion by exploring the periphery and the modes of social production and exchange available in these more remote locations. This value is further explored in one of the longer poems, “Flores,” during which the two companions search for food and engage in continuous dialogue:

--No te entiendo, mama, eso
de ir esquivando las casas
y buscando con los ojos
los pastos o las mollacas.
¿Nunca tuviste jardín
que como de largo pasas?

--Acuérdate, me crié
con más cerros y montañas
que con rosas y claveles
y sus luces y sus sombras
aun me caen a la cara.

Los cerros cuentan historias
y las casas poco a nada. (89)

[--I don't understand you, mama, this
thing of avoiding houses
and searching with your eyes
for pastures or groves
Did you not have a garden
so that you pass them right by?

--Remember, I grew up
with hills and mountains
more than roses and carnations
and their lights and shadows
that fall across my face.
The hills tell stories
and the houses little to nothing.]

Here, Mistral delineates a symbolic difference between the rural spaces in which the speaker ostensibly grew up and more urban contexts that allow limited access to the forms of cultural production available in the speaker's preferred context. In contrast to city gardens, these rural territories offer community, collectivity, and knowledge. Houses represent predetermined, socially sanctioned and domestic spaces that delimit particular types of behavior, particularly for women. But hills, mountains, groves and pastures engender a more unpredictable form of collectivity apart from the limited forms of identification offered in cities and cultural centers. Layers of meaning here assign positive value to nature, to the periphery, to women's forms of cultural production, and to a decolonial imaginary that contains these potential linked articulations. As Mary Louise Pratt argues, this poem offers a "clear, ironic inversion of established identifications of history with the human world" (70), and it also

inverts the established relationship between center and periphery upon which colonial discourses depend.

In both “Frutas” and “Manzanos,” Mistral also employs a dialogic technique, writing the poem as if it were a conversation between two speakers, in this case, between the posthumous mother and the indigenous child she takes along on her journey as companion and familiar. In order for this sequence of poems to succeed at representing a dynamic and open colloquial environment, it must move beyond the more reflective and passive states of mind supported by earlier lyric modes. As if to revise the traditional lyric situation in which a reader overhears a speaker addressing an absent object of affection, Mistral gives speaker, reader and addressee revised roles as more active participants in the formation of lyric situations. The rhetorical situation of the voice enters this discursive space, and Mistral’s speakers are engaged in conversations that dispute the purpose, direction, and outcome of the journey. For example, the son questions and struggles to understand the scope of their journey. As Pratt demonstrates, the poem, “A dónde es que tú me llevas” [“Where are you taking me”], for example, is devoted to this problem as the boy ponders the mother’s choices. In this way, the dialogic structure invests the poem with contradiction and tension, and it allows the poem overall to historicize its open-ended quest to recover and rediscover Chile.

Geography must also participate in this conversation. The status of knowledge depends on the unpredictable movements and patterns the walkers explore, and the status of lyric as a site of knowledge production and self-coherence also depends on

these habits, as the voices in the poem are pushed into new thresholds. Roland Greene has argued that lyric sequences since Petrarch make use of two important dimensions, ritual and fictional, both of which allow readers a chance to enter “a radically collective, synchronous text situated in the everyday world, of a performative unity into which readers and auditors may enter at will” (7). Thus lyric “potentially belongs to any of us,” because it provides a script for authorizing the self as discursive space to be entered into and performed (R. Greene 8). These dimensions make lyric transmittable across cultures and languages, since translation is one of its primary vehicles. That is, lyric translates various features of the phenomenal world into a coherent presence called the self. It makes the world available for self-assertion, which is a performance that Mistral’s poem dramatizes as a decolonial project. Just as Roland Greene argues that Neruda writes a materialist lyric more interested in spatial rather than temporal limits, Mistral similarly involves the voices of her poem in earthly perimeters. The status of knowledge changes in this context and in the forms and shapes that walking enables, as the performance of walking dramatizes the process of self-authorization made possible by lyric. In “Flores,” the dialogue between the speaker and her son intensifies around this concern:

--¿Y cuándo voy a parar
yo, mama, si tú no paras?

--No te podría dejar
en la tierra ajena y rasa
sin un techo que te libre
de viento, lluvia y nevadas.
¿Cómo volvería yo
a mi descanso, a mi término,
al ruedo ancho de mis muertos

y a la eternidad ganada,
dejándote a media Ruta
como las almas penadas? (91-92)

[--And when am I going to stop
mama, if you don't stop?

--I couldn't leave you
in a foreign land
without a ceiling that protects you
from wind, rain and snow.
How could I return
to my rest and my end
to the wide circumference of my deaths
and to the final eternity
leaving you halfway
like a fallen soul?]

On one level, the mother reinforces for her son their need to continue moving in order to reach their destination, which is symbolically imagined here in divine terms as a final place of rest and redemption. Death is also imagined spatially, as “ruedo ancho³⁷,” and thus as the largest or widest circumference that delimits experience and infers existential meaning. In the somewhat ahistorical and deracinated space of this journey, death occupies the status of colonial, economic, and cultural forms of alienation. The threat of alienation runs through the sequence but its cause is never entirely named except as a force that originates in cities, in enclosed spaces such as houses, and in the masculine and colonial definitions that keep such spaces coherently organized. The mother thus reminds the boy that movement is the form their journey and their collectivity must take: “Cuando empezamos a andar/tú no tenías compañía/ni para la noche ciega/ni las rutas escarchadas” [When we began to walk/you didn't

³⁷ Ruedo in this context could mean circumference, turning, or wheel.

have company/neither for the night/nor for the frosted routes] (92). The opening poem “Hallazgo” introduced the stakes of their journey: to form a sociable collectivity in the face of cultural and historical alienation, and the present dialogue in “Flores” serves as a reminder of this purpose. Mistral also implies the importance of movement as contexts for knowledge formation and as the context that provides material for their lyric formations of self and community. The poem conveys not only the understanding that rural spaces can function as arbiters of subjectivity but also that travel, exile, and displacement become likely sites for the formation of lyric subjects in the process of self-authorization.

Paterson

Williams’s *Paterson* is also concerned with the effects of industrialization, and his work offers somatic and aesthetic strategies for coping with industrial development and its effects. The section I want to consider closely in comparison to Mistral’s *Poema de Chile* is Part II of *Paterson*, “Sunday in the Park,” which also offers a walking poem interested in recording the effects of the mind in an ambulatory mode. In this section, interior layers of experience are densely mapped as the effects of historical processes, and Williams juxtaposes lyric moments of self-reflection and description with historical documents, letters, and other non-poetic materials in order to expand the frame of reference that defines the limits of American culture. His critique of lyric and of more traditional poetic modes, such as pastoral, is more pronounced than Mistral’s, but the effect is similar: to represent vernacular reality. As Ann Mikkelsen argues, William’s writing offers a “radical reincarnation of the

pastoral mode, which historically has been linked to narratives of the New World as well as to the kinds of social and political shifts Williams addresses throughout the poem” (602). Williams explores the discursive limits of a genre in order to find ways that it can accommodate changing conditions of social life.

For Williams, the pastoral and the industrial are categories of experience that mutually define and map the contents of American social life. Within the public setting of the park, Williams finds the meeting point between these rhythms. The figures he encounters are lazy walkers, idlers, “loiterers in groups,” lovers hiding in secret places, and many other characters that typify American existence, all attempting to find respite and leisure within the larger context of industrialization that Paterson the city has come to embody. By juxtaposing documentary fragments with pastoral and idyllic images of the park, Williams constructs this palimpsest of overlapping rhythms that revises the pastoral mode. In *Some Versions of Pastoral*, William Empson provides a helpful perspective on pastoral as, in one of its versions, a kind of proletarian writing that negotiates the meeting point between city and country, civilization and nature, or cosmopolitan urbanity and bare life. Pastoral negotiates between these categories, often depicting images of working life that are, as Empson notes, written about the proletariat but not *by* or *for* them (6).³⁸ Moreover, pastoral is concerned not only with representing the reality of experience but also

³⁸ Empson’s writing is oblique and avoids providing a clear definition of pastoral, which, like epic, can be defined more accurately by how it evolves (or devolves) rather than by what it is. But Empson does offer some clarification when he writes: “The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor, was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way)” (11).

with finding the appropriate form to do so. In this way, pastoral evolves over time and reflexively adapts to different historical circumstances and conditions of experience.³⁹ For this reason, Michael Denning offers an understanding of “ghetto pastoral” in *The Cultural Front*, which may be somewhat closer to the urban public pastoral that Williams’s explores. Williams’s depiction of the park and its characters somewhat approximates the “ghetto pastoral” mode, which “constituted a subaltern modernism and became the central form of the Popular Front” (231).⁴⁰ The difference here is that Williams gains access to this subaltern diversity of American experiences inside the proscribed limits of a shared, public park, and not in private domestic spaces or scenes of work. Williams’s point is showcase where pastoral and industrial rhythms meet, or where pastoralized figures make use of public spaces. Walking is the conceptual apparatus that makes the poem’s public encounters a possibility. Public space is thus a vital component of *Paterson* that Williams articulates throughout his long poem, and which he explores in detail in “Sunday in the Park.”

Williams makes uses of pastoral’s reflexive capacity to represent the diversity of characters and forms that constitute the boundaries of actual, lived experience within an urban, industrialized landscape. As Mikkelsen explains, “Williams depicts

³⁹ Empson further clarifies that pastoral often has less to do with representing actual experience in liminal, precarious circumstances and more to do with the capacity of this mode to position writing in a reflexive relationship with more static cultural forms. In a short essay, “What is Pastoral?” Paul Alpers also notes how pastoral changes even between Theocritus and Virgil. Virgil’s pastoral revises this mode and features the exile of the typical pastoral shepherd, thus “Eclogue 1 shows us how pastoral historically transforms and diversifies itself” (Alpers 455).

⁴⁰ “Ghetto pastorals were tales of growing up in Little Italy, the Lower East Side, Bronzeville, and Chinatown, written by plebian men and women of these ethnic working-class neighborhoods. . . they found city streets and neighborhoods ordinary, filled with children, and they rarely imagined the inner chambers of the city’s wealthy elites” (Denning 230).

figures deemed threats to the vision of an ethnically and politically pure body politic” (604). Although Williams’s documentary practice also borrows from Pound’s techniques of allusion, the density of textual citation does not inflate the authority of the poem so much as extend it into the lived-in spaces of the environment. This lived-in scope of *Paterson* is shaped, as the text tells us from the very beginning of Part I, by the cyclical turning of the seasons, which structure the mythic dimension of the poem, and also by the city of *Paterson* itself and its proximity to many diverse geologic features such as the river, the falls, and the rocky promontory on top of which the park sits. These aspects give the poem and the city its textures, and they allow its meanings to unfold in conversation with the movement and duration of these other entities. The city is not divorced from these processes but inextricably linked with them in Williams’s complex demonstration of what constitutes public space. *Paterson* also incorporates the lives and stories of current and past figures, some who are deemed essential to American history, such as Alexander Hamilton, who helped Paterson become an industrial city⁴¹, and others who become its remainders, such as Klaus, the Polish immigrant who spends his time ranting in Paterson’s park like a fire and brimstone Puritan preacher.

⁴¹ Michael André Bernstein writes, “During Paterson’s early years, in fact, the town was historically far less important than several other New Jersey communities such as Princeton or Trenton. Indeed, the city itself arose only *after* Alexander Hamilton’s ‘Society for Useful Manufactures’ had been established. When Hamilton first projected his federal industrial city to make the new nation independent of foreign manufacturers, there were only a few settlers in the district: a total of ten buildings and a single church near the Falls” (203).

Williams's exploration of public space in Part II begins with the figure of the walker and the forms of embodiment that walking allows. More specifically, he begins by describing the peculiar disposition towards space that walking enables:

Walking –

The body is tilted slightly forward from the basic standing position and the weight thrown on the ball of the foot, while the other thigh is lifted and the leg and opposite arm are swung forward (fig. 6B). Various muscles, aided. (*Paterson* 45)

To a certain extent, Williams mocks the scientific language used to describe something as simple and self-explanatory as walking. Breaking apart walking into functional bits and pieces as if it were a mechanical process seems to have little to do with the effects or experience of walking itself. Just as fluent readers of a language never take apart the syntax, verb conjugations, or vocabulary of a sentence in order to understand it, fluent walkers perform the act of walking without having recourse to understanding exactly how it happens. Walking is something we take for granted, when we are healthy, or something we use to help us translate and experience space. What Williams implies, however, is that walking is existential. It announces its importance in precisely those moments when it falters. Thus walking for Williams provides the perfect medium to explore the orders of perception in less than perfect circumstances, particularly within the context of a long poem like *Paterson*, which requires strategies of representation that can accurately convey the larger contexts—American history, industrialization—that converge within the poem's matrix of forms. What makes the walker walk, for Williams, is also what makes American civic life possible: a diversity of voices, movements, rhythms, experiences, and possibilities.

Williams intensifies the value of walking as a way to expose the voice to multiple thresholds by juxtaposing these descriptions of dynamic movement against prose sections that ostensibly represent more private and restrained thoughts:

For a great many weeks now (whenever I've tried to write poetry) every thought I'd have, even every feeling, has been struck off some surface crust of myself which began gathering when I first sensed that you were ignoring the real contents of my last letters to you, and which finally congealed into some impenetrable substance when you asked me to quit corresponding with you altogether without even an explanation.

That kind of blockage, exiling one's self from one's self—have you ever experienced it? I dare say you have, at moments; and if so, you can well understand what a serious psychological injury it amounts to when turned into a permanent day-to-day condition. (*Paterson* 45)

Like many of the extra-poetic materials that Williams includes in *Paterson*, this fragment from a letter is not identified with any particular source, but the content clearly involves a major theme that runs through the five books of *Paterson*. Some impenetrable and “crusty” surface makes writing and communication impossible, exiling the self and causing both cultural and psychological trauma. The antidote for this “blockage,” which will prevent it from becoming the status quo, is walking:

So during the early afternoon, from place
to place he moves,
his voice mingling with other voices
--the voice in his voice
opening his old throat, blowing out his lips,
kindling his mind (more
than his mind will kindle). (*Paterson* 56)

Whereas private letters for Williams become monuments to failed communication, the public vistas of the park can more effectively expose his voice, “his old throat,” to other possibilities of intersubjective expression.

Paterson uses the structure of the walk as a sensory apparatus and prosthetic extension of human embodiment that can facilitate perceptive states beyond fragmentation. The movements of walking allow the narrator to see the activities of the mind in a more active context. For most of the first section of “Sunday in the Park” Williams takes his readers along with him, and we hear and experience the interruptions, multiple voices and interjections, points of view, and other bits and pieces of information and sensation that compose this experience:

Signs everywhere of birds nesting, while
in the air, slow, a crow zigzags
with heavy wings before the wasp-thrusts
of smaller birds circling about him
that dive from above stabbing for his eyes. (*Paterson* 46)

Here Williams traces minute impressions in space (“zigzags” and “wasp-thrusts”) that complicate the situation of lyric utterance. Mistral complicated the voice by giving her speaker human and nonhuman interlocutors. Williams complicates the structures of his speaker’s voice by exploring interrelations between the “molecular, the ecological, and the urban,” that is, between “body, place, and city” (Rozelle 110). Their interactions produce “signs everywhere,” which do not belong to a single voice but to a larger, more expansive material frame of reference towards which the voice leans and which it must absorb and accommodate through the motions and counter motions of ambulation. “He is led forward by their announcing wings,” Williams writes, thus seeking the “counter weight” that will balance and complement the speaker’s mind.

Margaret Dickie argues that *Paterson* is “marked by incessant new beginnings” (77). As Williams searches for “an image large enough” to contain the structure of interrelation that compose the city, *Paterson* disintegrates and splits at the seams, unable to move beyond the sense that it is always starting over. Williams’s return to the American vernacular perhaps makes it difficult for his poem to assume the breadth of scope and vision of a total poem in the manner of Pound and Eliot, both of whom Williams’s repudiated. As Michael André Bernstein writes:

In Williams’s judgment, the attempt by Pound and Eliot to find a syncretistic language, true to each world and every epoch, had distorted the very particularity of their subject matter, had renounced the accuracy of response upon which a genuine perception must be grounded. (*Paterson* 198)

Thus Williams’s vision for the long poem is best adumbrated by the encounters made available in a city park and by the park’s making possible unregulated contact between many different social classes and types of American characters. In this revised pastoral mode, *Paterson*’s speaker follows idlers and vagrants who desacralize the city park:

Loiterers in groups straggle
over the bare rock-table—scratched by their
boot-nails more than the glacier scratched
them—walking indifferent through
each other’s privacy (*Paterson* 56)

These figures violate each other’s privacy, hanging around and making unrefined noises (scratching boot nails), and Williams’s imagines the entire scene as “the core of gaiety” (56). This unplanned scene requires the possibility of always being able to write a new beginning, and it privileges the vernacular character of American life in order to do so.

Like other writers during his time period, Williams used poetic discourse to explore fringe experiences in American culture and to evaluate the benefits of communicating and interacting in the public sphere. He explores what types of solidarity might exist not only in the public park but also within the limits of the poem itself. For example, as I suggested earlier, Klaus's story, interwoven with historical snippets representing Alexander Hamilton's contribution to Paterson's history, typifies the pastoral aesthetic that Williams explores. Klaus first appears like a crazy preacher: "This is a Protestant! protesting—as/though the world were his own" (65). He comes across as the type of unsanctioned public speaker who violates the idle time and quiet of other park inhabitants, climbing onto his proverbial soap box and spewing half-baked rants about the "words of Our Lord Jesus" (66). But eventually his voice and demeanor soften as his story emerges:

My family were poor people. So I started to work
when I was pretty young.
 --Oh, it took me a long time! but
one day I said to myself, Klaus, that's my name,
Klaus, I said to myself, you're a success.
 You have worked hard but you have been
lucky. (*Paterson* 67)

Klaus performs a version of the American dream, a narrative of American identity that underscores a more ideological and official version of its history. He names himself ("that's my name") and his labor ("Oh, it took me a long time!"), breathlessly evoking the spiritual and sublime dimension of American citizenship and consumption. His affect and comportment similarly evoke this dimension but also supply the means of his undoing:

NO! he shouted, bending
at the knees and straightening himself up
violently with the force of emphasis—like
Beethoven getting a crescendo out of an orchestra—NO!

It did *not* make me good. (His clenched fists
were raised above his brows.) I kept on making
money, more and more of it, but it didn't make
me good. (*Paterson* 68)

Klaus's fire and brimstone demeanor belie the content of his testimony, which suggests the futility of the American dream and the directionality of its unlimited, unharnessed momentum. His affect—"the falls of his harangue," as Williams writes—indicates he has been overcome and also undermined by the sublime status he worked toward. As if twisted and contorted into some demonic, inhuman shape, he rails against himself and within the confines of his language, struggling to understand the historical patterns in which he participates. His rhythm becomes a form of torture, and to this extent, he has become schizophrenic, wrestling with himself, and hearing voices:

And the voice said,
Klaus, what's the matter with you? You're not
happy. I am happy! I shouted back,
I've got everything I want. No, it said.
Klaus, that's a lie. You're not happy.

[...]

then one day
our blessed Lord came to me and put His hand
on my shoulder and said, Klaus, you old fool,
you've been working too hard. You look
tired and worried. Let me help you. (*Paterson* 69)

Williams's extrapolates characters from the unregulated interactions made possible in the space of the public park. Thus he also situates these characters' lives and biographies within the larger economic and political changes occurring during the time period. Although it is often difficult to tell if Williams ironizes Klaus's fall from grace, so to speak, it does seem, given the larger context in which Klaus tells his story, that Williams suggests more wide-spread economic changes are responsible. For example, Ann Mikkelsen writes:

During this period, new theories of the self and property were crucial to the revision of traditional spheres demarcating the realms of subject and object, self and other. . . . In the economic realm, a shift occurred from proprietary to corporate capitalism, as accelerated technological innovation and the development of marginalist economics created a gap between traditional notions of property or value and their counterpart in human ownership and labor. The farmer and landowner that Thomas Jefferson celebrated became obsolete, along with their agrarian society. The citizen of the capitalist state of the early twentieth century found herself increasingly defined less in terms of her labor—their use or exchange value—and more in terms of her capacity as a consumer whose choices determined the newly arbitrary values of those same products. (607)

Klaus represents a type of American personality ruined by the fables of the American dream and the rise of corporate capitalism, which supplanted not only the agrarian vision for America that Thomas Jefferson harbored but also the vision of industrial progress that Alexander Hamilton promoted as the antithesis to Jefferson's values. In the context Williams invokes, Klaus's labor as a worker and producer is no longer valued. He is left to rant and rave in the city park, communicating the remainder of his existence within the shrinking space left available for public interaction.

Against the background of all these fragments of human life and the detritus of noise and rhythm that runs through it, the "bare rock-table" on which the park sits

also performs its own kind of ruination. What all of these chaotic descriptions of public space lead us to is the poem's registration of the ephemeral conditions of the larger structures that provide contexts for living and forming communities.

Williams's begins section III, the final part of "Sunday in the Park," alluding to this underlying theme, which he could not evoke without having recourse to the underbelly of existence in the park or, for that matter, without having "failed" to write a long poem in the style of Pound or Eliot. Williams writes:

Look for the nul
defeats it all

the N of all
equations

that rock, the blank
that holds them up

which pulled away--
the rock's

their fall. Look
for that nul

that's past all
seeing

the death of all
that's past

all being. (*Paterson* 77)

Williams confronts the void of being, recognizing the topos of place and belonging that depends on the "the blank/that holds them up." The image of falling circles back to the earlier images of the Falls and of the rock on which the park sits, both of which

what Williams also implies is that language will approximate experience if place can shape a writer's style.

The "scholars" that Williams mentions above are likely Pound and Eliot, writers who, for Williams, represent the worst possible way to forge a relationship with place. Pound and Eliot sought the authority of older forms, but for Williams, Bové writes, "the point of view associated with the perceiving subject loses its authority and the tyranny of the ego's perspective in projection and perception is displaced" (596). Bové continues, "this representation is possible only in language if the subject is *there* too, in his/her mortality, as part of the process of opening space which admits and preserves the fourfold" (596). Williams chooses to be influenced by his own mortality, Bové argues, and not by far-flung authors who bear no relation to the specific experience William undergoes on a daily basis. Thus "digestion" for Williams is a fraught, degraded process that deflates the ego:

Degraded. The leaf torn from
from the calendar. All forgot. Give
it over to the woman, let her
begin again—with insects
and decay, decay and then insects :
the leaves—that were varnished
with sediment, fallen, the clutter
made piecemeal by decay, a
digestion takes place .

--of this, make it of this, this
this, this, this, this . (*Paterson* 141)

Mikkelsen suggests that Williams' version of digestion competes with Pound's concept of the ideogram, which is perhaps a more fluent arrangement of cultural particulars rather than the forms of public excess and loss that Williams explores. To

develop style, reality must be absorbed, digested, and released again, into the flux of existence.

Williams's exploration of public space has exposed his imagination and his voice to many forms of ruination. Williams's insistence on style in the above fragment is one instance of this sense of a *there* that Bové conceives. Like Lorca's notion of *duende* or Roland Barthes's conceptualization of the "grain of the voice," style has texture and style matters when it undergoes entropy, decay, dispersion, and ruination. Towards the end of "Sunday in the Park," in its final section, Williams imagines a figure very much like the figure of *duende*, which Lorca conceives not only as a process but also as something like a dwarf or a spirit of irrationality and death. In this final section that I will discuss, Williams conjures a similar image, difficult to understand in literal or instrumental terms:

His anger mounts. He is chilled to the bone.
As there appears a dwarf, hideously deformed—
he sees squirming roots trampled
under the foliage of his mind by the holiday
crowds as by the feet of the straining
minister. From his eyes sparrows start and
sing. His ears are toadstools, his fingers have
begun to sprout leaves (his voice is drowned
under the falls)

Poet, poet! sing your song, quickly! or
not insects but pulpy weeds will blot out
your kind.

He all but falls (*Paterson* 83)

For me, this section may be the *ars poetica* of *Paterson*, which delineates an inverse image of the giants that Williams evoked in Part I. Confronted by the "hideously deformed" foliage of his own mind, the poet is pressed to write and sing quickly

before decay takes over, before his ears devolve into toadstools and his voice into weeds. This and other images of defoliation throughout Part II may prefigure the destruction of the library in Part III, or they may reveal the poet's state of mind in the presence of external, defamiliarizing forces.

**V. Documentary Prosthetics:
Living With the Dead in *Paterson* and *The Book of the Dead***

The turn towards ritual and the occult in modernist writing is usually associated with writers such as H.D., Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, all of whom, albeit in different ways, investigated these dimensions of knowledge in order to lend depth, complication, and mystery to their writing. H.D.'s palimpsestic writing exemplifies one version of these occult practices, which were not necessarily supernatural but rather textual improvisations, manipulating the productively tenuous relations between language and reality. In *The Birth of Modernism*, Laurence Surette focuses on occult dimensions of modernist experiment as a reflection of this desire to implement more holistic and non-instrumental models of cultural transformation. For example, Pound's "fantasies of illuminated heroes such as Odysseus, Malatesta, John Adams, and Apollonius" adopted a counterfactual historical attitude, a "disease of empirical history," in which "events are determined by small groups or coterie of extraordinary individuals" (Surette 50). For Pound, conspiracy, secrecy, and sedition, among other forces, motivated historical change, and *The Cantos* provided the experimental medium, so to speak, which could make manifest these motivations and lines of influence. As a result, Surette argues, Pound's text is not just a repository of

signs, figures, and accidents divorced from the present, but an act—for Pound—that explores the textual dimensions of historical experience. Modernist writers found ways, as Jacob Korg explains, to interpret reality more poetically by assimilating the values of different disciplines, such as science, religion, and art, into a single perspective (1). “Experimental consciousness,” Korg clarifies, “does not deal with essences but with relationships” (3). Occult epistemologies thus resist mechanical explanations, positing history and historical change as a mysterious process full of paradigm shifts, watershed events, and other kinds of wholesale cultural changes. Poetry is therefore the medium that can dramatize and make manifest these non-instrumental forms of change. At a time when technological and scientific advancements had made traditional sources of cultural legitimacy—such as ritual and the sacred—obsolete, occult practices authorized poets in particular to become the specialized arbiters of culture in the public imagination. As Surette writes, “[when] occult secret history is adopted by poets, painters, and musicians, creative artists become the elite group that carries on the sacred and secret tradition” (51).

The representational practices of depression-era documentary writing are perhaps the last place one might look for instances of magical thinking, occult knowledge, or ritual practices. The proletarian imperatives of the writing, its colloquial point of view, and the activist intentions of the writers and artists infer the importance of other influences such as the popular front and the Spanish Civil War. Nevertheless, with the advent of the depression, the demise of modernity—or capitalist forms of modernization, more specifically—seemed imminent. Many

writers and artists, drawing from the energies and contradictions of the Spanish Civil War and the depression, rallied behind utopian possibilities of rebirth and renewal. Combatants, journalists, correspondents, and volunteers involved in the Spanish Civil War, such as Muriel Rukeyser, also focused their energies on the home front, fighting material and bureaucratic forms of oppression while articulating creative practices in defense of “the suprarational and suprasensory realms of human existence” (Pike 4).

I propose that documentary culture also conforms to the counter methods of occult practice, featuring appropriation, collage, and recycling in order to critique as well as renew history. For example, as Michael Thurston tells us, Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* strongly implies Eliot’s *The Waste Land* as an influential source, which it both “resembles and revises” (173): “the rituals of burial and their concomitant promise of rebirth set up the descent into the underworld, where Rukeyser locates redemptive and revolutionary possibility” (173). Rukeyser’s documentary text offers a similar way to recontextualize and deepen the meaning of the historical material she negotiates. Her writing ritualizes the deaths of the workers left discarded by the industrialists responsible for their deaths. Like the abandoned environmental landscapes in *Poema de Chile* or the wasted and discarded figure of Klaus in *Paterson*, these laborers occupy a similar status as precarious and expendable. Rukeyser’s text seeks to resurrect at least metaphorically the value of these workers’ labor by recontextualizing and thus resacralizing the meaning of their deaths. By titling her text, *The Book of the Dead*, and by calling on the spiritual and ritual dimensions of Egyptian books of the dead as a framing device, she offers a

political critique of the values of progress and industrialization. In comparison, Williams's desire in *Paterson* to find a "new line" of meaning and association within the American context negotiates the persistent emergence of the dead in the archival documents he uncovers and positions in his text. I would argue that Rukeyser's text does not perform the same kind of irony as *Paterson*, yet both confront the remains of the past in material terms, as pressures that consign bodies to certain kinds of experience. As Surette maintains, although we tend to associate the occult with supernatural planes of existence or unearthly sources of influence, occult practices are social and political in nature. Writers who use the occult do so not to insist on the presence of the supernatural, but rather to insist on the uncertainty of meaning and to destabilize the relationship between cause and effect that so often underscores most historical writing.

Documentary writing practices, I argue, conform to occult principles of reality, because they divert the original or intended meaning of a text and superimpose a revised, critically aware and self-reflexive reinterpretation. They offer the paradoxical notion that reality is not empirically verifiable but always emergent and therefore changeable. For example, M. NourbeSe Philip has suggested, in a statement reflecting on her purpose for writing *Zong!*, that her long poem's form of redress attempts to reverse the magical propositions imposed by history:

In its potent ability to decree that which is is not, as in a human ceasing to be and becoming an object, a thing or chattel, the law approaches the realm of magic and religion. The conversion of human into chattel becomes an act of transubstantiation the equal of the metamorphosis of the Eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Like a magic wand the law erases all ties—linguistic, societal, cultural, familial, parental, and spiritual; it strips the

African down to the basic common denominator of man, woman, or child, albeit sometimes meager. (196)

It takes an act of magic, Philip proposes, to turn a human being into a thing, to remove their culture, and it takes another act of magic—a revolution, perhaps, or another kind of metamorphosis—to reverse these effects, to invent new myths, practices, and rituals that augment the brutality of bare life. That Philip’s example is textual—or even conceptual—does not undermine its occult or magical impulse. Rather, she draws our attention to the poetic nature of history and historical experience, and places poetry in conversation with the law in order to see where one discursive field may unfold into and revise another.

I begin here, because *Zong!’s* similarity with Rukeyser’s text frames another way to link together the values of documentary practice with those of magic, ritual, and the occult. Transforming, elevating, inflating, or deflating the status of the document in modernist practice very often occurs around questions of the dead, as they do in Philip’s text, and involves practices of reviving the dead in conceptual, allegorical and textual ways. Sometimes a document is given new life, re-inspired, so to speak, and re-circulated, thus revealing how it may continue to exert a violent force in the historical present. This is the case in many of Williams’s texts, such as *In the American Grain*, which positions documentary texts in an argument about the “substratum,” to borrow a term from *Paterson*, or ideological underpinnings of American social life. Sometimes documents are placed in ironic and contradictory ways against each other, diminishing the status of historical truth but inflating and expanding the allegorical relationship between different versions of reality.

Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* explores the implications of this latter possibility, engaging with different types of representation in order to form a constellation of images and after-images of the dead that may add up to a larger whole. Grafting and framing together materials such as lyric poems, elegies, court testimony, and private letters dramatizes the status of the dead as an interpretive problem. Thus documentary practices become prosthetic modes of engaging with the occult realms of experience that hide beneath tacit assumptions about reality.

There are two different models of documentary practice that provide helpful frameworks for thinking through the specific work that Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* and Williams's *Paterson* attempt. On the one hand, the social and activist dimension of depression-era documentary writing provides the most likely context for these long poems. For example, during the 1930s in particular, many writers, artists, and political activists worked on government-sponsored projects that not only put writers and artists to work; these projects were also meant to expose and document the poverty and social conditions that many on the fringe of American culture were experiencing during the depression. On the other hand, I also propose that the surrealist practice of collage in the work of George Bataille and in his journal *Documents* may provide a useful framework for thinking about the epistemological uncertainties that emerge in these works. While Bataille's documentary practice may differ formally from depression-era documentary's desire to promote an ethical awareness of and direct contact with cultural difference, I maintain the potential connection as an open question.

Documentary forms of reportage and writing that emerged during the depression era as part of New Deal policies to reinvigorate the public sphere have traditionally been understood in the larger context associated with the popular front and the popular front's organized movements of communists, intellectuals, and artists who went abroad to fight with the Spanish republicans during the Spanish Civil War. Against a horizon of bleak industrial landscapes, exploited labor, unemployment, and rising poverty, documentary culture rose up in pursuit of more humane and authentic representations of experience. They also provided opportunities for writers to work, documenting aspects and regions of American experience from underneath. Many documentary projects were government sponsored, such as the regional travel brochures and pamphlets published as part of the Federal Writers' Project. These pamphlets are illustrative of the tendency of the documentary texts, photography, and styles of reportage of the time period, which provide exposure of as well as recreational access to America's "regional diversity" (Kalaidjian 166). Poetic texts like *The Book of the Dead* absorb this ethos of reporting on the front lines, so to speak, and their works attach "poetic language to...worldly concerns" by incorporating "extraliterary" materials from the historical world (Dayton 65). Thus one purpose of documentary poetics is to make room for precarious and liminal voices by revising high art expectations, offering a range of poetic and non-poetic material in novel formations, which could exaggerate but also dissolve generic differences between lyric poetry and photography, or elegy and court testimony. Dissolving these boundaries between different kinds of linguistic acts not only revises their historical

orientation, it also revises the relationship between different parts of the social body. Similar texts, such as James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, remap the social spaces of American experience in pursuit of subaltern realities, and while Agee's text is often more lyrical and personal than truly documentary, it thus demonstrates how documentary practices are dependent on the perspectives of outsiders who may romanticize poverty and difference. Helen Levitt's black and white photography provides another analogue for this kind of sidelong glance into reality that documentary can provide.⁴² Levitt's photographs of urban children playing in abandoned lots typify this perspective. Both mannered and authentic at the same, these artists' works provide highly stylized exposures to the "Hooverilles, shanty towns, migrant camps, and slums of America, revealing to the small-town middle class 'how the other half lived'" (Rabinowitz 4).

But these documentary techniques, as Rukeyser's text demonstrates, do not simply provide authenticity where they had been none before. Nor do they necessarily avoid becoming a form of entertainment, thus eclipsing the political dimension of the content and its activist purpose. *The Book of the Dead's* status as authentic history is productively unstable from the beginning. Its presentation underscores the argument that history is a mediated form dependent on the orders of perception. The "camera-eye" can augment the poem, and the poem can "extend the document," as Rukeyser

⁴² Agee's description of Levitt's photography reveals this tendency to romanticize the perspective of the documentary photographer when he suggests that Levitt's task was "not to alter the world as the eye sees it into a world of aesthetic reality, but to perceive the aesthetic reality within the actual world, and to make an undisturbed and faithful record of the instant" (viii). Levitt, Helen. Intro. James Agee. *A Way of Seeing*. Duke UP, 1989.

writes, but neither claims authority over truth. As Jeff Allred notes in *Depression Documentary and American Modernism*, documentary texts composed during this era as responses to social problems cannot provide a form of historical coherence, avowing the presence of new social realities without also interrupting and reorganizing perceptive habits (16). The “distinctive aesthetics that emerge in the depression era” engage in a “speculative practice of aesthetic construction in a subjunctive mood” (Allred 7). *The Book of the Dead* mixes and recombines forms, styles, and genres of poems from elegies to interviews, thus complicating the threshold of the subject within the poetic frame. Rather than confirming the status quo of a particular reality or voice, documentary aesthetics “denaturalize” the presentation of their materials, thus destabilizing the epistemological coherence of the text as an historical document.

Consider the following image that Rukeyser provides toward the end of the poem, “The Road,” which opens *The Book of the Dead*:

Now the photographer unpacks the camera and case,
surveying the deep country, follows discovery
viewing on groundglass an inverted image. (71)

The photographer’s ritual of unpacking the camera and case may signify an emergent mode of historical attention, the possibility of a new attitude toward reality, which the writer borrows as an analogue for her poetic process. But this camera, rather than capturing an authentic exposure of reality, offers, in contrast, an inverted image that becomes both an epistemological and an interpretive problem. Discovery only leads to viewing the inverted image of the photographer herself, whose world-view and

disposition are reproduced in the practice of making art and documentary. Rukeyser's image here bears a striking resemblance to the image of broken glass that appears toward the end of H.D.'s poem, *Trilogy*, which I discussed in the previous chapter. *Trilogy* also offers history and historical representation as a complex epistemological problem. What are the images that measure reality? What symbols allow subjects to perceive the truth of their experience? In these poems, broken glass infers, again, the persistent interpretative problems that plague writers, poets, historians, and artists. The inverted image, which the glass provides of the camera and case, dramatizes the subjective rather than objective dimension of history trapping both writer and photographer. Thus, while documentary culture emerges at a time period when representations of poverty, oppression, and depression are historically significant forms of oppositional culture, the modes of attention these texts offer are nevertheless performed in ironic and reflexive ways.

The status of the document in George Bataille's ethnographic work more aggressively questions assumptions about the status of reality and, more specifically, about the sovereignty of historical consciousness that lends continuity to reality. In Bataille's practice, historical, cultural, and anthropological documents undergo the same kind of dissolution and failure I find in the use of quotation and reference in the poems I consider here. Moreover, the relationship between depression documentary culture, which purports to offer naturalized depictions of social contexts and the structures of oppression, and the various strains of surrealism, including Bataille's aggressive assault on cultural norms, is suggested by the larger international character

of American modernism. As Walter Kalaidjian writes, “America’s communal tradition of revisionary critique was forged from a populist, international social text” (20). Kalaidjian develops his argument as a way to defend against claims of Anglo-American modernism’s “ahistorical formalism,” and points to the international, immigrant cultures that form and influence American populism as an experimental project. Williams’s writing, for example, reflects this ethos in his depictions of Paterson’s park idlers who traverse America’s cultured spaces with their “melting-pot” experiences (Kalaidjian 20). One could also use Kalaidjian’s argument to explain the perspective employed in surrealist writing, particularly in *Documents*, which seeks to destabilize elite claims to cultural continuity. Perhaps on the surface, these aesthetic styles exhibit different tendencies and produce different effects, but given the expanded, international context afforded by the events of the depression and the Spanish Civil War, documentary practices can be conceived in this larger arena, linking the oppositional writing practices of figures as disparate as Rukeyser and Bataille. These writers’ investigations of the sacred and of ritual also link their efforts to understand the failures and possibilities of their time period.

Bataille founded *Documents* in 1929 when he worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the magazine featured writers waxing esoteric and aphoristic on many of the topics that Bataille also considered in his philosophical writing, such as the status of the sacred, sacrifice, religion, and poetry (Brotchie 9). In *Documents* these writings were placed alongside images and photographs culled from different ethnographic and anthropological sources, and, although the magazine coincides with

the emergence of ethnology as a discipline, the presentation of writing as “evidence” in these texts subverts any claims towards knowledge or disciplinary coherence. Instead, *Documents* offered this subversive hodgepodge of aphoristic meditation alongside ethnographic, archaeological and popular culture images, thus mocking the common sense of empire by “making the familiar strange” (Clifford 121). As James Clifford suggests, this practice produces not only aesthetic but also cultural fragments, rendering arbitrary and unnatural that which seemed coherent and normal. The “basic method is juxtaposition,” which forces contact between “high art” and “hideously enlarged photographs of big toes,” thus “composing and decomposing culture’s ‘natural’ hierarchies and relationships” (Clifford 132). In *Absent Without Leave*, Denis Hollier suggests this failure constitutes an anti-aesthetic that enables a different conceptualization of the status of an object in formless and thus potentially infinite relations with other objects and materials across time and space. “He has just one rule: Show everything. Gather up everything. Tell it all.” (Hollier 136). As such, these fragments verge into the unrepresentable and the unfinished, likewise denaturalizing Western conceptions of reality.

One focus of *Documents*, and of *The College of Sociology* more generally, was to explore the domain of the sacred, or the vestiges of the sacred left behind by various forms of advancement and modernization. The rise of fascism provoked this current of critique, which spurred, as it did for writers like Rukeyser, a critique of aesthetic values and the exchange-value of ethnographic objects as artistic objects. Denis Hollier writes:

Documents takes opposition to the aesthetic viewpoint as its platform; the opposition is implied in the journal's title itself. By definition, a document is an object lacking in artistic value. Lacking in or deprived of, depending on whether or not it ever had any. But it comes down to the same thing: an object is either an ethnographic document or a work of art. This binary opposition gives the term "document" its anti-aesthetic connotations even when it is used without qualification. (127)

As Hollier further explains, the anti-aesthetic and anti-museum practice of *Documents* insists on the use-value of the objects on display, even if this use-value, the object's context or "material support" that gave rise to the object, is somehow invisible or unknowable from the point of view of a bourgeois spectator (Marx, quoted in Hollier, 128). The point is that the magazine's presentation of evidence indexes a use-value, thus destabilizing a "symbolic contract [that] governs the notion of beauty" (129). Labor is the absent presence that determines both form and meaning, and although labor becomes invisible and suppressed within the museum context, it provides fullness to the object beyond its exchange value.

This argument provides a rich context to make connections between depression-era documentary, which is ostensibly more concerned with the authenticity that can documents can provide, and these surrealist practices that undermine the ontological and epistemological authority of cultural forms. What *Documents* and documentary poems such as *The Book of the Dead* or *Paterson* share in common is this desire to restore labor value and use value to the document. Rukeyser achieves this effect by layering different modes of writing and speech in her text, a compositional technique that overwhelms the poetic space with expressive possibility. In *Paterson*, Williams critiques the advent of corporate capitalism, which

created economic structures based entirely on exchange value and consumption to the detriment of the populist figures that Williams celebrates such as Klaus whose identity is determined by his labor. A figure such as Klaus, once representative of American potential, is left by the wayside in Paterson. His convulsive and propulsive movements, indeed, his avant-garde affect, now appear schizophrenic and divorced from their context. In this way, Klaus's bodily style is the expression of his labor. His convulsive form becomes a work of art itself, dependent on the particular time, place, and confluence of forces that conveys his behavior.

Another illustrative example from William's writing that demonstrates how magic and the occult may work at the level of language is his appropriation of sections of Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*, parts of which he extracts verbatim as a chapter for his book-length essay, *In the American Grain*. In this text, prehistory and history merge in the materials that Williams orchestrates in order to represent the detritus or subtext of American experience. The text is both literary and anthropological and tries to devolve the latter into the former in order to unearth and thus destabilize the ideological underpinnings that substantiate American sovereignty. Its subjects range from Eric the Red to Cotton Mather to Edgar Allen Poe and beyond, all male figures who represent, in one way or another, the interdiscursive terrain that constrains American history. The chapter on Mather represents one stage, or uncovers one layer, in Williams's archaeological dig into America's literary past, and Mather's Puritan text is thus radically distorted and reconceptualized within the modernist context of Williams's presentation. That is,

Williams transforms Cotton Mather's zealous, apocalyptic rhetoric into modernist experiment, perhaps implying that Mather's antinomian rhetoric had always already made him modern. By appropriating Mather's purposive text, Williams positions himself not only as the unwitting heir to Puritan ideology but also as the kind of demonic figure who can dramatize or bring to light the text's underlying operations.

In the short example that follows, Mather describes the accounts of several witchcraft trials from the 17th century. In these examples, it is important to note that he was not a witness to the trials but rather occupied the role of a literary scholar or historian, assembling a record into a purposive text. Thus Mather is careful to tread lightly around the reader and to recognize the potential of his own writing to stray from its path. As a result, Mather's writing is uncomfortable with its purpose and authority, and thus it recognizes its status as an experiment. Williams enters the text at this moment, enabling the re-presentation of Mather's rhetorical technique to expose its incompleteness:

What is their covering of themselves and their Instruments with *Invisibility*? But a Blasphemous Imitation of certain Things recorded about our Saviour or His Prophets, or the Saints in the Kingdom of God. In all the *Witchcraft* which now Grievously Vexes us, I know not whether anything be more unaccountable than the Trick which the Witches have to render themselves, and their Tools *Invisible*. Witchcraft seems to be the Skill of Applying the *Plastic Spirit* of the World, unto some unlawful purposes, by means of a confederacy with Evil Spirits. Yet one would wonder how the *Evil Spirits* themselves can do some things, especially at *Invisibilizing* of the Grossest Bodies.... But I will not speak too plainly Lest I should unawares Poison some of my *Readers*.... (*In the American Grain* 102-3)

Williams reproduces the typographical particulars and idiosyncracies original to the text. One cannot ignore the anachronistic edges of italicized and capitalized words, of

the grossest bodies of the written form that estrange us from our routine experience of reading language. One can also not ignore the grossest bodies of the women that Mather scapegoats, women who threaten Mather with their trickery and imitation, their dramatic visions and singular acts, and with their capacity to “invisibilize” their methods of invention and apply the “*Plastic Spirit*” of the World. Here, witchcraft becomes an analogue for writing, a kind of performative writing that violates not only Puritan ideology but also the status of the document’s potential to register the effects of salvation. The act of writing itself agitates at the threshold of antinomian practice, and Williams exposes Puritan rhetoric at the moment it fails and reveals this status. The mode of reading activated by Williams’s text simultaneously invites new modes of historical perception, levels of awareness that invite delay and reflection into the reading process and experience of historical identification. In Mather’s Puritan vitriol, the witches are held up as examples, a type of metaphor that denies the possibility of experiment. In Williams’ version of modernism, every fragment, essay, snippet, gloss, or citation is both example and ideal: a paradigm and a prototype, an original and a copy that substantiates itself as the version of reality it demands.

This example from Williams’s text underscores how I interpret the relationship between documentary and occult writing practices. Although there are many different definitions of the occult, not to mention many different traditions, cultures, and histories both past and present that modernist writers borrowed from, in the broadest sense, I consider documentary practices to be examples of occult writing

by virtue of their insistence on the textual, figurative, and metaphorical dimensions of historical truth. In this way, they bear a trace of myth, and of forms and uses of language that carry this mythic dimension beyond ordinary, or, more specifically, rational uses of language. They insist on allegorical complexity, multiple versions of reality, and the possibility that contradiction and disjunction between texts and their parts is a necessary part of making meaning. As such, these features can form the basis for new political realities.

In his study on modernist writing, Jacob Korg explore Jacques Derrida's theory of metaphor as bearing the trace, as it were, of this mythic, or quasi-transcendental dimension of representation that steers language away from the present, and, for Derrida, toward the unrepresentable. Korg explores the primary, fundamental use of metaphor in explaining reality for mythic, experimental, and scientific purposes, and turns to Derrida in order to understand "that the metaphoricity of all language and all thinking has created a tradition of specious truths that must be demythologized" (21). In "White Mythology,"⁴³ the essay that Korg uses to develop his argument, Derrida describes this heliotropic ambition of Western philosophy, which only succeeds in producing a white mythology, thus illuminating itself—like Rukeyser's image of the groundglass—rather than the truth of reality it seeks. Nevertheless, Korg maintains the importance of metaphor for experiment, for turning reality against itself, and for supporting emergent forms of consciousness that can revolt against the status quo: "The metaphor, then, is not merely a comparison but a

⁴³ I also discuss Derrida's essay in reference to David Jones's poem *In Parenthesis* in Chapter One of this dissertation.

conjunction in which the two terms are brought together to generate a new idea” (21). In their use of different types of examples and forms of representation, both Williams and Rukeyser explore this experimental dimension of metaphor, and the notion that writing can invoke interpretive problems as sites of political renewal.

Rukeyser’s and Williams’s texts feature different versions of testimony and different ways of presenting the document as an example, which adumbrates a vision of reality. Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* not only includes documentary poems but also more traditional poetic forms that transpose documentary evidence into lyrical and elegiac contents. She folds different modes and forms into this larger, ritualized context and complicates the status of any one individual poem and the kinds of voices and discourses they traditionally offer. In the very first poem of the collection, “The Road,” Rukeyser invites her readers to comprehend this larger context in which to read and interpret her long poem:

These are roads you take when you think of your country
and interested bring down the maps again
phoning the statistician, asking the dead friend,

reading the papers with morning inquiry. (71)

Thus begins her “camera-eye tour of the eastern seaboard,” a poem as much about Rukeyser’s own curiosity as an outsider as it is about her desire to redress a social problem (Thurston 176). The poem contextualizes the project within this larger allegorical space, similar to the wandering, walking journey that Mistral’s speaker undertakes. In fact, *The Book of the Dead* should be considered part of a longer work, *U.S. I*, which also contains two other sections, *Night-Music* and *Two Voyages*. The

title thus works conceptually to link three distinct long sequences in a larger context, which complicates *The Book of the Dead* as well as the other poems. The title also works as a framing device that links these three poems in a more literal network. A major route for vehicular traffic through the eastern United States, U.S. 1 runs along the Atlantic coast and cuts across multiple urban, industrial and agricultural spaces. It thus contextualizes the road as a kind of text or ecology, connecting multiple geographies and providing passage for multiple bodies across space and time. In this context, Rukeyser's poems not only force the larger culture to reckon with and account for the Gauley Bridge disaster, they also make an argument about how these kinds of events might interact with social and political demographics and thus with the cultural imagination.

To claim this expanded vantage point as a textual device, Rukeyser uses the camera as a prosthetic instrument, which provides metaphorical access to West Virginia where Rukeyser can see "where/the Midland Trail leaves the Virginia furnace/iron Clifton Forge, Covington iron" and then "down/into the wealthy valley, resorts, the chalk hotel" (71). As these lines imply, Rukeyser's vantage point gives her access and allows her to record the visible coordinates of industrialization in West Virginia, represented by iron forgeries, on the one hand, and the wealthy valley with its resorts, on the other. Using the camera allows the poem to represent these economic relations within a larger network, where the map of West Virginia can be imposed onto the map of U.S. 1, which in turn could be mapped onto a larger network, linking proletarian concerns in the United States with those in Europe. In *Trilogy*,

H.D. used the palimpsest as her prosthetic instrument that linked disparate parts of time. For Rukeyser, camera images provide this opportunity to make connections between supposedly remote locations. By widening the lens to “see” connections between different geographic locales, Rukeyser can also look as if through a telescope in order to bring into focus underlying conditions or assumptions. For example, “the wealthy valley” may be able to sustain an image of its coherence in isolation from the larger economic situation that surrounds it, but the camera projects a larger structure of intersubjective relations. This practice allows the camera to signify, and what the camera can see and make manifest are connections across time that both expand and contract simultaneously from the micro to the macro and back again.

Collaborating with her friend and photographer, Nancy Naumberg, Rukeyser traveled to Gauley Bridge and began to compile this documentary text, combining influences from the styles of leftist documentary and reportage and the ritual techniques of citation and collage in the style of poetry that her compatriots were writing abroad. The combination of the two—proletarian reportage and modernist allusion—gives Rukeyser’s text an ability to ironize its use of materials and to critique the idea that any one text, form, style, or technique could accurately capture reality. Thus, while it makes use of the camera and of photography as metaphorical devices that “capture” Gauley Bridge, it also underscores Paula Rabinowitz’s assertion that documentary texts “may appear to be neutral sources of historical truth,

but [they] have and present vales that are persuasive, not simply artifactual” (5). As I will demonstrate, Rukeyser uses this instability to her advantage.

In the following example, Rukeyser draws attention to this technique of “seeing” the many contexts layered within the poem with the “camera eye.” While court testimony provides one angle or lens with which to measure experience, the camera envisions another angle or version that, at least according to documentary logic, widens the scope. In “Gauley Bridge,” a poem that appears close to the opening of the sequence, Rukeyser captures a descriptive impression of the local context:

Camera at the crossing sees the city
a street of wooden walls and empty windows,
the doors shut handleless in the empty street,
and the deserted Negro standing on the corner. (75)

This poem is composed as if from the point of view of the capacious vista a camera lens can offer. Perhaps it “sees” a wider view than lyric or testimony, or perhaps it can more effectively map the coordinates of social life that delimit experience. In this case, the poem-camera maps and sees “at the crossing” a depressed scene of walls, “empty windows”, and “the doors shut handleless.” This “crossing” seems to dramatize the writer’s and the picture taker’s inability to record the subtle relations that would help to explain different gestures. In spite of the camera’s alleged capacity to record and document occluded history, here it can only record absence, as if absence were the presence that history could offer. This representation, on closer inspection, defamiliarizes the larger scene, using the passive voice in many instances (“doors shut”, “deserted Negro”) to flatten and depress the action. There is no agent here, not even the camera’s signifying vision, because it cannot locate what might be

responsible for shutting the door, now “handless” and incapable of engaging or inviting anyone. It cannot tell us who abandoned the African-American figure left to wander on the street like one of Williams’s “Sunday in the Park” loiterers. Thus Rukeyser also ironizes and eulogizes the capacity of documentary to witness and give access to historical truth.

This section performs an irony reminiscent of Williams’s strategies of representation in *Paterson*, which similarly confronts history as a speechless discourse. I am thinking in particular of how Williams deploys archival documents in the interstices of his poems, almost as if to remind the reader of the presence of history and to give the lyric text a historical texture. Nevertheless, these documents register history at the moment that it fails to document historical truth. In the first section, “The Delineament of Giants,” Williams incorporates what might be a newspaper clipping or some other form of public account of an occupational accident:

Shortly before two o’clock August 16, 1875, Mr. Leonard Sandford, of the firm of Post and Sandford, while at work on the improvements for the water company, at the Falls, was looking into the chasm near the wheel house of the water works. He saw what looked a mass of clothing, and on peering intently at times as the torrent sank and rose, he could distinctly see the legs of a man, the body being lodged between two logs, in a very extraordinary manner. It was in the “crotch” of these logs that the body was caught.

The sight of a human body hanging over the precipice was indeed one which was as novel as it was awful in appearance. The news of its finding attracted a very large number of visitors all that day. (*Paterson* 35)

This fragment introduces a similar thematic concern found in Rukeyser’s text, yet the form of Williams’s poem, perhaps to an extreme not found in *The Book of the Dead*, threatens to disable the sympathy of the reader. He presents many characters, events,

and moments from history in the form of these archival documents, but leaves them oddly unassimilated into a larger structure that could give them a set of relations to explain their presence. Moreover, his tone and style often change as rapidly as the material, thus the reader is left with the sense that historical methods of writing, documenting evidence, or recording truth cannot keep up with the crush of detritus submerged beneath historical fact. This technique may be a more accurate method of representing history than even Rukeyser's use of the camera to visualize an intersubjective map of experience. The presence of these materials only reminds the reader of the presence of the dead, and Williams strangely represents this fall backward into death by anthropomorphizing the mechanism of the water works as a "crotch," a possible space of rebirth but one that only suffocates and destroys the body caught in its parts.

In the above example from *Paterson* and in *Paterson's* (or Williams's) obsession with the local hero, Sam Patch, Williams introduces a different kind of epic hero into the modernist long poem. Sam Patch also falls backward into the underworld of Paterson's churning falls:

On the day the crowds were gathered on all sides. He appeared and made a short speech as he was wont to do. A speech! What could he say that he must leap so desperately to complete it? And plunged toward the stream below. But instead of descending with a plummet-like fall his body wavered in the air—Speech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning. There's no mistake in Sam Patch. He struck the water on his side and disappeared.

A great silence followed as the crowd stood spellbound.
Not until the following spring was the body found frozen in an ice-cake.

He threw his pet bear once from the cliff overlooking the Niagara rapids
and rescued it after, down stream. (*Paterson* 16)

What kind of figure does Sam Patch, local hero, become? If his speech fails him, does he also fail as a representative figure binding Paterson together? Williams seems to imply as much at this moment, given the way that Patch, who is meant to represent the people of Paterson and thus offer them an image of their own possibility, fails to say or do anything except fall. Falling is the only form of permanence that Paterson the city and *Paterson* the text can experience. The rise of industrialization was certainly not permanent, and neither are the forms of communication that substantiate this earlier mode. Thus the poem repeatedly falls back into natural, mute, and faceless forms. By returning the dead to history in these examples, Williams makes history into this speechless discourse, reaching the condition that Eliot feared and wrote against in *The Waste Land*. Paterson is mere landmass with a river running through it, cutting angles slowly into its inhuman face.

In Rukeyser's text, history fails less often, or at least the poem regards its unholy descent into the underworld of Gauley Bridge as more enabling and redemptive. While the camera eye can attempt to absorb and remember this particular historical moment for posterity's sake, it can also, when juxtaposed against and with other forms, "train readers in a peculiarly elegiac politics" that "shows the complexity of the poem's address and the communities the poem sought to unify" (Thurston 173). Critics such as Michael Thurston, Michael Davidson and others rightly maintain that Rukeyser's work must be read against the larger background of political reportage. These politics saturate the text with its insistence on representing "the unrepresentable." Rukeyser's poem also blends different methods of figuration

into a more allegorical structure, insisting that many points of view and many strategies are necessary when representing historical complexity. Rukeyser's documentary practice conceptualizes history as a field of interpretation, a field of mutable signs that can be manipulated, positioned, framed, and deployed in different, sometimes contradictory ways. Different poems can be read against each other as different versions of reality.

For example, several pages into the sequence, the poem "The Doctors," offers, in contrast to "Gauley Bridge," a contradictory context for representing the historical gravity of this industrial disaster. The poem concerns the testimony of a doctor who treated the miners, and it borrows from the interview form of testimony to represent his voice as a particular kind of discursive act. What follows is Rukeyser's poetic rendition of a fragment of his testimony:

Danger begins at 25%
here was pure danger
Dept. of Mines
came in, was kept away.

Miner's phthisis, fibroid phthisis,
grinder's rot, potter's rot,
whatever it used to be called,
these men did not need to die.

--Is silicosis an occupational disease?
--It is.
--Did anyone show you the lungs of Cecil Jones?
--Yes, sir.
--Who was that?
--It was Dr. Harless. (87)

In this section, the doctor's testimony covers over gaps produced by other poems but, in turn, cannot help but produce its own gaps, given the nature of court testimony and

the limited forms of language used in this context. Somewhat reminiscent of Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, a poem that also shapes court proceedings into lyric poems, this poem's flat tone provides one example of how the language of court testimony works. The doctor's hesitant, short answers underscore his limited use-value and the limited performance he can provide as an expert. The oblique collage of terminology and other isolated bits of information at the beginning of the poem only underscores the doctor's reticence. Perhaps this testimony is meant to approximate in linguistic form what a photograph can capture, or perhaps it more likely comes across as a moment when language fails to accurately account for the complexity of reality.

Another documentary poem, "Statement: Philippa Allen," also concerns the structure and delivery of testimony as a form of knowledge. But Philippa Allen is not a doctor; she's a social worker and her position as such is more useful to Rukeyser. In the following section of the poem, Allen also employs a hesitant, flat tone. But she is also allowed to express her sympathy with the congressional hearings and her desire to see a positive outcome:

--You like the State of West Virginia very much, do you not?
--I do very much, in the summertime.
--How much time have you spent in West Virginia?
--During the summer of 1934, when I was doing social work
 down there, I first heard of what we were pleased to call
 the Gauley tunnel tragedy, which involved 2,000
 men.

[...]

Where did you stay?
I stayed at Cedar Grove. Some days I would have to hitch
 into Charleston, other days to Gauley Bridge.
--You found the people of West Virginia very happy to pick

you up on the highway, did you not?
--Yes; they are delightfully obliging.
(All were bewildered. Again at Vanetta they are asking,
“what can be done about this?”
I feel this investigation may help in some manner.
I do hope it may.
I am now making a very general statement at a beginning.
There are many points that I should like to develop
later, but I shall try to give you a general history of
this condition first.... (73-74)

In this portion of Allen’s testimony, which Rukeyser has shaped and bent to serve a particular purpose, Allen’s use of language describes the nature of her relationship with Gauley Bridge and the intimate knowledge she possesses. While the point of documentary reportage might be, as Tim Dayton explains, to overcome the distance between lyric poetry and the objective world, Rukeyser’s representation of Allen here is not exactly “objective” (66). In fact, Rukeyser maintains the value of subjectivity and subjective observation in the recording of these documentary events. For example, this “general statement” delays the many points that Allen intends to deliver later. Thus her purpose here is to establish an affective, emotional context: Allen loves West Virginia and she loves its people. In this sense, she more closely occupies the lyric position afforded Mistral’s speaker in *Poema de Chile* rather than the doctor’s reticence in the poem I quoted from above. The point is that none of these documentary texts lay bare in a clear and precise manner all the details, truth, and meaning relevant to the tragedy. Rukeyser manipulates her material into allegorical layers, offering different accounts of what happened and making use of different points of view in doing so. Allen’s is an essential point of view, a woman’s point of view, and she provides a bridge between Rukeyser and the community. Since

Rukeyser is even more of a privileged outsider than Allen, Allen's access to the affective conditions of the community and its people can complement the doctor's technical knowledge as well as Rukeyser's technical skill as a writer. Skill, knowledge, technique—these are not important components in Rukeyser's long poem. Rather, forming the appropriate foundations for solidarity, even if they are tenuous, represents a greater goal for writing. As Jenny Goodman argues, Rukeyser also “links her attempt to re-envision American identity to a more personal process of resisting the position she [Rukeyser] has been assigned as a privileged woman, a position that renders her complicit in the suffering of her fellow citizens” (269). Philippa Allen's character and testimony gives Rukeyser partial access to the lives and experiences of those living in Gauley Bridge and Vanetta, but her connection with Allen also provides Rukeyser an opportunity to critique the authoritative position usually ascribed to documentary reportage.

In the above-mentioned ways, Rukeyser's poem adopts documentary procedures and bears witness to the events at Gauley Bridge, but she also uses the guiding structure of the Egyptian Book of the Dead to refigure the status of these symbolically unburied workers who lost their lives. This framework, like *Zong!*, draws attention to the numerous contexts and forms of naming that attempt to control the status of the dead and their significance. Egyptian books of the dead were specifically used as books of spells that prepared the dead for the afterlife. Briefly, they allowed the living to die well and they established a structure of meaning around death that made death a significant ritual component of experience. Rukeyser

enframes and repurposes the poem both conceptually and practically as a book of the dead. Conceptually, because the poem can be read like an ancient religious text that bares a trace of this earlier mythic mode of using language and writing. Practically, because the poem, also approached as a religious text, can be used to “prepare” the dead for the afterlife even if only in a way that makes social death representable to history. The documentary procedures that “see” the larger context of the incident prepare the dead for their fate in a different way. The proximity of death in Rukeyser’s time period compelled many writers to explore other cultural and historical resources for confronting death and for renaming it. For example, I explored in chapter one how mass death, genocide, and total war erase the potential for some communities to control both the means to live and the means to die. One place where literature maintains the significance of dying and of the dead is in epic, thus writers of long poems explore the topoi of death within epic as a means to sustain the value of death and dying. For Rukeyser, writing a book of the dead helps to ritualize and resacralize the status of the unburied, still symbolically undead bodies of the laborers.

Two poems in *The Book of the Dead*, “Absalom” and “The Cornfield,” explore these dimensions of death, dying, and burial. The dead are everywhere present through Rukeyser’s poem, as its impetus, first of all, but they also materialize more metaphorically in the form of statistics, memories, anecdotes, testimony, and other official and unofficial forms of language. Each of these poems explores the status of the dead in distinct ways. In “Absalom” Rukeyser details the testimony of

another figure, a woman whose husband and three sons are dying from silicosis exposure:

My husband is not able to work.
He has it, according to the doctor.
We have been having a hard time making a living since
 this trouble came to us.
I saw the dust in the bottom of the tub.
The boy worked there about eighteen months,
came home one evening with a shortness of breath.
He said, "Mother, I cannot get my breath."
Shirley was sick about three months.
I would carry him from his bed to the table,
from his bed to the porch, in my arms.

*My heart is mine in the place of hearts,
They gave me back my heart, it lies in me. (81)*

Between sections of narrative anecdote, Rukeyser interposes lyric refrains that echo the Egyptian Book of the Dead and which help recontextualize the mother's experience. In one sense, these lines point outside the boundaries of the poem's specific historical context, offering a different modality for language that relies on the resources of lyric poetry and religious ritual. They also infer another dimension in which to interpret the flat tone the mother uses to deliver her story. While it may seem that Rukeyser empties the mother's discourse of any emotion, what Rukeyser may be dramatizing, again, are the ways that different uses of language authorize different experiences of reality. For example, the figurative and italicized portions of writing elevate speech, offering an alternative to the language of medical diagnosis and to the flat affectless tone of testimony. More specifically, the last line here may directly allude to the ancient Egyptian practice of weighing the heart in order to gauge the dead's readiness for the afterlife. This ritual was one of many challenges faced by

the dead in the underworld. Moreover, as Tim Dayton points out, “the term *mastery*...is another element derived from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, where it is used in formulas as: ‘I am master of my heart.... I am master of my arms.’” (77).

Mastery in Rukeyser’s text associates this ritual process of reunification and completion in death with political redemption that forces awareness of death as a social fact.

Mastery over medical and juridical procedures also provides another way to think about Rukeyser’s use of this refrain. Elsewhere in Rukeyser’s poem, parts of the body, such as the lungs, are scanned and x-rayed in order to develop a diagnosis.

Bodies are also discussed in legal terms as victims or in medical terms as patients, but Rukeyser’s poem makes use of the x-ray in a different sense, by opening the language of diagnosis to its lyric possibilities:

When they took sick, right at the start, I saw a doctor.
I tried to get Dr. Harless to X-ray the boys.
He was the only man I had any confidence in,
the company doctor in the Kopper’s mine,
but he would not see Shirley.
He did not know where his money was coming from.
I promised him half if he’d work to get compensation,
but even then he would not do anything. (81)

In the above section, Rukeyser details the mother’s efforts to provide medical care for her family, and she employs very plain speech in order to intensify the gravity of the narrative. The refrains also remind the reader of the importance of the poetic domain, which can provide a different form of clarity and redress:

I have gained mastery over my heart.
I have gained mastery over my two hands.
I have gained mastery over the waters.

I have gained mastery over the river. (82)

In this way, the speaker composes herself as an agent who gains mastery over her experience. The x-ray, like the photograph, becomes a method of signification that allows subjects to see the “substratum.” As Jenny Goodman argues, Rukeyser positions figures like this mother as historical agents who authorize the epic importance of their marginalized experiences. In this case, “Rukeyser’s heroic mother stresses the economic exploitation leading to her desperate struggle to survive and her active role in seeking justice and compensation for her sons” (Goodman 273). Gaining mastery over the heart signifies this process of claiming authority and renovating the structures of representation. Rukeyser’s poem explores the historical meaning of death and dying, removing it from the sterile domain of medical science in order to represent its existential significance.

The other poem I would like to consider, “The Cornfield” also maintains the existential importance of death as a ritual act. This poem explores burial myths in a more literal way by representing the circumstances surrounding the unauthorized burial of several African-American migrant laborers in unmarked graves in a cornfield outside of town, a practice that exemplifies the callous behavior of the companies responsible for these laborers’ deaths. This poem also provides a point of comparison between *The Book of the Dead* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, which similarly explores the epic topos of burial and rebirth. But unlike Eliot’s “Burial of the Dead,” which finds its speakers unable to communicate in the presence of so many dead, Rukeyser’s poem confronts this incommunicability in a different way.

Regeneration is a difficult process in both poems, but in Rukeyser's poem, it is difficult not only because myth is absent and history is speechless, but also because capitalist imperatives have denied these workers their right to a proper burial.

Rukeyser identifies the economic conditions responsible for more symbolic failures.

In the acts that the poem describes, despoliated bodies are wrested apart from their own potential to die well. Rukeyser writes:

Swear by the corn,
the found-land corn, those who like ritual. He
rides in a good car. They say blind corpses rode
with him in front, knees broken into angles,
head clamped ahead. Overalls. Affidavits.
He signs all papers. His office : where he sits.
feet on the stove, loaded trestles through door,
satin-lined, silk-lined, unlined, cheap,
The papers in the drawer. On the desk, photograph
H. C. White, Funeral Services (new car and eldest son);
tells about Negroes who got wet at work,
shot craps, drank and took cold, pneumonia, died.
Shows the sworn papers. Swear by the corn.
Pneumonia, pneumonia, pleurisy, t.b. (89)

Rukeyser's language is jarring, painful, and abrupt, as are the images of dead bodies jostling in the front seat of a car, "knees broken into angles." These knees and angles are reduced to becoming "affidavits" and "papers." In contrast to this painful image of the broken bodies of these African-Americans, the undertaker leisurely rests "his feet on the stove" and discusses the "Negroes who got wet at work." In short, the undertaker is allowed to speak, to move his body, to relax, to avail himself of his privileges, which have been stolen from the workers. Rukeyser also demonstrates the conspiracy at work to lie about the cause of death and deceive the public. According

to the undertaker and his “papers,” these bodies died from pneumonia and pleurisy and not from silicosis exposure and corporate malfeasance.

In another section, Rukeyser, like Williams, offers a revised image of pastoral, inventing a new dimension of the reflexive capacity of pastoral to represent the status of work and bare life:

For those given to keeping their own garden:
Here is the cornfield, white and wired by thorns,
old cornstalks, snow, the planted home.
Stands bare against a line of farther field,
unmarked except for a wood stakes, charred at tip,
few scratched and named (pencil or nail).
Washed-off. Under the mounds,
all the anonymous.
Abel American, calling from under the corn,
Earth, uncover my blood!
Did the undertaker know the man was married?
Uncover.
Do they seem to fear death?
Contemplate.
Does Mellon’s ghost walk, povertied at last,
walking in furrows of corn, still sowing,
do apparitions come? (90)

Rukeyser’s image of the cornfield echoes Eliot’s waste land, but her representation of death links the dead bodies strewn across the battlefields of World War I with the dead who suffered from corporate negligence and industrial development. Once again, Rukeyser reminds the reader, or anyone inclined to keeping a garden and tending the land, that earth, dirt, and the environment are laden with meaning and “all the anonymous.” Her critique is thus Marxist, as Tim Dayton implies: “The terrain on which her poem ultimately fights is that of history, and her vision of history is at its deepest level informed by Marxism” (131). It isn’t necessary to confirm that

Rukeyser was a card-carrying communist to witness the ways that she employed this form of critique in her poem, linking the experiences of different kinds of labor in an international context and suggesting economic conditions as an important framework for interpretation. Williams, Rukeyser, and other modernists used documentary forms in an allegorical way in order to reinvigorate interpretation as a creative practice and to link the economic with the spiritual, political, and social dimensions of experience. Hence their interest in occult practices that linked the past with the present in more fertile and flexible ways. In the above section of the poem, we can see her skillfully blending biblical allusion, documentary fragments, and stark description along with demands for the reader to “contemplate” the weight and confusion of the dead as this interpretive problem. Moreover, Rukeyser traverses the centuries, linking Abel and Mellon with other apparitions that, for Rukeyser, help to resacralize the land in which the dead are callously buried. Epic poems inform us of the extent to which burial was a significant component of dying well and of forming a sense of communal belonging. Thus Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead*, along with Williams’s *Paterson*, exemplifies how far away from this notion of community modern industrial life had drifted.

Chapter Three: The Ruins of the Voice

In chapter one I focused on poems that strategically represented forms of time and offer poetic models that make time more flexible and multiple and thus less teleological. H.D. used the palimpsest, for example, to revise linear constraints, which left her own body and identity unable to access more holistic models of literary community. In chapter two, I explored poems that represented space and spatial poetics. These poems more explicitly illuminate hemispheric models that represent and allow for intersubjective experience across the boundaries of modernity. Mistral's *Poema de Chile* takes the form of a walking poem in order to revise dominant ideologies of modernist and cosmopolitan culture and identity, thus making room, as H.D. does, for her own idiosyncratic experience of time and space. In this final chapter, I look more closely at the lyric voice as a site that also registers hemispheric displacement. My argument posits that, although often considered a timeless, universal, or ahistorical medium, lyric poetry in particular represents historical tensions between subjects and their cultural contexts. Figurations of the voice in the two poems I investigate suggest how individual or singular agents come to terms with historical, cultural, and social upheavals.

The two poems that I consider, Jose Emilio Pacheco's "Las Ruinas de Mexico" and Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* offer models of lyric expression that by necessity must engage the historical parameters that make available certain kinds of experiences. In Pacheco's poem, for example, the speaking subject is an isolated figure who wanders around a devastated Mexico City following an earthquake. The

effects of the quake and its forms of destruction and rearrangement delimit what the voice can access and represent. That is, disaster structures lyric experience, and it dramatizes how, in the late twentieth-century, certain experiences are defined by the imminent threat of violence and ruination. Moreover, what emerges in place of a more traditional lyric subject is, I would argue, a hemispherically aware subject. The environmental and geological scale of change fosters this level of awareness, which gives the speaking subject access to more remote and, I will argue, inhuman (or posthuman) meanings on the periphery of experience. Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* also represents violence as a commonplace feature of everyday life that delimits experience. In this poem, Reznikoff offers a strangely diluted form of lyric by shaping court testimony into lyric sequences. These poems feature blunt, public voices denuded of emotion or sentiment. They leave readers struggling to make meaning, but the point is that Reznikoff's public lyric in particular more acutely undermines the qualities (such as apostrophe or epiphany) that one finds typically finds in lyric utterance. Formally, they evince an emergent hemispheric awareness of human subjectivity's diminished significance.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation I focused on poems that were perhaps more sure of their epic qualities or more aware of the traces of epic they utilized and re-envisioned. By engaging epic conditions such as war and modernity, the poems I discussed previously ritualized and spiritualized the types of experiences that emerge in the face of disaster. They sought to recreate a ground for the possibility of epic experience. But the poems I consider in this chapter neither begin nor end

with any kind of any kind of epic promise to start over, begin again, forge ahead or carry on. They are more aware of the types of global and hemispheric transformations that diminish epic expansiveness and epic seriousness. In this way, these poems “make do” with what has been given to them historically and culturally—poverty or an earthquake, for example—and then shape subjectivity according to these new aggregations of the universe. They present and perform versions of reality but avoid achieving any kind of overarching mythical generalization.

“Las Ruinas” and *Testimony* emphasize the lyric component of long poems that I have not yet explored as fully. As I argued in my introduction to this dissertation, modernist and avant-garde long poems form composites of epic and lyric parts, with some writers such as Susan Howe, perhaps, emphasizing the restrained, condensed, and intense qualities of lyric more powerfully. Every word and every gap between words registers specific and singular importance. Consider also, the difference between Vallejo’s styles in *Trilce* and *España* that I first explored in Chapter One. His early poems in *Trilce* record lyric blindness and fragmentation whereas the epic desires of *España* notably revise and recontextualize this alienation. In this chapter, I explore lyric’s effects more closely, and I also consider how the formal sequencing of poems dramatizes the relationship between parts. If one can think of long poems as thematizing the tension between part and whole, between local and global or periphery and world, then perhaps these poems, more than the previous poems I explored, expose the vulnerability of the parts and pieces that drift within the complex, teeming whole that threatens to swallow them. By evacuating traditional

features of the lyric—such as emotion or epiphany—these poems suspend the traffic between whole and part, and explore with more patience the ontology of the particular.

I.

Much like Williams, Rukeyser, H.D., or any of the other poets that I have discussed so far in this dissertation, the contemporary Mexican poet José Emilio Pacheco uses the event of disaster as a point of departure for writing a long poem. This work, “Las Ruinas de México,” collected in *Miro la Tierra*, attempts to reconcile and cope with the particular qualities of disaster, ruination, and crisis provoked by the earthquake that devastated Mexico City in September, 1985. Pacheco, Spanish translator of Eliot’s *Four Quartets* among other examples of other modernist writing, is no stranger to this tradition of writing long lyric sequences that treat the subjects of disaster, history, and time as interpretive and aesthetic problems. However, his poem, unlike the early twentieth-century versions I consider in previous chapters, approaches its subject matter with more hesitation, as if the lyric framework used by earlier poets to explore the productive limits of expression had reached its ultimate threshold. This reticence, similar to the oblique and aphoristic point of view contemplated in Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster*, questions the capacity of writing to reconcile with the effects of disaster, to form communities in its wake, and to articulate responses that suggest the historical and philosophical value of writing. Just as Blanchot’s meditation in his long essay pushes literary expression into extreme states of fragmentation, restlessness and failure, the poems I consider in this

chapter, Pacheco's "Las Ruinas" and Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, begin to speak at the moment when writing becomes incommensurate with disaster. Blanchot writes:

It is upon losing what we have to say that we speak—upon an imminent and immemorial disaster—just as we say nothing except insofar as we can convey in advance that we take it back, by a sort prolepsis, not so as finally to say nothing, but so that speaking, might not stop at the word—the word which is, or is to be, spoken, or taken back. (*The Writing of the Disaster* 21)

Blanchot's text willfully refuses to speak clearly, pointedly, in order to articulate its thesis. It hesitates at the threshold where writing can claim an historical, social or philosophical purpose, and it thus provides a point of comparison with the effects of Pacheco's writing, which similarly forces the point of view and expressive vocation of the lyric subject to falter in the presence of extreme cultural fragmentation.

Moreover, like Blanchot's text, Pacheco's poem agitates tenuously around its subject matter, delaying the inevitable, so to speak, in order to preserve the value of its own hermetic performance.

Reznikoff's *Testimony* also performs a similar kind of cultural and historical reticence, offering a lyric voice of facts, details, and events without affect or judgment. As Charles Bernstein writes, "Reznikoff is not a poet of the ecstatic, directed to the beyond, but a poet of the near, the close at hand: of a returning to oneself as to the world" (225). His lyric sequence positions the form of "witness/testimony as 'self-cancellation' so that language speaks of/for itself" (C. Bernstein 229). In *Testimony*, which, like *The Book of the Dead*, participates in the documentary culture of the 1930s, Reznikoff edits and presents witness testimony culled from court proceedings of the late nineteenth century. In this work, he pulled

together several hundred statements from court records, which he then shaped into short poems with line breaks and edited into groups organized by geography and category. In this form, *Testimony* offers stories and anecdotes of individuals that experience life at its more precarious, individuals that are impoverished, disenfranchised, and clinging to fragments of everyday life. Yet Reznikoff does not sentimentalize these experiences. He shapes this testimony into lyric poems but also leaves the matter-of-fact and public tone of testimony in place, presenting facts instead of emotion. In this way, the lyric voice is drained of its rhetorical capacities to emotionally engage a reader, and a result, *Testimony* negotiates a kind of repetitive, routine violence that manifests not only in the serial, lyric form of the poems but also in the presentation of the voice as a public and impersonal rather than private or subjective event. Pacheco's and Reznikoff's lyric reticence questions the role that writing and writers play in responding to and creating community out of disastrous events such as, in the case of Pacheco's poem, an earthquake, or, in the case of Reznikoff's, ordinary poverty. These poems inhabit their public roles tenuously, tending to undermine rather than strengthen their ability to capture an historical reality and reflect ethically upon it.

An interesting and important feature in "Las Ruinas de México" that I would like to explore first, as a way of introducing the larger stakes of my discussion, is the choice Pacheco makes to compare the earthquake to other forms of disaster, such as, most notably, war and also the sinking of the Titanic. Here are two small parts from the first section:

4

De adentro viene el golpe,
la cabalgata sombría,
la estampida de lo invisible, explosion
de lo que suponemos inmóvil
y bulle siempre.

5

Se alza el infierno para hundir la tierra.
El Vesubio estalla por dentro.
La bomba asciende en vez de caer/
Brotó el rayo en un pozo de tinieblas. (11-12)

[4

The roar comes from within,
a somber rumbling of hooves,
an invisible stampede, explosion
of what we think unmovable,
and it boils forever.

5

Hell rises up to sink the Earth.
Vesuvius erupts from within.
The bomb ascends instead of falling.
Lightning sprouts from a well of shadows.]

Pacheco's language dubiously approaches the epic condition of the quake, and each stanza throughout this opening section is, like the two above, very brief, as if hesitant to fully explore the epic topoi offered by the tradition of long poems. Each stanza is only a few lines long, giving the sense that the voice has become exhausted, breathless, and unable to keep up with the scale of experience which the quake demands. Moreover, the quake is described as a bomb that ascends and explodes upward, giving this event a cultural meaning beyond the geological. Like a war, it

both vertically and horizontally rearranges the coordinates of everyday life, of familiar narratives, ordinary routines, and habits of thought. It would require, as in the case of epic, an excess of writing and figurative language to contain and understand it, thus these stanzas do explore and offer the topoi of epic in some of their images. It is impossible not to narrate and frame disasters like this one in terms of previous historical moments, such as war, that can lend meaning, significance, and purpose. The poem recognizes and experiments with this impulse, but it also shies away from shaping this event into a more holistic or purposive form. Its fragmentation makes a strong argument here about the status of the lyric voice and the fragility of cultural continuity.

Pacheco's argument may be to suggest the ubiquity of war in the cultural imagination as well as to define the sublime limits of devastation experienced by Mexico City's inhabitants. If the material effects of an earthquake, much like a tornado or a hurricane, can be compared to war, then two things happen: one, war has ascertained a defining force in the cultural imagination that helps subjects to figuratively and cognitively come to terms with sublime upheaval. Wallace Stevens explores this valence of war, or rather, the "war-like" conditions of experience, which sustain the imminent threat of violence within the spaces of everyday life. In his essay, "The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words," Stevens describes this threat as the pressure of reality:

By pressure of reality, I mean the pressure of an external event or events on the consciousness to the exclusion of the power of contemplation. The definition ought to be exact and, as it is, may be merely pretentious. But when one is trying to think of a whole generation and of a world at war, and trying

at the same time to see what is happening in the imagination, particularly if one believes that that is what matters most, the plainest statement of what is happening can easily appear to be an affectation. (19)

He continues:

And for more than ten years, the consciousness of the world has concentrated on events which have made the ordinary movement of life seem to be the movement of people in the intervals of a storm. . . . The war is only a part of a war-like whole. (20)

This “war-like whole” circumscribes and defines the shape of the imagination. Even though the imagination cannot contemplate it, the pressure of reality informs the language we use for understanding the passage of events and also for understanding eventuality (“the intervals of a storm”) as a condition of poesis. That is, the war-like whole to which Stevens refers lends the values of war—upheaval, apocalypse, revelation—to the imagination and to the “ordinary movement of everyday life.” Stevens’s long poems, such as an “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” exemplifies this vision that Stevens has for poetry, which registers how the magnitude of world-historical events such as war can unfold within the smaller scale spaces of everyday life.

These values inform the breathless and fragmented shape of Pacheco’s metaphors, which, as I said earlier, also imply a second thing: these events engender the same material consequences as war. Thus Pacheco exposes the fact that ecological and environmental disasters interact with the political economy and built environment of a particular region. As sociologist Diane Davis suggests in her study, the earthquake exposed the unsustainable character of Mexico City’s infrastructure and development policies (*Urban Leviathan* 281-83). These contingencies interacted with,

both directly and indirectly, a long history of conquest, colonization and development that left Mexico City a complicated, teeming amalgamation of competing discourses. The residue of these different lines of influences—from the conquest to later periods when Mexico City became the site of European and United States investment—come into play during the quake, revealing the textures of Mexico City’s built environment. Michael Dowdy argues that in his poetry Pacheco uses images, events, and places in Mexico City, such as its pollution or a KFC Franchise, to name two examples, to “[substitute] for the whole, that complex set of economic, political, cultural, geological, and ecological forces that produce the megacity of twenty million” (292). Pacheco’s poems thematize the ecological dimension of historical conditions and the historical dimension of ecological problems in this manner, by conceptualizing “Mexico City as an ongoing symbolic and material conquest of geographical space” (Dowdy 292). “Las Ruinas” conceptualizes the earthquake as such, as a factor that violently exposes the ideological forces structuring Mexico City’s socio-economic reality. In this context, the flaneur-like figure that speaks in front of the quake’s devastation and traverses its many sites of devastation, also holds this devastation at arm’s length and questions the rhetorical sufficiency of the lyric form of address.

Pacheco’s poem alludes to the economic, political, and social dimensions of this “war-like whole” in another suggestive example, from a later section. He compares the consequences of the earthquake with the sinking of the Titanic, which further contextualizes the quake as a cultural as well as potentially mythological type of event:

2

Una semana antes del desastre encontraron
los restos del Titanic en el fondo del mar.
Pasado el terremoto dijimos todos:
la ciudad zozobró en la tierra,
se estrelló contra un témpano invisible,
cayó de pronto en un abismo de polvo,
lo más hondo se alzó para devorarla.

(Aquí también como en el Titanic
el mayor número de víctimas se observa
en el pasaje de tercera clase.) (32)

[2

A week before the disaster they found
the *Titanic*'s remains at the bottom of the sea.
When the quake subsided all of us said:
"Crashed against an invisible iceberg,
the city capsized in the earth
collapsed at once in a chasm of dust.
The depths rose up to devour it."

(Here, as on the Titanic,
most of the victims held
third-class tickets.)]

In this stanza, Pacheco understands the quake as a form of economic collapse that exposes the precarity in some citizens's lives, and he notes the irony in experiencing Mexico City's earthquake right on the heels of finding and thus continuing to memorialize the remains of another disaster. Human culture, Pacheco implies, organizes itself around managing the limits of death and destruction and thus allegorizes the significance of historical events, such as the sinking of the Titanic.

By incorporating these subtle yet critical moments in his poem, I propose that Pacheco provides an expanded frame of reference for lyric poetry, one that depends

on these larger contexts to develop its agency. Unlike the voices of private expression and personal witness that lyric poetry is often thought to entail, Pacheco's poem holds the possibility of ecstatic utterance at arm's length. The fiction of the self that lyric poetry both constitutes and depends on is no longer tenable. Blanchot writes, almost as if he, too, had been a witness in Mexico City in 1985: "The crack: a fissure which would be constitutive of the self, or would reconstitute itself as the self, but not as a cracked self" (*The Writing of the Disaster* 79). In other words, not even a more radical and reflexive version of a self is possible. The historical contexts that substantiate the self as a political fiction are similarly suspect and can no longer be supported given the consequences of disaster. If it is difficult to explain the thrust of Blanchot's writing, it is because his quasi-philosophical and hermetic tone makes the explanatory value of writing and the explainable world unapproachable. That is, writing approaches its greatest freedom when it has nothing to say and any political imperative to address. Pacheco engages the space of poetry at precisely this moment, as Norma Klahn has argued in her discussion of Pacheco's apocalyptic writing, when it critiques the "the image of the poet" as "a witness or chronicler who is also the critical consciousness of his era" (83). Thus in Pacheco's writing, the poetic subject is an impersonal subject who does not invent like a prophet but borrows liberally from available forms and styles of writing, tones of voice, and attitudes that interrupt the image of the poet as a solitary, inspired speaker. Although I am not convinced that lyric discourse does not, in fact, make possible these digressions, interventions, and renovations of the voice, I do agree with Pacheco's poem, and with Blanchot's

implication, that disaster renders the traditional contents of politics and political responsibility a more difficult proposition. “Las Ruinas” explores what lyric poetry looks like when it confronts this difficulty, when it does not assume that writing can reflect on the status of disaster, but when it still also tries to preserve lyric inflection as a way of holding at arm’s length the complete devastation of experience and everyday life.

My reading of Pacheco’s poem emphasizes how this text tries to develop an appropriate response to the earthquake that almost completely destroyed the central parts of Mexico City in 1985, and in doing so it registers a transformation of consciousness from private to public modes of belonging. I’m interested in “Las Ruinas” because of the way it situates the lyric and lyric structures of figuration within the spaces of repetitive and routine violence that I outline above. Although the earthquake itself was cataclysmic, it interacted with the socio-cultural dynamic of Mexico City and its history in such a way that it revealed the operations of more subliminal forces. In this way it stages the difficulty of composing and assuming forms of textual agency vis-à-vis the almost wholesale destruction of historical and cultural meanings, and it wonders how literary representation can accommodate the shades of contingency that disaster reveals. Its desire is to engage a more holistic representation of the operations of community, history, and political economy, and to engage the dynamics of meaning and experience that implicate both the poem and the earthquake as historical events.

Two earthquakes devastated Mexico City on September 19 and September 20 in 1985. A magnitude 8.1 quake first hit the morning of September 19 at 7:14 am⁴⁴; hundreds of buildings collapsed, several thousand were killed and thousands more were left displaced, homeless and unemployed. While brigades of rescue volunteers were helping survivors escape from the multitude of collapsed buildings, another quake hit the following evening, on September 20 at 7:38 pm. The worst of the damage from both quakes leveled old colonial neighborhoods in the center of the city located around the Zócalo, the central plaza, both a pre- and a post-conquest meeting place. It destroyed factories and sweatshops, poorly built apartment buildings, hotels full of tourists, hospitals, schools, and communication systems. Those already feeling the negative effects of Mexico's economic transformations were most vulnerable. As Diane Davis points out in a public lecture, "Reverberations" on the earthquake, most public services, hospitals, schools and businesses were highly concentrated in the city-center, which inhibited immigration and development away from the city. In short, the quake revealed how unsustainable the city's infrastructure was. In the lecture, Davis also tells us rather dramatically that the last crisis that occurred at such a sublime scale was the destruction of the Aztec city, Tenochtitlán, in 1525 when Cortés inaugurated centuries of Spanish Colonial rule. Here, Davis implies Dowdy's point that Mexico City had become and remained a site for ongoing symbolic and geological conquest, and the earthquake was, to a certain extent, just another factor participating in this process. Davis tells us, for example, that the aquifer under the

⁴⁴ These details come from Elena Poniatowska's oral history of the earthquake, *Nothing/Nobody* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995).

Valley of Mexico had slowly been depleted to sustain development, leaving the ground under the city increasingly unstable. Moreover, Mexico's economy in the 1980s had also become more unstable and dependent on foreign investment, thanks, in part, to the Latin American debt crisis and subsequent structural readjustment by the IMF. These layers of cultural, economic, and historical transformations over a period of several hundred years created a volatile and interconnected terrain, one that revealed the complexity of its operations post-quake. As other more recent natural disasters imply, earthquakes interact with the political economy of a city, with its infrastructure, and also with the imagination, the myths and the histories of a place. These kinds of events expose a palimpsest of expectations and consequences. The traumatic effects of the quake have to be understood within this much larger socio-economic context, one that influences all levels of a culture, including the private domain of the subject and its material and imaginary interests in a public space.

"Las Ruinas" works with and against this historical background, considering more hermetically the effects of disaster on the imagination and on the structures of representation in lyric poetry. It thus figures its own poetic status as one of ruins as it searches for an appropriate form to capture the effects of violent transformation that neutralize the poet's point of view. Composed in five sections of twelve parts each, "Las Ruinas" embodies the hesitation of a single speaker trying to accommodate the scale of disaster. Each section takes on a different perspective, although identities remain undifferentiated and indistinct from the chaos of events. The voice in the first section might belong to a journalist or to the poet himself, who skirts the ruins of the

city, taking notice and describing the scene but not taking action. Part two might belong to the voice of a rescue worker, part three to a child, part four to the dead. Usual markers of identity are absent, and we are left with bare impressions, sensations, and rhythms. The poem also starts and stops quickly, offering an anxious awareness of the historicity of belonging, of beginnings and endings. In the first stanza, Pacheco writes:

Absurda es la materia que se desploma
la penetrada de vacío, la hueca.
No: la materia no se destruye,
la forma que le damos se pulveriza,
nuestras obras se hacen añicos. (11)

[Absurd is plummeting matter
pierced by the void, then hollow
No: matter can never be destroyed,
the form we give it is crushed,
our works shattered.]

The poem questions the sovereignty of cultural forms but not the force of disaster itself, which gains agency, power, and expression. The earthquake is heterological, arbitrary, and faceless. It does not participate in human structures of time and action. Its time is rock time, the geological time of planetary motion, the time of the ring of fire, the network of volatile tectonic plates that stretch around the Pacific from Mexico to California to Japan, and the time of these dynamics that implicate human structures of meaning. In the face of such meanings, the culture of human ingenuity and progress, for example, is narcissistic and arrogant, represented by the poem's own efforts to grope after an appropriate form of representation.

Pacheco continues in the next section:

La tierra gira sostenida en el fuego.
Duerme en un polvorín.
Trae en su interior una hoguera,
un infierno sólido
que de repente se convierte en abismo. (11)

[The Earth spins floating on fire,
slumbers on a powder keg.
A bonfire rages in the heart,
a stone inferno
suddenly an abyss.]

And the next section is similarly apocalyptic:

La piedra do lo profundo late en su sima.
Al despetrificarse rompe su pacto
con la inmovilidad y se transforma
en el ariete de la muerte. (11)

[The deep rock throbs in the cave
undoes its state of stone.
It breaks its pact with stillness,
becomes death's battering ram.]

And so on the poem repeatedly evokes figures of violence, of dissolution and dust that break their pact with human meaning, and in doing so represent the tangible threat of violence that rearranges the structure of everyday life and observation. The lyric voice suffers under the burden of this weight, and perhaps is enabled by it or give reason for it. Its small stanzas circulate like brief invocations that end as quickly as they begin, returning to the basest forms of matter, dust and death.

In the following four sections of "Las Ruinas," Pacheco continues to demonstrate how the scale of violence that interacts with the built environment of centuries of economic and cultural colonialism also threatens the coherence of the lyric tradition. As I have suggested, the poem makes an effort to witness the

earthquake, to adequately respond to it, and to find an equivalent on a human scale that can renew cultural possibilities. But in Pacheco's poem, conventional lyric topoi such as the moon, for example, no longer provide the kind of reflective power or source of meaning they once did:

Hay terror en la Luna que brilla plena entre escombros:
Porque la Luna es un desierto flotante, un espejo
de lo que nuestra tierra sera algún día.
Ni árbol ni pájaro.
Continentes de arena helada, mares sin agua,
huellas de un terremoto planetario,
acre silencio que por fin ha anulado,
innumerable, el gran clamor de los muertos. (28)

[There's terror in the full moon lighting the rubble
For the moon is a floating desert, a mirror
of what our Earth shall become.
Not a single tree, not a bird.
Continents of frozen sand, waterless seas,
rocks rendered mute and blind,
traces of planetary quake.]

Here the face of the moon disappears and then reappears as ruins. The moon's material surface reflects back the earth's own faceless desert and its future status as ruins. The topos of the moon as a source of enchantment and object of praise in the history of the lyric disappears, and thus the time of the moon leaves the circuit of human consequence and metaphysical speculation.

In a similar manner, the shock of the earthquake also violates the values assigned to the morning as an elongated space of rebirth and renewal, which stretches between waking up and beginning work:

Nadie piensa en las siete como una hora
prospicia a los desastres. Más bien creemos
que las grandes catastrophes sólo ocurren de noche. (33)

[Nobody thought of 7 am as an hour
for disasters. Rather, we thought/
great catastrophes happen only at night.]

Here the poem seems to recognize and take stock of traditional structures of lyric figuration. Consider as an example Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge," which celebrates the "silent, bare" morning that "lies open unto the fields" in the "smokeless air." In Wordsworth's poem the hour of dawn escapes the snares of industrial development. Like the tenuous, temporary evening in Stevens's "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" or perhaps even in the twilight scenes of transfiguration in David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, morning is a reflexive, liminal space. It fosters a lyric mode of contemplation open to the elements and distinct from the toil of work. The dawn of Pacheco's poem revises these expectations:

Reservamos la noche para la muerte
y en cambio transformamos la mañana
en símbolo de vida y renovación,
de esperanza, en una palabra.
Al regresar el sol quedan deshechos
los miedos y los males.
La luz que inventa el día protege al mundo.
Pore so duele como un doble traición
el terremoto de las siete. (33-35)

[We reserved the night for death
then made the dawn
a symbol of life and renovation,
in a word, hope.
Everything instilled in us the belief
that the returning sun dissolves
fear and evil
and the light that invents the world protects it
That is why the seven o'clock quake

wounds us like a double betrayal.]

The poem thus intercepts the common sense of self-reflection that prevails over western culture, exposing its ideological underpinnings, exposing the topos of illumination as a foundation of western knowledge. Within the logic of the poem, the earthquake is a material force that interrupts from beneath. The pressure of the quake gives way to the pressure of the dead, which gives way to a multitude of historical dead who have been erased in order to sustain an illusion of continuity. But disaster reveals these operations of history and the poem thus begins to give way to a new voice that belongs to material and public consequence. Because the summit literally falls, the voice in the poem cannot ascend beyond failure to renovate its purpose. Instead, this voice takes on the qualities of a public voice, one that must build its own strength from the dead:

Al respirar usurpamos
el aire que faltó a los enterrados en vida.
Extraño azar el de seguir aún vivos
en torno de la huella de tantos muertos. (28)

[When we breathe, we usurp
the air that those buried alive needed to survive.
It's a strange fate to be left alive
following the footprints of so many dead.]

The poem moves into this peripheral vision of a voice inflected by the dead. The attitude of watching something unfold disables the active voice of a personal subject, forcing a passive reorganization of experience. Again, for example, Pacheco writes, “it is a strange fate *to be left alive.*” It is a strange experience to become aware of how one’s life is arranged by external forces.

Despite the persistence of ruins that define the edges and the form of this poem, another modality of engagement emerges in the rescue brigades, groups of volunteers who worked together to rescue survivors trapped in the hundreds of collapsed buildings. Elena Poniatowska's oral history of the Mexico City quake, *Nada, Nadie* (*Nothing, Nobody*), offers testimonial reports of individuals who survived the quake, some of whom also volunteered in the brigades. Unlike Pacheco's poem, it multiplies the voices of the quake in a documentary style, providing a bridge to compare differences between Pacheco's and Reznikoff's poems. As a work that echoes and implicitly references the testimonio genre, *Nada, Nadie* makes use of the value of archiving experience. Here is the voice of one citizen, Lourdes Calvario, who remembers her experience:

I am Lourdes Calvario. I am twenty-eight years old. I work in the ENEP Acatlán with folk and modern dance groups. I live downtown, on Ecuador Street, in a house that fortunately remained standing, but when I learned at nine in the morning that the Nuevo León Building had fallen down, on the side where my teacher Carmen Castro lived—she was the director of the modern dance group, La Rueda, where I work—I bolted out of the house. (108)

In the same section of narrative, Calvario details her efforts to rescue survivors:

At 11 A.M., they had started getting injured people out, live people. The moment when they started getting the dead out from under the debris, I had the certainty that Carmen and Jorge would be found lifeless. I kept on helping out. I would assist the injured ones to reach the DIF on the other side of the Paseo de la Reforma. I would take their information and tell them which hospital to go to. I referred them to different places according to the seriousness of their condition. I paid attention to the corpses. (109-10)

Oral history and testimony genres, sometimes critiqued for claiming too much on behalf of their alleged authenticity, can also ironically provide opportunities to

critique the concept of historical authenticity, by re-aggregating the past and adding new and contradictory layers of meaning to the present. Moreover, these oral histories provide a necessary alternative to the stereotype of Mexico City as a post-apocalyptic global metropolis full of death, destruction, and underdevelopment. *Nada, Nadie* represents the ordinary people who live, work, and care for each other in this supposedly lawless place. In his introduction to the English translation of *Nada/Nadie*, Arthur Schmidt writes:

In recording the voices from the earthquake, Elena Poniatowska has reasserted the inherent value and latent power of the working people of Mexico City. All too often over the last half century, both Mexican and foreign observers have regarded Mexico City with a sense of horror, viewing it as a malignant organism whose gigantic dimensions and profound social rifts could portend only human disaster. (ix)

In contrast to this inflated, disproportionate image of Mexico City, Poniatowska's oral histories provide a narrative of the earthquake according to the citizens that live ordinary lives and make an ordinary living in the midst of these complicated discourses.

The popular testimony form that Poniatowska utilizes in this text is representative of the collective point of view that emerged after the quake. The image of workers, such as Calvario, moving in curled and broken lines from the collapsed buildings to ad-hoc medical centers, represents the disorganized yet spontaneous process that eventually became a full-fledged grassroots urban movement focused on addressing the city's housing needs, development policies, poverty, and

unemployment.⁴⁵ Pacheco represents the efforts of “Operation Ant,” as it was informally called, more figuratively in his text from the point of view of a child whose perception comes to embody and represent the rebirth of Mexico City’s collective desires:

El niño que se aburre en el jardín avizora
la columna de hormigas. Van al trabajo,
intercambian informaciones. Qué gran esfuerzo
llevar a cuestras su brizna o su fragmento de mosca. (21)

[The bored child in the garden sights
a column of ants. On their way to work,
trading information. What enormous effort
to haul their cuttings or pieces of fly!]

Trained to look up and out at the beautiful rather than down or inside at mundane or ordinary things such as a trail of ants, the lyric voice pays attention to other structures of significance within its new purview. The voice pays shifts, at least metaphorically, from a structure of empathy to a structure of action and solidarity. The naïve and curious perspective of a child offers the best analogue for the emergent consciousness experienced in the presence of the earthquake. Here the ants are workers, but their “work” is represented as potential, as “enormous effort.” Their labor is thus vindicated, because it instantiates a future temporality.

⁴⁵ Diane Davis writes: “As a result of the inadequate response by local authorities, combined with an unparalleled level of community solidarity in the neighborhoods, people in the area hit hardest by the quake organized themselves rapidly, even within a few hours, to deal with the injured and with damaged property. These local groups maintained and expanded their organizations months after the quake, as the government continued to flounder in its efforts to care for the injured and the thousands of homeless” (*Urban Leviathan* 282).

Other animals also circulate in this newly formed city of the dead, drawing our attention to what Bataille calls the base matter of experience that gets occluded in favor of the beautiful as the engine of lyric poetry.

Enjambran, tejen, amotinan, deslíen
Su rococo zumbante las moscas azules
en so traje de luces que un día también
sera bordado en mi taller de tinieblas.

Minuet, rumba, vals de circo o marcha guerrera,
vibra la danza de las moscas azules
en ésta que es ahora la ciudad de los muertos. (35)

[The bluebottle flies swarm, weave,
rage, unleash their rococo buzzing
in their suit of lights that one day will also
be embroidered in my shadow factory.

Minuet, rumba, circus waltz, or military March,
the dance of the bluebottle flies pulsates
in this, the city of the dead.]

In this passage, the once insignificant bluebottle flies buzzing over the dead conjure an image usually used to describe more monumental vistas and sights. To be rococo is to offer an excess of surfaces and a play of meanings. It is a regime of perception that overwhelms the senses, translating the sublime into artifice. Baroque and rococo art and writing also represent the aesthetic tendencies in effect during conquest, hence Pacheco may also reference this tacit feature of Mexico City's regimes of space. In any case, the collective swarm of flies has become sovereign and the city's architecture has returned to the earth:

Suelo es la tierra que sostiene
el piso que ampara, la fundación
de la existencia humana. Sin él
no se implantan ciudades ni puede alzarse el poder.

“Los pies en la tierra”
decimos para alabar la cordura,
el sentido de realidad.
Y de repente
el suelo se echa a andar,
no hay amparo:
todo lo que era firme se viene abajo. (17)

[Soil is the earth that supports,
the ground that shelters, the foundation
of human existence. Without it
cities can't be sown and nothing will grow and prosper.
“Feet on the ground”
we say to praise sanity,
a sense of reality.
And suddenly
the ground begins to walk,
there is no shelter:
All that was solid crumbles.]

Pacheco rejects the cultural desire to protect against catastrophe by building more cities and more monuments. Pacheco's investment in the apocalyptic evokes this concern over the fate of empire in a colonial context, but his work does not necessarily suggest that literature can provide an adequate response. Throughout the course of this serial poem, figures of dissolution such as dust and ashes evoke the presence of disaster that neutralizes the poet's subjective role as historical agent and witness to historical events. Pacheco's text confronts and questions the edifice of Western culture by exposing the ruins of literary representation, and his text calls into question the role of the poet as historian and witness. In “Las Ruinas,” the text is already in ruins, and the structures of the self already disposed to historical failures that dissolve its efficacy and its potential.

I want to argue that Pacheco's poem performs this operation in order to open the private voice to this more complex horizon wherein the values and rights of a larger social space trump those of the private individual. As David Harvey suggests in *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, the rights of the individual "are not the only rights we have available to us" (57). Harvey's point is partly that neoliberalism, the economic policies partly responsible for recent Latin-American social problems, falsely equates the values of the individual with its material interests. Pacheco's poem reveals the status of the self in a similar way as a political fiction that cannot accommodate the wide complexity of the earthquake.

II.

Charles Reznikoff's depression-era lyric sequence in *Testimony* provides a modernist corollary to Pacheco's more postmodern meditation on the status of the ruins of the voice. What *Testimony* performs, like Pacheco's poem, is how violence can become routine and how the threat of violence remains imminent, transforming an individual's or a community's experience of everyday life. It performs this threat by representing the voices of its subjects in a characteristically depressed, flat, and matter of fact tone. *Testimony*'s purpose is to offer facts and details, and, in order to present the ontological value of these particulars, it dispenses with traditional poetic refinement. Nevertheless, there are moments when Reznikoff's "hand," so to speak, is evident:

4

Arnold heard the blowing of the whistle;

the train was coming.
The only light was that of a small lamp
behind the shutters of the station,
and it gave at best
a weak light on the platform.
The night was dark and cloudy.
In trying to pass from the platform to the ground
where passengers boarded the train,
he could not see the steps that led from the platform:
slipped
and fell. (23-24)

This poem exemplifies the reticence that Reznikoff adopts to qualify the point of view and public value of testimony in a particular way. He may be, on the one hand, reproducing the colloquial rhythms of the witnesses who provided these narratives and anecdotes, but he may also be, on the other hand, dramatizing the basic, foundational structures of the lyric voice. As Mutlu Blasing argues in her recent study, *Lyric Poetry*, in “poetry we recognize ourselves in an uncanny return of something long forgotten, our origins into the passage of symbolic language” (16). Lyric combines two features: the narrative, referential function that tells a story and the performative, subsemantic function that produces a sound-shape of rhythms, modulations, and pre-linguistic, non-referential forms. Moreover, lyric is a “nonrational linguistic system that is logically and genetically prior to its rational development” (Blasing 1-2). Lyric poetry thus offers this space that “remembers” the becoming historical of the subject, because poetry “remembers the traumatic history that constitutes the individuated/socialized subject in language” (63). It can perform the process of moving from undifferentiated to differentiated experience. The “I” of lyric poetry is always historical and social, because language provides speaking

subjects with the resources to individuate themselves and also to belong to a specific linguistic code, what Blasing calls a “mother tongue.” Blasing opposes the notion that lyric has always been the domain of a private, expressive, politically stable individual. In fact, lyric is a nonrational, foundational, and public language. Thus Reznikoff’s fragmented, seemingly disaffected and flat style, a style that seems to violate the romantic disposition of private, ecstatic lyric, showcases the characteristics of lyric that Blasing defines.

The poem above, in fact, contains all the features of shaped, mediated, affected, lyric: punctuation, line breaks, enjambment, sounds (the train whistle), and images (“weak light”). Syntactic structures create interesting pressures and modulations, drawing attention to different words and their possible effects. Using a colon at the end of line one, for example, is deceptive and rhetorically strategic, given that the testimony would not necessarily offer a spoken analogue of this punctuation. The colon announces but also closes a gap at the same time, signaling visually for the reader the significance of the train’s arrival as an imminent threat. These features create a rhythm that may or may not approximate the spoken rhythm of the witness. What they do is draw attention to the lyric conditions of language that allow the subject, the speaking voice, to address itself as it enters the external, public space of court testimony. Because Reznikoff chooses the context of the courtroom to position his subjects, he chooses one of the more stark and discriminating public arenas in which subjects must figure out how to use the intimate, learned language of a mother tongue within a context that demands language be performed in a particular way.

According to Blasing's argument, Reznikoff's poems are thus lyric, and they also dramatize these performative features of the lyric situation.

The entire structure of *Testimony* is similarly deceptive and complex. Reznikoff edits and composes the work he selects into finely calibrated events, which are nested into topically related sequences. Volume I, for example, contains three sections, and each section is broken into serialized poems that contain shorter parts, some of which are given titles and some of which are not. The first section, "The South," contains eight sequences titled with roman numerals. Some of the sequences are also given titles, such as "Machine Age," which contains five numbered poems. This elaborate structure of nested poems complicates the "facts" of the testimony, I would argue, by linking each of the individual stories into a more complicated pattern of relationships. Like the poem above, each poem-statement quickly and quietly presents an historical event in a disinterested tone, but the collocation of poems gains momentum as the events accrue greater and greater relation, allowing shared patterns of social oppression to emerge. In the speech acts that Reznikoff reproduces, one can thus discern a new kind of lyric voice that belongs to a public and collective rather than a private subject.

Many critics also approach Reznikoff's style as an anti-lyric practice, or, as in the case of Stephen Fredman's analysis, as poems that remain fundamentally "inassimilable" (47). Told "in the barest detail," Fredman writes, they represent the "blind contingency of accident" and are not capable, as a result, of inspiring reciprocal and sympathetic engagements in the reader (Fredman 47). The reader also

becomes blind and dismembered, left to experience each poem the way the represented subjects in the poems experience the random accidents that disable them. Life itself is dramatized as “an ungrounded condition likely to be fatal” (Fredman 47). I don’t think Fredman’s recognition of this condition and the anti-lyric stance of Reznikoff’s verse is incommensurate with Blasing’s analysis of lyric. In fact, grounding these poems within the context of specific historical patterns of poverty, industrialization, slavery, and other forms of social alienation, also grounds the voice as an historical act. The voice becomes a mode of language that allows subjects to negotiate how they have been individuated by historical particulars and historical demands. Another example helps to illuminate this possibility. In the following poem, taken from the last section, “The West,” external conditions once again limit and derail the agency of a subject:

VII

The shovelers, unloading a ship lying at the wharf
with a cargo of coal,
had worked down to the “skin” or floor:
they had cleared a space of about three feet
under the hatch
and about twenty feet below the deck;
the coal around them
rising to a height of fifteen feet.

The two shovelers
filled the tub or bucket unusually high—
higher than the edge.
“Frenchie” was one of the men to steady the tub
until it cleared the hatchway,
holding a line as the tub was hoisted.

The engineer was signaled;
the bucket cleared the hatchway but,
above the hatch,

it began to rock
and swing;
still hoisted,
the bucket swung against the mainstay,
thirty feet above the deck,
titled over,
and three or four hundred pounds of coal
fell out—
back into the hold
and upon the head of “Frenchie.” (109-110)

Like many of Reznikoff’s lyrics in this collection, the above poem represents the ordinary labor and forms of production that anonymous subjects perform, subjects who are transformed, by dint of the random and unpredictable accidents that befall them, from being subjects into being objects. The routine, repetitive structures of their lives become routine forms of violence, and the ordinary shape of existence emerges as the effects of social divisions of labor. In representing these conditions, Reznikoff makes some interesting choices, and, even though these poems do divest language of affect, emotion, and sympathy, some of these choices are notably figurative and rhetorically suggestive. The image of the floor as a “skin” is particularly gruesome, for example, and represents the relation between skin and floor catachrestically. The mundane and ordinary word “floor” does not capture the true condition of the floor, which is worked down and stripped to its most raw and barest level. This image also links the human figures metonymically with the floor, as if they, too, had been stripped bare and worked down to “bare life.” Certain images are also isolated and thus emphasized on their own lines, such as “under the hatch” and “the coal around them,” which, in a typical objectivist move, gives representative power and agency to the external, objective particulars that circumscribe the shovelers working in the

midst of these threatening forces. The end of the poem reveals the omnipotence of these earlier images and figures proleptically as the conditions that make possible the poem's ending. That is, by the end of the poem, we realize how Reznikoff has staged the poem's images and modulations as representative of the objective conditions that instantiate its unavoidable, fatal ending.

In his essay, "The End of the Poem," Giorgio Agamben argues that poetry threatens the status of the voice by dramatizing the failure or cessation of the voice at the poem's end. Poems create a "schism," which separates voice from meaning (Agamben 110). The death of the voice is always imminent, always waiting at the end of the poem when both sound, breath, and language cease. Unlike Derrida and other poststructuralists such as Paul de Man who emphasize how the allegorical and figural performativity of words in literary language displace the unity of a symbolic system, Agamben suggests that it is the voice and the threat of its dissolution across which meaning oscillates between presence and absence. A poem "tenaciously lingers and sustains itself in the tension between sound and sense, between the metrical series and the syntactical series" (Agamben 112). In other words, a poem sustains itself and the illusion of its reality ("the life that is lived in the scene it composes") across metrical, rhythmic, sonic and syntactic modulations, creating a surplus of meaning and relation. But the topos of the poem also sustains the fiction of the voice, which falters at poem's end, creating an existential problem. As Blasing argues, this procedure evinces the historicity of lyric. Each of Reznikoff's poems in *Testimony* exemplifies this process, turning the lyric into a kind of miniature epic that narrates the inevitable

“blind contingency” of existence. Moreover, it is interesting that any single poem in *Testimony* serves to exemplify the whole in this way. Despite the elaborate structure that nests poems within parts within sections, each poem performs the same relationship between voice and structure. And while the effect might be to deaden the reader’s attention, to make him or her immune to violence and suffering, this reader was nevertheless captivated by the sequence’s extreme repetition and representation of social life as nothing more than mere objective pattern. After a few examples, we get the point, I suppose, that accident, contingency, and randomness define the lives of those in particularly precarious and marginalized states of economic and social exploitation. But the fact that Reznikoff intended to publish five volumes of *Testimony*, which would have included some five-hundred pages of stories, also testifies to the quality of attention that Reznikoff brings to bear on his subject matter. He makes an argument about the value of these lives, despite being defined by external circumstances. His poems thus preserve the contingency of every voice and of every subject’s marginal and idiomatic perception of everyday life.

Testimony exemplifies the poet’s interest in archiving the numerous experiences of ordinary subjects and in using the lyric poem as a vehicle in which to negotiate the historical status of these experiences. It is thus helpful to contextualize Reznikoff as an objectivist poet, who shared stylistic, aesthetic and political concerns with like-minded writers such as William Carlos Williams, George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, Louis Zukofsky, Lorine Niedecker, and Basil Bunting, who formed a loosely cohesive group of objectivist writers that read and influenced each other’s work.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis's introduction to the anthology, *The Objectivist Nexus*, maintains the difficulty in pinpointing a specific point of view or manifesto that unites the stylistic, formal, and thematic intentions of all the objectivist writers. And Zukofsky famously resisted, in his introduction to the objectivist issue of *Poetry* magazine, an issue which he edited, the decision to make objectivist writing into "objectivism," which would have given it a more singular and cohesive point of view like Jorge Luis Borges's "ultraism" or Wyndham Lewis's "vorticism." But even if Zukofsky and his contemporaries wanted to resist making objectivist writing more accessible behind the banner of an identifiable aesthetic brand, there are, as Zukofsky himself articulated, shared ethical and artistic concerns in the works of these writers. A focus on sincerity, authenticity, detail, and particularity appears in these poets' writing, with the understanding that such thematic and formal foci would revise the subjective and elitist concerns of poetry. Zukofsky, for example, as DuPlessis writes, "emphasized equally the formalist and historical aspects of his poetics by insisting that the poem be shaped by specific necessities of the particular historical moment in which it is written" (*Objectivist Nexus* 3). The "object" in objectivist writing indexes a world of object relations and intersubjective connections, and the poetry is "characterized by a historical, realist, antimythological worldview, one in which 'the detail, not mirage' calls attention to the materiality of both the world and the word" (DuPlessis, *Objectivist Nexus* 3). Moreover, often by virtue of having been children of immigrants and thus socialized in languages other than English, these poets "positioned themselves as outsiders in degrees of negotiation with a mainstream

literary and political culture” (DuPlessis, *Objectivist Nexus* 5).⁴⁶ In Reznikoff’s case, one can detect the poet’s sense of responsibility to the other in his poetry. Although secular in many aspects, one of the main resources for the activist and messianic content in his poetry is his Jewish background and his and his family’s experience as immigrants, living in cultural exile. As Stephen Fredman has argued in his analysis of the Hebraic and Jewish components of Reznikoff’s writing, these themes of “betweenness” and survival manifest as strong currents of meaning within all of his poems. Although some of this work, like *Testimony*, offers only the barest of details, evacuating to the greatest extent possible any kind of romantic sensibility or affect, it also evinces a “strong messianic” desire to alter the shapes of historical representation.

One of the shared features of much objectivist writing is seriality, and seriality provides an opportunity to explore messianic longing as a formal problem. Long serial forms are not the exclusive domain of objectivist writing, but poets like Oppen, Zukofsky, and Reznikoff relied on serial and sequenced forms in order to negotiate one of the more fundamental attributes of their poetics, which is, I would argue, to address the other as an historical subject and not just as a philosophical problem. Yet this form also historicizes its subject as a condition of interpretation, thus seriality also continuously defers its subject of address:

Seriality is a central strategy of the Objectivist poetry of thought and of its constructivist debate with a poetics of presence and transcendence. The formal ‘problem of connection’ is played out structurally and thematically...as the

⁴⁶ Blasing’s concept of a mother tongue is extremely salient here, given that Reznikoff’s writing often negotiated his status as an exile, both personally, as a child of Russian immigrants, and also more culturally, as a Jew.

relation between fragment and series parallels the thematics of individual and community. (DuPlessis, *Objectivist Nexus* 7)

Serial poems, sequences, and series, like Oppen's "Discrete Series" or Zukofsky's "A," the latter of which braids together in one of its sections, Cavalcanti's "Donna mi prega" and parts of Marx's analysis of the commodity fetish, perform this desire to achieve completion within a historical community even as it also dramatizes its failure to do so. Serial poems undermine the unity of voice, as Agamben also implies in his argument, and thus dramatize the disunity of voice and representation that compels an attention to particularity and to detail. An objectivist ethos takes care with a multiplicity of details, and seriality situates these details within a structure that defers closure, suggesting there cannot be a single, authoritative perspective brought to bear on either a text or a social problem. For this reason, serial poems are also often intertextual, like Zukofsky's "A", or informed by documentary procedures, like Reznikoff's *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, both of which extend the reality of the subject's voice into an intersubjective and relational field of complication.

Reznikoff makes use of seriality in complicated ways. As I have already argued, he nests poems within thematically linked groupings, and also divides different narratives into smaller parts in order to give the smaller sequence a shape and thus a rhetorical purpose. These shapes begin to interpret poems for readers, which is an inevitable feature of any published presentation of material, but which becomes particularly significant in the context of Reznikoff's poems, which critics have argued resist being shaped or framed intrusively. But *Testimony's* sequences always already thematically contextualize and present the poetry as historical and

public material, even when the voice seems intimate, bare or raw. Reznikoff's choice to frame his poems this way addresses one of the interpretive problems of the text, which is to present its objective, raw material in a way that engages a reader both poetically and historically, that is, as agents who engage the text as historical subjects but also patients caught up in the text's process of objectification. That Reznikoff culls material from a previous generation and not, as in the case of his other documentary text, *Holocaust*, from the historical present, implicates his readers in this more complicated position as both subjects and objects of history. One of Louis Zukofsky's prescriptions for objectivist writing, which he articulated in his essay, "Sincerity and Objectification," was to see the poem as an object, as a confluence of meanings and events that made sense and became available at a particular historical moment: "Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody. Shapes suggest themselves and the mind senses and receives awareness" (Zukofsky 273). Thus objectification in writing, or objectivist writing, can and must become objectivist reading, a form of historical awareness which serves to remind the reader of the larger construct of meanings that circulate in the act of reconstructing a text. Formal seriality necessarily complicates this subject position, extending for the reader the historical awareness constructed by the text.

Although any section or group of poems in *Testimony* may provide an exemplary instance of Reznikoff's form of objectification, one titled sequence, "Boys & Girls," perhaps more poignantly uses the serial form to instantiate social awareness.

This poem, included in the first section, “The South,” includes eight numbered parts, and the sequence as a whole groups these poems topically according to the subject matter of child labor and child endangerment:

“Merry Margaret
as midsummer flower,”
nine years old,
was on her way along an alley
to pick up cobs and coal
alongside the track of the railroad.

One end of the sack
was wound around her arm
and she swung it to and fro. (55)

As Zukofsky observes, Reznikoff’s style is concise and spare. His “economy of presentation” clears the ground and isolates the most basic parts necessary to convey “without violence...their individual intact nature” (Zukofsky 278). Using an analogy (Margaret/as midsummer flower), even if it is a quotation, can be understood as part of the essential and necessary presentation of the material, which sets apart the real Merry Margaret, a nine year old girl who carries a sack to collect coal and corn cobs from a train track, from a commonplace image of childhood. Reznikoff’s opening image functions ideologically, delineating a more romantic image of Margaret as mere hyperbole. In this poem, blandly titled “Boys and Girls,” the facts are more mundane.

Each poem in this sequence ends on a graver and graver note, focusing more accurately on the image of childhood as a luxury afforded by only a few:

Tilda was just a child
when she began to work for the Tells.
Her mother was dead

and her father had given up their home.
When, as is the way of women,
her monthly sickness first began,
she was frightened
and told Mrs. Tell about it:
“That is bad,” the farmer’s wife said,
“and dangerous:
you might go crazy and di.
There is only one thing to do:
work hard!
Work as hard as you can,
and you may still get well!”

She was up at five in the morning
and on her feet until ten or eleven at night;
milked fourteen cows daily;
carried water uphill
for forty head of hogs;
dug and bought potatoes
from the field;
and helped cook for a family of eight;
scrubbed the floors
and took care of the little ones—
did the work
two stout girls had done. (58-59)

A number of features make Tilda’s story poignant. She is older than Margaret and perhaps more world-wise, making her subject position both more liminal and more vulnerable. These vulnerable children, including the now ostensibly teenage Tilda, whose mother is gone and thus unable to school her properly about female experiences, are easily taken of advantage and swayed by authority figures and the like, to whom they are beholden for survival. Tilda is dependent on Mrs. Tell, and unable to discern, for the sake of her own interest, between reality and superstition. A superstitious logic convinces her to work hard, expending her energy and labor for the benefit of someone else. The poem represents this effort by listing all of Tilda’s

activities (ie., “milked fourteen cows daily;/carried water uphill”), which thus expresses her exhaustion formally in the poem and “objectifies” the poem as the effects of Tilda’s labor. The theme of Tilda’s survival intensifies via the serial form, which slowly yet forcefully through repetition hammers home the blunt reality that Reznikoff exposes. A procedural repetition of facts suppresses generalization and idealization. As Todd Carmody argues in his analysis of Reznikoff’s *Holocaust*, a work similar in form to *Testimony*, this editorial practice “foregrounds historical particulars,” which therefore “take precedence over historical generalizations” (102). Reznikoff’s craft filters out generalizations and forces the reader to reconcile with the overwhelming ubiquity of ordinary and mundane experience, which must almost always confront external demands, threats, and forms of suppression. Charles Bernstein similarly notes that Reznikoff’s “network of stoppages is anti-epic. It enacts an economy of perambulation and coincidence, of loss rather than accumulation (a general rather than a restricted economy, in Bataille’s terms)” (217). It might seem odd that Reznikoff’s precise, disciplined, and careful craft can produce a “general economy” of meaning, but what Bernstein implies is how Reznikoff’s sequence never achieves (in an epic sense) a purpose beyond the effects of its presentation. It never reaches a telos. In this economy of repetition, *Testimony* makes meaning by remaining mute and blind rather than by accumulating a greater weight or depth of significance.

Testimony could have become an endless, infinite sequence of narratives, illuminating the mundane, random violence that circumscribes daily life, and

Reznikoff's point is to make his readers aware of this potential that stories of random and faceless circumstance circulate beneath the surfaces of everyday life. A contemporary writer could easily take up Reznikoff's project and extend it into the present, offering narratives of economic hardship, precarity, and poverty. The effects might likely be the same. Despite this, Reznikoff's serial structure, as I argued earlier, still allows each part of this sequence to represent the totality of the whole. This feature underscores the difference, as Joseph Conte argues, between Reznikoff's poem as a finite sequence, like George Oppen's "Discrete Series," and infinite sequences, which emphasize an ongoing process (130). What makes a sequence "discrete," bounded or finite, is, in this case, the tension between parts that relates to a whole. In the case of *Testimony*, this whole "emphasizes the separate validity of individual poems" (Conte 130). Reznikoff's sequence *is* ongoing, in the sense that it references a world of endlessly repeatable circumstances, a general economy of meaningless meaning. But this is exactly how the text also becomes discrete and finite, because it succeeds in filtering out the idealizations that divert one's attention from the totality of the world.

Conte also helpfully distinguishes between objectivist poems as "anti-epic" and the more obviously modernist epics like Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Eliot's poem is guided by the "comprehensiveness of the ego," Conte argues, but objectivist sequences are guided by "the numerosity of occurrence" which extends the subject's voice and ego into an objective field of metonymic relation (Conte 132). Conte continues: the "poetry of the Objectivists is predominantly metonymic" and

“concerned with the relationship between part to whole” (126). The unities of metaphor, which bind the imagination with the world, fail in the presence of material conditions and objective relations between parts as they materialize in everyday life. Metaphor, according to this logic, exhibits control over objective phenomena, rendering it subjective. Metonymy rather than metaphor extends and diverts the subject’s voice into a field of indeterminate spatial relations that cannot be controlled only presented and then interpreted, via objectification, by writing. These are the tenets of objectivist writing: to feature the external conditions and circumstances outlining the pattern of ordinary life. Consider how many poems, for example, seem to end with the same drop in rhythm, the same “stoppage,” as Bernstein notes. In both of the following examples, Reznikoff shapes each story to end rhythmically in a similar way, despite the difference in content:

“Yellowstone Kit,” as he was called,
would come to Montgomery now and then,
and rent a lot;
put up a large tent
in which he placed a stand and a number of seats around it,
and electric lights
to light up the tent at night.

In the tent he gave exhibitions of sleight of hand
and lectures on the merits of his drugs for sale,
handing them around himself or by his helpers;
and at these exhibitions there was always music by a band. (13)

This poem ends without any kind of fanfare or significance, as matter-of-factly as those of Reznikoff’s poem that culminate with slightly more ominous endings:

The day had been dark and rainy,
and she and Fuller were sitting by the fire
late in the evening

in an old house on the mountain
about fifty yards from the road.
They had a bottle of whiskey between them
and had been drinking,
and Fuller was singing, “The Drunkard’s Doom.” (5)

These poems, both from a short sequence, “Social Life,” represent, as the title suggests, scenes of social engagement, whether entertaining, distracting, or not. They exemplify the kinds of lives lived by the subjects that Reznikoff features. None of the actions or events in either poem could be construed very symbolically except as representative of the objective conditions that circumscribe the lives of these voices. That is, sometimes a whiskey bottle is really a whiskey bottle, because it is the only form of entertainment available. The endings of these different poems are also subtle and precise. Although they end as quietly as they begin and thus convey that each poem could randomly begin and end anywhere, they also convey an undercurrent of survival that shapes the overall effect of the poems. They only point back to themselves, and because the subject matter points objectively back to its barest details, these poems tend to reveal, in the way they begin, end, and make do with “meaning,” an ethos of survival and endurance. For Stephen Fredman, this theme underscores the hebraic and messianic influence on Reznikoff’s writing. In a close reading of a poem, “A Compassionate People,” Fredman writes:

Reznikoff does not subscribe to a tragic view of life and death or even to the view that can be inferred from the Book of Job that the arbitrariness of fate still has a divine backing: instead, he portrays a world in which the “whim” of a ruler, rather than either destiny or divine intervention, decides without “reason” between life and death. In such a world, as many Holocaust survivors attest, it is as terrible to be spared as to be annihilated, for both conditions affirm the state of meaninglessness in which life and death wait at the mercy of human whim. (102)

Fredman could easily be describing the state of things in *Testimony*, which also denies the epic values of destiny and divine intervention. Fredman goes on to describe how such conditions affirm the value of exile and suffering as the basis for interaction and interpretation, when the poem in question, “ends not with praise for God but for the variety of exemplary human virtues, texts, and practices that have been culled from Jewish history” (104). The entire poem treats the emergence of Jewish scripture, some of which was written “in Babylon/where the Jews wept when they remembered Zion;” (Reznikoff, qtd. in Fredman 59), and exemplifies a major theme of Reznikoff’s writing, which is that human ingenuity can perhaps build civilizations but it can also endure in difficult circumstances of exile and dismemberment. The random endings, repetitive structures, and flat tone of *Testimony* highlight this ongoing concern with representing the ordinary facts of survival as an oppositional and political practice.

Testimony’s anti-poetic precision might seem an unlikely place to look for qualities of messianic symbolism, but its form, as Norman Finkelstein argues, resembles “what Gershom Scholem describes as the problem produced by the messianic idea in Judaism” (194). Finkelstein continues, quoting Scholem: “in Judaism, the Messianic idea has compelled a life lived in deferment, in which nothing can be done, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished” (194). Thus Finkelstein argues that deferment, exile, and alienation, those textual conditions also endemic to the modernist writing of Eliot and Pound, for example, resonates strongly in the writing of Reznikoff, Oppen, and other Objectivists: “it accords with their own drastic

experiences of assimilation, geographic displacement, and extreme changes in political and economic climates” (194). Reznikoff’s chosen serial form infers this messianic strain along with values of interpretation and textual multiplicity that inspire moments of messianic and apocalyptic reading. The purpose of each individual anecdote or story is to remind, or reveal—perhaps in an epiphanic sense—to the reader an overall pattern of historical subjugation. What makes each poem appear exemplary is the fact that we, as readers, have to infer the suppressed historical context, the suppressed meaning that unites individual experience. This partly enables a typological interpretation of each serialized part, but, given the unlimited quantity of examples, Reznikoff also implies that each testimonial moment is worth enunciating. In other words, these examples are both singular and repetitive. Formally, they repeat the purpose of revealing the contingency of experience, but they also, in their singularity, reveal the particular way an individual will always diverge from the norm.

The serial structure of Pacheco’s poem is also worth discussing, because, while it might appear random, it perhaps implicitly responds to earlier long poems, such as Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Williams’s *Paterson*. “Las Ruinas de México” is composed of five sections, whereas Eliot’s *Four Quartets* was composed in four neatly cyclical parts and Williams’s *Paterson*, although it eventually included five sections, was originally planned to follow the pattern of the seasons as a four-part representation of cyclical time. Four part sequences infer a neat and accessible totality, a human container that provides helpful, symbolic limits. Thus I argue that Pacheco’s

poem radicalizes and extends into an inhuman space the neatly contained four-part sequence of Eliot's poem and radicalizes Williams's plan as well, although Williams expanded his own structure by writing a fifth and even planning a sixth section. Some authors of long poems elect to use a procedure or external form that facilitates a poetic structure, such as Octavio Paz, who used the Aztec calendric cycle to structure the meaning of *Piedra de Sol*. These structures provide mythic and symbolic integrity, and anthropomorphize the structures of figuration, making them dependent on human orders of perception. In *Piedra de Sol*, as in *Four Quartets*, cyclical time solves the problem of locating or representing futurity. The poem ends and begins, as Eliot writes, as if "all time is eternally present" (13).

"Las Ruinas de México" is more arbitrarily divided up into five indivisible, singular, and apocalyptic parts. This work thus overflows the formulaic cycle structure of some long poems, asking at the end, "¿vamos a hacer/otra ciudad, otro país, otra vida?" [are we going to build/another city, another country, another life?] (37).⁴⁷ It adds a critical, speculative dimension to the form, thus implying that some structures, such as calendars and cycles, may provide temporary shelters for thought, but eventually they will falter as well, just like cities, countries and civilizations eventually succumb to the forces of natural history. This fifth part or fifth voice that Pacheco includes does not only belong to a critical and impersonal voice, but also to a public and ecological voice, a quality that Reznikoff's poem also shares if more

⁴⁷ These lines close the second edition of Pacheco's poem, revised and reissued in 1995. In the original version, the lines read more emphatically as statements and not as questions and thus assume the importance of rebuilding. This revision enhances the poem's overall argument.

implicitly. Pacheco's point in using this form, I would argue, is to make his readers aware of a tradition of writing in lyric sequences when confronting historical problems, and thus to make his readers aware of the forms of divided and deferred awareness and understanding that emerge in the face of disaster.

The objectivist principle that defines Reznikoff's sequence to a certain extent also frame Pacheco's, at least insofar as the fivefold structure expands the poem into another temporal frame. Pacheco's focus on the earthquake and the temporal reality of the quake as a force of dissolution stretches the framework of the text into a depersonalized, post human framework. In this way, I see both Reznikoff and Pacheco providing a hemispheric approach to understanding world relations. These poems recognize the constitutive relationship between human and inhuman forces of meaning. In Reznikoff's poem, the serial framework atomizes and dehumanizes experience, diminishing the heroic qualities that define epic poems. In Pacheco's poem, the serial framework represents the supremacy of another model of duration that diminishes and decenters human sovereignty.

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