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City University of New York PH.D. 1984

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IN THE FIRST COUNTRY OF PLACES: ENVIRONMENTAL MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

by

LOUISE CHAWLA

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Psychology
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Abstract

IN THE FIRST COUNTRY OF PLACES:
ENVIRONMENTAL MEMORY IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY
by
LOUISE CHAWLA

Adviser: Professor Leanne Rivlin

Conceived within the discipline of environmental psychology, this study explores an area in which environmental psychology, developmental psychology, and literature intersect. Its subject is the significance which memories of childhood places retain during poets' creative maturity. The value given to these memories has been mapped within the coordinates of two larger issues: what significance does experience of the physical world have in the development of a poet's work; and what significance does autobiographical memory itself have?

The study begins by reviewing Classical and Romantic theories regarding the value of memory. For the Metaphysical poets Vaughan and Traherne, for Wordsworth and other Romantic writers, and for the Transcendentalists, remembered childhood perception of the world was an important theme. When the

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issue of the value of places to children has been taken up in developmental psychology, anthropology, geography, and landscape design, quotations from this body of literature liberally appear. Considering that we now live in a world that has altered drastically, both physically and intellectually, and that the meaning of childhood memories may have correspondingly altered, this study has reopened this question with five contemporary American poets. Through a reading of their poetry and prose and through interviews, it has collected their own reminiscence and reflection regarding the importance of childhood environmental memory to them.

As central to this study as its subject is its method. In order to approach the discipline of poetry from within a discipline of social science, it has been necessary to use a method which combines objectivity with human depth and fullness. The study traces the development of hermeneutic phenomenology through the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer to arrive at a philosophical guide for the conduct of the research. It puts into practice a new ideal of objectivity appropriate for the social sciences, which is to view the subject of inquiry from different sides, through different voices. Accordingly, this study's topic has been pursued with five poets who represent five distinct backgrounds and points of view: David Ignatow, William Bronk, Audre Lorde, Marie Ponsot, and Henry Weinfield.

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The title of this work, "in the first country of places," has been borrowed from the poet Howard Nemerov, with his kind permission. He himself has used it in the title of an essay in the book Images and Ideas in American Culture: The Function of Criticism, edited by Arthur Edelstein.

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PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Being author of this dissertation signifies being beneficiary of many people's encouragement and support. From the outset, Dr. Leanne Rivlin and Dr. Kathy Christensen have given that most precious combination of advantages which a researcher can hope for: freedom to find my own way, along with helpful criticism and suggestions. In some respects, this dissertation represents a new departure within the field of environmental psychology, so that finding my way has sometimes meant groping. By never losing their faith in the outcome, they have never failed to sustain my own.

Acknowledgment is also due to the poet and translator, Dr. Allen Mandelbaum, who took an early interest in this project and gave names and introductions to other poets. One of his introductions was to Dr. Elizabeth Sewell--poet, translator, novelist, and literary critic. It was his recommendation that she alert me to literary traditions regarding memory and inspiration, which would be helpful in developing this study. In an afternoon's talk often punctuated by the phrase, "You might take a look at . . .," she graciously and generously fulfilled this role.

Dr. Joseph Glick, a developmental psychologist, and Dr. Marvin Magalaner, a literary scholar, have read the completed manuscript. They have given careful attention to every

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word, as well as helpful conceptual criticism. Dr. Roger Hart, a geographer who has specialized in the study of children's place experience, has also read and critiqued the work. Special acknowledgments are due to him for many years of shared interests, conversations, information, contacts, and opportunities. Whatever he gathers himself in our shared field of interest, he freely passes on.

Once this research was under way, the five poets who have taken part have each furthered it along, sharing not only their time and thought but also their friendliness. It is hoped that the following pages may adequately reflect the respect felt for their thought and for their work.

Research that has been carried out within a setting of home and family traditionally gives thanks to family members for their encouragement, and for patiently putting up with the researcher's absences and lapses. Now a veteran participant observer of this situation, I can verify that this tradition of gratitude is founded on real life events. Without my husband Devendra, who has urged, encouraged, nursed, nurtured, supported, and speeded both this research and this researcher along, this dissertation would not be. Without my daughter Ambika, its topic--memory of childhood--would not be nearly as meaningful, or as pleasant, to reflect upon.

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PREFACE

This study is about poetry and memory. It has developed out of concerns and questions within the discipline of environmental psychology. Specifically, this research is an outcome of this writer's commitment to the planning and improvement of children's environments. As an environmental psychologist, I am one among a body of planners, architects, psychologists, sociologists, geographers, and educators around the world who are presently at work developing and promoting ideas for better neighborhoods and better outdoor play spaces and programs. In this study, I have stepped back from this involvement and posed a long-range question: "When people grow up, what significance do memories of childhood places retain?" This study has raised this question with five contemporary American poets: William Bronk, David Ignatow, Audre Lorde, Marie Ponsot, and Henry Weinfield. It examines these poets' different orientations to childhood environmental memory, and how they have incorporated it into their work.

Why, as a psychologist, have I gone to poets with this question?

There are a number of compelling reasons. For one reason, the largest body of literature which casts insight upon this question is in literature itself. It is the work of poets and novelists. Psychologists have been assiduously studying the

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mechanics of memory for many years. The mechanics of a thing, however, have little to do with its personal meaning or significance. The long-range significance of experience has been the concern of psychoanalysis; but this field has concentrated upon exploring unconscious significance. The question adopted here is, "Consciously, what significance do people attribute to environmental memory? How do they consciously value it, in their own words?"

To anyone familiar with the field of phenomenological psychology, it is evident that this question falls within its domain. The following study is an attempt to carry out a phenomenology of environmental memory.

Despite its promise, phenomenological psychology remains a new twentieth century arrival. Long before it and flourishing beside it, imaginative literature had already been observing, analyzing, and describing the human meaning of experience, including the felt significance of environmental experience. From the time of the Romantic Era, childhood and a child's encounter with the physical world have been important literary subjects. A treasury of records of childhood environmental memory exists here.

There is a second critical reason for having brought this question to poets. When environmental professionals do speculate regarding the personal meaning of environmental experience, they tend to quote poets, or to quote other professionals who have derived their theories from poets.

One of the most widely quoted examples of this rule is

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Edith Cobb. The following study was directly prompted by her theorizing. Emphasizing the importance of the encounter with the world during middle childhood, Cobb summarized the results of a life-time of autobiographical research in a suggestive statement.

> In my collection of some three hundred volumes of autobiographical recollections of their own childhood by creative thinkers from many cultures and eras, ranging from the sixteenth century to the present, it is principally to this middle-age range in their early life that these writers say they return in memory in order to renew the power and impulse to create at its very source, a source which they describe as the experience of emerging not only into the light of consciousness but into a living sense of a dynamic relationship with the outer world. In these memories the child appears to experience both a sense of discontinuity, an awareness of his own unique separateness and identity, and also a continuity, a renewal of relationship with nature as process.[1]

This connection of creativity, memory, and childhood experience of the world has been cited within anthropology, geography, landscape design, education, and poetry itself[2] as evidence that childhood environmental memory is a critical source of inspiration for later creativity.

This theory has intriguing implications. If it is correct, it traces a line of influence in which the nature of the outer world which creative thinkers encounter as children, and the nature of their encounter, profoundly affect the course of their thought as adults. Their thought, in turn, profoundly affects the course of our culture. For these reasons, during the past three years I have repeatedly returned to reconsider this statement.

My own attempts to reexamine this theory have suggested

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that it must be broadly qualified. Sometimes it seems to hold. Sometimes it does not. The qualifications which have proved necessary have formed a worthwhile story in themselves.

Cobb advanced her theory as a universal rule: that it is the experience of all children, and that all creative thinkers draw upon it. When I began to investigate the origins of her thought, her own creative sources began to appear more particular than universal. Her book The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood liberally quotes Wordsworth.[3] Her collection of autobiographies, which she deeded to Columbia Teacher's College, predominantly represents nineteenth century British childhoods. According to Elizabeth Sewell--a friend who was with her when she was formulating her ideas, whom it was possible to interview--when the words "outer world" and "nature" appear in her writing, the referent in her mind was rural England.[4] In short, although Edith Cobb drew upon many streams of thought, if the tradition which her theory of memory belongs to must be assessed in one word, that word would be "Wordsworthian."

A further attempt to evaluate her work has suggested that the type of memory which she describes is itself particular rather than universal. She did not specify who she meant by "creative thinkers." According to my own review of thirty-eight autobiographies by twentieth century men and women from many fields (the arts, the sciences, mathematics, journalism, politics, and business), she must have meant "creative artists."[5] In this review, ecstatic memories of

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"a living sense of a dynamic relationship with the outer world" were described only by autobiographers who were creative artists, either as professionals or as committed amateurs. Those who confined their attention to other fields, although they were creative in their own areas of work, either failed to have, or failed to record, such memories.

Even among artists, the appearance of this ecstatic memory could be systematically related to the qualities of remembered places and how they were encountered. What appeared to be necessary for people to reveal these memories was freedom in a multilayered sense: an open, beckoning environment; an absence of supervision and constraint; a sense that the environment was their own, where they felt comfortable, where things could be used at will. This finding comes at a time when writers about children's environments habitually lament the loss of just such places.[6] Rural open spaces, the city vacant lot, streets which are moveable feasts of people, are being rapidly built up or taken over by traffic and other dangers.

Since Edith Cobb phrased her theory within the poetic tradition of Wordsworth, this research has been reopened within this poetic tradition. The people in this study are poets, like Wordsworth, but the world around them has changed. For twentieth century American poets, there is no valley of Grasmere, such as he had, either to grow up in or to retire to. Within a changed landscape, at a different time in history, writing a different poetry, what significance do initial

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childhood perceptions of the world retain?

If the essential concern which has motivated this study must be compressed into one sentence, it would be, "Today, does citing Wordsworth work?" With five contemporary American poets, the following study explores the question of whether childhood environmental memories continue to be drawn upon in later creativity, and how they are.

In proceeding with this research, one question will be left, unanswered, in the background. It is the question which Emily Dickinson pointedly phrased: "Is it oblivion or absorption when things pass from our minds?"[7] Childhood environmental experience may have effects which cannot be recovered in conscious memory. Like Edith Cobb, the psychoanalyst Phyllis Greenacre reviewed autobiographies. Like her, she concluded that adult creativity draws upon a special relationship with the physical world that is formed in childhood. What Cobb described as "a living sense of a dynamic relationship with the outer world" she described more clinically as "a peculiar degree of empathic animation of inanimate objects as well as a heightened responsiveness and anthropomorphizing of living objects," which "remains active either in its own right or appears in the form of the ease and wealth of symbolization."[8] Unlike Cobb, she saw early childhood, rather than middle childhood, as the critical period during which this relationship to the world is formed, and she spoke in terms of an unbroken way of relating to the world rather than in terms of conscious environmental memory that is rekindled for

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inspiration.

Arguments regarding unconscious connections must be phrased abstractly, in the vocabulary of some congenial theory. Greenacre chose the vocabulary of psychoanalytic theory. As a phenomenology, the study undertaken here will define significance only through the words and understandings of the people involved. Personal significance must be personally defined. In turning back to childhood, it is fair to argue unconscious connections; but the meaningfulness of the whole must still derive from some element of conscious experience, which still needs to be expressed in an individual's own terms.

This preface is like most in that, although it comes first, it was in fact written last. It is forethought recollected in afterthought. An earlier draft was written, but by the time this study as a whole was completed, it had to be discarded. The earlier preface presumed that the major determinant of environmental memories' significance would be the qualities of remembered places themselves: whether they were beautiful or bleak, welcoming or fearful, open and free or closed in and circumscribed. It assumed, further, that reading and interviewing the five poets studied here would primarily gather what my discipline terms "environmental autobiography"--detailed reminiscences of well remembered places. What occupied the interviews instead, in response to the poets' own interests and emphases, was the general role of childhood environmental memory within their poetry: the part that it has played, depending upon their poetry's purposes,

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style, and philosophy.

This outcome brings up a third good reason for conducting this research with poets. In one way, published American poets are a very specific group, who cannot be taken as representative of a vast unpublished or more prosaic population. In another way, however, their personal distinctiveness as intellectuals and writers should be balanced by the communicative representativeness that their role assumes. "Tuned in" to words, they are attentive to the terms and meanings that the entire English-speaking population shares. They pick them up and spread them further, and add some new terms of their own, actively contributing to the common pool of signification that all people who speak (write) for their age--as well as individuals who try to speak for themselves--draw upon. They are an influential part of the definition of influence itself. With regard to the question of environmental memory undertaken here, memory has been a subject of particular interest to poets. They tend to be informed of a long heritage of thought about it and to be observant of it. Their discussion of memory presented here may prove a sensitive indicator to representative trends it is now taking.

Through this intellectual reflectiveness, the poets studied here have made a fourth special contribution to the development of this study. In general terms, in their writing they define their place within the world. How they see the world is one of their primary preoccupations. One of the decisive factors in shaping modern perception of the world has

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been the rise of science. Each of these people has evaluated scientific conclusions regarding the world and the scientific methods used to arrive at them. Working with them has required greater self-awareness regarding my own conduct of social science. As a result, method has become a secondary theme which runs in and out through the following pages, an accompaniment to the main theme of memory itself.

In formulating their views on environmental memory, these five poets represent different poetic traditions and different philosophies regarding both memory and relationship to the physical world. The study that follows may be less of an environmental autobiography than was first anticipated, but it has become more of an intellectual and cultural history.

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Notes

[1]Edith Cobb, "The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood," Daedalus 88 (1959):539.

[2]In order of discipline, her work has been cited by: Margaret Mead, "Children, Culture, and Edith Cobb," USDA Forest Service General Technical Report NE-30 (1977), pp. 19-24; Roger Hart, Children's Experience of Place (New York: Irvington, 1979); Robin Moore and Donald Young, "Childhood Outdoors: Toward a Social Ecology of the Landscape," Children and the Environment, ed. Irwin Altman and Joachim Wohlwill (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), p. 84; Dorothy Cohen, unpublished speech delivered to the Department of Education and Child Development, Bryn Mawr College, October 1978; Robin Blaser, "The Fire," Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. D. Allen and W. Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), p. 239.

[3]Edith Cobb, The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

[4]Elizabeth Sewell, whom this researcher interviewed in April 1982 at the outset of this study, was a close friend of Edith Cobb, along with Margaret Mead. Like Margaret Mead, she sometimes stayed at her home and was closely associated with her when she was developing her ideas. Edith Cobb lived in England for a while, and Elizabeth Sewell believes that the English countryside left a deep impression upon her--that whenever she uses the word "nature," it is the nature she has in mind.

[5]Louise Chawla, "Past Place/Present Time: An Exploration of Environmental Autobiography," unpublished manuscript distributed by the Center for Human Environments, City University Graduate Center of the City of New York, 1981.

[6]Arvid Bengtsson, Environmental Planning for Children's Play (New York: Praiger, 1970); Grady Clay, "Remembered Landscapes," The Subversive Science, ed. P. Shepard and D. McKinley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969); Robin Moore, Childhood's Domain, forthcoming; A. E. Parr, "The Child in the City: Urbanity and the Urban Scene," Landscape 16 (1967):3-5; Colin Ward, The Child in the City (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[7]Emily Dickinson, Selected Letters, ed. T. H. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1971), p. 210.

[8]Greenacre, Phyllis, "The Childhood of the Artist," Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 12 (1957):42-47.

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PART I

MEMORY AND METHOD

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CHAPTER ONE

FIRST DEFINITIONS

I. To begin, it is necessary to define memory.

> Come thou, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with harmonious voice.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Them in Pieria did Mnemosyne, goddess of Memory, who reigns over the hills of Eleuther, bear of union with the father, the son of Cronos; they bring a forgetting of ills and a rest from sorrow. For nine nights did wise Zeus lie with her, entering her holy bed remote from the immortals. And when a year was passed and the seasons came round as the months waned, and many days were accomplished, she bare nine daughters, all of one mind, whose hearts are set upon song and their spirit free from care, a little way from the topmost peak of Olympus.[1]
>
> Hesiod, Theogony, lines 36-41, 53-66

It is reported that at a party, after a toast was proposed to memory, Goethe stood up and objected vehemently in these words:

> I do not recognize memory in the sense in which you mean it. Whatever we encounter that is great, beautiful, significant, need not be remembered from outside, need not be hunted up and laid hold of, as it were. Rather, from the beginning, it must be woven into the fabric of our inmost self, must thus live and become a productive force in ourselves. There is no past that one is allowed to long for. There is only the eternally new, growing from the enlarged elements of the past; and genuine longing always must be productive, must create something new and better.[2]
>
> reported in Ernst Schachtel, Metamorphosis

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. . . the past . . . never really existed: it has always been an illusion created by the symbolizing activity of the mind.[3]

Barrett Mandel, "Full of Life Now"
essay on autobiography

The descent beckons

as the ascent beckoned

Memory is a kind

of accomplishment

a sort of renewal

even

an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new

places[4]

William Carlos Williams, Paterson, II, iii

Memory refers to storing information and to accessing or retrieving information. More generally, memory encompasses three basic processes: encoding, storage, and retrieval. . . . Encoding refers to arranging information so that it can be placed in storage. The process of encoding includes modification of information such as selecting certain features for storage. For example, when you read a book you do not remember the words or sentences verbatim (except in very rare cases); rather you try to get the gist or the main ideas which you encode. Storage refers to storing information in the memory system. The fact that we can remember information for days, weeks, or years implies that information is stored. Retrieval refers to the process of accessing or getting at the stored information. Information may be stored in memory, but storage is no guarantee that we can get at the information. All three processes are part of memory, and thus it follows that a failure in any one of the processes can lead to a failure in memory.[5]

Henry C. Ellis, Fundamentals of Human Learning, Memory, and Cognition

II. This paper is an inquiry into how environmental memory endures and works its way into poetry. Environmental memory

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means memory of places and things--of all the fittings of the physical world that surround us, animal, vegetable, mineral, and man-made. Strictly speaking, it is not intended to apply to poets' attentions to men and women, or affairs of spirit or state. But after great pains to strip away all but the physical world from this study, through places and things, men, women, spirit, and state quickly entered back in again. So the term environmental memory has overtones and undertones.

This work is undertaken in the name of children's place in the environment, with the specific purpose of considering what influence childhood environmental memories may have upon adult poets. But since the point of such research is that children grow, the adult who is engendered has been accepted with full status. Since all the available evidence depends upon adult testimony, the manner in which poets regard the environment and the importance which they attribute to it in adulthood have been attended to also.

A limitation of this research is that it has concentrated upon twentieth century American poets confronted by the industrialized Northeast. It is the setting where the research is being done, and the region that the researcher personally knows well. In addition, children seem under some squeeze in this world as it is shaping up, which is the shape of things to come for many other areas of the world, so that it is an environment worth watching.

At the outset of work, help was given by Elizabeth Sewell, a poet, novelist, and critic. In a long interview, she gave background regarding classical and Romantic theories

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of memory and inspiration. The daughter of a scientist who has known from early childhood that she was going to be a poet, she has given the problem of reconciling science and poetry lifelong thought. Since this study is done in the discipline of environmental psychology, in a department of social science, with poetry for a topic, it begins with a similar dilemma. Elizabeth Sewell's voice will surface and resurface in it; but even when she has not been given formal recognition, a debt is owed to her for her initial directions as to the lay of the land.

The first consideration of this study must be memory and method.

> The rule, we find,
> Is to be permeable; marbles stain;
> Light filters through packed crystals; someone's pain
> Threads our interstices.
> Creatures of all kind
> Are porous, breathe, fuse with their media;
> Closures but seem.[6]
>
> Elizabeth Sewell, "Method," lines 1-7

Quoted texts up to this point now total six. According to content, they equal five on memory and one on method. According to form, however, they may be taken all together as six texts on method. Five ways of knowing and communicating are exemplified: extemporaneous speech, reported of Goethe; criticism, which reveals its philosophical affiliations in the passage by Mandel; myth; poetry; and science. They are the five means through which this research will be conducted. The texts which reflect upon memory as a source of literary inspiration outnumber the text of science five

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to one; but since the scientific text has the advantage of our dominant modern method of knowledge, this ratio will serve in order to begin a comparison of science and poetry as alternative methods of knowing and recording.

The fundamental similarity among the five passages on memory is that all are forms of discourse. They advance from word to word and phrase to phrase. The speech of Goethe was surely enhanced by nonverbal vocabularies of inflection, expression, and motion, and delivered with unreproducible individuality of voice and body. All that drama is lost, and only a thin echo of his energy is probably preserved in these words recorded by another, and very possibly modified in the recording. The other passages never had these resources of delivery. They did not begin in the heat of person to person response; instead they had leisure to compose themselves on paper, safe from interruption or interception by another. Yet their orientations to author, audience, subject, and event of language divide them variously. The decisive distinguishing factor among these passages is not whether they began as speech or writing, but whether they began as science or poetry.

All five passages discourse on memory. As discourse, they are not lost in memory, but are able to stand apart from it and talk around it: in other words, to think about it communicatively. We are all skillful at thinking noncommunicatively; but each author had to make the extra effort of collecting his words and arranging them artfully to persuade an audience to think along the same lines that he did. He

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had to arrange his own thought in lines to do it.

The different authors have different investments in keeping on line. The scientist and critic have arguments to make, and therefore they must convey their reader by linear sequence of thoughts to an appointed conclusion: in the understanding that it is a provisional conclusion until science or criticism progresses further and either the author himself or someone else amends the argument in light of new observations.

There is nothing provisional about the statements of Hesiod, Goethe, or Williams. They are setting out facts, as they see it. Intuitive, feeling fact--and therefore they need not appeal to linear logic. They appeal to felt recognition, which needs not convincing but evoking, and potential for that is present all along the line.

Different arrangements of line mean different alliances with time. The criticism and scientific text are committed to moving forward, to making a point according to a schedule of disciplinary advance. They are events in a logical history, embedded between the precedents and consequents in their fields. The price for progress is that they are locked in time. The future has yet to prove itself; and the past, which they are becoming, is outdated. Criticism can slip free of these restrictions to the extent that it models itself upon philosophy or art rather than science.

Goethe could refer backward and forward among his words through agilities of voice and gesture. The formal eloquence of his speech raises suspicion that his words were edited for

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publication. Otherwise, we have another token of his genius; for speech, given its nonverbal advantages, is commonly characterized by breakdowns and ellipses in grammar, reference, and sequence. The price for these dramatic flourishes is that speech is most defenselessly bound to time. All that Goethe could rely on to preserve his thought was the effectiveness of memory as he was pleading it.

The myth proceeds in narrative sequence, by chronology and cumulative detail. Yet it is questionable whether Hesiod himself believed it was history. Certainly no one today does; but it remains meaningful. Its principle of eloquence is to condense tracts of nonlinear evocation into figures and events. Williams, having neither speech nor communal myth at his disposal, has given the most painstaking attention of any to the line. Both descent and ascent along it are invited, through a new medium of attentiveness to the spaces that the line frames. Both the myth and poetry, not being attached to any principle of progress, making what were believed to be timeless statements in the permanence of script, have the greatest liberty of time. If the authors are successful, going back to the beginning, or lingering in the middle, should be as instructive as reaching the end.

As variations of discourse, the five passages can also be compared as variations of distancing. Discourse is a way of standing apart and talking around the subject. For this reason it is invaluable. To focus the eyes, to act upon something, and to think each requires keeping the subject of attention at arm's length. As we shift from instinctive

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physiological focusing, to the cooperation of body and mind in work and play, to thought alone, the contribution of discourse increases. Discourse is thinking's organ for simultaneous distancing and focusing. Cassirer[7] compared the symbolic distance of discourse to aesthetic distance, which separates us from the world so that we can contemplate it, and create.

The five passages position themselves differently on a scale of distance from the physical world and from the operation of the body. No matter what Goethe may have stood up to talk about, whether memory or the dinner, he and his audience stood within the same walls and he communicated body to body. All of the other texts are distant in the sense of being prepared and presented not in the world, but within the tracery of symbols on a page.

In the examples of distancing at its most extreme, there is not even reference to body or setting in the texts of science and criticism. They are abstracted, drawn away, in the sense that the dictionary (Webster's Dictionary) defines abstract as "considered and treated apart from any particular object." They talk about either philosophical or functional features of memory which have been separated out through logical analysis, which can never be physically seen.

The myth and poetry have taken an intermediate distance from the world. To continue with the sixth passage:

> Creatures of all kind
> Are porous, breathe, fuse with their media;
> Closures but seem.
> Given a mind,

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Much more so; tides of the universe have play;
Stars sift across our system once a day;
Cosmos and chaos all we do.[8]

"Method," lines 5-11

Mnemosyne is a Titaness, one of the original children of the union of Heaven and Earth, when cosmos first formed from chaos. Her race, more elemental than Zeus, was overpowered by him; but, with her at least, he had no quarrel. The myth draws us into a world that we are familiar with through our bodies, a world of mothers and fathers, of powers, of genealogies.

The myth is also physically familiar because it is drama with a local setting. These larger-than-life figures frequent the places of people. The Muses whom Hesiod invokes chose for their dwelling place Mt. Helicon, renowned for fragrant plants and numerous cool springs, on whose slopes, history has it, Hesiod had the job of shepherd. The Muses might have been local acquaintances of his.

The passage of poetry, out of context, may appear as abstracted from the world as the passage of criticism. In context, it is contiguous to the myth. The descent referred to, whatever else it may be, is the Passaic River at the point where it plunges past Garrett Mountain into the Passaic Falls, as witnessed by a fabulously omniscient local physician, Dr. Paterson, to whom Williams sometimes bore striking resemblance. What it is, then, is metaphor.

Then, Soul, defined
As other, yet materially fleshed,
Thy proper form retaining, o be meshed--[9]

"Method," lines 12-14

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Metaphor, as Elizabeth Sewell[10] has written, is a kind of tying of bonds. Something like love, it is seeing a part of oneself in another. The inescapable usefulness of environmental metaphors that Elizabeth Sewell has defended is that they attach us to the physical world in which we are, after all, a part, and arouse all of the somatic memories by which we simultaneously know our body and the world. They are a way of knowing ourselves in full context.

When Elizabeth Sewell was asked about inspiration, her first attempt at explanation was that it is "you and not you." So is something loved. So is the world outside us. So is metaphor. All require a cooperation of you and not you.

Such pliant give-and-take science cannot allow. Two opposed forms of knowing are at stake. One is knowing achieved through being able to control and predict. The memory experiments that the scientific text goes on to summarize are judged significant by a measure of control, the degree to which the results observed are predictable by scientific postulate, not by chance. So at the side of science goes technology, the application of control. And behind it as generous contributor stands government. In myth and poetry what is involved is knowing achieved through experiencing, undergoing, loving, sometimes fearing. You is open to not you, and it is an unpredictable risk. The only possible control is the control that a master craftsperson has who knows how to submit to yet shape material. The effect is that unilateral dictating of terms is unthinkable. That would be to lose the Muse.

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In its own way, every test of a scientific hypothesis is also a risk, but it is a risk of a different kind. Scientific knowing requires the strictest separation of self and observed object. Otherwise the results get confounded. The prestige of science is claimed on the basis of this separation. By the Cartesian division self | world, the separate knowing self sees the world through a one-way mirror, unprejudiced, in truth. It discovers not meanings, but facts. Myth, poetry, and engaged speaker are hopelessly confounded in a selfworld, where everything has personal meaning. Criticism is more flexible in its way of knowing. When it founds itself upon philosophy, it can choose different epistemological positions.

With any engagement, feeling enters knowing. Every manner of work for stakes engages feeling. A scientist testing a hypothesis, a critic writing an essay, someone digging a well, can all be expected to be emotional about their work. Curiosity and a sense of accomplishment are always involved. There may also be acclaim, promotions, bonuses to win, which incite feelings about results. But when the self is confounded in the work itself as it takes shape, more versatile feelings, as much as one's self has feeling, enter in.

In the texts, engagement shows as a matter of style. Each passage, representing a way of working involving more or less of the person, correspondingly reveals more or less personal energy. The scientific text unfolds in fittingly aloof exposition. Goethe, speaking about something that mattered deeply to him, can be presumed to have added to his message intensity of voice and expression. Mandel the critic

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worded his conclusion decisively; for him too it must have mattered. The challenge the poets faced, in the absence of physical presence, was to make their subject live through appropriate energy of meaning, rhythm, and sound. Energy is not just a spin-off in their texts; it is their measure of appraisal.

Under the circumstances that have been described, it might be assumed that nobody approached his subject in such heat of the moment as Goethe. Possibly not, but by the end of his speech, after unburdening himself, Goethe must have quieted down. The particular passage from Paterson happens to be the one in which Williams said he suddenly found himself master of the variable metric foot after forty years of struggle, when it suddenly unrolled, smooth for him. According to self-report, by the end of the passage at least, he was ready to hit the ceiling.[11] Poetry can engage sustained ferment.

If this excitement isn't evident in the passage from Paterson itself, it is token that style, as a product of aesthetic distance, entails distance as well as aesthetics. Williams was invested in his subject, which took heat, but he was also a stylist, which took coolness. Therefore he had been able to keep working at the challenge for forty years, as doggedly as any scientific researcher.

In what they have to say about memory, all five texts concur upon one essential: memory is a creative act. The scientific text only alludes to transformation of information for encoding; but the effect of the experiments it later

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summarizes, without exception, is to elaborate how memory transforms material at every phase. To begin, as the text remarks, people attend to material selectively. What people notice varies according to their social background, interests, values, and age.[12] Even at this point, imagination contributes. Bartlett,[13] who did the first extensive research in this area, discovered that a great deal of what we believe we have perceived we have in fact inferred. The probability of long-term retention of something noticed depends upon how much attention or emotion it arouses in the first place;[14] or how often the incident has been repeated or mentally rehearsed.[15] Bartlett[16] also observed that the form and items of remembered detail quickly become stereotyped and afterwards suffer little change. They become organized according to a theme, which persists indefinitely.

Language is a critical ingredient in memory. Although sensory experiences that have made deep impressions may persist indefinitely independently of language,[17] memories that are elaborated and interrelated with language stand a better chance of being retained.[18] Language is a line by which to secure them. Richness of memory depends upon sensitivity to all physical features of the thing perceived, but retrieval, and of course communication, is improved by semantic encoding.

These observations have been applied to explain why childhood memories are fragmented and capricious, and why early childhood is often not remembered at all. It is generally accepted that accessible memory is dependent upon

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language development, which is not adequate until about the age of seven.[19] Another discontinuity across time is that retrieval cues change. We physically leave behind things associated with the past, as we move away from childhood settings and the world around us alters; and we psychologically abandon them, as we grow into new sensitivities and new modes of encountering the world.[20]

The literary criticism of autobiography essentially rephrases these conclusions regarding memory in its own terms. Mandel has worded the point that memory is creative especially strongly, since he has adopted the phenomenological position that the present is the only existing time, by which past and future are defined. Regardless of philosophical persuasion, however, all literary critics, like all psychologists, accept that autobiographical memory is untrustworthy as a record of fact. Just like the person who writes it, it is a process of creative interpretation and reconstruction at changing moments of time.[21] As Gusdorf, a pioneer in the study of autobiography, put it, "In autobiography the truth of the facts is subordinate to the truth of the man.[22]

Later in his essay, Mandel came close to speaking of the spirit of living memory that Goethe toasted. He observed that autobiographical memory can be called true to life if by life is understood a vital principle that inspires personality and character, a consciousness around which a lifetime is coordinated. One is tempted to call it the theme of a life . . . which calls to mind the observation of Bartlett that what

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organizes remembered detail and endures across time is a theme.

Science, out of concern for fact, has not approached anything as subjective, as qualitative and unquantifiable, as the force of memory within the pulse of present life. Criticism has been preoccupied with sorting fact and fiction, and has no more than most tentatively approached it. The message of both the ancient and modern passage of poetry, as well as Goethe the poet, however, is immediately to the point that memory is the matrix of inspiration. It is the first point they come to, and, according to them, only the beginning of memory's power.

It may be objected that what Goethe spoke of is no longer memory, if it is woven into the fabric of our inmost self. Like well digested food, if it loses form, dissolves, and becomes another body, or bodiless energy, how can we speak of it at all? Yet both passages of poetry have managed to. Certainly no numbers could ever be applied to measure it, but words have been. And what else is word's meaningfulness if not memory? If poetry communicates, not through logical persuasion, but through evocation, what else do its words evoke? Goethe had to leap to the defense of memory as he knew it; it was as if his mother's honor were at stake.

Elizabeth Sewell considers it noteworthy that classical and Renaissance psychologies of the art of memory regarded topics as <u>topoi</u>, or fields of places.[23] The provision for memory, as well as the ground for new ideas, was a very full

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field, stocked full of images, stories, words, other people's verse, all possible allusions. (In other words, well encoded.) When somehow, with a kind of leap, two otherwise disparate things within the field made a connection, memory would flare, or maybe something new.

> a sort of renewal
>
> even
>
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
> places[24]

III. Science, then, in contrast to poetry, moves by linear sequence of thoughts to reach a reasoned conclusion. It maintains impersonal distance from its subject in order to contemplate unbiased truth. It speaks in abstract universals, not particulars, since it has universal truths to pronounce. The measure of its success is that observations are repeatable, given proper equipment and training; if not, it is a sign that they must be relinguished to newly revealed consensual evidence. Isn't this how progress is achieved?

The great advance of science over other forms of knowledge was initiated by a separation of personal values from the thing known, by a concentration on the thing to the exclusion of the self. Empiricism began when Galileo and Newton dared to postpone debates about the meaning or first cause of things indefinitely, and to proceed meanwhile as if things were merely things, objects of the senses independent of human values.[25] Otherwise they could never have gotten started. It is a mode of thought that contrasts to poetry,

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which remains as entangled in human meaning as it ever has been, a remnant of archaic ways of knowing.

So the popular prestige of science goes, to the extent that the history and philosophy of science are popularly thought about. In more current form, popular awe of science is condensed into the figure of the scientist who wears a white coat, spends all day pouring chemicals from test tube to test tube, and who, if pressed, can make a werewolf (who is sometimes actually the scientist in disguise).

Both this philosophy and this figure of science are stories that were current in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Through the nineteenth century, scientists appear to have believed in the objectivity of their work, and some still argue for it. Yet a good part of the intellectual history of the twentieth century can be summarized as successful assaults mounted by philosophers, artists, and scientists themselves against the declining defenses of this Cartesian empiricism. The result has been a rapprochement between scientists and artists so that some, at least, can comprehend and appreciate each other. What we have then, are two sciences: science in the body of individual scientists thinking, and science the social-political megalith, which Michael Polanyi distinguished as "the scientific image of the world."[26] According to Polanyi, it is this second version that whelps werewolves. A sign of its power is that everything today, including poetry, must struggle against measurement by science in this dominant second sense. This nineteenth century legacy must still be repeatedly reevaluated

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by anyone attempting to work differently--as when writing poetry, or using it for research.

The essential contention between this view of science, as a way of knowing, and poetry, as a way of knowing, is the degree of distance that separates knower and known. Distance is a matter of two considerations: the degree to which it is possible to know objectively, without intrusion of the self, and the degree to which knower and known are distant because distinct, unrelated, unlike.

According to the Enlightenment, objectivity can be assured; it is possible to divide mind and object, and conquer knowledge. Knowledge is ours to conquer because nature is ours to conquer, being a mechanical, unconscious creation, no kin or kindred spirit. Consonantly, Descartes, who decisively legitimated the separation of mind and object, also reassured that animals lacked soul (then how much less other things). This "scientific image of the world" continues to be embodied in some scientists. Jacques Monod, the biologist, recently defended it succinctly, "The cornerstone of the scientific method is the postulate that nature is objective."[27]

In contrast to this Enlightenment mind, popular theories continue, is the mind of children, savages, and poets, who can be conveniently disposed of together because all show the same signs of incorrigibly projecting themselves into what they see, and littering the world with subjective fabrications. By Werner's term, their perception is physiognomic.[28] It is global and dynamic, with little differentiation of

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feeling and perceiving, or imagining and perceiving. By Lévy-Bruhl's term, for the same reasons, their thought is prelogical.[29] It is animated and animistic.

Elizabeth Sewell[30] accepts the justice of these observations, but the presumption behind Lévy-Bruhl's term has provoked her ire. On the one hand, she finds reading him a great pleasure, because his description of prelogic exactly tallies with how she herself does think as a poet. On the other hand, it contains an implicit evaluation which she resists. Lévy-Bruhl may struggle with his definition of the word, protesting that he does not mean pre in time and he does not mean that it less valuable. The unmistakeable implication, however, is that prelogic is an unevolved, immature, and therefore less valuable form of thinking than strict logic itself. For this reason, she considers it a dangerous word. For this reason also, an alternative term which she has popularized in her own writing is "postlogic" . . . "As a défi to Lévy-Bruhl, if you like pre and post."[31]

For those who like pre and post, postlogic usefully denotes "that reflexive interaction and identification of subject, instrument, and agent."[32] In the process of thinking about things we think with them; and language, the instrument of thought, joins world, body, and mind together through its metaphors. To the degree that language lacks mathematical precision it gains expressive power, for to that degree it corresponds better to all the half articulate feelings and understandings that go along with being a mind in a body in a world. Language lends itself to relationship. As we

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interpret the world, the world interprets us.

In this controversy regarding pre- or postlogic, two major points are at issue. One is perception. One is communication. Perception of the world and communication are also central issues for this study's subject of environmental memory in poetry. Therefore, as part of this study, it is necessary to consider the pre- side of thought and the post- side, and the Cartesian logic that conforms to a scientific image of the world in the middle.

One tendency of prelogical thinking which is observable in children, savages, and many poets is an animistic turn of mind. It is a critical feature of childhood environmental experience and memory. Animism, through common derivation from the Latin anima (air, breath, life, or soul) is associated with a spirited family of words: animated, animation, animal. Its own definition is:

> The old hypothesis of a force (Anima mundi, soul of the world) immaterial but inseparable from matter, and giving to matter its form and movements; the attribution of soul or spirit to inanimate things. (Webster's Dictionary)

According to Piaget,[33] animism declines from early childhood to maturity by a predictable sequence of stages, which proceed, in effect, from one item of this word family to the next. Initially, the whole world is animated by moods and intentions familiar to the child. The child projects its own animated feelings onto it. Subsequently, only things that move, that show animation, are considered alive. This classification still permits confusions like clouds, waves, or bicycles. Finally, the world is sorted out and only plants and

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animals are admitted into human company, with proper limitations.

Poets often seem to get stuck at the first stage. Through myth, through metaphor, through symbol, through simile, through pathetic fallacy, life can be shared with anything. And if, as Elizabeth Sewell has argued, it is a case of post-logical thinking, then it is difficult to distinguish whether it is a problem of perception or a problem of communication. "Intensely seen," said Theodore Roethke, "image becomes symbol."[34] It may then be fittingly communicated as such. Extended, symbol becomes myth, allegory, personification. Abbreviated, its beginnings are discernible in simile and metaphor.

Since the turn of the century, evidence has been gathering that not only children, savages, and poets are guilty of the transgressions enumerated. It has even been suggested that we may be more guilty without them. What appeared infantile or primitive to the Enlightenment may appear sage after mystical or modern enlightenment. Lynn White,[35] considering our culture's ecological abuse, contrasted it to the animism of St. Francis, who extended his chivalry to sun, moon, the elements, and all wild things as much as to people. White concluded that, "The problem is to find a viable equivalent to animism."

In light of the contemporary psychology of perception, the essential difficulty with animism is not misapprehension by children and savages, but by the nineteenth and twentieth century anthropologists and psychologists who promoted the

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term. They judged by the standard that the culmination of cognitive development is the ability to derive reasoned knowledge of things, safe from self-confoundment. Their idea of animism assumed that, being separate from what we perceive, we falsely project ourselves into it. According to the psychology of perception of the Gibsons, Neisser, or Arnheim,[36] there is no projecting ourselves into what we see, because there is no perception in which we are not already entangled. We don't perceive, and then think about it; perceiving and thinking proceed simultaneously. Afterwards we may consciously think about our perceptions at leisure, but preconscious thinking is already in them.

This preconscious thinking draws on a massive complex of what we have learned by experience and what we have been taught. It is socially learned group thinking as well as private thinking. As Owen Barfield put it, "It is the thinking in the perceiving that makes it one, objective world for us. There is nothing more private than a mere percept."[37]

This reflexive interaction of subject, object, and instrument of thought sounds, it might be observed, quite like post-logic. It suggests that animism may not be a categorically different way of thinking, but a different interval on a continuum.

As evidence of the difficulty, under close examination the texts of some of the most respectable empirical scientists might be accused of revealing a twinge of animism. Surprisingly unrare is what Barfield[38] called the "crypto-noetic

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vocabulary," a device to smuggle mind and intention back into the mindless objective universe. Suzanne Langer has collected a few examples:

> So one reads of coelenterates "solving the problem" created by their increasing bulk, and slime molds "circumventing" other engineering problems by clever inventions; of creatures that "succeed in evolving" new anatomical structures; of flowers "learning to mimic" animals and animals "knowing how to synthesize" chemicals; of cells "inventing" their functions, and even "knowing how to count"![39]

In a pinch, there's always Nature. From an article by Szent-Gyorgyi, Langer excerpted: "Nature discovered oxydation by molecular oxygen . . . we usually find that the way Nature reaches its purpose is the only possible way, and yet, in spite of its simplicities, the most admirably ingenious way."[40] Its really quite intelligent of Her.

With the turn of the century, microphysicists began mixing up an even headier brew to serve to scientists who believed in objectivity, beginning unavoidably with themselves. For a long time already, scientists had been dealing with inferred nature more often than visible nature. "Objective" was only a metaphor. They inferred conclusions based upon the record of artificial aids to the senses, and studied a nature more conveniently represented in mathematics than actually observed. Laws, after all, are not instances of things but instances of thought. At least, in the meantime, this inferred nature could be represented by physical models. In this sense, it could still be touched, manipulated, seen. Until subatomic physics. Quitting the realm of ping pong ball-like nuclear particles for the quantum simultaneity of matter,

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space, time, and energy, preconceptions of objective knowledge had to be abandoned too.

The problem was codified in Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty, or Indeterminacy. As the physicist Freeman Dyson summarized it, "The laws of subatomic physics cannot even be formulated without some reference to the observer."[41] The physicist David Bohm has described the new universe:

> One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts. . . . We have reversed the classical notion that the independent "elementary parts" of the world are the fundamental reality. . . . Rather, we say that inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.[42]

Early in the century, the solid ground was literally taken out from under our feet.

The complication, as Freeman Dyson[43] has remarked, is that the two levels on which mind manifests itself in the description of the universe--the subatomic level the physicist contemplates and the thinking feeling level the poet celebrates--are connected. A human mind in a human body in human society observes the experiment, and its own observing. How can we take our mind and body out of nature?

All of the above considerations which cluster around the issue of prelogic or postlogic have plagued modern science since its inception. The purpose of this discussion has not been to settle the problem, but to show some of its different sides. The issues raised here will appear again when

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the five poets who have participated in this study present their world views.

While the nineteenth century belief in objective knowledge continues to hold wide currency in the form of a mass "scientific image of the world," later developments in scientific thought have been attended to by an intellectual minority that includes many poets. Scientists may have to fit their work into the strict rationality of their time, but artists must fit their work into the alternate, looser, but still commanding rationality of their time too. And it is the same time, in which artists' world views incorporate scientific discoveries.

Both scientist and poet work in an atmosphere of unknowing. The scientist is driven to resolve doubts, to sift out certainty and uncertainty; but the poet, as Keats defined it, "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[44] This second form of exploration allows thinking and reasoning with feeling and value. When microphysicists produced field theory and the Indeterminacy Principle, many poets recognized that science had begun to parallel their way of working.

In Europe, in a Catholic country, the Italian poet Ungaretti observed in "this crisis of savants in quest of a measure" that, in accepting indeterminacy, physicists had accepted the spirit of poetry. For "poetry is the thirst for truth"; but "to have thirst for poetry, is to profess humility,

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to be conscious that man doesn't progress except by means of illusions and in accumulating errors, to be conscious of our inability to know, except in indeterminacy, reality."[45] He proceeded to compare the physicists' margin of indeterminacy to the margin of connotation in poets' words. In similar spirit, in America, the poet Richard Eberhart defended indeterminacy as poetry's great power. Poetry "is not as plain as day," he commented, "because the day is not plain."[46] Charles Olson considered his own theory of composition by field a parallel, in poetry, of Heisenberg's field theory, for both began in the acceptance that "We ourselves are both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition."[47]

In the field of philosophy, thirty years before microphysicists were compelled to reorient their epistemology, Edmund Husserl took science to task for ever presuming to have been able to separate the knowing subject from its objects, with all their intricate human meanings.[48] Consciousness, regardless of what Descartes may have said, is always consciousness <u>of</u> something. Therefore knowing can never be separated from the world we know, nor it from us. We can never talk about the nature of reality without reference to our experience of it. Experience of anything is partly a function of the thing itself, and partly a function of the personal and social horizon of the perceiver. Because Husserl's philosophy has provided the basis for an epistemology which avoids a naive scientific image of the world, it will be elaborated in greater detail in presenting this

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study's method.

Heidegger[49] grounded Husserl's phenomenology more emphatically and inescapably within historic context. He emphasized that we always know through the horizon of our moment in time, through language, and through an orientation of care. Our most essential mode of being in the world, Heidegger insisted, is as care. Just as it has been observed that knowing has the two aspects of controlling or permissively loving, he recognized that care has the two aspects of greed, worry, and domination, or preserving and cherishing.

John Wild,[50] who studied under Heidegger, has noted that phenomenology requires a new language for expressing human understanding of "facts". As a reminder that facts are as embedded in the world as human being-in-the-world is, he has proposed to call them world-facts. They are:

1. Facts that are configurative, with horizons and backgrounds.
2. Facts that implicate an experiencer, who is not apart from the world.
3. Meaning-bearing facts.
4. Facts attuned to the expressive function of language.
5. Facts in their "full concreteness". (Remembering that concreteness derives from the Latin concrescere, to grow up together side by side.)

And keeping in mind, of course, that between fact (Latin factum, something made) and fiction (Latin fictum, something fashioned), the difference in conscious artistry is only a matter of degree.

These world-facts that are needed are unmistakably

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similar to poetry-facts. Heidegger felt this consequence acutely, and moved closer and closer to poetry over his lifetime. Gadamer[51] believed that art activates our abilities to participate in the world and understand it. Suzanne Langer[52] considered art phenomenological exploration at its most adept.

The practical point of Husserl's criticism of science was that every scientific discipline must be founded upon a phenomenological examination of the essence of its subject matter and its activity.[53] A phenomenological method must be adopted to interpret the meaning of scientific work. His insistence that science must be founded upon an epistemology that incorporates human meaning may be compared to the position of the poet Richard Eberhart, who noted, "Poetry evaluates science; science does not evaluate poetry."[54]

Yet phenomenology, as a branch of philosophy and a critique of science, and poetry and the other arts are not interchangeable as ways of knowing. Phenomenologists have taken pains to distinguish that the intuitive knowledge they are speaking of is not empathy, but something more distant, detached, almost, one might say, more "objective".[55] For poetry must accept the risk, when presented by the not you, be it muse or any other inspiring other, of letting go and abandoning itself to wherever it may be led. Phenomenology, as another method of conscious reason, must hang back.

Nevertheless, the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger and Gadamer--the phenomenology of interpretation, whose purpose is to clarify what something means within its own context of

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tradition and according to its own self-understanding--has created enough bridge between science and art to make it possible to turn to poetry as a valid complementary method of thought. It has made it possible to undertake this study.

The purpose of this study is to consider what significance childhood environmental memories may retain in later life. It has been an advantage to open this question with people for whom memory appears to be especially significant, who are also skillful in communicating it. If the texts of Hesiod, Goethe, and Williams are accurate, then for poets memory is fundamental material for work.

In proceeding with this research, it will be recognized that the most forceful effect of memory may be what Goethe spoke of, that it becomes woven into the fabric of our inmost self, not to be laid hold of but to be lived. The most telling influences of childhood places may become so inseparably part of a person that it is impossible to recover them in any observable form. However that may be, the accumulated record of poets' autobiographies and poetry itself shows enough evidence of conscious environmental memory that this study can begin with confidence that enough memory will be accessible to assure material worth reflection.

The next chapter in this introductory section will review classical, Renaissance, Romantic, and contemporary theories regarding the function of autobiographical memory.

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CHAPTER TWO

FUNCTIONS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

Memory is an activity of the mind and body that is so vastly inclusive, so contributory to all other human activities, that, to reflect upon it, different capacities of memory need to be recognized. For the purposes of laboratory experimentation, psychologists have broken memory into divisions such as short-term and long-term, or episodic and semantic, along with all the memories of the five senses and kinesthetic memory. Tulving,[1] one of the most active memory researchers, has suggested that about fifty different laboratory divisions of memory can be analyzed. They are useful to our understanding of how any act of memory is compounded of different subprocesses. But for the purposes of the topic of poets' attention to place, functions of memory in the sense of different methods of autobiographical reflection are more appropriate to consider. Each of these forms of reflection would use an assorted complex of laboratory categories of memory.

Memory appears in two aspects which distinguish it as it is lived. It proceeds through reenactment and it proceeds through recalling. Reenactment requires the participation of the body and the emotions along with the mind, as it makes what is absent present by reliving it. When reenactment

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unfolds through thought and feeling alone, we call it a vivid imagination. When action is added, it becomes commemoration, when the present honors the past, or compulsion, if the past dominates the present. Recalling makes what is absent present simply by naming it. Memories of emotions and senses contribute to names' meanings, but recalling is primarily an act of mind. Reenactment is an act of body and mind.

The distinction between these two forms of memory parallels the distinction between art and science. Science functions through recalling. Its concern is to describe observations precisely through words and mathematics. It communicates from mind to mind. The arts of music, dance, drama, sculpture, and painting function through reenactment. They involve mind, senses, and emotions together, evoking sensory memories. Literature exists at the meeting ground where recalling and reenactment overlap. It is simultaneously concerned with the precise naming of observations, and with engagement of the body and the emotions as well as the mind.

Memory is not language, because reenactment is possible, independently of speech. Language is memory, however. For one reason, every particle of it is an artifact of history. It is a museum of history; but, by our resorting to it everyday, it is also the continuing survival of history in the present. It is not only a museum; in Heidegger's words, it is our "house of being."[2] Language is also memory for the reason that, although we may use it with the design of calling attention to what is at hand, in the vast majority

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of cases we use it with the design of recalling what is absent.

Language is a facilitator of memory. This feature of it has already been discussed to explain the meager, fragmentary nature of childhood memories which antedate language mastery. The levels of processing theory of Craik and Lockhart[3] states that memory depends upon perceptual and cognitive analysis of our sense impressions; that it improves as analysis becomes deeper and more elaborate; and that deeper levels of analysis involve language. It is possible that painters, who work and communicate in shapes and colors, may think in shapes and colors and remember in shapes and colors perfectly well. It may be the same in the case of musicians and sound, or dancers and movement. Yet if anyone who works in nonverbal media wants to clarify memories or intentions, for the record, success depends upon command of words. At this task novelists and poets should have the advantage.

With particular regard to this study's topic of environmental memory, it is significant that many words that denote emotions and states of being derive from the names of qualities of the physical world. Etymology reveals this connection in the case of many words whose origins have become obscured: blessed, honored, holy, calm, glad, candid, awkward, angry, sagacious, sinister, sad. But often only a moment's reflection is needed to reveal this physical-emotional bivalence of words: light, heavy, rough, bright, blue, crooked, even-handed, depressed, whole, torn, sweet, high. Through these

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words which apply equally to things and to people, language keeps the margin between people and the world permeable.

Memory in Classical and Early Christian Thought

Poetry is joined to memory at its base of origin. This connection is one of the meanings that can be read into the myth of Mnemosyne and the muses. In preliterate times, poetry served the need to preserve history. Rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and dramatic sequence aided the memory of the epic bards who were their societies' history books. Lyric poetry availed itself of song and the repetitive rhythm of the dance which entice reperformance. By making use of devices that aid memory, poetry not only served the preservation of history; it also served the preservation of itself. With the invention of printing and the spread of literacy, it was freed from the need for strongly patterned rhythms, sounds, and sequences, for standard similes and epithets. New individuality and variety were made possible, while public indispensableness was lost.

The Greeks formalized the connection between memory and the art of language through more than myth. Memory was one of the five parts of the art of rhetoric. Of what use was excellence in all of the other parts--invention, disposition of thoughts, elocution, and pronunciation--if one forgot what it was of importance to say? To train memory rhetoricians elaborated landscapes in the mind, and placed objects that would remind them of the arguments of their speech, in correct sequence, along a path that they could later retrace.

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From this technique of memory arose the concept of topics as fields of places, which has already been mentioned.[4]

Plato gave the art of rhetoric a new turn. Of what use was excellence in all five parts of rhetoric, if by memory one did not mean memory of true Being, of the realm of Ideas? Rhetoric, well applied, must mean the art of reminding the souls of listeners of the truths that they once knew.[5] Plato believed that only philosophers could be entrusted with true rhetoric. He denied that poets might reproduce it; and so he turned them out of his republic. In the non-ideal world to which he exiled them, they have kept busy enough.

In the early Christian world, St. Augustine, a rhetorician well read in Plato, gave classical versions of memory a new focus. Instead of the Good, what beaconed at the base of memory was God. Augustine set up a logical proposition. Since a happy life and a blessed life are universally desired, they must be known through memory. Since nothing could be more happy or blessed than the contemplation of God, God must also be known through memory.[6] Therefore memory forms one of the three great powers of the soul, along with the understanding and the will. The operation of all three powers is coordinated through love.[7]

In the Middle Ages, St. Bonaventure, well read in both Greek philosophy and St. Augustine, promoted use of three guidebooks for the recovery of the memory of God. The Book of Scripture leads a person to a correct reading of the Book of Nature. Versed in the Bible, it is possible to find traces

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of God, correspondences to higher truths, everywhere in external nature. With eyes opened to the work of God in nature, it is possible to turn within and read a similar imprint in the Book of the Soul.[8] All through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, this theology sanctioned poetic license to find the physical world a storehouse of symbols--mnemonics for spiritual memory.

Memory as Preservation

In current use, memory still serves autobiographical functions both exalted and mundane. Different capacities of autobiographical memory require different proportions of recalling and reenactment. One capacity of memory is preservation. When recalling predominates, and images and feelings contribute quietly within ourselves to words' definition, preservation in its pervasive, daily sense is served. Self-identity is preserved by constant recall: "This is my name, my family, my place of origin, my present address, my role, my rank, my things, and my agenda." A great bulk of cultural history is preserved through recalling also, as it is printed in books, labeled in museums, passed along in conversation, and declaimed in lectures, speeches, and sermons.

This preservative recalling is a form of memory with which we are flooded. Overindulged in, it becomes the backward turned face of memory that Goethe protested in his toast.

Habit, custom, ceremony, and skill also preserve. Then reenactment occurs almost automatically, often only at the periphery of consciousness as the memory of the body or the

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dictates of social conduct take control. It is the great risk of mental reflection upon memory that this contribution of body and behavior can be overlooked. To overlook it would be to omit the principle that Marx emphasized, that we are related to the world by praxis as well as theoria, and that alienation and freedom manifest themselves in the character of our physical engagement with the world. Marx concentrated his attention upon work, but the same analysis could be applied to leisure; and it is reasonable to expect that the nature of our work and leisure leaves a mark upon the nature of the world that appears in our autobiographical reflection.

The physical world itself preserves memory. As the setting for the people and events of our own experience, as a monument to the people and events recalled to us, it serves as a stimulus to their memory. Therefore a thing by itself becomes covered and elusive, because it becomes enriched by layer after layer of human associations.

That we live as minds and emotions that live through bodies that live through the world is a series of connections that appears too simple-minded to bear stating. Yet when phenomenologists and existentialists stated it, they accomplished one of the major philosophical breakthroughs of the twentieth century.[9] Through the same line of connections memory forms. For memory to preserve all of these connections, it must include reenactment.

Before phenomenology stated that we are grounded in our bodies and the world, as a philosophical axiom, literature had described it, as a working proposition. In Wordsworth's

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poetry, recollection of past events, past feelings, and past people often begins with the motif that he is revisiting past places. The summoning breeze that touches him outside awakens the breath of inspiration within. For Proust, even more pivotally, the code to memory is composed of physical responses to physical things.

Memory as Renewal

There is another, rarer sense in which memory is said to be preservation, which goes to the heart of the topic of poetry and environmental memory. It is the purpose for which Wordsworth and Proust wanted their memory preserved. Sometimes memory preserves experiences that bring renewal. It is this capacity of memory that Goethe toasted.

The Metaphysical poets Vaughan and Traherne, who were directly following in the tradition of Plato, St. Augustine, and St. Bonaventure, also sought memory in this sense. If the Good, or God, is recoverable through memory, then memory means nothing if not renewal. In turning the pages of the Book of the Soul backwards, the first chapters may prove the most portentous.

> When yet I had not walkt above
> A mile, or two, from my first love[10]
>
> Henry Vaughan, "The Retreat," lines 7-8

Traherne read, or wrote, in this book the lines:

> Those Pure and Virgin Apprehensions I had
> from the Womb, and that Divine Light
> wherewith I was born, are the Best unto
> this Day, wherein I can see the Universe.[11]
>
> "Third Century," section 3.1

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Working in the same tradition, Wordsworth added on.

The Metaphysical poets worked in a period when Christian, Platonic, and Cabbalistic teachings had fused. They wrote in the wake of the Renaissance, when the Platonic figure of Eros had been rediscovered, reembellished, and reinstalled to preside as the spirit of the age.[12] Eros formed "a tye of Bodyes" which united all things through a common source and a common destination. Through the offices of Eros, all things were felt to be attracted to God and the spirit of God was conveyed down through all things. Memory could mimic this double movement. By turning backwards (as Eros stooped downwards), it could impel the spirit forward (as Eros drew things upwards).[13]

Wordsworth continued to work in this tradition. As it was for the Metaphysical poets, nature for him was a channel, or a book, through which one spirit could be discerned. Whether it were in "the light of setting suns," "the round ocean," "the living air," "the blue sky," or "the mind of man," he found:

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[14]
>
> "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above
> Tintern Abbey," lines 100-102

Wordsworth's best-known poems begin with a return to memories of childhood envelopment in nature, to:

> . . . a time when meadow, grove, and stream
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem

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Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.[15]

"Ode: Intimations of Immortality from
Recollections of Early Childhood," lines 1-5

Wordsworth believed that reentry into childhood "spots of time" when nature was keenly felt and loved can secure many blessings in maturity. It impresses the beauty of nature upon the poet's own mind. It can bring "tranquil restoration" among sadder settings. It has a moral influence that encourages kindness and love. Most tellingly, because it rekindles a sense of communion with a divine spirit pervading creation, it can lift the poet out of the body into a condition of "living soul" when the eye has power and joy "to see into the life of things."[16]

The permanence of landscape, and the permanence of nature through unfailing renewal, safeguard these memories. Each return to them confers deeper significance. Time idealizes them and harmonizes them with the growing philosophical wisdom of maturity.[17]

One and one-half centuries later, Proust still sought renewal through memory, but with a difference. In the promptings of things, he no longer sought to discover a creative force outside himself, but to discover past pieces of himself that he could reassemble--to preserve himself--through his own creative effort.

Memory as Liberation

By another combination of recalling and reenactment, memory can become liberation. For the most painstaking

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definition of this function of memory, acknowledgment must go to Freud. He drew upon the Greek aesthetic principle of catharsis, which is a process of dramatic reenactment; but he developed a method of reenactment that was strictly initiated by recalling.

According to psychoanalysis, the first direction of advance must be backwards. Environmental memories, seen by this method, are symbols saturated with meanings of the body.

In analyzing memory, Freud gave Eros all-important status, just as Vaughan, Traherne, and Wordsworth had done. His definition of it could almost pass for theirs. It meant an innate striving to "form living substance into ever greater unities, so that life may be prolonged and brought to higher development."[18] The forces which impelled his world, however, were physics, chemistry, and biology; so that he expanded upon the definition differently than they would have done.

Freud also saw childhood as a period of closest union with the surrounding world. He characterized infancy as a stage of primary narcissism, when "the ego includes everything." During this stage when the infant is engulfed in pleasurable security as it is carried about, cradled, and nursed, there exists only one undifferentiated, unified libido which antecedes any division into the ego and external things. The result must be "a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the surrounding world."[19]

Marcuse,[20] following after Freud, took from this theory a social moral. If this memory of primary narcissism can be

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transferred from its place in the past to a position in the future, it can then serve as a spur to social liberation. As long as the possibility of relating to the world through pleasure rather than pain can be preserved and cherished, no repressive civilization can drive people into resignation.

Memory as Prophecy

If memory did not contain the paradox that it opens forwards as well as backwards, that it contains capacities of renewal, the poet Ungaretti reflected, "it would become confounded with despair, it would lead to suicide and not to poetry."[21] Word "charged with presentiments," he called it. The phrase rings true, although it alludes to the future. The capacity of memory and the capacity of prophecy are allied.

The overlapping of past and future can be represented by the figure of a circle. Since earliest times, there has been no better model for theories which would tie all points in time, or space, together.

In Neoplatonic symbolism, the circle represented the sustaining current of love which flows ceaselessly out of God down through all levels of being, to return back to Him. To Plotinus, this circle stood for infinite, ongoing revolutions with no beginning or end. Christianized, the circle acquired a beginning and an end--a history. It could equally well represent the history of all mankind or the history of a single individual. The Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Apocalypse, on the one scale, were paralleled by Birth, Sin, Salvation,

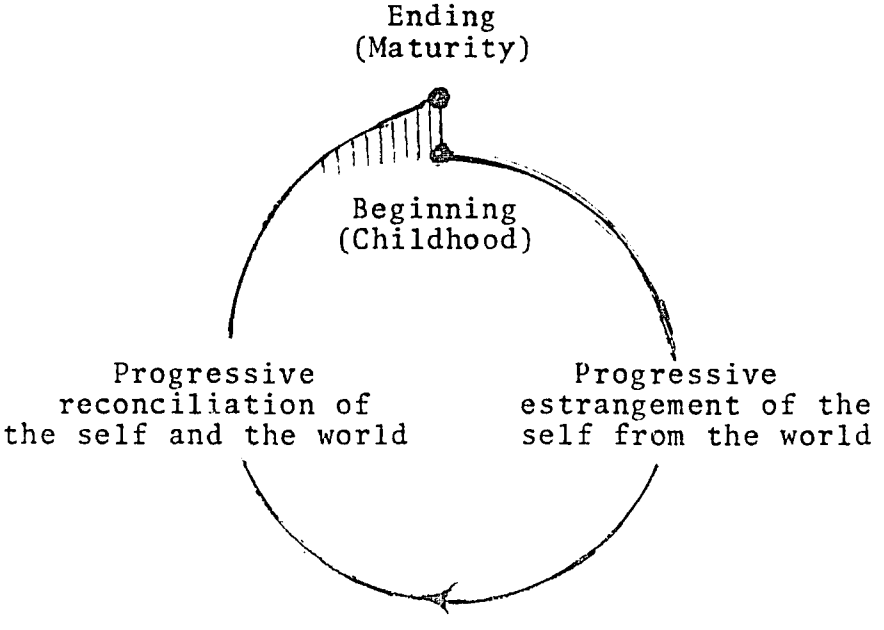
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and Death followed by Resurrection, on the other.[22]

The Metaphysical poets worked within this Neoplatonic world. It was a circle in which the beginning and the end exactly met. Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained were the same estate. Vaughan and Traherne, aspiring to regain their native "Angell-infancy," believed that they could still enjoy the same childlike apprehension of the world in maturity, given some diligence and moments of grace.[23]

By the time of Wordsworth, the circle had broken.[24] It had not yet crumbled into chaos, as some modern poets would say by now; but beginning and end no longer met. The great Romantic transformation of the circle as a model for cultural and individual development was that the end came to represent a higher point of progress. The circle opened into a spiral.

M. H. Abrams[25] has synthesized the model of development which underlies Romantic poetry, prose, and political thought.



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Memory of childhood, as a period of happy union with the world, could still serve as a guide for movement into the future. It could serve only as a guide, however, not as an exact map. Recovered unity had come to represent something higher, which incorporated all the hard-won gains of maturity.[26]

Even in the contemporary world, the circle as a model for memory is not irrelevant. To observe a connection between memory and prophecy is another way of observing that all human beings compose one race--that our genetic and social resemblances outnumber our differences. To observe similarity between memory and prophecy is like observing the similarity of points on a circle of common humanity. In a circle everything connects. Present and future take turns becoming past, while past becomes present and present becomes future. Why would we have any interest in past lives, or in the pastness of our own, unless they shared a common nature that has bearing upon our present and our future?

If we begin with the physical fact that our existence is an existence that all things share on one common planet--the circle rounded to a sphere--then the next physical fact which we in the twentieth century assume is that neither organic nor inorganic existence is ever a fixed material fact, but an ever-in-flux relative stability of form. It is true of a physicist's metal, and more complexly, dynamically true of a biologist's plant or animal, that an object's permanence is not an endurance of a material, but of a functional pattern.

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The commonality across one life and across lives that makes memory meaningful to us is the reproduction of a common pattern.

Memory as a Clue to Paradise

Implicated in each version of memory as renewal and prophecy is la nostalgie du paradis; when we look in the past for our vision of the promised land. To pagans, it means the Golden Age, to Jews and Christians, the time before the Fall, to Romantics, childhood in nature, to people after Freud, infancy. Here we find, as redemptive models, adults companionable with God or gods, the child, and the newborn. They inhabit different paradises, but all share some of the some blisses. They exist in a time when there is no death, or it is far postponed, when nourishment falls from the trees or courses freely from the earth like milk and honey, when all desires are sympathetically fulfilled. It is an impossible vision. After the Fall there is no going back. Death keeps coming closer, and the fulfillment of desire requires our own effort. Many people are contented to narrow paradise down to their home garden plot. Artists have shown themselves more resistant to relinquishing these memories.

To see the past as paradise requires forgetting as well as remembering. It wasn't paradise yet. The Age of Bronze was foretold. The serpent rested waiting in the tree. If we think for only a moment, there were other sides to infancy and childhood also. In less sentimental autobiographies, one of the strongest childhood emotions that is often acknowledged is fear.

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Elizabeth Sewell[27] insisted on the connection that we recall and project into the future not only heaven but also hell. Childhood, in its brighter moments, can serve as a model for paradise. In its darker moments, it places us in situations of the greatest possible vulnerability and fear.

Memory in Paradise

Is there anything we do that doesn't make use of memory, that taps neither recalling nor reenactment? Unconsciousness. Some people would add consciousness with a capital C, illumination, when we don't just envision paradise but arrive there. (Here Jungians may be lurking in the trees intoning archetypal memories.)

In softer versions of enlightenment, it can happen to almost anyone at any time. It is equated with freshness of perception, with momentary unmediated vision.[28] To describe it, childhood remains useful, since childhood is a time of open perception. Enlightenment in this form may also be stretched to include renewal touched off by environmental re-experience, which Wordsworth and Proust put to use to strengthen construction of their personal autobiographies.

Some versions of enlightenment take a harder line. Some forms of Western mysticism, Hinduism, and Buddhism coincide with the psychology of autobiographical memory in concluding that memory of ourselves is a fiction created by our imaginations. They add the judgment that, in St. Theresa of Avila's words, "Imagination is the fool in the house." The counsel,

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instead, is to lose ourselves entirely. One of the charges brought against memory is that recalling, our incessant use of language, is a phenomenon of distance not only because it can make the distant present, but because it also distances what is in fact present, so that we never really see it. Memory, as language, can seduce us to abandon the present for a never existing past and future. The alternative to such memory is innocence, but it is an innocence more extreme than childhood. This innocence is innocent of memory, of language for awhile, of guilt, of pastness, of anticipation of the future.

It is not as evident, however, that in avoiding recalling of name, address, rank, role, and agenda, such reports avoid reenactment. What many mystics describe, when past and future drop away, is that they participate in the present by becoming one with the overwhelming life that they behold before them. Sometimes it has produced poetry, in ecstatic somatic language, in commemoration. What path do mystics prescribe to achieve this state? Constant recollection of their articles of faith, often accompanied by ornate visions of devotional imagination. Castles require fools.

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CHAPTER THREE

MEMORY AND CHILDHOOD

This reflection upon memory has spun itself out by passing across meanings of the word which may be useful in connecting poetry, memory, and place. It has not considered memory of childhood specifically. Childhood has entered this paper for two reasons up to this point: as a time of animism and as the origin of material that is useful for our later construction of heavens and hells. These aspects of childhood, along with other aspects that developmental psychology has explored, may prepare poets' connections to place in ways that are profound.

In this final part of the introductory section of this study, theories of language development, cognitive development, and affective development which attempt to define children's relationship to the physical world will be reviewed. These theories will be compared to some prominent attempts by poets themselves to explain how their development, on their own part, may also progress through involvement with surrounding things. Some of these theories will resurface when the five poets studied here discuss environmental memory.

In general cultural terms, a basic connection can be drawn between the development of children and the development of poetry itself. Each child represents a crossing point

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between its society's and its family's memories and aspirations. Just as genetically it is something old and something new, socially it is a carrier of history and tradition as well as hopes for a different and better, but not too different, future. Uncertainty and possibility exist when children fulfill both traditions and expectations imperfectly. Like every other cultural activity, poetry also survives through this link between new and former generations.

The discovery of twentieth century developmental psychology is that, while the growing child is busy getting tradition and history imparted to it, there is a radical break between the child's mind and adult minds. Because theories of development have tended to equate children's minds and poets' minds, as this discussion has already reviewed, the connections between childhood and poetry belong to these areas in which both diverge from what are considered more objective, logical, "adult" frames of mind.

A critical facet of development is that children are engaged in identification in both senses of the word. Two activities that take up a good part of children's time are identification, in the sense of noticing and naming, and identification, in the sense of losing self-identity in the identity of another. Identification in similar senses of naming and profoundly knowing engages poets also.

Piaget[1] discovered that when young children begin to learn and apply names to things they appear to consider the name an unalterable given of the thing. They identify name and thing too strictly. That Tom could have been called John

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or that a cat could be a chatte is unthinkable. At the same time, children are faced with the problem that they have more to say than they have words to say it with. Some verbal flexibility and ingenuity is demanded. When Howard Nemerov[2] was writing up pronouncements of his five-year-old son, his wife looked over his shoulder and observed that, equipped with a limited, idiosyncratic vocabulary with great gaps, young children have to use what little language they do have hard. Inventive phrases and metaphors result.

A major method by which children extend language is play. Linguistic play by itself engrosses.[3] Vygotsky[4] believed that play with objects is also critical. When a child pretends that an object is something that it is not, he theorized, the object becomes a pivot through which the word for a thing is severed from the thing itself, enabling the child to realize that words and objects are separable, and to manipulate words' meanings mentally. Then words are freed for creative applications. It is a common assumption that language makes it possible to transform things mentally in preparation for touching them. Vygotsky's theory suggests that touching and using things in new ways, praxis, may also lay the foundation for inventive fluency with words.

Poets, despite vaster equipage, find themselves in the same situation as children, that they must use language hard. Poetry is needed when plain speech is not sufficient. Sometimes, feeling is too intense for plain speech. Sometimes there is no single word to capture a complex of insight and feelings.

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Poets who find themselves with inadequate words are in a situation like that of children at play who find themselves with inadequate objects. Just as alternate objects may come to children's aid, causing them to extend their language, in a corresponding manner objects may come to the aid of poets, causing them to extend their language also. Objects, being wordless but fluent with sensual texture and human association, pivot between the external world of the physical senses and the inner world of mental meanings for adults as well as children. An object can amplify the language of poets in two ways. It can lend its name when standard signification lags, through metaphor, symbol, and simile. It can also challenge a poet to discover new language for it. Sometimes it is not enough to say "vase" or "flower" for the fact in front of us. Too much is lost. Then the object tantalizes the poet to find fresh words.

Ungaretti[5] stressed the usefulness of distinguishing in a word its precise signification and its margin of indeterminacy, or its connotation. This indeterminacy provides space in which imagination and sentiment can move. To evoke eloquent objects requires use of this margin. But the indeterminacy, Ungaretti reminds us, lives actually within ourselves. Objects, being eloquent but indeterminately mute, contain in their names and descriptors a vocabulary evocative of ourselves.

Names and images of objects can penetrate us to become furnishings of the realm Vygotsky[6] called inner speech. According to his theory of language development, inner speech

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and external speech coexist in each of us. Inner speech begins as a vestige of our early childhood soliloquies. As we learn to conform external speech to the rules of social communication, to link words into well-mannered sentences, our talking to ourselves goes underground to carry on the fugitive existence of inner speech. Here words coagulate with emotions and physical impressions to form what Vygotsky called "senses," in which whole thoughts are compressed into single kernels. Why should we think in sentences when one vague sense can say so much?

Poetry occupies the borderland between external and inner speech. The most sophisticated skills of verbal communication are at its disposal; but the margin of indeterminacy which allows fluent movement derives from inner speech.

For poetry, external speech, or recall according to rule, is both a guide to grammar and an old rhetoric to be discarded. External speech, by itself, is a pregiven, a stereotype. Spontaneity and linguistic advance are possible because it is underlaid by inner speech, in which words combine with body memories, in which recalling combines with reenactment. Through this means of tapping into the body, language also gains access to all of the body's collection of rhythms.

When Vygotsky theorized about the impact of play with objects upon freedom of language use, or the impact of physical senses and memories upon words' meanings, he was original in considering naming from the perspective that it can be an inroad by which physical activity influences mental activity. He was equally interested, however, in the implications of

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the standard conception of naming as an outroad through which mental activity is directed to the outer physical world: in language as a signal system.

The conception of language as a signal system, literally, is a conception of a system of pointing something out, of catching attention and focusing it upon something. When people communicate, words signal to others; but they always signal just as compellingly to ourselves. In learning naming, a child is learning to give its own attention to the world at the same time that it is learning how to get some desired attention from other people around it.

The poet Robert Duncan believes that when poetry, or any other adult activity, remains spirited and animated, it is evidence that this power of naming to focus attention has continued to absorb us from childhood on into adulthood. He calls this fine tuning of attention "finding the universe."

> Our engagement in language is active only as long as we are finding the universe. When we cease to find the universe, then actually we cease to have the occasion of language. . . .
>
> Language, first just at the level of names, is our agency whereby things come close to us and enter our psychic world. I mean, without any name for table, I have a suspicion that we don't really know what happens. I think the name comes along with the focus, it's a reification of the universe. Each name is a reification of things. As long as a person is in love with and curious about and searching for the universe, he is engaged in language. And language has to increase for him to get anywhere in the universe. The symptom of ceasing to be in language, of ceasing to read a poem, of ceasing to be active in your science, of ceasing to read and of ceasing to wander and talk is a de-reification of the universe and a letting go of everything around you.[7]

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The two meanings of identification emerge side by side in the process that Duncan describes. The universe that is coming into focus for us as we identify it by name is the universe that we are in love with and curious about and searching for--in a word, that we identify with. To identify with the universe means that we have adopted its identity as our own and we and it are combined, or, to put it another way, fertilely united. The issue of birth then might even be the muse.

Childhood is a time of fluid identities as well as a time of naming. Along with children's animism goes a projection of their feelings and behavior into things around them, or a projection of responsive authority or sympathy. In examples that Piaget[8] has given, the pebble in the garden tires of one view; the flower that is cut feels pain, which is softened if it has companions in the vase; the bridge that leads home from apple stealing breaks to punish us; the night eats dreams; the moon protects us in the dark. It is as if, by naming something, a child raises that thing not only into existence, but into full life and consciousness.

Duncan considers this sense of a participatory world the starting point for finding the universe through speech.

> I think in human language we turn the sounds of our mouths into a language of things in order to imitate the way we experience. I think there is a primal intuition in our expression: The mountain speaks to me. So we try to speak back. What Piaget says makes sense to me. We speak back to something that speaks to us. So in speaking, there is a cooperation going on between world and person.[9]

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There is a cooperation going on between person, and a world of mountains and people. When voices emanate from the air around mountains, there are always other people in the scene--whether it be a case of a paleolithic human discovering language, or an infant, and no matter what the terrain of mountains. Observations of babies' first speech attempts show that they develop out of a synchronized give-and-take between baby and caretaker in which gesture, laughter, touch, eye contact, and vocalization proceed all at a pace.[10] Both Piaget and Vygotsky ground language in social interaction.[11] Beyond language, Erikson,[12] in keeping with his friend and teacher Freud, attributes our lifetime sense of the world--as something generally beneficent, forbidding, or frustrating--to our infant treatment at social hands.

Identification, in the sense of sympathetically slipping into the way of being of another, is also believed to develop out of early childhood social interaction. Hoffman[13] has hypothesized that our capacity to feel empathy and sympathy begins through initial physiological confusion as to where our own body ends. When other people around babies laugh, or cry, or show pain, they tend to do the same. Hoffman has suggested that other people's signs of emotion stir up an infant's own remembered feelings associated with these signs, through a conditioned response; so that the infant cannot distinguish whether it is itself or the other who is undergoing the emotion. If we began with a clean sense of a separate existence, the sight of another's pain should just be occasion for relief that it is another, and not ourselves. Differentiation

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between ourselves and others proceeds gradually during early childhood. Through social experience, we learn that others often do, in fact, feel as we would in a similar situation. Social teaching is critical at this point. It teaches us either to understand and respect others' feelings, or to ignore them.

Hoffman has not extended his hypothesis to explain sympathy for nonhuman things. Since children animate the world and invest it with human responses, however, it is reasonable to expect that a process similar to the development of human sympathy unfolds. Animals' behavior and cries compare with humans'. Plants, objects, and elements in the landscape, through motion, color, and condition, either directly suggest human expressions of emotion or become associated with them.

The social environment, in turn, teaches children to care for things or to disregard or abuse them. There is evidence that personal experience and social teaching are as critical for the development of identification with nonhuman things as they are for human sympathy. An examination of the childhoods of dedicated conservationists, for example, has revealed that each of them spent many free hours outdoors in woods and fields and with animals, and that each of them had at least one adult model who taught attentive respect for wild things.[14]

Poetry, read to children, is itself a form of teaching. When Elizabeth Sewell was asked how she kept a sense of an animate, responsive world when she was a child, despite the pressures of "logical" thinking around her, she replied:

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"My own very deepest instincts and my own love of poetry. Certainly, if you believe poetry, poets say it to you constantly."[15] For children who read poetry, it is persuasive authority--words of adults printed in books.

So, it appears, the young child's inability to neatly separate its own identity from others, given encouragement, turns into a legacy of empathy and identification. According to many poets, it is a legacy they cannot do without.

Keats,[16] in reaction against attempts to distinguish poets from other people by positive qualities, was struck that what was in question was not something positive but "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." An identity of this kind that lacks rigid structure and boundaries, like that of a young child, can metamorphose into other forms.

> As to the Poetical Character itself . . . it is not itself--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen . . . A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no identity--he is continually in for--and filling some other Body --the sun, the moon, the sea and men and women who are creatures of impulse, are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute--the poet has none; no identity.[17]

In their own words, or using Keats' words, a long succession of poets have attributed their poetic power to their powers of identification.

To begin, the first requirement for something to be remembered and written about is that it must be noticed.

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Identification means attention. Not the cursory, glancing attention that is required to identify something by a ready label, but the wholly engrossing attention that is required to transport oneself inside the skin, or fur, or mass of another. It means attention such that, in Rilke's words, "If a thing is to speak to you, you must for a certain time regard it as the only thing that exists, the unique phenomenon that your diligent and exclusive love has placed at the center of the universe. . . ."[18] It is knowledge through the body as well as the mind: a kind of reenactment.

Further, for something to be commemorated, it must be deemed important. Identification of this kind, itself, seems to halo things with significance. As a process, it is an event. In Rilke's words again, calling it by the term inseeing, "If I am to tell you where my all-greatest feeling, my world-feeling, my earthly bliss was to be found, I must confess to you: it was to be found time and again . . . in such inseeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this divine inseeing."[19] Entering into something is like its entering into you. Preserving something we have identified with becomes a matter of preserving a part of ourselves.

Regardless of the degree to which childhood experience may prepare for adult identification with nonhuman things, when it comes to familiarity with the true grit of the earth, as a physical fact, childhood is unquestionably an excellent preparation for poetry. Unsupervised childhood is a variety of contact sport. "Bruised, scratched, and mud-caked," as

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Williams[20] described it, to a degree few adults, even in their worst moments, ever manage to recapture. Beyond their lexical definitions, the mountains, rivers, trees, and city walls that cast their presence across poems ancient and modern must have their margin of indeterminacy filled in by personal experience. By body to body contact with the real thing, childhood prepares for a vivid, well fleshed symbolic life.

In closing, some observations are in order regarding historical change. In the domain of the physical environment itself, one of the most dramatic changes in our century of dramatic change is the transformation that the landscape is undergoing. It is this observation which originally motivated this study.

In a study by this researcher of environmental memories recorded in autobiographies, feelings associated with different childhood places were compared with physical and social descriptions of the places.[21] All the poets in the sample remembered episodes of ecstatic communion with the environment. These elated or profoundly peaceful feelings of relationship with a sense of presence pervading the environment almost always occurred under one specific conjunction of conditions: outdoors, unsupervised or alone, unconstrained by "no trespassing" signs or fear, in an expansive, alluring environment. Usually the memories were connected with forests, fields, or gardens, but sometimes endlessly unfolding city streets inspired this feeling. These memories conformed to the type of memory that Wordsworth considered essential for the growth of a poet's mind.

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Most of the poets in the selection of autobiographies grew up in the beginning of this century, when safe, open, engrossing places were more accessible than they are today. In the autobiographies of people growing up in American slums and suburbs in the 1940s and 1950s, wild rejection of the dirty streets owned and exploited by others, and ironic rejection of the clean yards owned and fenced off by others, made their first appearance. The American landscape's transition, as it becomes increasingly built up, fenced in, bought off, down driven, and populated by creatures more feared by parents and children than rattlesnakes, poses a question as to how naming and knowing will proceed from childhood to adulthood under this new set of conditions. Among artists such as poets, who help to form larger cultural attitudes to the surrounding world, what will environmental experience continue to mean?

A further historical reflection is required: All of the connections between childhood and poetry that have just been made are historical constructions. Before the eighteenth century, neither children nor poets of childlike types existed--at least not according to modern definitions of "childlike." Children appear to have been considered miniature adults for all purposes until the eighteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution made home and childhood a diverting refuge for the right classes.[22] It simultaneously made nature and poetry diverting refuges too.[23] A sense of a personality as a lifetime process of development, rather than a static entity,

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also arose during this period.[24] All of these changes were underway before Wordsworth linked childhood and nature with adulthood and poetry.

When Raymond Williams[25] considered autobiographical myths of childhood paradise, he concluded that what is at issue is not just an individual process of loss of innocence, but an actual environmental transformation. He noted that such accounts set up an association in which the countryside or old city quarters stand for old ways, human ways, natural ways, and childhood, in contrast to modern cities which stand for modernization, progress, development, and adulthood. He saw in such associations "partial interpreters" of broad social and economic changes that began with the Industrial Revolution, which are increasingly overtaking the world.

> What was once close, absorbing, accepted, familiar, internally experienced becomes separate, distinguishable, critical, changing, externally observed. . . . What we have finally to say is that we live in a world in which the dominant mode of production and social relationships teaches, impresses, offers to make normal and even rigid, modes of detached, separated, external perception and action: modes of using and consuming rather than accepting and enjoying people and things.[26]

Children are nestled among family and friends at home, rather than exposed to employers and employees in factories and offices, so that, to the extent that adults can separate these two sides of their own lives, children continue to experience "older" social modes. The physical opportunities of countryside and old city quarters, however, are becoming lost to everyone. Until World War I, poets-in-the-bud still encountered environments with little fear of crime and no

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fear of cars, where nature was still present in whole or in part, where grown-ups still engaged in fascinating physical work: a world still, in many ways, Wordsworthian. In some respects, this more open world persisted through the childhoods of the five poets studied here. Poets will still grow; and childhood ways of first naming and knowing, of animating and playing, will surely remain childhood ways. According to the different theories of language and identification that this paper has just reviewed, childhood ways, by their essential character, offer many points of entry into the life of poetry. As the physical world of adults and children evens out, however, as the hard, square, partitioned, stone and metal world of adult plans increasingly occupies the landscape, time will reveal whether memories of childhood places remain a cherished prelude to poetry.

One last historical observation needs to be made. The modern world is changing on many fronts. Besides changes in its landscape, this introduction has referred to changes that it is undergoing in its social and economic relationships and in its philosophy. Part II of this study will review changes in its poetry. In the midst of all of this change, these five poets have had to define their place. They have taken various positions. Some of them will restate some of the older theories which connect poetry to the world, to memory, and to childhood which have already been presented here. Some of them are in the process of delineating new forms of connection. In the research that follows, some now familiar views will get re-expressed; and some new, less familiar views will find a voice.

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[25]Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[26]Ibid., pp. 297-8.

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PART II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PHYSICAL WORLD IN AMERICAN POETIC THEORY: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

This section will review a few prominent American poets' philosophies of their relationship to the physical world. The best way to ease the complexities of this history may be to begin with a summary, an encapsulation in a few words of all of the details that are to follow . . . in the manner that business proposals begin with an Executive Summary which condenses the next few hundred pages into one page for very important people. Even scholars of the past may take a lesson from modern efficiency. For those who must enter the pages ahead, it may provide a guide to seeing one's way through so that there is less risk of getting lost somewhere in the middle.

To the best of my knowledge and ability to understand, the following seems a fair summary of the main historical problem that has been unfolding. I have chosen someone else to do this work of summarizing because he has managed the requirement of being succinct yet exact and complete so well that it has seemed impossible to improve upon it. Some may object that it is improper to begin a consideration of American poetry, especially one which emphasizes the twentieth century, by surrendering this responsibility to an Englishman writing

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in 1790. The propriety is that Blake was so far ahead of his times, coming in at the origins of the problem, and that his voice has appeared peculiarly harmonious and contemporaneous to twentieth century American poets. A number of executives/executors at work in the business of poetry today have proved receptive to his recommendations.

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity;
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast. . . .[1]
>
> William Blake
> from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

The main elements of the story are here--the primitive, the priesthood, confusion over where the deity of a place or thing resides. Blake reaches further back in the past than this American review can go, except to the degree that history may repeat itself. He ends, however, at a point where it is useful to begin: at a point of contention between poets and priests.

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Transcendentalism

According to the dominant strains of Colonial American theology, there was no question but that deity was abstracted from the objects of this world. Whether Calvinist or Anglican, the dogma was theism, that the material world that God created is outside of Himself, dependent upon His unfailing support but no aspect or appearance of Him. Pantheism, that nothing exists except God in different modes and attributes, was heresy. There was no question . . . but it was a sensitive matter.

The delicacy of the distinction was aggravated because, as Josephine Miles has pointed out, the first colonists imported across the Atlantic the sublime mode of poetry, the poetry of praise.[2] The good book of the many sects of Protestant dissenters who set forth for the New World was the Bible, replete with Psalms. The educated also packed Virgil and Ovid. The first poetry written in North America was a translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses by George Sandys of Virginia in 1616. It was suited to minds attuned to marvels, transformations, riches, and abundance such as this continent promised. As indigenous poetry began, it was a panegyric of the land: Useful real estate promotion, to be sure, but nonetheless a heartfelt claim of those who had arrived. For wasn't this the land of freedom, where the faithful had come to enjoy God's favor?

Southern abundance evoked effusions that the South was a second Eden, where people could again live after the fashion

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of the Golden Age. The Puritans, more conscious of the Fall, expected that they would have to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow; yet they too added to the landscape vivid highlights of the imagination. Instead of looking backwards with pagan nostalgia, they looked ahead with millenial anticipation. They were assured that the New World was the New Earth promised in the book of Revelation. After the Second Coming of Christ, Satan would be chained and God's chosen flock would enjoy one thousand years of earthly bliss, in preparation for the end of human history and eternal bliss in heaven. The Puritans believed that they had been commissioned to prepare for the Apocalypse by transforming the wilderness into a New Earth, and building cities which would become a New Jerusalem. They bequeathed this millenial environmentalist spirit to succeeding American generations.[3]

The orthodoxy expressed by Anne Bradstreet, as she watched the sun set upon a New England autumn landscape, was a popular theme, in sermon as well as verse:

> I wist not what to wish, yet sure, thought I,
> If so much excellence abide below
> How excellent is He that dwells on high,
> Whose power & beauty by his works we know!
> Sure he is goodness, wisdom, glory, light,
> That hath this under world so richly dight.[4]
>
> Anne Bradstreet, "Contemplations"

It was a topic Puritan ministers, such as Jonathan Edwards, could work themselves into a fervor over.[5] But woe to any who might assume, because God created and governed the world, and sustained it by His continuous presence, and wrote upon

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it so that everything was a symbol or moral parable of the divine, that God was in the world! How could it follow? The path to God, unquestionably, was not nature, but the prescriptions of his ordained elect. (Otherwise, how would the social order hold together?)[6]

The Transcendentalists belonged to the first generation born after the Revolution. This Revolution that had succeeded was founded not upon old theology, but upon the new principles of liberty and equality of the Age of Reason. Science and technology, which were already offering much and which promised more, were likewise products of secular reasoning. Unlimited land and raw materials beckoned. There was unparalleled social fluidity, during this interval when colonial social stratification had decomposed but industrial classes had not yet formed. The War of 1812, which appeared miraculously won, redoubled confidence.[7] The first half of the nineteenth century exulted in what Frederick Ives Carpenter has described as "the American dream at its moment of greatest intensity and innocence."[8]

The first Transcendentalists were descendents of the Puritans. Several came from ministers' families and trained for the ministry. Belonging to a new democratic generation, they lacked the refinement to observe that God could have no part in the world that He created. They walked with eyes wide open into heresy, and there:

> I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing;
> I see all; the currents of the Universal Being

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> circulate through me; I am a part or parcel of God.[9]
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

The route of their walk, when this clarity came upon them, was always reported to be through landscapes of woods or fields, "standing on the bare ground," "in the blithe air" --as in Emerson's case, "crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky."[10] For--letting Emerson be their spokesman again, which he principally was--

> In the wilderness I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.[11]

As Emerson observed, there is nature, as tranquil landscapes, and there is nature, as commodity. Nature in the first sense, which is "a most poetical sense," is observable only to him with "the eye and the heart of the child. . . . who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood."[12] To anyone with commodity on the mind instead, there unfolds not "wild delight" but property borders and estimations of yield.

Commodity better suited most of the Transcendentalists' Puritan brethren, now reformed Unitarians. Those with capital were busy laying railroads and busy bricking factories. Given the necessary separation of God and His world (except as God's favor manifested itself through prosperity), the scope of operation in the material world was left wide open. To dispense with secular life, Unitarian apologetics adopted the epistemology of Locke: knowledge of the world is simply a

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build up of physical sensations, which logical reasoning connects one to another. For knowledge of spiritual things, the only avenue open was respectful acceptance of ancient revelation as it was passed down by priests.[13]

In Europe, Blake and Coleridge had already taken to their pens, aghast at the implications of Locke. In Blake's terms, at issue was the validity of the production of something other than Satanic mills. Coleridge found defense for poetry in the German Romantic Idealism of Schelling, Schlegel, and Kant. As the American Transcendentalists were introduced to German philosophy, chiefly through the agency of Coleridge and Carlyle, they were also quick to see its relevance for themselves. Kant, as he reacted directly to Locke in working out his logic of a priori intuitions, influenced Emerson particularly. Emerson himself usually called Transcendentalism simply Idealism. He attributed the name that he and his sympathizers were popularly known by to Kant's use of the word "Transcendental" for the primary intuitions of the mind by means of which sensory experience is admitted and arranged.[14]

It stood to reason, from Emerson's point of view, that this intuition that orders the world must be God given, and therefore a direct connection with the divine with the potential to intuit God also. A further possibility was that God might turn up in the things perceived as well as in the act of perception. A final deduction was that if such intuition is native to the human breast, then who needs priests?

The Transcendentalists found further support for their

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position in Oriental Idealism. Emerson's grandfather had joined the Asiatic Society of Bengal to study Hindu literature, numerous articles on Oriental lore and thought appeared in journals that Emerson must have seen when he was a student at Harvard, and the first translations of the Bhagavad Gita and Vedic hymns had recently appeared.[15] In Hindu philosophy, the pantheism that the world is, as Emerson put it, "the garment of the Over-soul," made of His very stuff for all to see, could not have been more baldly stated.

The verdict of scholars, however, is that the Transcendentalists found corroboration in German and Hindu philosophy for a movement that was already native American.[16] The benevolence of the land invited its identification with the benevolence of God. The Quakers, whose writings the Transcendentalists read, had always insisted that nature was a veil through which one could glimpse God, with no need of intermediaries. As David Bower[17] has summarized it, Transcendentalism appropriated certain insights of Puritan, Quaker, and other colonial theologies, as they were refracted through the secular and equalitarian ideology of the Revolution, and reexpressed them in the vocabulary of Oriental and European Romantic philosophy.

The early Transcendentalist figures are better remembered for their essays than for their poetry. Transcendentalism is important to consider, however, because it crystallized a drift of thought which was critical to American literature. In effect, it shifted deity making from the priesthood back

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to the human individual . . . back to the same place where literature starts.

A number of the basic premises of Emerson's Essays relate to the physical world, poetry, and memory.

> Premise: A human center. a) The human person is the spiritual center of the universe. "We learn . . . that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; . . . that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old."[18]
>
> b) The center has consciousness of itself and the world through intuition. When intuition acts with exuberance to express itself, it is called imagination. For--here Emerson uses the term Reason, the Reason, to mean intuition--"the Imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world."[19]

Consequence: Intuition, not labored logic, is the preeminent means of knowledge. Its organ of expression is the imagination. It follows that the imaginative writer--the Poet--has a social position even more critical than that of the scientist, philosopher, or theologian. His role is to remind everyone of the spiritual knowledge they already have, but tend to forget.

> Premise: A center circumferenced by Nature. a) The structure of the universe duplicates the structure of the human spirit, in widening circles of correspondences. When a man becomes wise: "He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part."[20]
>
> b) The center has consciousness of itself and the world through intuition . . . but intuition must reflect off the world for the center to see itself. "We must learn the language of facts. . . The ray of light passes invisible through space and only when it falls on an object is it seen."[21]

Consequence: Self-knowledge and knowledge of nature are

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interdependent. In terms of nature, the result is that nature is pervaded by moral lessons and parables. In terms of the person, the conditions of the surrounding world have profound influence. Emerson believed that country life offered a richer abundance of illuminating metaphors and parables than "the artificial and curtailed life of cities."

Language and thought are conveyed through images of natural facts, whether the intention is self-knowledge or knowledge of nature. Language has authority to the degree that it expresses self-knowledge and knowledge of nature simultaneously. It should flow freshly out of sentiment and nature, not bind itself in stale habits of the past.

> Premise: A center surrounded by the commonplace. Since everything in the world derives form and significance from the same human center, there is nothing trivial or profane. "What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body; show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature."[22]

Consequence: America, the local, the provincial, was literary subject enough. American writers had no reason to feel that they belonged to a cultural backwash, or that they had to seek inspiration from "Italy or Arabia," or "Greek art," or "Provencal minstrelsy." They could write about the local with assurance that it had universal relevance.

> Premise: A center in line with childhood. Responsiveness to nature requires retention of the eye of a child: innocent of tradition and prejudice, wide with wonder, intuitive, assimilative. "The sun illuminates only the

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> eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood."[23]

Consequence: Neither scholarship nor mastery of traditional forms, but renewable openness to new perception, is the basic requirement of a poet. Perception cleanses itself by centering itself in the present. Recalling childhood incidents would be another encumberment; the need is to reenact innocence. On the strength of innocence, the poet rides not privileges of class or education, or the controlled energy of his "possessed and conscious intellect," but the greater energy of "abandonment to the nature of things."[24]

With this new found ancient Idealism, Blake would have been in essential agreement.

None of the premises were original. A conception of nature as a moral parable paralleled Puritan theology, and beyond that Medieval symbolism. Nature as a system which reduplicates the soul had already been detailed by the Neo-Platonists, whom the Transcendentalists had read. Some premises directly derived from Romantic philosophy: the preeminence of the imagination, the elevation of the local and commonplace, the special sanctity of the child. The Transcendentalists put all of these premises together, however, in the service of democracy. They spoke oracularly, never doubting that they spoke in universal truths, but also never forgetting that the mission of their truths was to inspire free men and women in a new free nation. They wrote as if

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impelled to rise to the occasion of their time and place, and the undercurrent of their pronouncements was the electric optimism of "the American dream at its moment of greatest intensity and innocence."

Toward the end of his essay "The Poet," published in 1844, Emerson observed:

> I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own times and social circumstance. . . . We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials. . . .[25]

Walt Whitman

The poet whom Emerson summoned appeared in the person of Walt Whitman, of These States (based in Brooklyn), author of Leaves of Grass (and more Leaves of Grass), the first edition of which he printed by his own hands, according to his own report, on July 4, 1855. When the new author sent a copy of the slim first edition to leading literary figures of his day, it was as much to Emerson's credit as to Whitman's that, on first opening its pages, Emerson recognized his man. (Whittier, a more typical recipient, threw his copy in the fire.)

The Transcendentalists had sent a liberating message to anyone in the newly decolonized nation who had literary ambitions. Whitman, who covered Emerson's New York City lectures as a newspaper reporter and who carefully read his Essays, had paid attention. "I was simmering, simmering, simmering," he later said, "and Emerson brought me to a boil."[26] When Whitman boiled, the spirit of democracy, which flowed

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temperately through Emerson, billowed enough steam to drive the pistons of the transcontinental railroad.

Whitman accepted Transcendental premises lock, stock, and barrel . . . "and vistas of glory incessant and branching." The sense of America as a noble experiment that conformed to the dictates of the soul, which ran through Emerson's Essays, fired Whitman from first to last also. The former comfortably accepted the image of the sage of democracy; the latter advertised himself as its bard. Despite frictions that occurred in their personal relationship, they never broke regarding essentials.[27]

The major difference between them was a difference in style. Emerson spoke sagely, and Whitman broadcast. Emerson always spoke, regardless of eloquence or wit, with sobriety suited to the lecture platforms where he was to be found. Everything he wrote could have been read from the pulpit, granted a little tolerance of unorthodoxy by the congregation. Whitman spoke for the open road. Therefore some of the propositions Emerson understated, or left as implications, got magnified into terms that would have blown any congregation out the door.

When it came to a sense of the world, what Emerson called the One, and Whitman the All, tallied. Both were buoyed by an evolutionary spiritual optimism, according to which evil was just a momentary mirage in the grand march of things. Both saw the soul as inheritor of certain spiritual perfection, and that for this goal all cycles of stars and geologic ages

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prepared a way for the human soul and served it. The one point on which a difference in emphasis amounted to more than just a difference in style was that where Emerson looked on the body and surrounding objects and saw signatures and signets of the soul, Whitman saw the soul itself quivering in its own flesh.

> I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
> And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
> And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.[28]
>
> "Song of Myself," 48

A manifesto Emerson would have had to concede, in the sense of correspondences; but to which he would surely have muttered, just as he is said to have muttered after Whitman released his enthusiastic thank you letter for Leaves of Grass in print, "but. . . ." Whitman entertained no buts. Nor did he restrict himself to correspondences. Emerson may have stated in his essay "The Poet":

> Insight which expresses itself by what is called Imagination does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others. . ."[29]

Yet he left demure boundaries in his own writing. Whitman exuded, merged, promulged into the world around him. He agreed with the creative principle Emerson was describing, that writing should flexibly flow from the forms of the poet's encounter with his subject matter; but he did not care to go through the heart of matter to the bone-white form. The skin had heart enough for him, and he was happy to dally

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there with the sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch of it.

While Emerson unrolled noble rhetoric about the Over-soul, Whitman, in addition to all his own noble rhetoric, got down to such specifics as:

Regarding the economy of nature:

> And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure,
> but that does not offend me,
> I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
> I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polished
> breasts of melons.
> And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings
> of many deaths. . .[30]
>
> "Song of Myself," 49

Regarding priorities:

> The smoke of my own breath,
> Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root,
> silk-thread, crotch and vine,
> My respiration and inspiration, the beating of
> my heart, the passing of blood and air
> through my lungs,
> The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and
> of the shore and dark-color'd sea-rocks,
> and of hay in the barn,
> The sound of the belch'd words of my voice
> loos'd to the eddies of the wind,
> A few light kisses, a few embraces, a
> reaching around of arms,
> The play of shine and shade on the trees
> as the supple boughs wag,
> The delight alone or in the rush of the streets,
> or along the fields and hill-sides,
> The feeling of health, the full-noon trill,
> the song of me rising from bed and meeting
> the sun.[31]
>
> "Song of Myself," 2

Regarding the place of himself in the scheme of things:

> For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
> The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
> Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
> Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths
> and deposited it with care.
>
> All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete
> and delight me,

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Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.[32]

"Song of Myself," 44

Regarding the place of things:

> . . . there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe[33]

"Song of Myself," 48

Regarding how to feel things--this time put in plain prose:

> We were all lost without redemption, except we retain the sexual fibre of things.[34]

Emerson never quite said that. When Emerson met Whitman for a long walk on Boston Common before the publication of the 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass which contained the "Children of Adam" poems, he urged him to delete these too frank revelations--not, however, in the name of principle, but in the name of sales, so that Whitman's other poems might get the reading they deserved. Whitman thanked him for his concern but replied that he could not remove them without destroying his book's whole scheme.[35]

All of the above quotations, if put together into a sense of the world, suggest a vision radically distanced from any Puritan or Quaker legacy, radically different than that of the American on the street in the nineteenth or twentieth century, and radically different than that of most other nineteenth century American poets. Not until twentieth century American poets does it find many sympathizers.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Whitman absorbed Darwin's theory of evolution without it ever shaking his faith

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in an anthropocentric universe. He welcomed it as scientific evidence for the connection between people and nature that he emotionally felt; but he never took it as more than "but one of many theories, many thoughts, of profoundest value," and his other thoughts left the human soul undisturbed in center place.[36]

The vulnerability is that the human breast, as center point for deity making, rests midway between the contraries of faith and doubt. Sometimes even Whitman wavered. In the poem "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," Whitman confided spells of uncertainty:

> That may-be reliance and hope are but speculations after all,
> That may-be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful fable only,
> May-be the things I perceive, the animals, plants, men, hills, shining and flowing waters,
> The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms, may-be these are (as doubtless they are) only apparitions, and the real something has yet to be known,
> (How often they dart out of themselves as if to confound me and mock me!
> How often I think neither I know, nor any man knows, aught of them)[37]
>
> from the poem series "Calamus"

He could not wholly evade the misgivings of his century, which ushered in ours: that human life might be not All, but all, not center but periphery to nature. In these doubts about the body, too, Whitman shares the company of twentieth century poets.

When it came to what he was doing as a poet, Whitman's assurance never failed. He believed in two primary impetuses to humanity and the universe. On the part of the creation it

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was motion. Under a jotting he titled "The Great Unrest of Which We Are Part," Whitman quoted:

> Every molecule of matter in the whole universe is swinging to and fro; every particle of ether which fills space is in jelly-like vibration. Light is one kind of motion, heat another, electricity another, magnetism another, sound another. Every human sense is the result of motion; every perception, every thought is but motion of the molecules of the brain translated by that incomprehensible thing we call mind.[38]

This scientific vision of the world perfectly suited his sense of life as ceaseless birthing out of the leavings of many deaths. But, good idealist, it was not enough. The impetus of humanity was motion of another sort, emotion--motion out, from a human center. The poet's task was to tie the two sorts of motion together.

The kelson that joined the self to the creation was not only love but words. "We must not say one word against real materials," Whitman the material loving idealist said, "but the wise know that they do not become real till touched by emotions, the mind."[39] How do emotions get into materials? Through a poet's words.

The soul may achieve its identity through the act of observing, feeling, loving, and absorbing material things, but they receive real identity when the new Adam, the poet, names them. The poet lets the invisible in the visible--the unspoken language in all things--be heard. Late in life, in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," Whitman called this process of endowing "facts," "science," and "common lives" with "the glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong

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to every real thing, and to real things only" ultimate vivification. Without it, he said, "reality would seem incomplete, and science, democracy, and life itself, finally in vain."[40]

Where do these vivifying words come from? From being in the world, actively.

--From being democratic, an ear-piece of the people. "Language has its bases broad and low, close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by the masses, people nearest the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea."[41]

--From being one of the people, a user of necessities, from laying hands on things. "A perfect user of words uses things. They exude in power and beauty from him--miracles from his hands--miracles from his mouth . . . things . . ."[42]

--From being all inclusive, from becoming. "Latent, in a great user of words, must actually be all passions, crimes, trades, animals, stars, God, sex, the past, might, space, metals, and the like--because these are the words, and he who is not these, plays with a foreign tongue."[43]

So the word that becomes flesh, when it rises in full life and penetrates life, began in flesh.

Whitman summarized the historical progression underway (taking some liberty with a foreign tongue himself): "The priest departs; the divine literatus comes."[44]

In these annunciations of the coming of the poetic word, Whitman was in perfect timing with European Romantic thought . . . giving appropriate allowance for the time required for

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it to cross the ocean. When it came to the translation of these ideals into a detail of technique, he was also in smooth harmony with his contemporaries, paradoxically. Despite the singularity of his verse in polished parlor times, when Longfellow's Hiawatha, not Leaves of Grass, was the bestseller -- despite everything that set Whitman apart from other poets of his age--in the primary principle that he extolled to govern the use of words, there was no disagreement.

"More sensed detail" along with "a wider universe of possibilities" Josephine Miles has called it.[45] "The divine law of Indirection" Whitman called it. "Connotation," to call it plainly. ("Area of indeterminacy," to call it as we have.)

It was the problem of soul and body again, this time in black and white. Given that the poet's task is to vivify, to let the invisible in the visible out, to give tongue to all the emotion stirred by life's motion, the down to print question is how. Whitman answered in characteristic style. If soul and body are one, then:

> I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems,
> And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality,
> For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of my soul and of immortality.[46]
>
> "Starting from Paumonok"

The body, quite simply, must speak for the soul.

The poets of the nineteenth century who had the critical approval, sales, and laureateships that Whitman lacked, who still attended to priests at pulpits, kept clear of such

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heresy. Yet according to Josephine Miles, based upon word counts and a review of all attributions of emotion to physical things in major works of English poetry from 1700 to 1950, the clear trend across the nineteenth century was for poets to rely increasingly upon the physical world's capacity to capture and conjure both idea and emotion.[47]

In metaphysical and courtly poetry, objects, plants, and animals were used heraldicly, with standard associations. For example, the lamb signaled innocence, the lark gaiety, the lion valor, the rose love. In the eighteenth century, concurrent with the industrial and scientific secularization of the world, these standard symbols gave way to a closer look at the object itself, along with a more variable, more individual response to it. Yet the responses attributed were still unabashedly human--as any page of Blake will show. In the nineteenth century, John Ruskin denounced such bestowal of human passion upon nonhuman things as distortion of the "thing in itself," and branded it "pathetic fallacy." A more scientific, more calculatedly aesthetic eye was required. Whitman, of course, never felt the touch of any cool "thing in itself." Yet when it came to material to work with, Ruskin, Whitman, and scientists alike knew that they must find it in the thing.

Beginning with the eighteenth century, poets were commonly hikers, and many kept sketchbooks. Their descriptions of things reveal increasing attentiveness to physical detail. By the nineteenth century, many poets' notebooks were as precise as natural scientists' accounts. Whitman wrote:

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> Most writers have disclaimed the physical world and they have not over-estimated the other, or soul, but have under-estimated the corporeal. How shall my eye separate the beauty of the blossoming buckwheat field from the stalks and heads of tangible matter?[48]

His observation, in order to phrase this thought, of the tangible beauties of stalks and heads, was made with the scientifically educated eye of his century. Color, shape, scent, sound, temperature, and texture such as had never appeared in print before were made use of to carry poets' meanings. The expressiveness of things had increased from standard symbol, to simple adoption of human emotion, to complex implication.

Whitman faced the uncomplicated task that the world that bordered the roads he loafed along conformed appealingly to his sense of himself. There was no disjunction between his sense of the wholesomeness of his body and soul and the wholesomeness of the things around him that presented themselves to be co-respondents in his testimonial. The Camden streets and close-at-hand fields and woods of his old age were not very different from the friendly streets of Brooklyn or the fields, streams, and beaches of Long Island that he had loved as a boy. The only behemoths and leviathans on his horizon were the three-piece suited ones who had sold out democratic ideals and the blood of Civil War soldiers to turn their own profit.[49] Whatever blights specked the landscape, they were so small and localized in terms of the country's sweet vastness that they were not yet noticeable. It never occurred to Whitman to compare the exploitation of working men and women, which incensed him, with any "harvesting" of the earth's profusion.

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Along with the nineteenth century, so exited this state of affairs.

Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson is the transitional Transcendentalist. Born in 1830, twenty-seven years after Emerson and eleven years after Whitman, she takes up the Transcendentalist line at a point where it wavers. She owned a dozen of Emerson's books and allusions to him in her poetry are third to the Bible and to Shakespeare.[50] Her reception of Transcendentalist faith was more coolly critical than Whitman's, however. She lived closer to the edge of twentieth century skepticism.

When asked if she had read Whitman, she replied, "You speak of Mr. Whitman--I never read his Book--but was told that he was disgraceful--."[51] Nonetheless, there are so many exuberances, questionings, and figures of speech which she and Whitman share that some critics have argued that, despite her protestations, she must have read him secretly.[52] Without historical proof, the issue will have to remain unresolved. Regardless of the answer, there is enough shared sensibility that they can be compared as common heirs of Transcendentalism.

Despite their points of similarity, if Emily Dickinson did read Whitman, she would surely have uttered the same critique as Emerson: "but." Her universe included "buts" excluded from Whitman's world. Living on the edge of skepticism, her poetry has an edge of irony that is distinctively hers. Instead of professing, her poetry plays agilely with paradox.

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Emily Dickinson spent her life in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the heartland of the Calvinist orthodoxy that the Transcendentalists were reacting against. It was embodied in her neighbors and her neighborhood, so that she was never able to escape it. Orthodox Christian views on life, death, and paradise became foils for her poetry. She herself took a provisional position. Heaven and hopes for an afterlife were reevaluated.

> The House of Supposition--
> The Glimmering Frontier that
> skirts the Acres of Perhaps--
> To me--shows insecure--[53]

As a young woman, Emily Dickinson refused to become a church member. It was a radical decision which set her apart from her family and her community. One of the canons of church dogma was that this world is only a corridor on the way to a better one. Living in a beautiful house in a beautiful garden, surrounded by New England fields, woods, and mountains, deeply loving her family and friends, Dickinson--like Whitman--found the present world all too alluring. Her schoolgirl reason for refusing church conversion was that "it is hard for me to give up the world."[54] Even as an older woman, after living through the death of many of her friends and the death of her own youthful hopes, after a severe depression and a struggle to maintain her sanity, she did not lose this personal item of faith. Whitman marveled over "the mere fact consciousness." Emily Dickinson, on her part, could say, "I find ecstasy in living--the mere sense of living is joy enough."[55]

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The popular image of Emily Dickinson is that she was a recluse, never moving out of her home, in stark contrast to Whitman the rover, who observed the country up and down, both geographically and socially. It is partially true of the last period of her life; but even then it is a deceptive image. She traveled within a circle that took in Boston and Philadelphia. She was born into the comfortable home of a prominent lawyer and civic leader who served several times as a state legislator and once as a Congressman. The family home sheltered many visitors and many intellectual debates. She was educated in Latin, German, French, history, natural history, and philosophy. Both the classics of the past and the leading literature of the present were available to her. Engrossed in the task of fashioning poetry out of her intense inner life of crises and illuminations, such a home offered more of a haven than the prison that it has popularly been made out to be.[56] When a confidant asked her if she did not find her situation confining, considering that she did not leave her house to travel about visiting, she replied, "I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time." After a moment's hesitation she added, "I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough."[57]

The House of Supposition, in the zone between faith and doubt, is naturally furnished by paradox. When Emily Dickinson looked out upon nature, she found it neighbored on her own state of mind. She is often cited for calling nature a

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"Haunted House"; but, as part of the paradox, in her usage "haunted" is an ambivalent word. It may be unsettling and spooky, but it lies within the scope of mystery that fired her imagination. When she took a long view of nature, she approached it more tentatively than Whitman, recognizing that its infinite space and time measure an abyss. She found the thought of it "awe to me"; but for that same reason it was of central importance to her work. "I work to drive the awe away," she wrote in a letter, "yet awe impels the work."[58]

Interwoven with her sense of nature is her sense of childhood. Nature may sometimes obtrude in her work as a token of doubt; but childhood enters primarily as a token of faith. Her usage of the word "Child" is imbued with recollection of the Biblical promise that it is the identification required for admission into paradise. In moments of reconciliation between her inner and her outer life, it is the alias that she often uses. When nature is seen through childlike eyes, it presents a closer, more cordial view. It may be a "Haunted House"; but it is not foreign or frightening when she enjoys inhabitance of "the larger Haunted House . . . of maturer Childhood."[59] The same ticket that serves to gain entry into paradise is the only ticket that can be used to solve the riddle of nature's mystery.

> We spy the Forests and the Hills
> The Tents to Nature's Show
> Mistake the Outside for the in
> And mention what we saw.
>
> Could Commentators on the Sign
> Of Nature's Caravan

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Obtain "Admission" as a Child
Some Wednesday afternoon.[60]

Whitman, making free use of a rhetoric of apostrophe and exclamation, publicly proclaimed that everything is full of life and consciousness. Dickinson, making free use of a rhetoric of dashes--little pauses for reflection--simply took for granted that everything is. When she turned her attention to the real things within the close range of her house and garden--bird, beetle, bee, ray of sun, flower--she recorded interchanges of intimate conversation. Whether she approached the outer world in pain or doubt, hushed by awe, or on familiar terms of "great cordiality," she found a private, personal voice expansive and clear enough.

In her midway state, Emily Dickinson's sensibility reaches both forward and backward in time. Compared to Whitman, her ironic doubts make her more modern, more anticipatory of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, regardless of her rebelliousness and Transcendentalist commitment to self-reliance, she remains overall more orthodoxly, conservatively Christian than Whitman. She may have experienced both faith and doubt, but the decisive background which endured across the span of her life was faith. "On subjects of which we know nothing," she wrote to a close friend late in life, ". . . we both believe, and disbelieve a hundred times an Hour, which keeps Believing nimble."[61] It kept her poetry nimble too.

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Notes

[1]William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[2]Josephine Miles, Eras and Modes in English Poetry, new ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976).

[3]Cecilia Tichi, New World, New Earth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[4]Anne Bradstreet, The Works of Anne Bradstreet, ed. J. Hensley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 205.

[5]Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," American Transcendentalism: An Anthology of Criticism, ed. B. Barbour (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 63-81.

[6]Ibid.

[7]David Bowers, "Democratic Vistas," American Transcendentalism, pp. 9-21.

[8]Frederick Ives Carpenter, "Transcendentalism," American Transcendentalism, pp. 23-34.

[9]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 6.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[12]Ibid., p. 6.

[13]George Hochfield, "An Introduction to Transcendentalism," American Transcendentalism, pp. 35-51.

[14]Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," Selected Writings, p. 93.

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[15]K. W. Cameron, "Emerson's Orientalism at Harvard," Emerson Society Quarterly 32, 3d quarter (1963).

[16]Bower, "Democratic Vistas"; Hochfield, "An Introduction to Transcendentalism"; Tony Tanner, "Saints Behold: The Transcendentalist Point of View," American Transcendentalism, pp. 53-59; Hyatt H. Waggoner, American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

[17]Bower, "Democratic Vistas."

[18]Emerson, "Nature," p. 35.

[19]Ibid., p. 29.

[20]Emerson, "The American Scholar," Selected Writings, p. 48.

[21]Emerson, "Intellect," Selected Writings, p. 297.

[22]Emerson, "The American Scholar," p. 61.

[23]Emerson, "Nature," p. 6.

[24]Emerson, "The Poet," Selected Writings, pp. 319-20, 332.

[25]Ibid., p. 338.

[26]Quoted in Waggoner, American Poets, p. 154.

[27]Waggoner, American Poets.

[28]Walt Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. 66.

[29]Emerson, "The Poet," p. 332.

[30]Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, p. 67.

[31]Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[32]Ibid., p. 62.

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[33]Ibid., p. 66.

[34]Quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, "Only a Language Experiment," Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Roy H. Pearce (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 72.

[35]Walt Whitman, "Specimen Days," Complete Prose Works (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1901), p. 184.

[36]Whitman, "Notes Left Over," Complete Prose Works, p. 321.

[37]Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, p. 88.

[38]Whitman, Complete Prose Works, p. 196.

[39]Whitman's reference to love appears in "Song of Myself," Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, p. 28. The reference to words occurs in the same book in "Democratic Vistas," p. 485.

[40]Ibid., p. 445.

[41]Whitman, "Slang in America," Complete Prose Works, p. 407.

[42]Whitman, "An American Primer," quoted in Matthiessen, "Only a Language Experiment," p. 67.

[43]Whitman, "An American Primer," quoted in C. Feidelson, Jr., "Whitman as Symbolist," Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 83.

[44]Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," p. 457.

[45]Josephine Miles, Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Octagon Books, 1965).

[46]Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, p. 17.

[47]This paragraph and the following paragraph are taken from Miles, Pathetic Fallacy.

[48]Whitman, notebook entry, quoted in Matthiessen, "Only a Language Experiment," p. 73.

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[49]Whitman, "Democratic Vistas."

[50]Emerson's influence on Dickinson has been carefully traced in Waggoner, American Poets, pp. 181-222.

[51]Emily Dickinson to T. W. Higginson, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. by T. H. Johnson and T. Ward, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:404.

[52]M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, The Modern Poetic Sequence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[53]Emily Dickinson, Poem 696, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. T. H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 2:537.

[54]Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, Letters, vol. 1, p. 67.

[55]T. W. Higginson's description of his first interview with Emily Dickinson, in a letter to his wife, Letters, vol. 2, p. 474.

[56]For a brief discussion of Dickinson's references to home, see Karl Keller, The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 28-29. A book length discussion has been provided by Jean McClure Mudge, Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975).

[57]T. W. Higginson's description of his first interview with Emily Dickinson, Letters, vol. 2, p. 474.

[58]Emily Dickinson to Louise and Frances Norcross, March 1884, Letters, vol. 2, p. 817.

[59]Letters, vol. 1, p. 481.

[60]Dickinson, Poem 1097, Poems, vol. 3, p. 771.

[61]Emily Dickinson to Otis P. Lord, 1 May 1882, Letters, vol. 3, p. 728.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE PHYSICAL WORLD IN AMERICAN POETIC THEORY: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At this point this review must get madly selective in order to remain reasonable. It is bad enough to dispense with the nineteenth century in the name of Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson, but some authorities, at least, can be cited in excuse.[1] There is no help for it that the closer one approaches the present, the more history blurs. The best recourse may be to plunge on along the path already taken, with the hope that a word from Blake may serve again in the interlude ("If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise"[2]). Which brings us back to Whitman.

Whitman: Twentieth Century Observations

con:

> He is America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it is America. . . .[3]
>
> Ezra Pound, "Walt Whitman"

> A certain ghoulish insistency. A certain horrible pottage of human parts. A certain stridency and portentousness. A luridness about his beatitudes.[4]
>
> D.H. Lawrence, "Whitman"

> He had seen a great light but forgot almost at once after the first revelation everything but his "message," the idea which originally set him in motion, the idea on which he had been nurtured, the idea of democracy--and took his eye off the words themselves which should

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have held him.[5]

William Carlos Williams
"An Essay on Leaves of Grass"

Whitman's originality is both genuine and spurious. It is genuine in so far as it is a logical development of certain English prose; Whitman was a great prose writer. It is spurious in so far as Whitman wrote in a way that asserted that his great prose was a new form of verse. (And I am ignoring in this connection the large part of clap-trap in Whitman's content.)[6]

T.S. Eliot
Introduction to Ezra Pound's Selected Poems

The poems in which he collects large number of concrete things, particularly things each of which is poetic in itself or as part of the collection, have a validity which, for many people, must be enough and must seem to them all opulence and élan.

For others, I imagine that what was once opulent begins to look a little threadbare and the collections seem substitutes for opulence even though they remain gatherings-together of precious Americana, certain to remain precious but not certain to remain poetry. . . .

It seems to me, then, that Whitman is disintegrating as the world, of which he made himself a part, disintegrates.[7]

Wallace Stevens
Letter to Joseph Bennett, Feb. 8, 1955

Softened by pro:

. . . He is content to be what he is, and he is his time and his people. He is a genius because he has vision of what he is and of his function. He knows that he is a beginning and not a classically finished work.[8]

Ezra Pound, "Walt Whitman"

He was the first to smash the old moral conception that the soul of man is something "superior" and "above" the flesh.

It is a new great doctrine. A doctrine of life. A new great morality. A morality of actual living, not of salvation. . . .

This was Whitman. And the true rhythm of the American

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continent speaking out in him.[9]

D.H. Lawrence, "Whitman"

Leaves of Grass! It was a good title for a book of poems, especially for a new book of American poems. It was a challenge to the entire concept of the poetic idea, and from a new viewpoint, a rebel viewpoint, an American viewpoint. In a word and at the beginning it enunciated a shocking truth, that the common ground is of itself a poetic source.[10]

William Carlos Williams
"An Essay on Leaves of Grass"

Whitman succeeds in making America as it was . . . into something grand and significant. He had the faculty . . . of transmuting the real into an ideal.

If this were all there is to Whitman, it would still be a great deal; he would remain a great representative of America, but emphatically of an America which no longer exists. . . . Beneath all the declamations there is another tone, and behind all the illusions there is another vision. When Whitman speaks of the lilacs or of the mocking-bird, his theories and beliefs drop away like a needless pretext.[11]

T.S. Eliot
Introduction to Ezra Pound's Selected Poems

The good things, the superbly beautiful and moving things, are those that he wrote naturally, with an extemporaneous and irrepressible vehemence of emotion.[12]

Wallace Stevens
Letter to Joseph Bennett, Feb. 8, 1955

New voices added (even softer):

. . . O, something green
Beyond all sesames of science was thy choice
Wherewith to bind us throbbing with one voice[13]

Hart Crane, "The Bridge"

It is across great scars of wrong
I reach toward the song of kindred men
and strike again the naked string
old Whitman sang from. Glorious mistake!
that cried:
"The theme is creative and has vista."
"He is the president of regulation."

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I see always the under side turning,
fumes that injure the tender landscape.
From which up break
lilac blossoms of courage in daily act
striving to meet a natural measure.[14]

Robert Duncan
"A Poem Beginning With a Line By Pindar"

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors
close in an hour.
Which way does your beard point tonight?[15]

Allen Ginsberg
"A Supermarket in California"

These quotations invite some generalizations. The poets who came into their powers in the first third of the twentieth century, who were born when Whitman was still presiding "good grey poet"--Pound, Lawrence, Eliot, Williams, and Stevens--are qualified in their praise of him and caustic in their criticism. Nevertheless, they grant him feeling. Crane's emulation of Whitman in the 1920s when he was out of fashion compounded his own literary problems. Duncan and Ginsberg, representatives of the Beat generation, are silent about Whitman's flaws, and sympathetic.

Pound, Eliot, Williams, and Stevens fault him for literary crudity. They want attention to technique, more classical moderation and finesse. Even if it's going to be free verse--at least more sophistication.

One continuity across this span of poets is that most continue to hold a vision of American vistas. Except for Stevens, who was too suave for such effusions, each addresses this new world as a land of new beginnings that poets must rise equal to. No one, however, wants to identify himself

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with it in the way that Whitman did. Pound introduces the idea that the country's distinction is vulgarity. Duncan introduces more loving foreboding.

Eliot and Stevens, who grew up in the nineteenth century and passed their adulthood in the twentieth, believe that Whitman's America is gone. Duncan and Ginsberg, young in the twentieth century, speak as if Whitman's spirit still walks abroad and claims the country as its own.

England, 1900-1940

Between 1892, when Whitman approved his deathbed edition of Leaves of Grass, and 1917, when Eliot's first volume of poetry, Prufrock and Other Observations, appeared, an undeniable change occurred. These twenty-five years separate a century in which the world still hung together and a century in which the world promptly fell apart. Three thousand miles also separated the publication of these two books. America was merely onlooker to the collapse of the world; Eliot sent his message direct from the debris.

Science, that was only one part of the general air of promise in Whitman's age, dominated the new century. What had science provided? A war that made past wars seem ceremonious. Faith, already wounded, was read off as a casualty by many. As Lawrence noted, modern writers found themselves face to face with life, not salvation. Under the circumstances, it wasn't as cheering as he glossed it.

Pound and Eliot put their best energy into defending

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art against science. Paradoxically, in developing their aesthetics both drew upon science. Although both men had already quit the United States for residence in Europe before gaining fame, it is important to review their theories because of their great influence across the English-speaking world.

Pound pushed, patronized, publicized, and advised other poets whom he approved of as if he had single-handedly taken over the responsibility of setting twentieth century aesthetics on the right track. One of his first public moves was to publish the three Imagist principles formulated by himself, H.D., and Richard Aldington in 1912. They required "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective," conciseness, and composition according to the musical phrase rather than mechanical prosody. In 1913 Pound attempted to define what an image, as in Imagist, was:

> An "image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.[16]

Hart was a determinist psychologist. He believed that every picture or thought that passes through the mind has been set in motion by either an outside stimulus or a chain of associations, which in turn sets off what he called "complexes." Complexes were "causes which determine the behavior of the conscious stream, and the action which they exert upon consciousness may be regarded as the psychological analogue of the conception of 'force' in physics."[17] Pound took liberties in application of the term; rather than applying "complex"

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to some obscure "cause," he applied it to the image, idea, or emotion that was its effect. In the aesthetics which he proposed, the implication was that a poet's craft consisted in a layering of stimuli that would set off a desired chain of mental associations.

Pound was against the use of standard symbols, such as the cross or the scepter, as stimuli. "The natural object is always the adequate symbol," he insisted.[18] What he formulated was a science of connotation, responsive to the increasing sensuousness and implication that already marked nineteenth and twentieth century poets' uses of images--which Whitman had already advocated, in his fashion. Pound was original in justifying his aesthetic according to rules of determinist science. "The arts, literature, poesy, are a science," proclaimed Pound, "just as chemistry is a science."[19]

Chemistry was where T.S. Eliot found the analogy that he wanted for a core principle of his aesthetics.[20] His "catalyst theory" of poetic creation compared a poet's mind to a filament of platinum, which, when it is immersed in two elements, causes the creation of a third without being affected itself in any way. The poet as a person is an inert observer. He observes, and applies his craft so that a poem results, without personal involvement on his part.

To an important resource of his craft, Eliot gave the name "objective correlative."

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a

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> chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[21]

For example, to evoke memory Eliot used:

> A broken spring in a factory yard,
> Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
> Hard and curled and ready to snap.[22]
>
> "Rhapsody on a Windy Night"

Pound would have called it an image. One modulation of Eliot was that he made free use of objects in the surrealist dream universe that Freud had recently certified. Another was that, when he named an object, he appealed to it as correlative to an already existing emotion; he didn't begin with it. Delivered of this impersonal technique to support his theory of the poet as impersonal technician, Eliot proceeded to write poems of great personal grief and alienation.

Eliot took lessons in style from French poets, especially Baudelaire and Laforgue. He described how he learned from them the possibility of expressing modern urban life:

> . . . I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. . . . I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry; and that the source of new poetry might be found in what had been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic. . .[23]

Eliot sharpened the technique so tellingly that when he published his masterpiece on the subject, The Waste Land, in 1922, it won him immediate widespread fame.

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Eliot's city was a far shore from Whitman's Brooklyn ferry. It was precisely Eliot's intention, like that of other ambitious poets of his generation, to distance himself from such robust romanticism as far as possible. Whitman, on the ferry, admired the smokestacks pouring out black smoke ahead of him; and the working men and women he rubbed shoulders with exalted him. By Eliot's time, although the glow had been lost, the grit had been gained. The new poets were able to see people and places with an acuity that Emerson's and Whitman's Transcendentalist faith protected them from. One of the discoveries was that people and places underwent transformations together under the pressure of the same forces. Eliot's London was fitting objective correlative for the emotions of its people because it was the product of their way of earning their living and passing their leisure. Pound's theory of usury represented his attempt to get at the roots of such a parallel. Lawrence wrote profusely and vehemently about it. Marxism, which dominated the intellectual scene in the 1930's, proclaimed it. The fortunes of people and places were connected in a new way.

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The United States, 1900-1950: Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams

"The major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God," Wallace Stevens wrote. One of the great visible changes in the modern imagination "is the movement away from the idea of God."[24] The world, no longer "so richly dight," no longer breathed assurance of "goodness, wisdom, glory, light." First God's priests had withdrawn; at this point, so had the divine literatus. Poets sat down to write in a spirit of blunt realism.

When it came to poets' approach to object and image, two emphases were in style. Images were expected to be implicative, to carry more of the message by their sensuous suggestiveness. They were to take the place of discursive description. At the same time, they must be clear, definite, and exact. They must accurately present unlovely realities. The result was that image and scene continued to play a part of major importance in the new poetry, ranging from center subject to indispensable commentary.

When it came to subject matter, the sordid, the sterile, the "unpoetic" occupied the view. In the United States, although the world was never blown apart and pock marked with bomb craters as Europe was, it was pock marked with progress. The waste land was recognizable here too. Poets faced a double-bind question: Now that people could see that they lived in a waste land, was there any getting out? If they answered no, what then? If they answered yes, were they sentimentalists? Some poets settled in and wrote their own chronicles

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of despair. Some resisted and set out to rediscover the country for themselves.

The first two-thirds of the twentieth century will be reviewed through the work of two Americans who resisted. The work of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams is central to this review for several reasons. Both men dug in in this country, instead of leaving for Europe, and took up the problem of their relationship to their surroundings with devotion, even doggedness. The territory they dug into was haunted by Whitman's ghost: the stretch of metropolis that runs down the Northeastern seaboard. In terms of the unpoetic, it remains the frontier. Both men were survivors of the pressures of their surroundings. Their lives and work spanned the transition from Whitman's world to the modern world. Both men defined their relationship to their world comprehensively, not just in terms of individual rules of technique, but through a general philosophy about it. To anyone considering poetry, person, and modern places, their ideas, which they gave their best to, are not to be ignored.

Wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens was born in 1879 in Reading, the hub of the Pennsylvania Dutch countryside. Woods and fields began at a close walk from his home. When his first book opens--the journal that he kept in his twenties--he was as moon struck as any young romantic poet could be.

> The moon was very fine. Coming over the field toward the bridge I turned to see it hanging in the dark east. I felt a thrill at the mystery of

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> the thing and perhaps a little touch of fear. When home I began the third canto of "Endymion" which opens with O moon! and Cynthia! and that sort of thing. It was intoxicating.[25]
>
> Journal entry, July 19, 1899

The moon shared his ardor with flowers, in profligate specificity, sky, and clouds.

When Stevens went away to Harvard he had to fight bouts of homesickness, especially the first year. Reading was still indispensable. Years later he recalled:

> When I was a boy and used to go home from college, I used to feel as if it was going back to mother earth and I would return to college not only invigorated in the normal way but rather furiously set up and independent.[26]
>
> Letter to Tom McGreevy, Sept. 10, 1951

By his final year at Harvard, he had won popularity and respect. He edited The Harvard Advocate, and filled up any edition's empty spaces with his own poetry and prose. He was writing some quite nice Shelley. When he graduated he moved to New York City to seek his fortune as a journalist. New York was another wrench at first--further away from the earth, and away from illusions. The only newspaper work he was able to get was tedious and frustrating. He wrote in his journal after walking home from the office one night:

> Great Scott! it never occurred to me until this minute that the moon just ended is the one I called "that queen" last year. Neither sun nor moon is part of my world this year.[27]
>
> Journal entry, July 22, 1900

It was a passing phase. Three months later he was writing:

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> I have a great affection for moonlight nights
> somehow--and could cry "moon, moon, moon" as
> fast as the world calls "thief" after a villain--
> What a treasure of silver and gold they are--
> and how lovely the planets look in the heavens--
> Bah--mere words.[28]
>
> Journal entry, October 14, 1900

Ah! Words were stealing some of his attention away.

Stevens was forced to accept that his prospects in journalism were dismal. Under his father's urging, he changed to law. It took him three and a half years as a law clerk, eight to six Monday through Friday and half a day Saturday, with bar exams to study for at night, until he began to establish professional footing. In 1909, he felt secure enough to marry. In 1916, he was offered a vice-presidency in the newly founded Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. He left New York, to spend the rest of his life in Hartford as that rare combination, major poet/business executive.

During his ten years as a bachelor in New York, business, business associates, law books, or city streets rarely earn mention in his journal or his letters to his fiancee in Reading. They are filled instead with the minutiae of his freedom: plays, books of art and literature, art exhibits, moon, sky, snow, and fresh winds that penetrated the city, and all the graces of New Jersey farms and fields and Hudson riverside that he struck out for come Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. Then he commonly hiked thirty or forty miles a day. The descriptions that he lingered over when he got back to his room reflect not only upon Stevens, but upon the massiveness of the transformation about to assault this

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landscape. Just as he prescribed for a lady on a later Sunday morning, it is clear that the measures of Stevens' soul during these years were:

> Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
> Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
> Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
> Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights[29]

"Sunday Morning," II

Stevens still had forty years to live, growing older as the earth urbanized, suburbanized, industrialized around him. Ultimately his soul had to measure itself. The cause of his estrangement from the earth wasn't the spreading concrete and macadam, but the unyielding nature of his queen.

Unlike Whitman, Stevens couldn't congratulate himself that the universe had evolved to receive him and that he would flourish as long as it did. He noted that he had more the veinings of an annual than a perennial. Instead of comparing himself to the reblooming lilac bush he compared himself and his wife to:

> Two golden gourds distended on our vines,
> Into the autumn weather, splashed with frost,
> Distorted by hale fatness, turned grotesque.
> We hang like warty squashes, streaked and rayed,
> The laughing sky will see the two of us
> Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains.[30]

"The Monocle de Mon Oncle," VIII

Modern nature kept a soulless measure. People no longer perceived themselves at the center of nature, but on the sideline.

But if nature cruelly measured Stevens, like the good Christian that he wasn't, he could repay in more merciful measure. He spent the rest of his literary life working out

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generous compensations for the perceptions that came his way.

Instead of the Transcendentalist All, Stevens began his account with a modern Nothing. One must be like "The Snow Man," he wrote in his first published collection, to shed all romantic fancy, all pathetic fallacy, and be like this listener:

> who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.[31]
>
> "The Snow Man"

Whitman began chanting exuberant eternal relationship to everything. Stevens began with this nothing.

> From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
> That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
> And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.[32]
>
> "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"

It must be conceded that Stevens' nothing, perhaps because it was a harder pit to crack, inspired lifelong creative delicacy and power, in contrast to Whitman's All, which absorbed what was most vital in his élan within the first ten years of his career. Stevens' nothing was as fecund as the Buddhist void.

In place of an immortal soul, Stevens set to work equipped with a capable imagination. Since it began assuming nothing, it proved an even more subtle material. In most humble form, it was omniscient. All things that can be known, are known through it. Reality can only be "not that which is but that which is apprehended."[33] In exalted form, the imagination is transfiguring. Through faithful attendance upon what it sees, it can raise the world up from the dust of disregard

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and invest it with the powers of one of the "radiant and productive" fictions without which we cannot live.[34] In his last collection of poems, published shortly before his death, Stevens was able to metamorphose himself into a cast of heroes and heroines of capable imagination for whom the world, as it came moment by moment in its freshness, came as a meditation.[35] In the midst of realism, in the midst of nothing, the divine literatus had reappeared.

When Stevens wrote of reality, he meant either of two opposed realities. On the one side, there were the pressures of reality, the lethal reality of the waste land that must be resisted. The grace of the imagination must be appealed to to subdue its pressures:

> We are confronting, therefore, a set of events, not only beyond our power to tranquilize them in the mind, beyond our power to reduce them and metamorphose them, but events that stir the emotions to violence, that engage us in what is direct and immediate and real. . . . The resistance to this pressure or its evasion in the case of individuals of extraordinary imagination cancels the pressure as far as those individuals are concerned.[36]

On the other side, there was the reality that materializes like an angel itself. Stevens called it "the necessary angel." It was the reality of nature, the divinely appareled void. Even if it is not accepted as a messenger of God, it can be accepted as beneficent. In opposition to someone who suggested that people write poetry to find God he proposed:

> While it can lie in the temperament of very few of us to write poetry in order to find God, it is probably the purpose of each of us to write poetry to find the good which, in the Platonic sense, is synonymous with God. One writes poetry, then, in order to approach the good in what is harmonious and orderly. Or, simply,

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> one writes poetry out of a delight in the harmonious and orderly. If it is true that the most abstract painters paint herrings and apples, it is no less true that the poets who most urgently search the world for the sanctions of life, for that which makes life so prodigiously worth living, may find their solutions in a duck in a pond or in the wind on a winter night.[37]

Imagination has its source and strength in this reality, or it has none at all.

In effect, Stevens' reality divided into the new world of vulgarity, violence, and desolation, and the old world of nature, the queen he still revered, along with a few tranquil home items. In the face of the problem of how to live in this changing world, Stevens' solution was that, as much as possible, he didn't. He lived in a pleasant house furnished with antiques, French paintings, and Oriental objets d'art, amid a garden on which his wife lavished her care, a short walk from the city rose garden. He woke early to read and stroll in the rose garden before going to the office; and after the office walked home to fine cooking and a fresh bouquet on the table. Occasionally he took the train to New York to visit friends at their clubs, restaurants, or well-appointed pieds à terre, and to do some midtown rare book, pastry, or fruit shopping. Late in life he found midtown New York no longer the same, and reduced the trips. He was content to see the rest of the world through the filter of friends' letters, which carried postmarks from Cuba to Ceylon. The tenor of his life appears in phrases in his poems and letters:

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a postcard from Switzerland of an ice palace
lunch at the Canoe Club, with three Martinis
mango with white wine, sugar, and lime juice
an illustrated weekly from Colombo
the blue vase full of yellow and red flowers
rare Chinese illustrated books
chrysanthemum tea
woodapple jelly
grass
trees
clouds

William Carlos Williams

grass and clouds and trees
chicories and daisies
marigolds wrapped in an old newspaper
the warm blue car rails gleaming among the cobbles
a quart of potatoes, half a dozen oranges,
a bunch of beets and some soup greens
how a spotted dog goes up a gutter
a schoolyard crowded with children
the mental hospital garden
no river but bog
sewer intakes
the bomb

William Carlos Williams lived in a pleasant house furnished with paintings by modern artists who were his friends,

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amid a garden which he and his wife together gave some care. Born in 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, he grew up like Stevens knowing rural, pastoral, turn-of-the-century America. Like Stevens, he grew up loving woods, fields, and clear creeks and rivers. One way in which he showed his devotion was to settle down for life in the town where he was born. The idyls left him, anyway, as the region changed. A difference between him and Stevens was that when he woke up in the morning, instead of taking a bus to a business office, he drove off to Passaic General Hospital or to his private obstetrics-pediatrics practice. He welcomed his patients, including clinic patients, for other reasons than just money. In his spare time, he researched his locale, which resulted in some of the phrases from his poems that are given above. The world that Williams turned a hot clinical eye to neighbored Stevens' home, too. Beginning with roughly similar home settings, however, they looked different ways.

Ironically, Williams, the great champion of local place and local tongue as the wellspring of the poem, had a British father who did business with South America, and a Puerto Rican mother of Jewish and Basque descent whose heart stayed in Paris. French and Spanish were spoken at home. When Williams and his brother finished grammar school, they were sent to school in Switzerland for a year. Williams admitted that his militant determination to define what native America meant was intensified by his parents' refusal to absorb their place.[38]

Williams, like Stevens, was brought up by church-going

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parents who never let him skip Sunday school. He was likewise quick to lay God and church aside in favor of self-reliance, whatever its perils. It was less easy to cast off the elevated standards of achievement set for him. At age twenty-five he wrote to his brother, "If our works are not divine, if they are not truth in stone, wood, or iron, they are nothing."[39] Two years later, he wrote that he had changed dramatically: "One thing that has helped me immeasurably is that idea I have had that someday I can show the world something more beautiful that it has ever seen before."[40]

By 1909, when his first book of verse was printed at his own expense, Williams was sworn to making paper and print as sturdy a relic of divine works as stone, wood, and iron. Between the determination to do it and know-how to do it, however, many years intervened. When Williams met Pound, when they were both undergraduates in Philadelphia, and became irrevocably drawn into the brotherhood of poetry, he was already busy writing poems of two incompatible kinds. He wrote sonnets and odes in the style of Keats, and spent years laboring over a new "Endymion" which described the wanderings of a noble prince in a debased landscape through which a river ran. These poems he showed around. Later he burned them. At the same time, in copybooks that he lined up at the side of his bed, he pursued a second "secret life" of writing. Here he jotted down spontaneous free verse in the style of Whitman. He regretted later that they were lost.[41]

The rest of Williams' career as a poet may be described

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as an endeavor to learn what to keep, and what to discard. He began with three principles, which he came to realize he could never abandon except at the peril of his creative life.

One was sex.

> It all happened very quickly. Somehow poetry and the female sex were allied in my mind. The beauty of girls seemed the same to me as the beauty of a poem. I knew nothing at all about the sexual approach but I had to do something about it. I did it in the only terms I knew, through poetry.[42]

Another principle was things.

> In a review of Williams' Collected Poems: 1921-1931, Marianne Moore referred to his "inner security." Williams welcomed her notice of it:
>
> The inner security . . . is an overwhelmingly important observation. . . . It is something which occurred once when I was about 20, a sudden resignation to existence, a despair--if you wish to call it that, but a despair that has made everything a unit and at the same time a part of myself. . . . I resigned. I gave up. I decided there was nothing else in life for me but to work. . . . I won't follow causes. I can't. The reason is that it seems so much more important to me that I am. Things have no names for me and places have no significance. As a reward for this anonymity I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones.[43]

Another principle was iconoclasm. For a man who resigned, Williams was never a man to give in.

> From the beginning I felt I was not English. If poetry had to be written, I had to do it my own way.[44]

Since art is supposed to present an effect of unity, Williams astutely learned to put all three principles together. They converged in place.

Williams put together the dynamics for combining sex and things during published correspondence with the feminist Dora Marsden in the 1917 pages of The Egoist, a small paper which

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Pound introduced him to.[45] He believed that man is by nature a "vague generalizer" but woman is by nature in touch with the concrete, the ground, "the reality of fact." Man's connection with the earth then must come through sex. Marsden added that thinking, to be real, must coordinate two things which are real: "the person who thinks and the rest of the phenomenal world, the world of sense." Thinking, therefore, meant emotionally, physically apprehending something, not emptily manufacturing ideas that feed upon themselves. Williams went along. Just before he became an Egoist he had been an Imagist, committed to the credo "No ideas but in things."

By the time that Williams wrote In the American Grain in the early 1920s, he had added to this formula that America must be conceived as the body of a woman, and that the spirit of an individual can only grow through physical knowledge of the ground, of the place. Williams concluded triumphantly: "It is this to be moral; to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, generous, brave--TO MARRY, to touch--to give."[46] (Or was that Whitman?)

Williams combined things and iconoclasm in the concept of the local. The local was defiantly America rather than England--a position inherently iconoclastic at a time when T.S. Eliot held the day. Williams never missed a chance to jab at Eliot. One issue was that the immense prestige that Eliot had won, partly through his classical erudition, left no spotlights vacant for poets of a different bent, such as Williams. Another issue was that American critics, publishers,

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and poets alike were giving their applause to a man who had formally abandoned American citizenship, landscape, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and religious pluralism, and shaken the dust from his feet, so to speak. It made Williams look nostalgically back to Whitman as a symbol of the American spirit of liberty.[47]

The Egoist position that true thinking is the result of physical experience, not juggling abstractions or reading books, became Williams' main ammunition in trying to overturn Eliot. It sanctioned his own day-to-day "provincial" round: all the knowledge that he drew in through his eyes, ears, nose, and hands in his role as a doctor; the reckless acts of unlettered men and women that caught his imagination; the play of children. With a little stretch of the imagination, which Williams had ready, it also sanctioned other things that he noted keenly, like the sagacity of dogs and sparrows, or the ruggedness of weeds. Out of such local subject matter, human and nonhuman, Williams fashioned his poetry and prose. "Possessors of knowledge in the flesh," he called those he commemorated, "as opposed to a body of knowledge called science or philosophy. From knowledge possessed by a man springs poetry. From science springs the machine. . . . Poetry, however, is the flower of action."[48]

Poetry worth the name, then, since it must come out of knowledge in the flesh, can only come out of the local.

> From the shapes of men's lives imparted by the places where they have experience, good writing springs. One does not have to be uninformed, to

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> consort with cows. One has to learn what the meaning of the local is, for universal purposes. The local is the only thing that is universal. . . . The classic is the local fully realized, words marked by a place.[49]

Williams expressed his sense of place not only through his subjects, but also through his poetic theory. One consequence was that poetry must draw its vitality from local speech. Williams resembled Whitman in his fascination with American speech and slang. Since he gave stricter attention to style, however, he also extended his listening beyond individual words and phrases to synthesizing pattern and meter. "I have been actively at work," he wrote to a friend in 1932 when he was still struggling, "watching how words match the act, especially how they come together. The result has been a few patches of metrical coherence which I don't yet see how to use--but they seem to run to groups of lines. Occasionally they give me the feel of authenticity."[50]

By 1950, when Williams had completed the first four books of Paterson and his determination to discover a new meter had paid off, another consequence of his sense of place was that he was able to view composition on the page as if it were action within a field. He heartily endorsed Charles Olson's theory of composition by field,[51] enough to reprint several pages of it in his autobiography. Conscious of his parallels with Heisenberg, Olson developed his theory out of a conception of the poet as an actor in the field of force that is a poem--not an actor elevated above surrounding objects, or actors, by superior human status, but just one actor, or object, among

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others.

> (We now enter, actually, the large area of the whole poem, into the FIELD, if you like, where all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other.) . . . For the moment, let me indicate this, that every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality. . . .

Then the poet will find:

> If he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share.[52]
>
> Charles Olson, "Projective Verse"

The poet does not stand back and describe his world. He reenacts it as he transfers his perception of it, his own immersion in it, to the paper. Therefore the poem is to be guided by his ear, his breath, his physiological response. . . the force of life moving through him onto the field. It was a theory that Williams, who already felt "as much a part of things as trees and stones," considered "an advance of estimable proportions."[53]

Williams may have been able to defy Eliot in poetry; but in the realities of fact, he had to admit that the accusations against people and place contained in The Waste Land could be aimed at his strip of the local also. He observed with as keen an eye that his lady land had also grown blowzy. Starting with his own brand of despair, however, he refused to settle for Eliot's. He believed he could win through in his art by fighting. So he wrote of having to conceive "the sullen,

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volcanic inevitability of the place," of having "to go down and wrestle with its conditions."[54]

Like Stevens, therefore, Williams found himself faced with resisting the pressures of reality. At the outset, resistance meant two different things to them. Stevens escaped into the imagination, never forgetting reality. He chose as his alias Ariel, winged and light-footed creature who flitted above the ground, sipping honey. Williams squared off reality, never forgetting the imagination. He sweated chest deep in mud, Caliban at his shoulder. Therefore economy, politics, perversion, pollution--topics assiduously avoided by Stevens and not even in his vocabulary--pack Williams' poems, novels, stories, essays, and letters. Paterson is an exhaustive analysis of the destruction wreaked on man, beast, land, and river by SUM, the Society for Useful Manufacture, with a little help from modern usury, and all other assorted forms of violence. Williams considered such alerts part of his responsibility as an artist.

In the end, however, after Williams suffered several strokes and was confined to bed for a long period, he took Stevens' path of resistance. He turned to the things that had consoled him since he first came into consciousness of the world, and freely vented his love. They came to the same things: nature, dear people, home. In the fifth book of Paterson, Williams abandoned his theme of the river, which had emptied into the sea already anyway, and went uptown to the Cloisters, to the Unicorn Tapestries. There was still woman

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there. As a former obstetrician who had delivered an estimated 2,000 babies, he never included in his worries that the world was barren. And there were the fleurs parsemés. Williams recorded them with as much appreciative detail as he had given in his autobiography to the flowers he remembered collecting as a boy in the woods by the family farm, or in the fields outside his Swiss boarding school. The only distinction between them was that the remembered flowers had gone the way of all flowers, but not these. In their art, both Stevens and Williams came down to the same final consolation, their art.

> The flower dies down
> and rots away
> But there is a hole
> in the bottom of the bag.
>
> It is the imagination
> which cannot be fathomed.
> In is through this hole
> we escape . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> through this hole
> at the bottom of the cavern
> of death, the imagination
> escapes intact[55]
>
> Paterson, V, i

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The United States: 1950-The Present

During the 1940s a poetry underground of a kind that Williams had hoped for, and that he had some hand in, began to come together. It was an underground because it was a new generation that was beginning to write during the War or just after the War, who were still unknown and unpublished. Since for the time being they were locally isolated and trying to learn their way from scratch, they were for all purposes an underground. Whitman had gone underground too, saying that if future generations wanted to find him they would have to look unber their boot soles.[56] As the new generation came up, many of them came up crowned with leaves of Whitman's green.

They were heirs of Whitman and Williams in several ways. They went to work in free verse, which meant embracing Whitman; but they often found more precise help from the advances that Williams had made. They saw their work as process, rather than as achievement of a perfect product. They were unabashedly local, finding whatever was in front of them and their own part in it weighty enough. Like other American locals, they were defiantly anti-intellectual to the degree that it might mean down-grading the dirt under their fingernails or native ingenuity. Galway Kinnell has told a story about a meeting between William Faulkner and French intellectuals that he witnessed in Paris, that he considered representative of many American poets as well. The meeting was a failure because when anyone turned to Faulkner to ask his opinion on some

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deep matter, he would reply, "Oh, I'm not a literary man, I'm just a farmer."[57]

A difference between this generation and Whitman's and Williams' was that the America of highways, polluted rivers, and military arsenals that Whitman missed, and that Williams saw emerging, was the only America they grew up knowing. Another major difference was that this generation came after writers like Whitman and Williams had battled to make a name for an American poetry. They could relax, feeling secure in their roots, and read and imitate anyone who caught their attention. As part of the new climate, in between stays at home they could set out for new places, which now meant Asia and South America as much as Europe, without feeling that they were abandoning America. When they got home, it was to a local that had become part of a global village anyway.

This final section of this review will consider aspects of the past thirty years of American poetry which have bearing upon how poets see and describe place and thing. To be honest, any characterization of any period of history must begin with the qualification that there are as many variations in style and belief as there are people at work. One of the new aspects of the modern world is that these variations can be wider than before, because our time and place has not only itself as a potential model, but all past times and all foreign places--at least as many as exist in translation. Some of the observations that will be made characterize a number of people who form a recognized school of poetry. Others characterize

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enough individuals, as individuals, to be noticeable trends that cut across schools or styles.

Subjectivity and Objectivity: Projective Verse

One of the most influential developments, in terms of a sense of place and things, was promoted by Charles Olson. It is the practice of composition by field, or projective verse, which has already been mentioned because Williams considered it representative of his practice as well. Olson was father figure to the Black Mountain school of poetry. This school, Beat poetry, and the San Francisco Renaissance overlap to some degree through both membership and beliefs, so that the theories Olson enunciated have been shared by a sizeable number of well-published American poets.

Olson cited Whitman, Pound, Lawrence, Williams, and beyond them Keats, as poetic pioneers. According to him, what all of them have in common is an insistence upon resignation to the present (salvation be hanged), with the capability of taking their ease in the present's inconclusiveness. In terms of the poem, it means that the poem itself is a revelation of process, without any tidy beginning or ending. It is the disclosure of "negative capability" by the poem itself. Outside the realm of poetry, Olson claimed support from Heisenberg and Heraclitus. In the following quotation, he discusses how composition by field honors some of these earlier discoveries:

> Our advantage is that a century and a half after Keats, the universe as seen by Heraclitus' naked eye and mind has been restored. . . . One cannot

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> abstract from it. One has to get it in its place or occurrences. And study it in place and in motion (what Heisenberg gave us the wonderful words for to go with Keats' ambiguity: The Uncertainty Principle). Right out of the mouth of physics one can seize the condition Keats insisted a man must stay in the midst of: . . . "a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts. . ." Only thus do you have <u>both</u> mass and momentum, or substance and motion.[58]

This new type of poetry, Olson realized from the first, "involves a new stance toward reality outside a poem as well as a new stance towards the reality of a poem itself." It requires "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects."[59] An observing subject that is immersed in its world and in the making of its poem mixes with them so that its distinctness disappears.

Robert Creeley, a close friend of Olson's who helped him formulate the theory of composition by field, observed that the terms of the old mind-set like "subjective" and "objective" break down in the new consciousness. It is "perhaps better to junk both terms," he suggested, and replace them with a more neutral vocabulary, such as "a man and his objects must both be presences in this field of force we call a poem."[60]

Olson's theory of projective verse was widely reprinted and it has been accepted as a manifesto of style by many poets. As Denise Levertov has observed, the present age shows an

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unprecedented interest in the dynamics of a poet's thought. People want to follow "the mind as it feels its way through a thought or an impression."[61] Much contemporary poetry continues to be guided by the intent of reproducing the poet's process of thought and perception.

Poets who have objected to Olson's poetics have related aesthetics to morals. To resign oneself to permanent uncertainty is not necessarily the most satisfying human condition. Nor is everyone ready to dispense with "the lyrical interference of the 'subject' and his soul." Richard Wilbur, who has worked skillfully in metrical forms, has described poetry like Olson's as art "conceived to be a door"--an entry into the world of real experience itself. Strict poetic forms, whether traditional or invented, function like windows. Like window framing, they limit the world of art and declare that, "This is not the world, but a pattern imposed upon the world or found in it; this is a partial and provisional attempt to establish relations between things." If an artist blurs the distinction between subjective and objective, "the world becomes an extension of himself, and is deprived of its reality . . . this is bad aesthetics--and incidentally, bad morals."[62]

David Ignatow has noted that the obverse to Wilbur's objection that the blurring of subjectivity and objectivity erases the world is that it erases the individual. Carried to its logical climax, Olson's work would eliminate the human factor. When a poet shows himself in process, "simply in process," "he avoids discussing what is good and what is wrong,

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but involves himself in the metaphor of man simply as an ongoing situation or condition. There is no effort to reflect upon the moment or upon an external event."[63] Ignatow considers such a floating style an abdication of the challenge of giving human life meaning. As a personal friend of Williams, he believes that Williams inaccurately equated his own writing method with Olson's. Williams never relinquished a faith in the redeeming power of the individual personality. It is evident in his choice of subjects and in his style.[64]

This discussion of Olson's theory reveals one of the characteristics of contemporary American poetry. It is divided by deep doctrinal differences, which correspond to a multiplicity of practices. A determined minority of poets continue to work in traditional forms. Many emphasize ongoing perception, using open form, in the tradition of Olson. Some employ open forms, but comment as much as they observe.

The Local: A Changing Landscape

One of the strong strains in modern American poetics has been Eastern aesthetics. It is evident in Olson's appeal to Heraclitus, who lived at the crossroads of Eastern and Western culture at a time when there was open communication between Greece and Asia. Eastern philosophy has often been invoked in debates regarding subjectivity and objectivity in poetry. A number of American poets have gone East or have seriously tackled Eastern scholarship in this country. Hindu philosophy was sympathetically received by the Transcendentalists when the Puranas and Vedas began to appear in translation at the

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beginning of the nineteenth century. Pound, and through him Fenellosa, publicized Chinese aesthetics at the beginning of the twentieth century. Zen Buddhism, which began to get press in this country at the same time, has had a wide impact. East and West have met, and the East has settled in to stay.

Not only the East has. As scholarship and translations in the field of primitive mythology and poetry have appeared, they have also been absorbed. Just as painters and sculptors in Europe at the beginning of this century eagerly took lessons from primitive art, a similar new primitivism has reanimated the work of numerous American poets. It is reanimating the world that these poets see as well. Among the presences arising from the earth, Nature embodied in the all-encompassing body of the Great Mother, under various of the countless names and forms that she has worn since primitive times, has been resurrected. She is saluted by name again by poets diverse in style and background, by men and women both.

The values that Gary Snyder has expressed have been given allegiance by many other poets:

> As a poet, I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the late Paleolothic; the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe. . . . The coming revolution will close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past.[65]

This revolution is possible, Snyder believes, because the recent spread of information about ancient or remote cultures has made us "the first human beings in history to have all of man's culture available to our study" and to be "free enough

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of the weight of traditional cultures to seek out a larger identity."[66]

Revolution means turning around in a circle. Poets who hold to this primitivism have returned to the point where Blake began his history, when, "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects. . . ."

Implicit in Snyder's statement is the belief that this revolution is imminent. Such a faith and fervor characterized American poetry in the sixties and seventies more than poetry today in the eighties. Nevertheless, it remains common practice to reinvigorate American literature through an infusion of art and ideas from foreign cultures.

The result is a very different local than Williams knew. The need to be local that Williams was so urgent about--in the sense of being able to capture local speech, local history, local lives, and local physical fact--is no longer heard with the same urgency. Most poets state some form of agreement with the basic proposition that "all the arts are regional in the sense that they derive from immediate relation to felt life."[67] But in the new culture, whether one's region is Northeast, South, or West, other times and places can be felt to dwell, at home, on the doorstep. The new American local has come to mean the place where all the rest of the world arrives.

Of course, not all Americans see it this way. Many, if they think about the East, South America, Africa, or primitive peoples at all, think about them for different reasons. Such

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as business, or national security. Contemporary poets still find themselves up against the same problem that their predecessors faced: the pressures of this other reality.

Just as most new poets have refrained from trying to copy the elegance of Stevens, as a matter of poetic style, similarly, on this issue, many have aligned themselves with Williams, rather than Stevens, as a matter of lifestyle. Stevens savored his garden, as one reality that could redeem him from another. Williams, when a sapling that was up against the bulldozer caught his eye, dug it up and found a space for it in his garden. The moral is, don't resist, RESIST.

Williams' and Stevens' letters in the 1950s, and Williams' poetry, reveal their foreboding over Soviet-American hostilities and the stockpiling of the bomb. Williams set to work on the problem by analyzing all the economic connections he could see between banking, business, and the arms build-up, and put it in the middle of his poetry. The generation of poets who have grown up since Big Business, Big Government, and Big War became everyday facts of the landscape no longer spend time looking for their origins. They analyze them instead as just what they have become--their everyday experience of the landscape.

In 1955, Allen Ginsberg, then a young unknown whom Williams was corresponding with and encouraging, looked out of his window at the towers of downtown San Francisco when he was high on peyote and, putting the long extemporaneous rhythms of Whitman back in use, recorded what he saw:

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> Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!
>
> Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind![68]

"Howl," II

Whatever it was, the new world wasn't a hollow waste land. For better or worse, mental deities reanimated it. "Howl" must have struck a sympathetic chord, because its publication made Ginsberg famous overnight.

Under the shock waves of the detonation of the Vietnam War, more poets saw the landscape itself as an active embodiment of unholy alliances, such as Williams had only begun to uncover. Robert Bly analyzed the current fiscal balance:

> It's because the aluminum window shade business is doing so well in the United States that we roll fire over entire villages
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It's because we have new packaging for smoked oysters that bomb holes appear in rice paddies
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It's because taxpayers move to the suburbs that we transfer populations.
> The Marines use cigarette lighters to light the thatched roofs of huts
> because so many Americans own their own homes.[69]

"The Teeth Mother Naked At Last," III

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Black Poetry

In coming to this vision of the country, white poets were arriving at a conclusion which every major black poet before them had already expressed. For black poets, however, it was not a conclusion; it was their point of beginning. Their people had already arrived at this understanding of America before the boats carrying them to the new world docked on its shores. Their subject was prepared. Under social conditions which declared it illegal for black people to learn to read and write, it took three hundred years for poets to be born who could voice their vision. Another distinction was that black poets did not need drugs, like Ginsberg, or anthropological theory about teeth mothers, like Bly, to make their statement. They only needed to get command of their medium to put their people's experience into words.

In the twentieth century, black poetry came into its own. It overcame the practice paces, yet hurdles, of imitating formal white conventions or imitating broad black dialect. The poets who contributed to the Harlem Renaissance united ease with conventional forms with respect for black speech and rhythm--in a general avant-garde climate of experimentation with form and faithfulness to experience--to produce some of the masterpieces of American poetry. In poems like "A Litany at Atlanta" by W. E. B. DuBois or "The White City" by Claude McKay,[70] their visions of society and landscape already contained the mordant anger that white poets later learned.

Besides the timing of their discoveries, there is another

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great distinction between the course of black poetry and white poetry in the twentieth century. In reacting against the environment that they found themselves in, black poets were speaking for a minority population with whom they kept faith. Like alarmed white poets, they may have felt themselves poets at odds with their country, but they never felt themselves poets at odds with their people. Therefore a moral strenuousness runs through their work. They have not been contending with a sense of a world without human purpose--with a nothing. The spreading power of Pan-Africanism in the sixties and seventies excavated and imported new meanings that black poets have put to use in taming America and turning it to their needs. They have not, like many white poets, found themselves up against meaninglessness.

Alternate Resolutions

Faced with the pressures of reality, the question remains, what can be done? There is always Stevens' solution. Louis Simpson,[71] who phrases his problem in the terms that he is a member of a tribe that uses supermarkets and highways, who himself doesn't like supermarkets and highways, has defended this choice. He calls it "rolling up," after Confucius. Confucius says: "When the government is rotten, he rolls up and keeps the true process within himself." Another solution is to go out and actively find or recreate an alternate environment. It is also an old wisdom, called "back to the farm." In the flight from the cities that characterized the sixties and seventies, many poets could be counted among the refugees.

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A third solution is active, organized resistance. Some poets feel that it is the step that must follow from their writing, that the next step of their writing must follow from. Acting on this belief, a number of poets have served as voices of the anti-war movement and the environmental protection movement.

Any or all of the above three solutions can be combined.

A fourth solution is to record whatever presents itself with unflinching eye. This final option tends to be shocking. One may profess helpless innocence, like Williams when he got to the fourth book of Paterson, when the Passaic River was nearing the ocean, reeking pollution. "What can I do? I just write what I see," he exclaimed. It is hard to maintain angelic innocence, however, without intermittent glimpses of heaven. By itself, unrelieved, this option begins to sound like another attempt to épater le bourgeois, or a closed circle of hopelessness. Denise Levertov has observed: "Orpheus did not sing about hell; he was in hell, and sang there, leading the way out."[72]

Some poets cherish faith in a more subtle form of resistance. At this point, Williams and Stevens would surely raise an eyebrow. (Whitman and Emerson might wink.) As the primitive has reawakened and reanimated the world, the word magic has begun to be spoken by poets again. Not as an idle adjective, but as an active noun. And not only by professedly Paleolithic poets, such as Gary Snyder, but even by poets as urbane as Howard Nemerov. Nemerov has described this change that has come over his work since he first began writing under

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the influence of Eliot, Auden, Stevens, Cummings, and Yeats:

> It involves a growing consciousness of nature as responsive to language or, to put it the other way, of imagination as the agent of reality. This is a magical idea and not very much heard of these days even among poets--and practically never among critics--but I am stuck with it. Trying to say this somewhat difficult idea, I came upon this: I do not now, if I ever did, consent to the common modern view of language as a system of conventional signs for the passive reception of experience, but tend ever more to see language as making an unknowably large part of a material world whose dependent existence might be likened to that of the human unconscious, a sleep of causes, a chaos of the possible-impossible, responsive only to the wakening touch of desire and fear--that is, to spirit; that is, to the word.[73]

According to the poet Robin Skelton,[74] although poets may be reticent about it, it is not such a rare idea. It is sanctioned by good authority, in both Western and Eastern religious tradition. In prior times, a belief that words and things have come simultaneously into existence allowed poets to work in traditional forms which were self-evidently artificial artistic creations, yet maintain faith that their language and their experience of the world were inherently connected. Certainly, as Nemerov has observed, this view of language runs counter to the dominant contemporary world view. Different beliefs regarding the nature of language itself form one of the divisions in American poetry today.

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Notes

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[3]Ezra Pound, "Walt Whitman," Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Roy H. Pearce (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 8.

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[5]William Carlos Williams, "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After, ed. M. Hindus (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 22.

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[10]Williams, "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," p. 22.

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CHAPTER SIX

COMPARISON AND COMMENTARY

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries Compared

When the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are compared from the point of view of landscape, the change that divides the two centuries is cataclysmic. In the metropolitan Northeast that this review has focused upon, industrialization shifted from a jog to a scramble during World War I; and the still largely pastoral landscape that Whitman knew succumbed to factories, freight yards, storage tanks, warehouses, chemical dumps, highways, housing developments, and all the other paraphernalia of our modern existence.

From the point of view of verse, consistency as much as change is apparent. Verse is a mental thing; and "the scientific image of the world" was already in place in the nineteenth century.

Blake, writing his summary of the deanimization of sensible objects at a time when modern science and industry were just beginning to gear up, missed the next episode in the story. Science and technology developed along with such a profound secularization of the world that even forms of worship chosen from poetic tales went by the board. The priesthood lost its control over the vulgar; and men not only forgot that all deities reside in the human breast, but they forgot all

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deities. Poets of these last two centuries have been left to their own devices to find poetic material in the world.

One consistency across the two centuries is that, try as poets will, the lyric has superseded the epic. Blake is a good example of the difficulty that the epic has gotten into. In the absence of poetic tales that could unite him with his public in a common faith, he was forced to invent idiosyncratic esoteric ones. When modern poets attempt an epic now, it is not about communal heroes, but about themselves. What poets share with their readers now is the day-to-day secular world. No wonder, then, that with no common language anymore about heroes in golden armor who slay monsters, or more humble heroes who rise from their own slaughter to walk and talk again, despite monsters, contemporary poets turn to the language of "the meal in the firkin" and "the milk in the pan."

This concentration upon little pieces of the world has been sustained by the faith that Blake, in one of his own lyric moments, has expressed--that it is possible to see the universe in a grain of sand. Whitman, reeling off his catalogues of common objects, put this faith in the words that "there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe."

Another impact of industrialization across the last two centuries is that, for the world as a whole, craftsmanship is out and mass production is in. Poets, as craftspeople, are something of an anachronism. Denise Levertov has written of the nostalgia for pre-industrial life that poets can easily feel:

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> We sigh--or I do--for the days when whole cultures were infused with noble simplicity; when though there were cruelty and grief, there was no ugliness; when King Alcinous himself stowed the bronze pots for Odysseus under the rowers' benches; when from shepherd's pipe to warrior's sandal to palace door and bard's song, all was well made.[1]

Blake, who achieved the rank of master engraver just at the point in history when the printing press took over his function, knew this change all too well. The story is told that when there was no food in the house, his wife would set the table with empty dishes at meal time, and the two of them would duly sit down and duly rise from the table.

Food and shelter are the most elemental objects in the world of poets as well as everybody else. To the extent that industrialization has altered the way in which poets engage with the physical world in order to secure a living, it has also altered the environmental relationship that enters poetry. Jobs that require deep physical engagement have become the exception rather than the rule. Stevens accepted modern office work. Through it he procured a world that was a refuge for his contemplation. He looked, listened, smelled, tasted, and felt the wind on his cheek, but he didn't touch. It shows in his poetry. Williams had work in which he could lose himself. He doctored through emphatic identification, to diagnose, followed by a laying on of hands. It shows in his poetry. Poets like Robert Frost, Hayden Carruth, and Gary Snyder have kept to farm work with the understanding that their bread and butter and their poetry are laid down on the table side by side.

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For everything that has been lost in the modern world, by the grace of the imagination, at least, it is possible to find some compensation. In a world in which both people and nature get their value calculated according to estimates of industrial yield, both innocence and experience have been mustered in defense. Denise Levertov has appealed to poets' experience. In comparison to poets of ages when things were well made, she believes that modern poets have greater consciousness of the power of the imagination--that it is possible through the imagination for them to breathe life into dust--"that the imagination does not arise from the environment but has the power to create it."[2]

This consoling power of the imagination was discovered at the beginning of the Romantic era. From German and English Romantic writers, this insight was passed to the Transcendentalists. Poets have relied upon it ever since.

The first Romantic poets also claimed innocence in their defense. As the introduction to this paper has already observed, one emblem of innocence is nature. The products of nature exist opposed to the products of the machine. Poets have cemented--or, rather, earthworked--their alliance with nature by calling their art "organic." Their minds, correspondingly, grow; they are not assembled.[3]

The Massachusetts Transcendentalists knew from the outset that forest paths and farmers' fields were where they belonged. For a time, Whitman introduced a new note by chanting cities and machinery as exuberantly as nature. Twentieth century

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poets show a return to earlier Romantic conservatism. Nature gets better billing than cities again. It bodies forth not only beauty but superior wisdom. The Puritan tendency, that Emerson retained, to read moral parables and holy signs into nature, may at first appear antiquated and remote to our modern sensibility--until we reflect upon our own tendency, shared by many poets, to borrow prophetic social and spiritual lessons from ecology.

As this paper's introduction has also observed, another emblem of innocence is childhood. The first Romantics endowed childhood with special distinction: it became seen as a period more intuitive and spontaneous, more attuned to nature, more "poetical." A poet or other artist who could retain "the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" could be preserved from a grim mercantile identity.[4]

Modern poets still write about their childhoods, in poetry and prose. Many, as they do, do not disavow childhood innocence. The first line in the first poem in Williams' first published book read: "Innocense can never perish" [sic]. Fifty years later he could still affirm, "I really believed that then, and I really believe it now. It is something intrinsic in a man."[5] There has been no general show of disaffection with the concept of innocence.

Whether innocence is derived from childhood memory is more problematic, however. Williams referred to it as something inherent in an individual, regardless of age. He himself was able to recreate his childhood with great zest in his

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autobiography, but he never made overt appeal to it in his poetry. On the contrary, neither the theory of poetry as participation in the flux of the universe, which Whitman initiated and which composition by field and Oriental aesthetics have extended, nor the spirit of modern realism, leave much room for childhood memories. At least, not if by memory we mean <u>what</u> we did, or recalling.

In the spirit of realism, Stevens considered what was left of his childhood, seventy years later:

> It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
> Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
> By our own motions in a freedom of air.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer remain.
> The lives these lived in the mind are at an end.
> They never were . . . The sounds of the guitar
>
> Were not and are not.[6]
>
> "The Rock," I

Not much of substance.

Any poet who is serious about the principles of composition by field or about Oriental philosophy must just as mercilessly reduce childhood memories, the moment childhood is over, to pure illusion. Unless, by memory, we mean <u>how</u> we did things, or reenactment.

While there may be no place in modern poetics for idealized memories of the past, to be returned to and returned to like old jewels in a safe deposit box--the role usually associated with Wordsworth's investment counseling--no one has been denying a place to memory as reenactment. Or to reenactment

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as a recovery (memory) of innocence. According to Olson, or Oriental philosophy, in the name of reenactment it is only possible to speak of innocence. To speak of identification with an animated universe, into whose movement one enters, and moves. There is always the possibility that, in moving, one might strike remembered beats. In the spirit of realism, these beats are struck off against real things-- like madeleines or the tilt of paving stones.

But then, if we go back to Wordsworth and attend carefully to the cut of jewel he recommended we invest in, that is exactly what he said:

> . . . the soul
> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity, whereto
> With growing faculties she doth aspire[7]
>
> "The Prelude," I

The way to take slices of the past that he recommended, was not according to what, but according to how. Modern poetry has been repolishing this meaning of memory in its own terms, in its own style.

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Commentary

This review has passed across time and across people as if historic trends have unfolded, as if the present were the point that the past were aiming at, as if progress were a just measure of history. To consider history according to a measure of progress, one must keep clear of any question whether the past might be as much a work of the imagination as the future. One must, in other words, keep clear of any reflection upon the nature of memory.

With a history in hand that involves poets and poetry, to keep to such a clear line of thought requires special fastidiousness. The difficulties of history are vexingly compounded when one is studying people of the imagination and their work. The declaration of Karl Shapiro that "Everything shows progress except poetry" rings with increasingly compelling sound as one proceeds in such a study. When this century began with Ezra Pound prodding, "Make it new," what was the it, if not the same old things? One might say, if not things remembered.

If all of the poets who have been considered here are reconsidered, one can't help noticing that they have a way of saying some of the same things over again. It is easy to find examples of such duplication:

> The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image more or less luminous arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought.[9]

* * * * * *

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> Poetry is a passion, not a habit. This passion nourishes itself on reality. Imagination has no source except in reality, and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality. Here is a fundamental principle about the imagination: it does not create except as it transforms.[10]

The first is Emerson. The second is Stevens. Maybe one hundred years, considering the sweep of history, are too close, still too interbred. But then, one can find ancient agreement. In De anima, Aristotle developed a similar theory of knowledge. He said that knowledge begins with the perceptions of the five senses, which are treated and worked upon by the imagination, to become material for the intellectual faculty. Imagination is the intermediary between perception and thought. This image-making part of the soul makes the higher processes of thought possible.[11]

It is unsettling, in trying to write a history, if it comes down to a few ancient articles of debate, and there aren't even any clear cut divisions and progress regarding them. It is even more unsettling, from the point of view of history, if the debate seems to volley back and forth over what to do, once common assumptions have been accepted. The assumptions that everyone in this review seems to accept, in one form or another, allowing for some variations in terms, are at least three.

1. The imagination gives life to reality. An idealist, of course, takes this principle literally, enough to add that without the imagination there would be no reality. Realists, like contemporary psychologists of perception, keep within the

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restriction that the imagination, a/k/a active mind, organizes reality into something livable. It is entirely excusable that poets should hold to such a belief, if we observe that they are people who, out of nothing but a pen and blank sheets of paper, create worlds where none existed before. It is all the more excusable if they enjoy any success, and these worlds live not only in their minds but in the minds of many.

2. The source of the imagination is reality, the life that it encounters. A very old principle. "There is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses": Aristotle. Idealists might object, but since they always give themselves over to finding evidence of the mind in everything that they see, and then make use of these things as metaphors for the mind, it ends up for all practical purposes as the same behavior.

3. To be potent, the imagination must be a passion. The prerequisite for principles 1 and 2. When poets say "life," as in 1 and 2, they mean something urgent, actually vivifying. Nature says something of the same sort.

All of these principles have their counterparts, if they are applied to memory. They suggest how memory must be in order to lend itself to poetry. It must be imaginative. It must originate in attentiveness to reality. It must be passionate.

This review has followed through philosophies of reality as if they were decisive when it comes to poets' practice. Yet the evidence that has been amassed is that there are far

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more sweeping and subtle variations among lines of poetry than there are among lines of philosophical persuasion. Variations as endless as things in the world, and poets. For it is not philosophies of the world that the poet puts on paper, but changing moments of the world as they appear to changing moments of the poet. As a result, the fixed philosophies and poetic principles that poets espouse in prose do not always correspond with what they practice in their poetry.

Perhaps this flexibility follows from poets' first assumptions. To people gifted with a potent imagination, to make free with any subject despite dogmas and disquisitions is not just a privilege of poetic license, but a display of noblesse oblige.

Every poet stands in the middle of a world that must be affirmed, as the source of the imagination, and rejected, as not up to the imagination. It is a delicate point of balance. This review has contrasted idealism and realism as fundamentally different stances in the world. But when it comes down to poet and paper, how much does it matter? Does the eye that witnesses look less or longer? Or the heart beat slower or stronger? Are improvisations in a poem's measure the measure of a person's philosophy or the measure of the person? According to realist and idealist:

> A man's sense of the world is born with him and persists, and penetrates the ameliorations of education and experience of life. His species is as fixed as his genus. For each man, then, certain subjects are congenital. Now the poet manifests his personality, first of all by his choice of subject. . . .
>
> What is the poet's subject? It is his sense of the world.

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> For him, it is inevitable and inexhaustible. . . .
>
> The truth is that a man's sense of the world dictates his subjects to him and that this sense is derived from his personality, his temperament, over which he has little control and possibly none, except superficially. It is not a literary problem. It is the problem of his mind and nerves.[12]
>
> Wallace Stevens, "Effects of Analogy"
>
> The chief trait of any given poet is always the spirit he brings to the observation of humanity and nature--the mood out of which he contemplates his subjects. What kind of temper and what amount of faith report these things?[13]
>
> Walt Whitman
> "A Backward Glance O'er Travell'd Roads"

If the essential determinant of poetry is the person who contains the combining of world, mind, and meter, then it explains why histories of poetry tend to turn into a string of stories of individuals, rather than chronologies of poetic theory.

Standing in the middle of a world laced with leviathans, whether one is an idealist or a realist appears to be somewhat immaterial. In single combat with the monsters, regardless of philosophical persuasion, modern poets must fall back upon the same elemental equipment as heroes in all the old tales--a stout heart and strong sinews. Some measure of craft is invaluable. Possessed with these advantages, whether they believe that the leviathan of scaly side, gnashing jaws, and belching smoke is fleeting flimsy illusion, or as firm as a rock, they may still clutch their weapon, and scribble on and on and on. With sufficient merit and valor, they may win into a realm of well-proven existences where the pen doubles as dancing master's rod, and sinews, if they are strong

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enough to bear the price, strike a conquering chord. Here leviathans can be subdued, and even schooled in levity.

To keep in good form, since this review began by delegating the introductory summary to a tutelary spirit of another time and place, it is only fitting that it should close with the words of one of his compatriots.

> For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews;
> Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
> Make tigers tame, and huge leviathans
> Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.
>
> William Shakespeare
> Two Gentlemen of Verona, III, 2, 78-81

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Notes

[1]Denise Levertov, The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 205.

[2]Ibid.

[3]For a discussion of the Romantic poets' association of the creative process with natural process, see Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

[4]Peter Coveney, Image of Childhood (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967); Williams, Culture and Society.

[5]William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, ed. E. Heal (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 9.

[6]Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 525.

[7]William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, ed. T. Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

[8]Karl Shapiro, "What Is Not Poetry?", The Poet's Work, ed. R. Gibbons (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 104.

[9]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 17.

[10]Wallace Stevens to Hi Simons, 10 August 1940, The Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 364.

[11]Summarized in Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[12]Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), pp. 120, 121, 122.

[13]Walt Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

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PART III

METHOD

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHOICE OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHOD

The method of this research can be considered another outcome of its topic, a historical development that also originated in questions regarding the relationship between person and world. When individual reflection regarding world and self is the subject of study, method and topic have the opportunity of presenting alternative revelations of each other, analogous to form and content in a poem.

Research within any discipline of science consciously presumes to define some aspect of the world with exactitude. The introduction of this study argued that, explicitly or implicitly, any discipline of science also presumes to define our human position in the world. It examined positivist science's position that we may stand apart from the world as an independent observing, evaluating consciousness, in contrast to poetic mind. The second chapter, which reviewed nineteenth and early twentieth century poets' philosophies regarding person and world, turned in good part into an account of their responses to science's way of seeing, including conflicts of adjustment to a landscape transformed by technology in the wake of science. To evolve a method for this research to follow, it is necessary to review nineteenth and twentieth century reflection regarding

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the relationship between person and world briefly again--this time from the viewpoint of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that its founder, Edmund Husserl, conceived as "a rigorous science" (Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy).[1] The term implied that it is more rigorous than science itself, because it seeks to uncover the first truths glimpsed by consciousness, which science merely borrows and uses for its own ends. According to Husserl, the preeminent concern of philosophy must be revealment of things' essences (what he called their eidos), which form the basis of everyday understanding of the world, which science too founds itself upon. He believed that philosophy had wrongly fallen into the position of being apologist for science's truth claims. Instead, only philosophy is able to provide the science of essences which must underlie any science of facts. He conceived of phenomenology as both the philosophical system and the working method which can disclose this epistemological foundation.[2]

Husserl entered philosophy through an education in mathematics--otherwise the most rigorous of the sciences. Therefore, despite his challenges to science, from his early thesis on the psychological presuppositions of mathematics through his late writings, he developed phenomenology not in opposition to science, but as the necessary foundation of meaning for its operation. Self, world, and time--all the elements of the present study--as well as the possibility of a phenomenological psychology that could elaborate our sense

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of them, were primary considerations for him.

The development of a phenomenological psychology was a particularly critical concern for Husserl because it could serve as the intermediary between phenomenology as pure philosophy and the different branches of the sciences. It could perform analyses of scientific thought and activity which could ground scientific observations philosophically. What phenomenological psychology must be like was therefore one of Husserl's primary concerns.

In Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (1913), Phenomenological Psychology (1925), and The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936), Husserl presented the outlines of how a phenomenological psychology must be. In many unpublished manuscripts, he attempted to illustrate how this psychology must conduct itself.[3] Just as he sought to ground rather than to dismantle the physical and social sciences, similarly he did not seek to deny the possible usefulness of empirical psychology. What he did challenge was psychology's pretention that it could carry out an empirical investigation of people as human beings. In his time, psychology was characterized by a physicalism which reduced all explanations to physio-chemical forces. He charged that it could explain knee jerks and reflex arcs well enough, but not human beings who perceive and behave according to human interpretations of the world. To appropriate the domain of human meaning, Husserl maintained, psychology must work according to phenomenological

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principles.

The subject of the present study lies squarely within phenomenology's domain. The substance of this subject is a human construal of meaning. Phenomenology must be accepted, however, with the caution that it is not a neutral guide to method. Since both phenomenology and this study began through a desire to better understand human relatedness to the world, phenomenology has circumscribed this subject at the same time that it has prescribed a method. It presents a sequence of philosophical premises regarding person and world at the same time that it presents a sequence of methodological procedures. The following brief outline of some facets of the heritage of thought originated by Husserl makes no attempt to comprehensively describe phenomenology as a philosophy. Instead, it seeks to derive a research method from a few relevant principles as neutrally as possible--within the limitation that no purely neutral human method of any kind exists--in order to arrive back at a point at which poets again, rather than phenomenologists, can be attended to.

The review of phenomenology that follows is necessarily historical. Disciples of Husserl have taken different features of his thought for their own use and have put them to use differently. The result has been a number of different phenomenologies which are so distinct that it is impossible to extract a common denominator that unites them all under one general definition. As a result, any appeal to

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phenomenology must clarify the historical line that is being taken up.[4] The present study is based upon the line that has been successively handed down from Husserl to Heidegger to Gadamer: from full professor to young privatdozent, from new professor to student.

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Notes

[1]Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

[2]In this paper, the term "phenomenology" will be applied to the line of thought which runs from Husserl to Heidegger and Gadamer. Strictly speaking, Heidegger broke with Husserl over the definition of the word and its practice, and he left the word for Husserl's use alone. Gadamer has also avoided applying the term either to Heidegger or to himself. He has characterized their work as "philosophical hermeneutics" instead. Nonetheless, the word phenomenology has entered general usage to signify different traditions of thought which stem from Husserl. It will be used in this broad sense here.

[3]Joseph J. Kockelmans, Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967).

[4]Ibid., p. 315; Stephan Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), pp. 245-8.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

A LINE OF SUCCESSION

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)

Husserl and Descartes cherished a common aspiration: to create a philosophy in the image of a rigorous science, which can ground science, by reaching back in consciousness to a beginning point of indubitable certitude. Like science, philosophy must have a generally accepted content and a clearly defined method and avoid opinions, notions, and points of view which do not possess intersubjective validity.[1] In this mission, however, Husserl divided his attention in two directions. Increasingly in his later work, like Descartes he turned within to seek a point of pure consciousness which could unerringly perceive and constitute the world. In the analyses in which he related consciousness and world, he turned his attention outward, "Zu den Sachen selbst," "To the things themselves." The one direction undercut the other, as this review will examine. Husserl's philosophy remains problematic as a result; but the effort to resolve the conflict kept him fertilely at his thought and at his writing until his terminal illness at the age of seventy-eight.[2]

At the core of Husserl's analyses of consciousness and world is the principle of intentionality. Husserl adapted the concept from his teacher Franz Brentano, who himself

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adapted it from Scholastic philosophy. The principle of intentionality asserts that every conscious act is consciousness of something. Correlates are that consciousness derives its meaning from the world and the world derives its meaning from consciousness.[3] Husserl's conscious ego, therefore, is distinct from Descartes' independent ego, since the ego is inconceivable apart from consciousness, and there is no operating consciousness apart from the content of consciousness, which derives from the surrounding world.

The radical conclusion of the principle of intentionality is that scientific objectivity, which justifies itself according to a clean separation of consciousness and world in the tradition of Descartes, is an impossibility. Objectivity in this sense, which Husserl called naive, assumes an inviolable consciousness and an independently existing res extensa that it observes. Descartes was explicit about these preconditions. His ego, for which thinking sufficed, must be:

> a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this "me," that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and is even more easy to know than the latter. . .[4]
>
> from Discours de la méthode

In opposition, Husserl argued, the sciences must lay their foundations upon phenomenology, which can trace the intentional connections between consciousness and the world. In place of Cartesian doubt, Husserl offered phenomenological reduction, which keeps all unexamined beliefs and commitments

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that accompany everyday living and scientific thinking in abeyance in order to carry out descriptions of phenomena as they appear in themselves. Even at their first appearance, they are intentional phenomena.[5]

If objectivity in a Cartesian sense is inappropriate even to the natural sciences, Husserl reasoned, how much less then could it ever be pretended in the case of the human sciences, in which the subject conducting the investigation and the object of investigation are identical in kind? Among the human sciences, Husserl gave particular attention to redefining psychology. Through its focus upon the functioning of consciousness, it has the potential to examine the presuppositions and beliefs that constitute naive experience, which the phenomenological reduction temporarily suspends.[6]

Husserl was indebted to William Dilthey for the principle that a valid psychology must be "an analytical descriptive psychology" seeking understanding, rather than a "constructive psychology" seeking causal explanations in imitation of the physical sciences. In keeping with Dilthey's dictum that, "We explain nature; man we must understand," psychology must be able to reflect upon people as experiencing, feeling, thinking beings who are intentionally involved in historical, cultural worlds.[7]

Contrary to Descartes, the thinking ego has place, material thing, and body after all. In practice, one of the most striking distinctions between phenomenological psychology

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and empirical psychology is that phenomenological psychology accepts the body as the source of all experience and devotes great care to analyzing the embodied nature of perception.[8] The reverse side of the principle that the ego has place, thing, and body is that places, things and bodies are always animated by the personal subjectivity of the ego. In phenomenology, to use other terms, the realms of phusis and psyche are fundamentally connected. They are not connected merely as simultaneous presences, but they are connected at the origin of their existence for us.[9]

In place of an ideal of objective truth, phenomenology substituted the ideal honored by its name: A return "to the things themselves," as they first show themselves to us. Husserl considered the practice of this return to be more rigorous than any empirical science because of another fundamental principle: "The things themselves" are hidden. They pass unnoticed, or lie covered over by traditional assumptions about them. Phenomenology's mission is to suspend all traditional views in favor of a primordial experience in which phenomena reveal themselves to consciousness in a genuinely original way (the phenomenological reduction).[10] The consequence in terms of method is that a true method is not guided by a priori decisions; instead it must follow the nature of the thing which it investigates.

As the context for these principles of the intentionality of consciousness and the hiddenness of truth, Husserl developed the notion of the Lebenswelt, the life-world.[11]

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It is the world of naive prescientific subjectivity, in which everyone, scientist and philosopher included, live. It is the horizon which is always given with everything that appears to us. According to Husserl, scientists had fallen into a crisis of self-understanding, with the risk of dragging everyone else along with them, because they believed that they had transcended the naive subjectivity of the Lebenswelt and that they had shed all contact with it. In an "objective" world which loses its character as a world in which people live, people themselves turn into neutral objects.[12] When things are deprived of human meaning, so is the consciousness that perceives them.

As the point of departure for any endeavor to uncover truth--whether it be scientific or philosophic truth--Husserl would replace a consciousness that is a narrowly rational subject only with an embodied consciousness in all its human meaningfulness.[13] Working through phenomenological psychology, phenomenology must lay the foundation for all the different branches of the sciences by analyzing the intuitively given whole of the world of prescientific experience out of which different theoretical interests arise. It must provide a fundamental description of how people are enmeshed with the objects and events of the life-world, and show how scientific terms and concepts develop out of this original, taken-for-granted horizon.[14]

Husserl retained the traditional aspiration of philosophy, however, that a philosopher must analyze a way through

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apparent changes to reach a transcendent realm of phenomena of pure essences and unchanging Being. He conceived of phenomenology as a pure philosophy which must speak of the relationship between consciousness and life-world in absolute terms. The realm of changing, situational beings therefore falls to phenomenological psychology.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the life-world is that it is saturated with cultural meanings, which change across history.[15] Phenomenological psychology, therefore, has an endless challenge of constituting the relationship between consciousness and world in different concrete, historical situations. An outcome of Husserl's concept of the life-world which has special relevance for the present study is that, just as there is no consciousness without the contents of consciousness, there is no cultural meaning without the people and things which embody it. In moment-by-moment lived experience, cultural horizons of meaning are more omnipresent for us in things than in people.

Another principle of phenomenology which Husserl adapted from Brentano which is critical for the present study is the phenomenological now: that non-present events are devoid of reality unless they persist for us in some "unity-form of the flux," in some present form.[16] The "objective" time of an even succession of coexistences cannot be real for us; psychological time reveals a non-linear, motivational sequence of coexistences.[17]

Despite the great achievements of Husserl's philosophy,

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there was a conflict inherent in his thought which has resulted in revisions in his ideal of phenomenology and phenomenological psychology by most succeeding phenomenologists. In threading its way from point to point of Husserl's recommendations for a phenomenological psychology, this brief review has emphasized points of contact between the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, his appointed successor. A review of Husserl's primary concern, phenomenology as pure philosophy, would have led to an emphasis upon differences. At the same time that Husserl inveighed against assumptions which cover over "the things themselves," he was dazzled by what he called "the wonder of all wonders"--"the pure ego and pure subjectivity."[18] His ultimate goal, which he coveted but never attained, was to discover this pure ego, this transcendental self that exists independent of the world. Only attainment of a transcendental consciousness would make it possible to perceive the things themselves in their pure essences. In other words, he still conceived of phenomena as objects that appear before a transcendental knowing subject, in the tradition of Descartes. He still hoped to disentangle himself from the selfworld by finding a self | world. Heidegger turned aside from this ideal into the path of hermeneutic phenomenology.

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Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

The turn that Heidegger gave to phenomenology was that Being can only be known to us through our temporal, finite, fallible, context-bound being-in-the-world. Heidegger retained from Husserl the project of carrying out an analysis of intentional human relatedness to the world; but he would have nothing to do with intentional analyses that constituted the world out of a transcendental subjectivity. Instead, he founded intentionality in human relatedness to the world through the essential orientation of care, of engagement with other things.[19] For human "being," he chose the term Dasein which means "there-being." The essence of human being, according to Heidegger, is its ek-sistence, its standing out of itself; being-in-the-world.[20] Instead of a pure, doubtless reasonable, self that exists somewhere "inside ourselves," we exist outside ourselves in the things around us. Simultaneously, human being, which is a being there, creates the there where Being can be revealed.[21]

Heidegger, like Husserl, opposed to science's claim that it could discover objective truth the necessity of a return to day-to-day containment in the life-world as the beginning point for the pursuit of truth. Heidegger analyzed three ever-present modes of Dasein's essential way of being in the world: through mood, understanding, and discourse, Dasein is in the world and the world discloses itself to Dasein.[22] Both mood and understanding arise in response to the facticity of the situations in which Dasein finds

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itself. Every mood has its understanding, just as every understanding has its mood. Discourse articulates the intelligibility of mood and understanding through words; but it is as fundamental as they are, because it is already present in listening and thought even when it is not manifested overtly through speech or writing. Discourse is possible because the moods and understandings undergone under different situations become shared experiences of ek-sistence.

Heidegger's preoccupation with human being as it is caught up in words, moods, and intuitive understandings is a legacy of Husserl's valuing of naive, prescientific perception. The revolutionary turn of Heidegger's thought was that he proceeded from the premise that there is no transcendental self naked of the world to the conclusion that there is no transcendental naked truth either. Heidegger overstepped Husserl's challenge that it is impossible for empirical science to lay truth bare to challenge that philosophy, likewise, cannot bare truth. The final truth that science was seeking was only a new appearance of the absolute Truth that metaphysics had already been after. For more than two thousand years, according to Heidegger, metaphysics and science together had been misdirected.[23]

In an essay "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger resumed the reconsideration of truth that he initiated in Being and Time.[24] It begins with an historical review. Modern science and philosophy have adopted from classical metaphysics a theory of truth as conformity between intellectual

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assertion and thing observed, which was condensed in the medieval statement, "Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus." Conformity had been metaphysically justified according to two logics: 1) Things conform to the intellect of God, since they came into being through His idea; and 2) The human intellect conforms to the things which it perceives because both intellect and things have been mutually coordinated according to a divine plan of creation. Both arguments for conformity conceive truth as correctness.[25] Modern science and philosophy have continued to adhere to this definition of truth even though they have dropped its grounds of justification.

When Heidegger turned aside from the Truth of science and metaphysics, it was not for the sake of a relativism that denies that there is truth. A saving return to truth, for Heidegger, remained open in the direction pointed out by phenomenology's initiating slogan, "To the things themselves." Being must be looked for through human being which is a being among things (things used here in a sense that includes all beings, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate). Each thing has its own being, and therefore its own potential of significance for us. A person encountering a thing does not independently give it significance. It already has significance.[26] Heidegger sought a return to the pursuit of truth as it was conceived before the intervening two thousand years of science and metaphysics, according to a pre-Socratic choice of terms: truth as a-letheia, the unforgotten, or

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unhidden.[27] If truth is lost among things, it is also to be found there.

Heidegger turned, then, to a conception of truth as an opening of a "clearing" in which the being of a thing is free to reveal itself.[28] Here the grounds upon which an assertion may conform with the thing perceived become that both the person who perceives and the thing perceived share the same clearing. The person who perceives must have come to dwell in the domain of the thing where the thing is free to initiate an encounter. (In later essays, Heidegger developed the consequence that by this new truth claim the old sequence of asserting confirmed by perceiving is reversed into perceiving confirmed by asserting.)

As the place where Dasein always finds itself, this clearing must originate in the prescientific everyday world. Therefore the clearing opens in a world usually covered over by forgetfulness, by the unthinking taken-for-grantedness of things, by pregiven understandings.[29] Heidegger, like Husserl in his description of the life-world, recognized that all things in this world are already cultural and historical for us. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger held that they remain so in their essence. And Heidegger, much more than Husserl, included in his description of things that they are known and shared among us through language.

In his later essays, Heidegger developed an understanding of language as the <u>there</u> where things are brought into the clearing. It became a critical component of his definition

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of aletheia. To Husserl's search for original, unprejudiced perceiving, Heidegger added a search for original, unprejudiced speaking. (According to his student Gadamer, Heidegger was first and foremost a person of face-to-face speech, so that it was more than a matter of convenience that almost all his writing began as lectures. His speech and writing were also distinct in style. In contrast to the linguistic waywardness of his writing beginning with Being and Time, his lectures have been recalled as "clear and deliberate" and his personal address as "plain and unassumingly direct." Therefore it should be kept in mind that Heidegger's usage of the words "language" and "speech" signifies living dialogue among people more than just print sealed in books.)[30]

Heidegger did not consider language a tool which we can pick up and lay down at our convenience. In keeping with the notion of Dasein as "there-being," it is part of the inescapable there in which we find ourselves.[31] The world presents itself as matter to speak about; but once we have spoken about it, language is as much a part of the matter of the world as matter itself.[32]

Correspondingly, just as forgetfulness and unthinking custom are everyday parts of our perception of things in the world, they are equally part of our speaking of the world. The powers of concealment and revealment that are contained in a definition of truth as aletheia are also intrinsic to language when it attempts to speak of truth.[33]

Heidegger explored this dialectic of concealment and

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revealment in language in several senses. Central to it is language's own invisibility when it points out and makes other things visible. When we speak of something, we direct our attention to the subject, away from the words through which we speak. But language, in its turn, distracts us from the concrete subject we speak of in order to be able to speak of it at all. For example, to say the word "tree," we must generalize among all trees and abandon sight of any earth-bound real tree. Language can address the matter of the world only because it transcends it.[34] Also characteristic of language is that when each person uses it, it is already a preexisting force filled with meanings ready to hand. Each word's potential of history and meaningfulness is always greater than anyone can ever be conscious of. Additionally, fatefully, language has power to misname and cover over the truth of things as well as power to name and reveal. It is capable of falsehood as well as truth.

Out of Husserl's principle that the truth of things normally goes hidden, Heidegger developed a dialectic of concealment and revealment as the essential nature of both truth and the language which attempts to speak truth. Truth as aletheia is something constantly emerging and receding from our perception, which must be repeatedly rediscovered--rather than, as metaphysics and science since Plato would have it, a static idea. Heidegger revived a conception of truth according to which not only mythological gods and goddesses travel in disguises and speak the truth amid

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ambiguities. All things that we see and speak do so.

Such a renovated conception of truth required its own method of investigation. Heidegger found hermeneutics, the art of interpretation, a method adaptable to the pursuit of truth as aletheia. Its name and history predisposed it to this use.[35] Other members of the same Greek word-family suggest original connotations of its name: hermeios, the priest at the Delphic oracle, and Hermes, the go-between in parleys between gods and mortals, who was credited with the discovery of the alphabet and writing. During medieval and Renaissance history, hermeneutics was applied in the service of scriptural, classical, and legal exegesis. In the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher and Dilthey analyzed its potential to cover the general art of understanding. Heidegger showed that it is relevant for the practice of ontology. All through these transformations, it has retained the common function that "something foreign or strange or separated in time, space or experience is made familiar, present, comprehensible."[36]

Hermeneutics can be contrasted to Husserl's ideal of the analysis and reconstitution of truth. The first principle of the hermeneutic circle is that we are caught in the circle and can never get out. Here the word "circle" is interchangeable with the word "world," in the sense of a human world. The historical, cultural, spatial, and embodied boundedness of being-in-the-world makes analysis such as Husserl recommended impossible. A following principle of the circle is that

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this entrapment that is a limitation is simultaneously a basis for openness to possibilities. Parallel to the dialectic of hiddenness and truth Heidegger developed a dialectic of bias and openness. The past and the horizon of the present create a direction for movement into the future.

Heidegger's hermeneutics altered Husserl's sense of the now as the only real time in which past and future live by emphasizing the future orientation of the present.[37] Choice of the hermeneutic circle as a method for phenomenology took advantage of the circle's characteristic that momentum comes out of the past but is directed to the future. It conformed to Heidegger's analysis of human being as a "thrown-project"--something thrown helplessly out of a particular fateful past whose thrust is forward.[38]

Heidegger's analysis of the "thrown-project" in Being and Time emphasized that past and future form fateful biases. His later writings added to this sense of bias an increasing sense of the openness that these dimensions of time also constitute. The directions of the throwing are also origin points for catching. Although Heidegger never abandoned his stress that the present is future oriented, his later writings deepened the recognition that present and future can fruitfully draw upon the past. Hermeneutics had originally come into being through just such a turn.

In the book What is Called Thinking?, Heidegger developed his ideal of hermeneutic thinking, and of the sense of the positive potential of the past, through a philology of the

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word think.[39] In Old English, "to think" and "to thank" were closely related. An Old English noun for thought was thanc, which Heidegger translated as "a grateful thought." It meant, according to Heidegger, therefore also a memory. But memory, continued Heidegger, could also be termed an act of devotion: that is, "a constant concentrated abiding with something--not just with something that has passed, but in the same way with what is present and with what may come."[40] Heidegger proceeded from this philology to translate thinking by the German Andenken and Andacht, used in the senses of "remembrance" and "devotion."

The circularity of the nature of truth as aletheia and of hermeneutics as the method to pursue it are grounded in the circularity of thinking as the activity of pursuit. Thinking shares the circle's special privilege of being able to move forever without coming to a stop. It is always "on the way" to truth; it never arrives there. In the realm of empirical science, one consequence of technological progress was that the notion of Truth as singular gave way to a notion of a succession of provisional truths that make up the grand way to Truth.[41] The discovery of each contingent truth, however, is a procession from intellectual anticipation to confirming observation. An ultimate exhaustive explanation beacons at the end of the course. Heidegger substituted the notion of an unending search process that is an end in itself.

It is evident that when an activity is defined as an end sufficient unto itself, it must be defined by either aesthetic

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or moral standards, or both. This turn of Heidegger's thought was a turn away from Husserl's ambition of developing phenomenology along the model of "a rigorous science." The magnitude of Heidegger's deviation is shown by his eventual comparison of the thinking which he was attempting to art, and especially to poetry.

Clearly then, Heidegger no longer advanced phenomenology as a foundation for the empirical sciences as Husserl had done. Instead of seeking to make science more valid, when he turned his attention to science at all, he concentrated upon understanding how scientific thinking has been applied in the form of technology, since in this form science as it already is pervades contemporary being-in-the-world. The target of his criticism was that technology forces things into "standing-reserve," a stockroom tallying which only recognizes things in terms of their usefulness for manipulation and consumption.[42] He saw hermeneutic phenomenology, which seeks to understand the significance of things in and of themselves and to preserve their non-exploitive value from forgetfulness, as fatefully opposed to this world view.

Under the dominance of a scientific world view, Heidegger felt that philosophy for the most part had already crumbled and broken into the separate disciplines of symbolic logic, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. These are disciplines adapted to technology. "They constitute the functional patterns and successful instruments of the politico-economic, i.e., of our essentially technological world."[43]

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The need for a phenomenological psychology, which had been one of Husserl's commitments, no longer appeared either necessary or desirable to Heidegger. When he rejected transcendental phenomenology such as Husserl envisioned, he rejected with it the need for a phenomenological psychology as an adjunct discipline which could study the operation of consciousness in mundane situations. Heidegger's phenomenology exclusively recognized consciousness in mundane situations. By itself, it superseded the place Husserl had reserved for phenomenological psychology.

More moderate philosophers and psychologists since Heidegger have attempted to reinstate a relationship between phenomenology and psychology. A few have argued that there is still room for phenomenological psychology as a separate discipline intermediary between psychology and phenomenology.[44] The majority, however, have positioned phenomenological psychology within the general discipline of psychology, where it means "empirical psychology on a phenomenological basis."[45] In this position, empirical investigation is combined with a critique which seeks to free it of objectivism, whose point of departure is a phenomenological understanding of human being. Gadamer, who has been the inspiration for the method followed by the present study, has worked within this second, more moderate position.

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Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-)

Gadamer's ambition may be described as to bring Heidegger's philosophy to bear upon the entire range of interpretive disciplines that constitute the humanistic and social sciences.[46] He has mounted the following argument. The principles of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology are revealed by the act of interpretation itself. . . . The sciences are interpretive. . . . Therefore hermeneutics, as the art of interpretation, contains by its very nature the power to heal the breach between phenomenology and the sciences which appeared irrevocable at the point at which Heidegger's work broke off. As Gadamer envisions the healing, it does not require a refutation or modification of such extreme charges in Heidegger's later essays as that "Science does not think,"[47] or that modern science and the totalitarian state go together as joint applications of the spirit of technology.[48] The healing requires a modification of the conduct of science, through a self-awareness of its hermeneutic nature.

Gadamer belongs to the company of contemporary phenomenologists for whom phenomenology's critical victory may be described as the demonstration that "all that which presents itself to us need not be subjected to proof and cannot be subjected to proof."[49] Against anyone who objects that such concepts of Heidegger as "the clearing," "an event of being," or "forgetfulness of being" are not open to any conscious intentional act of verification, they accept as sufficient affirming counterstatement that "Nothing can be proved in

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this area, but some things can be shown."[50]

Gadamer accepts outright that any truth that depends upon showing is akin to aesthetic truth. Or the "truth" of a game. Or practical truth. In his major work Truth and Method, art and play are analyzed as accurate models of the process of understanding and research in the human sciences. In other works he has explored parallels between hermeneutics and practical wisdom.[51]

For Gadamer as much as for Heidegger, language is integral to every consideration of truth and understanding. His own definition of hermeneutics witnesses its centrality: "Hermeneutics may be precisely defined as the art of bringing what is said or written to speech again."[52] Unlike Heidegger, however, who finally left truth and method disjunctive, Gadamer has maintained that they are complementary. He bases his defense upon the nature of hermeneutics, which he identifies with the nature of language. For someone like Gadamer who can talk about "the conversation that we ourselves are,"[53] hermeneutics and language also bring us back to the nature of the ek-sistence of Dasein.

Gadamer became a student of Heidegger in 1923, so that he was with him during the years in Marburg when the ideas of Being and Time began to be sounded in lectures; and he remained his friend for the rest of his life. Yet almost as pervasive in Gadamer's thought as Heidegger is Hegel. Although Gadamer parts with Hegel over the concept of Absolute Knowledge and Absolute Spirit, he freely acknowledges his

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influence otherwise, and points out Heidegger's own less freely acknowledged indebtedness in the areas of dialectic and history.[54]

Hegel's dialectic of the relationship of spirit and world has been taken up in Gadamer's expansion of the meaning of hermeneutics. As Gadamer has put it, "Nobody knew better than did German idealism that consciousness and its objects are not two separated worlds."[55] The principles of Hegel that knowledge is an act in which both the apprehending consciousness and its object are transformed, and that it is a mediation and refocusing of the past within the new and expanded context of the present and anticipation of the future, are guiding principles of Gadamer's own work.

Gadamer makes the claim upon the human sciences that they must recognize these principles of knowledge and incorporate them into their method if they are not to atrophy their ability to think, if they are not to remain appendages of technology.

In a recent collection of essays, Gadamer summarized the essential insights of hermeneutics as three:[56]

1. Every answer is an answer to a question.
2. Interpretation is always interpretation-on-the-way; it is an endless task.
3. The commonality of all understanding is understanding through language.

All three insights assume the historicism of understanding. Not only the literary text, the art object, or

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the subject in a scientific investigation stands within its particular history, but the interpreter also does. Any words that pass between them also do. Therefore Gadamer opposes the position that an exact reconstruction of a writer's or speaker's intention can be a tenable goal of understanding. His own position is that understanding occurs when there is "a fusion of horizons," when the historical context of interpreter and object of interpretation meet.[57] Once it is accepted that understanding is an historical event, it follows that it must be continually renewed in each new period of history.

Ricoeur credits Gadamer with having successfully opened a way to reestablish a dialogue between Heidegger's ontology and the human sciences through this concept of the fusion of horizons.[58] It emphasizes the open possibilities of communication. It "means that we do not live within closed horizons nor within a unique horizon."[59] It makes a definition of truth as aletheia--as a tension between unknown and known, between foreign and recognizably the same--as applicable to the human sciences as it is to phenomenology.

Gadamer has untiringly pursued the implications of this concept of understanding for interpretive method. The implications which the following pages summarize have all had heavy bearing upon the conduct of the present study.

Gadamer aims his description of method against what he calls the scandal of "alienating distanciation" which is the common presupposition of the contemporary human sciences. It

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sets the researcher apart from the subject of study rather than recognizing their primary relationship of participation. At the point of entry into the hermeneutic circle, participation is already engaged because the interpreter enters with a question already phrased. The question represents the interpreter's preconceptions regarding the type of answer that the subject of study may supply. The interpreter enters, in other words, with prejudices.

One of Gadamer's cherished endeavors is to rehabilitate the meaning of the word "prejudice."[60] Philology discloses that it was not until the Enlightenment that it fell upon hard times. In early law, a préjugement was an interim judgment given before all the evidence was in, a full court hearing was held, and a final judgment was handed down. It could be expected to influence the final verdict; but its justice depended upon its original insight and wisdom. Prejudice in this sense is inevitable in considering any case, but like legal precedence its merit requires evaluation. It is also so intrinsic to the act of understanding that Gadamer can say, "It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudgments that constitute our being."[61]

Prejudice has two related aspects: individual expectations, and historical tradition. In conjunction, they form the ground that the interpreter stands on, the basis of understanding. They cannot be overcome--any more than Dasein can stand outside of place and time. Yet just as this boundedness forms the horizon that makes Dasein's understanding

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of being possible, similarly it forms the horizon that makes understanding of the subject under study possible. "Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are conditions whereby we experience something--whereby what we encounter says something to us."[62]

One consequence of this reevaluation of prejudice is that a way has been opened for past traditions of thought to contribute to current research and thinking. Only a science which follows phenomenological principles, not objectivist science, can draw the philosophical psychologies and other sciences of Western classical tradition into the compass of their reflection.[63] (This reflection upon the past may prove worthwhile for double reason. The past may turn out to be still incriminated in current prejudices. Felicitously, a disclosure of past ideas may vivify current thinking.)

Tradition on the side of the subject of study is equally active in the framing of a question. A question always comes from a certain direction; but the only guide to know which direction is likely to elicit a meaningful response comes through prior immersion in the subject's tradition.[64] Questioner and questioned must already share enough common pool of knowledge and understanding to being communication. In Heidegger's terms, the questioner must already stand in the clearing where a being reveals itself. In Gadamer's terms, conversation is always conversation with a tradition.[65]

To follow the progress of the hermeneutic circle: Once a question has been posed, it does not stop with an answer.

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Every answer rebounds as a question put to the questioner.[66] By the dialectics of interpretation, the subject's horizon challenges and interrogates the perspectives of the interpreter's horizon. The interpreter has had to enter the subject's world in order to begin questioning; and to that degree it has been necessary to reorient his or her own. Every responsive sequence of question and answer draws the interpreter deeper into the subject's world.

Gadamer has described the movement of the hermeneutic circle that begins at this point as a method that was not arrived at through method, but through a dialectic of truth.[67] It evolves as the questioner and the subject matter interrogate each other.

One consequence of this movement is that the interpreter's world is put at risk. It is one reason why Gadamer compares interpretation to serious engagement in a game.[68] The action of the game takes precedence over the players, so that, "All playing is a being-played." In contrast to methods of objectivist science in which the inquirer attempts to control and manipulate all occurrences, in hermeneutic method the interpreter must be open to being modified by answers as they come. The risk is real. The interpreter must choose carefully and decide beforehand that the subject of study is desirable and that the modification promises to benefit rather than to hurt.

Another consequence is that the interpreter, never having total control, can self-evidently never have total knowledge.

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This consequence is in the spirit of the game. On this point, Gadamer has observed that if one envisages perfect control over all spheres of life and all questions wrapped up in answers, would it satisfy our desire to know?[69]

A requirement of this mode of procedure is that the interpreter must be able to initiate communication, be attentive and responsive to it, and be able to translate the message communicated into appropriate new words. Gadamer is explicit that interpretation is a native gift and that it can be improved through education but not implanted.[70] It is a gift as much as other gifts such as artistic fluency, distinction as a player, or practical wisdom.

The heart of the hermeneutic circle is that it revolves around the message being communicated. Neither interpreter nor carrier of the message--whether that be text, art object, or subject in the social sciences' sense of the term--is the focus. Both are transcended by their common focus upon the truth that the communicator is trying to express and that the interpreter is trying to understand.[71] The dialectic of question and answer which propels the circle is directed to looking <u>with</u> something or someone <u>to</u> something else.

On this basis, Gadamer distinguishes hermeneutic phenomenology from the traditional conduct of literary criticism and scientific investigation. One of the basic principles of phenomenology laid down in <u>Being and Time</u> is that nothing stands behind the phenomenon.[72] Similarly, hermeneutic interpretation does not attempt to get behind the message

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presented. It attempts to let it stand out in its own way of being. It is the distinction of truth as aletheia. Otherwise, truth in the sense of something that goes hidden has always been the popular endorsement of the sciences. It is evident in the natural sciences in the pursuit of more and more minute microscopic revelations and more and more precise mathematical equations. It is evident in the social sciences in the attention given to analyses of hidden machinery, such as in the theories of Marx and Freud. It is evident in what Gadamer calls reconstructive textual hermeneutics (which, it may be added, includes a large body of literary criticism) which aspires to uncover something behind the text such as the author's creative personality, intention, or world view.[73] All these areas of research also presume that truth is hidden, but somewhere in the dark.

If we stop at this point and review the preceding description of engagement in the hermeneutic circle, it can be observed that it could substitute equally well for a description of two people engaged in spoken conversation. The coincidence is clearly not coincidental, given that for Gadamer language is a model as well as an expression of what we are, as well as what we know and can pass on. The challenge of hermeneutic method may be described as finding a way through the fixedness of written text, concrete form, or the opposing posture of face-to-face encounter when researcher and subject meet to the give-and-take of dialogue.[74] The circle moves when the movement of conversation is achieved,

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in which the interpreter questions the message-bearer and the message-bearer questions the interpreter.

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Notes

[1]Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 74-8, 85-91.

[2]In developing its major summaries and conclusions, this description of Husserl's philosophy has drawn heavily upon Joseph Kockelman's book, Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967).

[3]Edmund Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, trans. W. P. Alston and G. Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 43-51.

[4]Quoted and translated in Kockelmans, Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology, pp. 37-38.

[5]Edmund Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), Part 3-A, pp. 103-189. This exposition of Husserl's thought has attempted to keep to everyday language and avoid the complexities of his own terminology, which would require extensive definitions. It should be noted, however, that for each scientific discipline, he wanted phenomenology to elaborate a science of essences, which would reveal the essence (eidos) of each subject which it studies. In his terminology, each scientific discipline would have a regional ontology, or eidetic science, as its foundation.

[6]Husserl, Crisis, Part 3-B, pp. 191-265.

[7]Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. W. R. Boyce-Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 6-11; idem., Phenomenological Psychology, trans. John Scanlon (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 3-7.

[8]Husserl, Phenomenological Psychology, pp. 79-83.

[9]Ibid., pp. 100-107.

[10]Husserl, Crisis, Part 3-A, pp. 103-189.

[11]Ibid.

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[12]Ibid., p. 6.

[13]Ibid., Part 1, pp. 3-18.

[14]Ibid., Part 3-A, pp. 121-132.

[15]Ibid., Part 3-A, pp. 138-9; Husserl, Phenomenological Psychology, pp. 85-90.

[16]Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 75; idem., The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness, trans. J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. 40-48.

[17]Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, pp. 74-7.

[18]London lectures of 1922, quoted in Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 1:87.

[19]Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 225-41.

[20]Ibid., pp. 67, 78-86.

[21]Ibid., p. 171.

[22]Ibid., pp. 172-8, 182-8, 203-210.

[23]Ibid., pp. 41-51.

[24]Ibid., Section 44.

[25]Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," Existence and Being, trans. R. F. C. Hull and A. Crick (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), pp. 295-6.

[26]Ibid., pp. 305-9.

[27]Ibid., p. 306.

[28]Ibid., pp. 300-303.

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[29]Ibid., pp. 313-318.

[30]See Hans-Georg Gadamer's reminiscence in the introduction to Heidegger's Basic Writings, ed. D. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 16, and Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement, vol. 1, p. 274.

[31]Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 203-5.

[32]Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language, trans. P. Hertz, except "Words" trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); see also Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Language, Meaning, and Ek-sistence," On Heidegger and Language, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 28.

[33]Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 264-5.

[34]See Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, ed. M. Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 321.

[35]Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

[36]Ibid., p. 14.

[37]Heidegger, Being and Time, Part 4.

[38]Ibid., p. 174.

[39]Martin Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, trans. J. G. Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 138-147.

[40]Ibid., p. 140.

[41]Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Thinking, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 1:54-55.

[42]Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," Basic Writings, p. 298.

[43]In "Hegel und die Griechen," quoted and translated by A. Borgmann, "Heidegger and Symbolic Logic," Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, p. 10.

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[44]Kockelmans, Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology, pp. 344-8; Jean Paul Sartre, The Emotions: Outline of a Theory (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).

[45]Kockelmans, Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology, footnote pp. 343-4; Stephan Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963) pp. 307-313.

[46]David Linge, Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics, by Hans-Georg Gadamer (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), p. xxviii.

[47]Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, p. 8.

[48]Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?", Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. and ed. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 112.

[49]Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, pp. 251-4.

[50]Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 22.

[51]See the essays in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1981).

[52]Ibid., p. 119.

[53]Gadamer has borrowed this phrase from Heidegger, who borrowed it from Holderlin. It appears in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 340.

[54]Gadamer, "The Language of Metaphysics," Philosophical Hermeneutics.

[55]Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 119.

[56]Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, pp. 106-108.

[57]Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 273.

[58]Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," Heidegger and Modern Philosophy.

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[59]Ibid., p. 159.

[60]Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 235-58.

[61]Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 9.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, p. 155.

[64]Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 326-7.

[65]Ibid., pp. 258, 324.

[66]Ibid., pp. 333-341.

[67]Ibid., p. 326.

[68]Ibid., pp. 91-99.

[69]Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, p. 148.

[70]Ibid., p. 114.

[71]Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 99-100.

[72]Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 60.

[73]Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 290-293.

[74]Ibid., p. 331.

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CHAPTER NINE

APPLYING GADAMER'S METHOD

Phenomenology and Metaphysics

The foregoing tradition of phenomenology evolved contemporaneously with the tradition of poetic thought reviewed in the second section of this study. The great change in the modern imagination that Wallace Stevens identified as "the movement away from the idea of God" (see page 114 of this study) has been implicated in the development of phenomenology as much as it has been in the development of poetic theory.

Heidegger was born in 1899, ten years after Stevens, six years after Williams, and within a year of Eliot. Son of a village sexton, until age twenty-two he concentrated his studies in theology and philosophy with the intention of becoming a Jesuit priest.[1] But history was not so doctrinally clear. Husserl assembled his main body of writing, Heidegger composed Being and Time, and Gadamer read and listened during the period between wars, when the currency of both Faith and Reason was as inflated as German marks.

Husserl labored in the defense of Reason by scrutinizing the shortfalls in Enlightenment Reason's armory. He died in 1938 just before the assault against Reason could sweep him, too, away. As a person of Jewish descent, Husserl would

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undoubtedly have been deported to a concentration camp in 1939 or 1940.

From Being and Time through many of his essays, Heidegger worked in the middle of the madness of the build-up to war and war. He concentrated his attention upon a reorganization and redefinition of Faith. Gadamer has observed that Being and Time grew out of Heidegger's encounter with the theological ferment at the University of Marburg during the 1920s when he was professor there.[2] At Marburg he befriended Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Jaspers and came into contact with Paul Tillich. In Heidegger's concept of human being as a "thrown-project" which cannot absolutely know itself, Gadamer finds a parallel with the age-old motif of faith that mortals cannot achieve full self-knowledge and understanding through their own powers alone. In Heidegger's call to authenticity and in his maintaining that a margin of the unknown surrounds every revealed truth, other theological parallels can be drawn.[3]

For Gadamer's own part, through his adherence to the message of the text, rather than anything behind the text, as the focus of interpretation, he has allied himself with the tradition of theological hermeneutics. He acknowledges this connection, as well as the company he keeps through the ensuing principle that the interpreter must respond to the message of the text through personal understanding of being.[4]

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Phenomenology, Metaphysics, and Poetry

Research for this study was first conceived without any recognition--and certainly without any expectation--that metaphysics would enter into it. It quickly surfaced in the review of poetic theory, however, and persistently refused to go away. Since this researcher first took lessons in scientific method in positivist schools, it was even less anticipated that metaphysics would appear in scientific method than that it would appear in poetics. Which is one more score by phenomenology against positivist science's naivete.

Strasser has contended that the human sciences must be metaphysical, whether it is their intentional purpose or not.[5] Not to be so is not to push questions of meaning and understanding as far as they logically go. Against a philosophical standard of judgment, it is to be trivial. Against a poetic standard of judgment, it is also.

Gadamer sees a historical progression in which classical science, crowned by metaphysics, provided an all-of-one-piece orientation to the world. Modern physical science, which abjures human meaning, provides no equivalent. As philosophy has come to revolve more and more around a philosophy of physical science, he believes that art and the human sciences, through their subject matter of human knowledge and experience regarding self, society, and world, have become the custodians of philosophy's metaphysical strain.[6]

Both phenomenology and poetry, it can be observed, have fallen into the same dilemmas. Both trace their ancestry back

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to an Age of Faith, when Reason, Art, and Science were three attentive handmaidens. Now that Faith and Science have gone separate ways, who, and how, shall Art and Reason serve?

To put it briefly, this review of phenomenology began, with the best intentions, only in order to derive a workable method to approach its subject; but it has ended up anticipating--sometimes even duplicating--many of the poets' ruminations regarding its subject. Phenomenology has already trespassed upon the domain of this study's subject regarding many issues: consciousness and world; experience of the life-world; the transformation of the world by technology; tradition; sense of time; language; and art itself. To adequately describe phenomenological positions regarding each of these issues would require another dissertation in addition to this one. This review can only take note that these positions exist.

In reviewing phenomenology as a guide to method in the human sciences, the special position which Heidegger and Gadamer have given to art has been omitted up to this point. They have described it in a different language, but their areas of overlap are evident.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger defined art as "the letting come to pass of the advent of the truth of beings."[7] It creates the openness, the clearing, where an encounter between human being and other beings (human and all other) can occur. In contrast to technology, which imposes the human will as the determinant of the mode of all beings,

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it grants other beings a place where they can reveal themselves in their own free way.

Poetry received Heidegger's closest attention. He often used it as a synonym for art (as he was doing in the definition of art just quoted). Yet, through its convergence with language, it acquired special power. Language's ability to bring beings into the open by naming and pointing,[8] if abetted by poetry's granting of freedom, comes as close as Dasein can approach to calling Being into its presence.[9]

Which was Heidegger's own aspiration. After his wartime immersion in the poetry of Holderlin, his own style of writing took a poetic turn. "The Thinker as Poet," written in 1947, is composed of fragmentary poetic images of his own. The affinities between his philosophy and poetry became a major theme of his writing. When Rudolf Carnap, logical positivist, chose Heidegger as a perfect example of the nonsense terminology of metaphysics, observing that he was as meaningless as poetry [10] ("The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language"), Heidegger did not object to the aspersion. He commented that Carnap was quite astute to have noticed that philosophy and poetry are closely related. They are not identical but they spring from the same source: namely, thinking.[11]

Like Heidegger, Gadamer describes art as revealing being.[12] In his defense of art in Truth and Method, however, his regard for Hegel appears even more overtly than his tutelage by Heidegger. His own definition of art is "the

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assembled achievements of the human mind as it has realized itself historically."[13] Because of the emphasis upon history in his definition, he is able to draw art into community with the human sciences as well as hermeneutic phenomenology on the basis that all share a common sense of truth--one which must be understood within a framework of the concept of world view. It is not absolute, but temporal truth. It does not seek to surpass Dasein's temporal, world-bound experience, but to reveal it in all its varieties.[14] Yet art (like language) does surpass the concrete world and its participants in that it focuses both artist and audience beyond themselves to this revelation of truth. The special position of great art is that artist and audience are also able to surpass themselves in the sense that they are directed beyond the simple recognition, "How true it is," to the recognition that, "It is more than true than I had known before."[15]

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The Method of this Study

The purpose of the present study has been to explore the significance accorded childhood environmental memories in the work of a few contemporary American poets who come from different backgrounds and write in different styles. Because it has asked a question within the tradition of poetry, it has had an opportunity to pursue phenomenological method in a double sense: through its own method, and through the "phenomenology" of poetry itself.

Despite the close relationship between poetry and Heidegger's form of philosophy, this research concerning poetry remains an example of psychology, not philosophy. It has not taken up the topic of the significance which environmental memory assumes in a general sense, to show how human understanding of its own being and of Being reveals itself in it. Some of the poets have; but that is the fortuitous overlap between the two phenomenologies of this study and its subject. This study's own intention is to examine the experience of one distinct group of people during one distinct period of history. It has worked through five members of the group with the expectation that their individual reflection regarding the significance which environmental memory assumes in their own work will suggest similarities, or at least prompt more questions, regarding the significance that it assumes in the world of contemporary American poetry at large. Some of the individual poets have speculated themselves regarding historical changes in the use of environmental memory

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in poetry. Through its historical boundedness, the question followed here remains a limited question, within the domain of psychology.[16]

As "empirical psychology on a phenomenological basis," this study has not followed Husserl's model of phenomenological psychology. Its goal is not exhaustive description of poets' environmental memory. It has asked an empirical question which has answers (even if many alternate ones). Considering that Husserl kept one of his students laboring over a phenomenological description of a mailbox for an entire term,[17] it is indeed good fortune that this study has had the possibility of leaving the description of environmental memory as lived-experience to the poets themselves. Since these people have more sides and angles to them than mailboxes, the task may take them many terms.

This study has attempted to translate Heidegger's and Gadamer's vision of phenomenological thinking into one possible method for psychology. Its model is not description. Its model is conversation. It is an attempt to think <u>with</u> others <u>about</u> a question which concerns their world. Unlike traditional psychology, its goal is not to get behind their world to hidden forces that are opaque to the participants themselves. Having asked a question of significance, it remains on the surface of conscious understanding. Unlike literary criticism, its object is not the text itself. The text is another form of the conversation. Environmental memory within the text is its single focus.

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This method is an attempt to reapply the Greek ideal of dialectic and dialogue as Gadamer has reconceived and reanimated it.[18] It has taken up a question and turned it about within "the communicatively understood and intelligible world,"[19] examining its different sides and angles sometimes through conversation with a text, sometimes through the direct response and reflection of spoken conversation.

In attempting to apply a hermeneutic vision of thought and communication, derivation of a method has been simplified by the synthesizing work of Joseph Kockelmans. He has summarized five essential principles, or canons, of hermeneutic phenomenology which ensure that a thing's meaning be determined through just such a dialectic of question and response between a researcher and the text or people who convey meaning.[20]

One of Kockelmans' principal endeavors has been that he has attempted to link the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology to empirical concerns.[21] According to the definition of empiricism which he emphasizes, empirical method and hermeneutic method represent different moments in all social scientists' practice of their discipline.[22] The first basis of the link between an empirical approach and hermeneutics is that they are united within the activity of any single social scientist.

There is no scientist who is not empirical, according to Kockelmans, because he uses the term primarily to refer to theorizing.[23] He notes that all data gathering in empirical method presupposes an a priori step, which is the adoption of

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an empirical theoretical attitude. It is this attitude which is the essence of an empirical approach. As in all theoria, when scientists adopt this attitude, they temporarily disengage themselves from their everyday concernful involvement in their social and physical worlds and stand back to observe them.

To keep to the model of a conversation, like a reader with a text or two individuals tête-à-tête, each scientific discipline also proceeds through a dialectic of knowledge and ignorance. Any discipline has collected only a pond of knowledge, compared to which its ignorance remains atlantic. In this tension between known and unknown, empirical theory delimits the regions within which disciplinary interchange may proceed. It frames a discipline's conversation in idealized, formalized, universal terms. In doing so, it makes many implicit assumptions regarding the domain of a discipline's topic of inquiry. Explicitly, it defines a discipline's problems and establishes its methods and terminology.[24]

Although empirical theory must be a priori in the sense that it defines the framework of the subject matter, the problems, and the terminology which all practitioners of a science share, it is not a priori in the sense of Kantian constructs which antedate experience. The scientists who formulate it already bring naive prejudgments based upon lived-experience to their definitions of their subject. Kockelmans, like Gadamer, notes that in the social sciences such naive understandings are themselves constitutive of the subject areas. Empirical theory sets forth general explanatory and

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predictive statements. Within the social sciences, these statements have meaning only in so far as they are applied to explain and predict thought, feeling, and behavior within specific social, historical situations. Interpretative methods based upon hermeneutic principles are required as a necessary complement to empirical theory in order to supply the social, historical meanings which these situations have for the participants involved.[25]

Although a method based upon hermeneutic understanding does not secure objective knowledge, in a positivist sense, it can provide objectivity in a sense appropriate to the needs of the social sciences. It is possible to trace similarities between Gadamer's ideal of dialectic and Husserl's new ideal of objectivity. Husserl sought to analyze and reconstitute the appearance of a thing based upon its perception from changing points of space and time, adding on--through phenomenological psychology--its perception according to the changing nature of the perceivers. If we accept the definition of dialectic which Strasser gives in his review of contemporary phenomenology, it sets Gadamer's and Husserl's methods into correspondence: "any orderly change in perspectives which enables human beings in search of meaning to overcome the limitations of one-sided perspectives and limited horizons in a systematic manner." Like Gadamer, Strasser has gone on to observe that, "In a community of persons dialectics necessarily materializes itself as dialogue."[26]

If this study had confined itself to one poet, it could have prepared a phenomenological description in Husserl's

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sense. It would also have had numbers enough to practice thinking, in Heidegger's sense. By working with five poets, carrying questions and ideas from one person to another, so that the initial question has been considered from their five perspectives plus the interviewer's perspective and all the assorted perspectives of tradition that have been drawn in, this research has practiced dialectic in Gadamer's sense instead. Therefore it also possesses objectivity in the sense contained in Strasser's definition.

The choice of poets to include in this study may also be termed "objective" in the same sense, since people were chosen with an eye to different environmental backgrounds, different writing styles, and different poetic traditions, to ensure that environmental memory would be examined from different perspectives. Beyond this sense, however, the choice was totally subjective. Gadamer's warning that the interpreter will be modified by the object of interpretation, so that there must be an initial openness to the change, was operative here. Both the choice of poets to concentrate upon in the review of literary tradition which composed the second chapter of this study, and the choice of contemporary poets whose work will be reviewed in the following chapter, depended upon subjective taste. They were chosen with the anticipation that the repeated reading of their work that this study would require would continue to give pleasure. Within the boundaries of this precondition, final choices evolved according to limitations of time and opportunity.

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In reflecting upon what made me welcome one person's poetry and avoid another's, a distinction made by Denise Levertov seemed effective here.[27] She has distinguished poetry that is narrow self-expression and poetry that is expression, or revelation, of the world. The first she classifies as art therapy. The second she accepts in the name of poetry itself. The first tends to be autobiographical, through direct narrative or fantasy. The second may or may not be. The first revolves around the self with a mixture of self-pity and boastfulness. Her description of the second corresponds to the words of one of the participants in this study when he was describing the experience of writing well: "Not loss of self in a sense of anomie, of depersonalization, but a loss of self in the sense of a loss of egotism" (Henry Weinfield).

Because of its autobiographical emphasis, the first kind of poetry may appear to offer the richest material for the purposes of this study. But this study's guiding question was not whether or not memories of childhood environmental experience appear, but the significance assigned to them--whether they appear overtly in the poetry or not. Questions of significance and relationship to the world are the special concern of the second kind of poetry, since they are questions which transcend narrow self-interest. So it is not inappropriate--even though it has been beyond objective control--that this work has gravitated to poetry of the second kind.

Within these qualifying limitations, "the conversation

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that this study itself is" has unfolded through the following sequence of procedures.

1. Immersion in the tradition. Within a month of completing the proposal for this study, the interview with Elizabeth Sewell that formed the catalyst for this study's first chapter took place. Allen Mandelbaum, a poet and translator who is also a professor at the City University Graduate Center, took an initial interest in this project. He arranged the interview with her with the advice that she could help me in getting started. The help in starting was an introduction to Tradition. Her frequent references to Bruno, Blake, Wordsworth, Goethe, and Rilke served as instant reminder that not all twentieth century Americans live exclusively in the twentieth century, or America--especially not if they are poets. The next three-quarters of a year was spent reading widely in the field of literary history. Although the reading concentrated upon American poetry as the second chapter was written, it included a return to European Renaissance and Romantic history to gather some sense of context.

2. A choice of contemporary poets to work with. Having come into the clearing of American poetry, I wished to consider the role that environmental memory plays today by looking at it in the work of a few contemporary poets and discussing it with them. After the first two chapters had been written, Allen Mandelbaum also began this second phase of the study by giving names of poet friends who could either

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help me directly or offer further recommendations. Before calling or writing anyone, I found their work in bookstores or libraries to determine if it was something I could look forward to reading and rereading. Allen Mandelbaum's introduction led directly to David Ignatow and Henry Weinfield. His friend Jane Cooper recommended Marie Ponsot. Henry Weinfield arranged that I work with his own friend, William Bronk. My determination that a minority poet be included led to the interview with Audre Lorde. She accepted involvement, apparently, on the basis of a letter; but I suspect that colleagues of hers whom I had spoken with in the process of researching the poetry of American minority women also played a part.

Preparation of the chapter of literary history led to a decision to concentrate upon the question of the significance given to urban environmental memories in poetry. Metaphysical and Romantic traditions which link childhood memory and adult poetry have always referred to memories of natural landscapes. No theories linking urban memory and poetry seem to exist; yet cities will soon be home for most of the world's people, including future poets. Therefore four of the poets who participated grew up in cities. William Bronk did not; but the opportunity to work with him was not one to pass up. Although he has kept a measured distance from the city, it still figures in his autobiography and in his writing. He has offered a visitor's view of it.

Another consideration was to include poetry by both men

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and women. Initially, it was also hoped to balance work by both older and younger poets. The opportunity to work with four older poets quickly presented itself, however. (David Ignatow, William Bronk, Marie Ponsot, and Audre Lorde range in age from their late 60's to their early 50's.) The amount of time that it takes to work with each person in a study such as this one precluded adding other younger poets to the company of Henry Weinfield.

The word "choice," as it can be applied to this phase of the research, is obviously double pointed. I not only chose people to work with, but they chose to contribute. Each person gave at least one long interview. Some gave two. They had to decide that giving some of their time to discuss this topic was worth their while. Each person not only shared time but also extended a friendliness and courtesy that seemed to be part of a general ethic of helpfulness. In this personal characteristic, they are probably no more representative of all poets than they are of all people.

3. Preparing for interviews. Before meeting each person, I read everything available that he or she had written. With all of New York City's bookstores and libraries as a resource, in most cases it meant everything published. Each person's poetry was supplemented by one or more of the following forms of prose: essays, literary reviews of other people's work, autobiography, published journals or letters, or interviews by other people. In some cases unpublished material was also shared.[28]

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Special attention was paid to the appearance of childhood environmental memories in the writing. Since the significance given to them depends upon adult thought and feeling, general attention was also given to the relationship to the physical world that the writing revealed, both explicitly through philosophy and implicitly through environmental imagery.

Questions that arose during this reading were noted down for the interviews. The interviews developed directly in response to the reading.

4. Interviews. Interviews were open-ended, and differed from person to person with the exception of two constant questions: the conditions under which writing began and became a way of life, which sometimes crystallize in "the moment of vocation"; and the significance given to childhood environmental memories during the writing career. An environmental history to review what childhood environments were and how they were experienced was necessary to the extent that it did not already appear in the writing. The fourth area of questioning was a person's philosophy of connection to the physical environment. Questions on this subject varied from person to person, beginning with the aspects of relationship which the writing emphasized.

People were interviewed in their homes or workplaces. I entered each interview without notes or written questions, but with copies of the poetry books so that individual poems could be referred to if they came up for discussion. Being

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saturated with the person's writing, my own questions were ready in mind; but how they would appear and become phrased depended on the course of the interview.

Although data in the form of environmental and career history were collected, the interviews differed from standard social science interviews in which data are the single quarry. The quarry was interpretation. The interpretive section of the interviews evolved through sequences of the following series of statement and counterstatement: Interpreter) A presentation of my own interpretation of how an environmental experience entered the person's writing, or how the person's philosophy influenced use of environmental experience. Poet) A reaction to the interpretation, confirming, amending, or adding on to it. Interpreter) A presentation of my understanding of the reshaped interpretation. Poet) A response to the new understanding.

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into shorthand so they could be quickly referred to. At least three hours were spent with each person.

5. Written Interpretations. The process of interpreting each person's work began at the moment that the project began. The identification and rephrasing of my own concerns in the language in which poets themselves discuss them was the first step. By the time that I was able to speak with poets in the language of their own tradition, the interpretation was already well underway. The preparation for individual interviews could be termed "variations on a general interpretation."

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The interviews were their refinements. A mental interpretation of each person's work was already in place before writing it out began. During the final written step, this understanding was checked against a last careful reading of the person's work, in the process of choosing the words that would best present the person's position.

As each section on a poet was written, a copy was mailed to the poet. Each person shared reactions by letter, telephone, or in conversation. Taking into account approval or suggested changes, the final version of this section of the study was assembled.

The best way to understand the work with individual poets is to turn to the example of the next section.

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Notes

[1]Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 1:292.

[2]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), p. 214.

[3]Ibid., pp. 208-214; idem., "The Religious Dimension in Heidegger," Transcendence and the Sacred, ed. A. M. Olson and L. S. Rouner, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion, vol. 2 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 193-207.

[4]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 295.

[5]Stephan Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), p. 201.

[6]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1981), p. 144.

[7]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Basic Writings, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 184.

[8]Ibid., p. 185.

[9]Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?", Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. and ed. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

[10]Rudolf Carnap, "The Overcoming of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," Logical Positivism, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 60-81.

[11]Reported in Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Thinking, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 1:8.

[12]Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 127.

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[13]Ibid., p. 86.

[14]Ibid., pp. 87-8.

[15]Ibid., p. 102.

[16]Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, p. 270.

[17]Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 133.

[18]Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science.

[19]Ibid., p. 159.

[20]Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Toward an Interpretative or Hermeneutic Social Science," Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 5 (1975):73-96. The five canons of hermeneutics are as follows: 1) The meaning of a phenomenon cannot be projected onto it, through preformed theories, but must be derived directly from it. 2) The meaning of a phenomenon must be expressed in maximally human terms, rather than abstractly theoretical terms. 3) The interpreter must try to achieve the greatest possible familiarity with the phenomenon. 4) Development of understanding follows the course of the hermeneutic circle, in which knowledge continuously reflects upon itself. 5) An interpreter must show the meaning of the phenomenon for his or her own situation.

[21]Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Some Reflections on the Meaning and Function of Interpretative Sociology," Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 42e Jaargang, Nummer 2 (Juni 1980):294-324. idem., "Reflections on Social Theory," Human Studies 1 (1978): 1-15; idem., "Theoretical Problems in Phenomenological Psychology," Phenomenology and the Social Sciences, ed. Maurice Natanson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 225-280.

[22]In the above articles, Kockelmans inserts a third form of scientific method, which is descriptive, into his analysis of the practice of social science. It is concerned with the discovery of the formal ontological structures which are found in phenomena, and the basic principles that govern their development over time. To shorten and simplify this methodological discussion, only the relationship between interpretative and empirical method has been considered here.

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[23]Kockelmans, "Reflections on Social Theory," pp. 4-5.

[24]Kockelmans, "Some Reflections on the Meaning and Function of Interpretative Sociology," pp. 294-6, 315.

[25]Ibid., pp. 316-320; idem., "Reflections on Social Theory," pp. 7-10.

[26]Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, pp. 256-9.

[27]Denise Levertov, The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 92-7.

[28]In addition to interviews and poetry, the following supplemental material existed for the following poets:

Published interviews:	Ignatow, Lorde, Bronk, Ponsot
Essays or books containing philosophical or political views:	Ignatow, Lorde, Bronk
Published autobiography or journals:	Ignatow, Lorde

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IN THE FIRST COUNTRY OF PLACES: ENVIRONMENTAL MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

by

LOUISE CHAWLA

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PART IV

FIVE POETS

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CHAPTER TEN

INTRODUCTION

This section will follow the subject of this study, the creative significance of childhood environmental memory, through the poetry, prose, and spoken reflection of five contemporary American poets. Each is a unique individual. For the purposes of this part of the paper, the presentation of each person will be left at that, without further commentary. Nevertheless, as each person's words follow in turn, it is hoped that they may assume more of their rightful role as poets by speaking not just for themselves, but for many; so that by the time this section closes they may have come to exemplify some of the major understandings and perplexities of our time.

Because this study was designed to reconsider Wordsworth's model of poetic development, which ascribes initial inspiration to a childhood sense of the world, a common question explored with all five people was the origins of their writing. The history of their early writing will be emphasized, in their own terms. It can be observed how environmental memory enters in these accounts, or how it has been left out.

Along with this examination of memory and inspiration, a broad chronology of each person's life and work will be provided, so that readers will have some general sense of who

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these people are as individuals and as writers. In supplying this framework, these people's own modes of self-presentation will be respected. David Ignatow, Audre Lorde, and Marie Ponsot have made many details of their personal histories public knowledge. They themselves have treated this information as a necessary background in order to understand some of their deepest themes as writers. William Bronk and Henry Weinfield are not confessional writers in this sense. These differences in personal and literary style have been maintained in the presentations given here.

As the preceding chapter has explained, there was no original intention of considering metaphysics in this study. It soon became apparent, however, that not to do so would be to turn away from what poets themselves were focusing upon. As this study progressed, the simple environmental autobiography that was first intended acquired a wider dimension of intellectual history.

As a result, sometimes the presentations may seem to diverge from the subject of memory itself. The explanation is that significance is always significance within context. The significance that environmental memory is given must fit within a person's general philosophy of relationship to the world. Therefore the presentations will first review each poet's formulation of the world and his or her relationship, as a poet, to it, in order to map the general geography within which coordinates of environmental memory may be plotted.

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Yet in making room for philosophical interpretation, the original impulse of this study, that environmental memory begins with physical experience within an actual world, has not been relinguished. The original impulse was to see how environmental memory fares, considering that it entered Metaphysical and Romantic poetry through a world that was usually flower or field soft, whereas now it must find entry through a world that is as often as not rock hard. Gadamer has argued that, "Philosophy cannot enjoy an unperturbed reign over the kingdom of interiority, neglectful of the social intrusion of science and technology."[1] This study began with the assumption that poetry cannot either--that it must reveal its own embeddedness in an environment, as well as a society, altered by it.

This study's concentration upon poets with urban childhoods derives from this original resolution. The intention was to examine environmental memory when its background differs physically, as well as historically and philosophically, from that of the Metaphysical and Romantic poets who previously defined its meaning.

At the same time, in keeping with the interplay of thought and things that environmental experience represents, urban experience leads quickly back to interiority. In attending to poets' reactions to cities, it became clear that to ask about cities is equivalent to asking about that great abstraction, civilization. The derivation of the word "civilization" from the word for "city" is not happenstance.

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A city, if there is anything that it is, is a concretization of a society's ambitions, as they rise or fall in skyscrapers or slums. In this respect, a special characteristic of the four city poets presented here needs to be noted. As poets go (and as most poets go), all of them belong to a line of political dissent. Either by active organizing and speaking or by quiet withdrawal and ironic statement, all have expressed opposition to the hierarchies of power and influence that dominate our civilization today. This coloring of their sympathies must add shading to their perception of the city. All four city poets are also dedicated teachers of minority students within the New York City college system.

The order in which the presentations have been arranged is essentially arbitrary. Because William Bronk is distinct by having grown up in the country rather than the city, his work has been placed first. Among the city poets, the only consideration has been to intersperse the words of the women and of the men.

The sources of information that are common to all of the people presented here are their poetry and interviews with them. For each person, at least one other source of information has also been drawn upon in the form of interviews with them by other people, published journals or letters, their own reviews of other people's work, autobiography, or literary, political, or philosophical essays. The amount of information available varies greatly depending upon the poets' ages and careers. This variation will be

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reflected in the length and depth that the separate presentations have been able to achieve.

Finally, in harmony with the hermeneutic principles that have already been set down, it must be recognized that although print is static, people are not. Each poem or passage of prose originated in a moment that can never be exactly repeated. The poets' reflections upon their work in interviews may be offered like authoritative summations; but at another time their reflection may not have run precisely so. Although the review of each poet may appear to present a unity, it is due to writing's craftiness that can make pattern out of patchwork. This report has attempted to follow lasting, deeply engraved themes; but the questions it asks are difficult, and the people here may approach them from different sides at different times.

"The Spies"

by William Bronk

Withhold conclusions on my last report;
I'll try to send again in two days more.
I begin to suspect some things of a different sort
from what I spoke with you about before.
But this is such an elusive country here
I wonder that we hope to get it clear.[2]

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Notes

[1]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1981), p. 161.

[2]William Bronk, Life Supports (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 14.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN
WILLIAM BRONK

For forty-five years, William Bronk has been publishing poetry and prose in little magazines and small press editions. For almost all of these years, his center of work has been his home in Hudson Falls, New York. Although his collected poems won the American Book Award in 1982, he has not pursued recognition, trusting that, "If the poems have any real vitality and stability, as long as they're around where they can be discovered they'll make their own way."[1] When time has done its sifting and carrying away, his work stands to be one of the rocks that will be left behind.

It was Henry Weinfield's suggestion that William Bronk should be included in this study. The relationship between people and the physical world is a central concern of his writing. He is not a city poet, so that including him required altering the original intention of this study to deal only with city poets. Once his writing has been seen, however, this sacrifice in consistency seemed small compared to the gain in perspective which his work brought.

It was only possible to visit Hudson Falls once for one interview, in July 1983. Bronk has avoided writing any autobiography, and only one other interview with him exists which gives any background to his work. Therefore the question "How did you begin?" took most of the time spent with

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him. The use of memory in poetry was only briefly discussed. His views on world and word and people and place have clear implications for the consideration of memory, however. Adding what he has written to what he said has given enough foundation to prepare this presentation.

This presentation has been divided into two parts. Since Bronk's philosophy regarding people and world is critically relevant to the questions taken up by this study, it will be reviewed first. His beginning as a writer and the significance of memory to him will be taken up only after this context has been established.

Bronk remains in the line of inheritance of the Transcendentalists by place as well as preoccupation. He was born in 1918 in Fort Edward, New York.[2] His mother was staying with her sister there while his father was working on an out-of-town building contract. Otherwise, Bronk's life is associated with the larger neighboring town of Hudson Falls, which a turn-of-the-century gazetteer described as "one of the principal commercial centers of the country and one of the most notable places in northern New York. . . . principally noted for its great industries."[3] Nevertheless, it has never exactly been a modern metropolis. The first colonists came to build sawmills and gristmills on the seventy foot falls at this point where the Hudson River changes course from east to south. In the nineteenth century, paper manufacturing became the dominant industry, using pulpwood floated down the river

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from the Adirondack Forest. In its building stock, in its industry (or relics of it), and in the proximity of farms, fields, an old feeder canal, and the Old Champlain Canal, the town still evokes the nineteenth century within the twentieth.

The Bronk family, who gave their name to the borough of the Bronx, have been in the Hudson Valley since the 1640s. Bronk doubts that this ancestry has made him feel more rooted to his place, since it was not a wealthy or a socially high-placed family that could raise any special pride. It must have created a closer affinity with Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman, the subjects of his first book of prose, however. Like their families, it was working-class. Bronk's grandfather was a shipwright in New Baltimore. The family was poor in a rural sort of way, which meant, at that time, that they lived like almost everybody else.

Bronk's father improved the family fortunes by going into the lumber and building materials business and investing in real estate. One sign of his success was a large Victorian house with surrounding fields and woodlands that were partially sold off as Bronk was growing up. The family moved into the house when Bronk was two. It is where he still lives.

Bronk has not had to adapt to an environment where urban violence, banality, and ugliness predominate. Certainly there are many features of Hudson Falls that might strike most people as ugly, or banal. It has been

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marred by decaying buildings, dumping, and hard use. It exhibits haphazard planning. But its man-made marks are encompassed by the region's essential gracefulness. Like Mistress Bradstreet contemplating the autumn sunset, he remains in a locality where he is assailed by landscape and light. His poem "Where It Ends" gives testimony to it (see page 238). Between her time and his, only the tone of the contemplations has changed.

There is no longer any couplet comparable to hers:

> Sure he is goodness, wisdom, glory, light,
> That hath this under world so richly dight[4]
>
> "Contemplations," lines 13-14

One could adopt the same subtitle for Bronk's work that he applied to his youthful essay on Melville: "The Ambiguities."[5] By Melville, Mistress Bradstreet's under world and other world were already beginning to come unpinned. The faithful theme of Bronk's own writing might be put in the one word "world"; but by his time there are worlds and worlds. Bronk's world is clearly an ambiguous situation.

A great unfailing source of ambiguity is the method we rely on to try to keep the world together. Besides the world, Bronk never tires of contemplating rationality. It is so intrinsic to creating worlds, and believing in them, that sometimes in his writing the words "world" and "reason," with attendant "belief," could substitute for each other.

Bronk has examined the alliance of world, reason, and belief so closely that Cid Corman, his friend and first publisher, once wrote objecting that he did not value either

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"Where It Ends"

The gentleness of the slant October light
Cancels whatever else we might have thought.
It is a hard world, empty and cruel;
but this light, oh Jesus Christ! This light!

The maple leaves, passive in front of the house,
are laved in it, abandoned, green gone.
That nothing else should matter but this light.
Gentleness, gentleness, the light.[6]

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belief or reason and that, therefore, all of Bronk's talk about them seemed like dreary irrelevancy. Bronk wrote back:

> Belief and reason. Yes, as you say, I am clearly doomed by my very approach. You know, maybe, someone who isn't? But I'm sure you do know the old story of the inveterate gambler who was warned away from a certain game on the grounds that it was crooked and replied that he knew it was crooked but that it was the only game in town. Belief and reason, God help us, are the only game in town. Who knows better than I know, how--so to speak--crooked they are. But this is what it is to be human.[7]

So, point by point, Bronk's poems analyze how belief and reason continuously construct worlds, which continuously fall apart.

One method of construction is the idea of place.

> We have the idea of homeland. As others before
> and after, or in other worlds, I have loved
> my native places as if, without them,
> I should be lost, having no real place.
> But our homes are contrivances, coverings
> for emptinesses. Our local landscapes
> acknowledge our unarrival, are brochures of desire
> and postcards from there. They tour an untraveled space.[8]
>
> "Local Landscapes," lines 13-20

Another fundamental method of construction is time.

> What they were up to there, in their own time
> is something as big and trivial as today is.
> You talk about time, but time requires a line
> from one point to another, time requires
> direction and distance. These people--. They failed
> to solve the same equations we fail to solve.
> We can think of them as being here
> in a long immediate present at no
> distance, or somewhere else in another world,
> some equivalent world, a world not reachable
> from here, no direction there to here.
> They moved in no direction. They didn't move.[9]
>
> "The Greeks, the Chinese,
> or Say the Mayans," lines 1-12

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A guiding intention is to give things form.

> . . . World, world, I am scared
> and waver in awe before the wilderness
> of raw consciousness, because it is all
> dark and formlessness: and it is real
> this passion that we feel for forms. But the forms
> are never real. Are not really there. Are not.[10]
>
> "The Arts and Death: A Fugue
> for Sidney Cox," lines 49-54

A great flaw in rationality is that its foundation, names and terms, are weak.

> How almost like the beasts, with only barks
> and cries we are, so tangent is any speech
> to all we know. What opposites are true![11]
>
> "The Bach Trombones at
> Bethlehem, Pennsylvania," lines 13-15

After place, time, names, and forms have been exposed in this way, there is not much basis left for biography or autobiography--these other exercises of rationality. Bronk finds dream experience, which gives relief from reason, a closer approximation to the way in which we actually experience the world. "I feel there is an experience there somehow or other which is confirmed also by waking experience. An intensity of feeling there and also a more free feeling when we're not concerned with distractions of our waking life."[12]

In terms of the practice of writing, the reasonable deduction from these reflections would seem to be a floating, impressionistic poetry responsive to a fluid, eternal "now," such as Olson advocated. Surrealism would seem another logical choice. But Bronk loves rationality too much to abandon it. Instead he has kept it working to the advantage

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of his poetry.

"The Changes" is a poem which shows how little is left of us, when faith in reason is taken away (page 242). Reason, observing itself, composed the poem. Since the poem cannot resolve itself in reason, it resolves itself, again, in light.

The other great element of ambiguity which Bronk finds the world created from is want, or desire. The final section of his collected poems contains a poem "Questions for Eros," with the verse:

> Eros, have I ever called your name?
> Always, in all the calling, I had thought
> to call you. Is there a name? Or have
> I always called it wrong? Wrong? Is
> there a right? What name is not diminishment?[13]

Eros, by such a name, is like the one addressed by Socrates at the banquet in The Symposium.[14] This Eros was the squalid child of Poverty and Plenty, homeless, poor, and always in distress like his mother, but enterprising, fertile at intrigue, and terrible as an enchanter and sophist, like his father . . . a philosopher at all times.

Such Eros begged--he did not boast, and he went tattered; so he could be easily overlooked. When readers and reviewers remarked that one element that Bronk's poems are short of is love, he wrote a brief rejoinder:[15]

> Some people say, "Well good,
> now you write about love."
>
> "Yes," I say, "what else,
> I always have; what else?"[17]
>
> "Yes: I Mean So OK--Love,"
> lines 1-4

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"The Changes"

How soon across these hills air
hazes green to blue, then hardens it
to purple. Ah, the changes! Cloud shadows run
the lifted contours of the ground and the earth is moved
like water, form and color changing with the light.

And there is weather here, and seasons, so that hour
by hour, month to month, it seems it could be
almost only by our own not
moving that this air-moved, light-moved, restless place
could be called, as we do call it, the same place.

Oh call it so, but rather because a change
which stills all other change is in ourselves,
where an inner weather rages and becalms, grows light
and dark, with as complete effect as though
it were everything the weather, the shifts of light.[16]

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Another accusation that reviewers have leveled against Bronk is that his poetry shows no time and place. When he was questioned about the significance of the locality of Hudson Falls to his poems, he replied that it comes into them in the same way love does. Although it appears overtly only sometimes, it is probably always there by implication, by indirection.[18]

Despite all sophistication of the ambiguities he displays, Bronk cannot be called a skeptic. Behind it all, he is certain that there is a real world. It tantalizes him directly through the place where he is. Sometimes in Bronk's writing "world" means a false fabrication of reason and belief. At other times, it means the reality which reason cannot contain.

Bronk finds desire a door in and out of the real world. In imagining shapes and possibilities of fulfillment, we leave it for invented worlds; but when desire remains unsatisfied, as it must be--being desire--the invented worlds fail us and we are left facing the real world again.[19]

In his attempts to speak of this real world, it appears as formidable as the God of medieval theology: uncreated, infinite, eternal, independent, self-existent, indestructible, ineffable. The absurdity of rationality is that it depends upon limiting this limitlessness. Buildings, plumb lines, the layout of cities, the naming of places and things--all of our geographic mapping, all of our invention of a concrete spatial world--is an effort to contain ourselves within this world without boundaries. "A kind of

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cage for the sake of feeling the bars around us."[20] Calendars, clocks, time schemes, histories and biographies are efforts to put starts and stops to this beginninglessness and endlessness. "We want the mark of time."[21]

Belief in this infinite world makes Bronk reject finite belief or reason. Any idea of the finite is a contradiction of the infinite. The finite must pretend as though the infinite did not exist; but our real experience, our real existence, in a real world, is in an infinite field.[22]

Words, being finite, presuming finiteness, can barely approach reality.

> There is a real world which does make sense.
> It is beyond our knowing or speaking but it is there.[23]
>
> "The Real World," lines 13-14

Certain abstractions like "world," "I," "others," "real," "true" come as close as we can to it; but any embellishments beyond that must make these terms falsely temporal and unrepresentative. Attributes fictionalize reality.[24]

The real world is the only true basis of identity that we have. The difficulty for us is that--infinite--it is so much beyond us that, in one sense, it has nothing to do with us. "The real surrounding is a medium more than man / can will, despoil, or even reckon with."[25] The difficulty for us is compounded because, in another sense, it has everything to do with us. It, on its side, wills, despoils, and reckons with us. One certainty of reality is that it will undo us.

> We are in the real world as nothing in ourselves,
> as a skin on that world, as a network of nerves, an
> awareness not of ourselves but of that world, even

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> as though we might be that world's awareness of itself. In this act of union, the self is shed like an exoskeleton and we lie so close against the real world our identity lies there.[26]

Despair in response to such reality runs through Bronk's writing. Against the charge that people call his poems pessimistic or dark, he has invoked the defense of truth. "I deal with despair because I feel despair. Most people feel despair but they are not prepared to deal with it except pretend that it's not there. I think it's there metaphysically, that it is not a matter of an individual predicament, it's not a matter of a human predicament. It's in the nature of reality and not to be denied."[27]

But Bronk's world is ambiguous. It is not all mocking silence and dark despair. His first published book was titled Light and Dark. For the latest book which has come out since the collected poems, a reissue of early pieces, he again chose chiaroscuro, Light in a Dark Sky. Against the book title Silence and Metaphor stands the title To Praise the Music. Music, which somehow best embodies the side of the world which is ravishment, is one of Bronk's most constant metaphors. Many of his poems have been inspired by the experience of music--the most temporal of all activities, as precisely quantified as mathematics, which must be played against silence.

One of Bronk's most memorable phrasings is that "I am the instrument of the world's passion."[28] Unable to possess any identity of any consequence for himself, he still lives

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in the world with feeling. His poetry is filled with response to the real physical world that surrounds him. Love may be a terrible power that sweeps him up one moment and gives way to despair the next, but sometimes it comes like simple love. Consider one more colloquoy between his reason and the world, called "The Lover as Not the Loved" (page 247).

When Bronk was asked if he thought of this reality beyond fictions as sacred, he answered, "Oh, of course, sacramental." When he was asked if it was a constant presence or something known momentarily, he said, "I feel it in varying intensities, the way you feel anything." He compared it to personal relationships, which even at their closest are sometimes matters of indifference.

> And I suppose the same thing is true of my sense of that--yes, it's constant, but that doesn't mean but that there are times when I am hardly aware of it, in which I forget it and am almost indifferent to it. But otherwise, yes, it's constant. In the course of time I am more frequently or more constantly aware of that. And also feel more and more able to speak of it directly, in the kinds of terms which we are likely to shy away from and be embarrassed by, particularly as what becomes for this civilization a more and more secular world becomes less and less so for me.[29]

* * * * * *

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"The Lover as Not the Loved"

What am I then, because in a sense, I am
though clearly not? Compared to what there is,
there could never be comparison because
I am wholly absorbed in it, am nothing more.

Something other though, something apart.
A feeling instrument. How else?
Tonight, in April, I stood on the bridge by the T*
in the late, faint light, worshipping.[30]

---

*The "T" is the point of juncture between the Old Champlain Canal and a feeder canal.

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Despite some changes in emphasis, all of these conceptions regarding world and worlds have been evident since Bronk's earliest published poetry and prose. He would allow that the sense of the world that his writing has developed, the sense of an incommunicable reality that figures so prominently in it, probably went back to childhood in some form, although he didn't consciously put it into ideas until he was around twenty.[31] Although Bronk's poems repeatedly present the waiver that to write any personal history would make more of a story than a reality that is his, for people who find poetry enriched by such fiction, this part of the paper will attempt to follow the beginning of his writing, and the significance of memory and place to it.

Feeling "different," which included some measure of feeling helplessly separate, was part of childhood. As he explained, "I was not a very boyish boy, and I was never a capable athlete at all. Neither a skillful nor a willing fighter."[32] He was never friendless for that reason; but an understanding that every life is essentially alone, regardless of circumstances, probably began then. Besides having river, canals, woods, fields, and old outbuildings where he could play, he also read a great deal. His mother and two older sisters set an example for it.

Bronk's apprenticeship in poetry began at fifteen. When he was that age a new English teacher joined the high school faculty. She was a poetry enthusiast and expected everybody in her class to write it. Simon and Schuster

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were publishing a series called "Pamphlet Poets," which were little chapbooks of individual poets' selected verse. Each student was to take an author and begin learning to write through imitation. Bronk's assignment was Conrad Aiken. Although he had been reading poetry since childhood, it was the first time that he read it with any seriousness. He also went through the first step that he believes any artist in any discipline must go through, of admiring someone and feeling, "I could do that too." The apprenticeship made a greater impression than he first realized. Years later, after he had begun publishing his own work in his own voice, he came upon the chapbook in the house. Looking it over he was struck, "'Oh my God! This is where I got this, and that is where I got this,' and so on."[33] The moral of the story is that, whatever else early memory may contribute to poetry, other people's poetry is one donation.

By the age of fifteen, feeling odd and different in Hudson Falls left him also feeling vulnerable and unprotected. It had become a very confining community. The point when he would go from feeling odd and different to being able to say, "Now I know I'm odd and different, so I don't give a damn"[34]--when the town would no longer seem confining--was still years ahead. Going off to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, to another small town but one with an intellectual atmosphere, brought tremendous release and freedom. It gave him greater freedom to be himself.

It also gave him freedom to develop his own voice

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as a poet. His freshman and sophomore English teacher was Sidney Cox. Cox had nonconformist principles when it came to teaching writing. "He was not interested in anything that sounded like anybody else. He wanted you to write something of your own."[35] . . . "You were allowed to say anything in any way you wanted as long as you really meant it."[36] Participation in the class led to an invitation to the open house that Cox held every Sunday night, when he gathered students that he was interested in and other congenial intellectuals. Once extended, it was a standing invitation. In his senior year, Bronk lived on the third floor of the Coxes' house, which they let out to students.

Bronk continued to work with Cox independently throughout his junior and senior years. After he left Dartmouth he continued to send him writing. He was so much influenced by him during this critical period that it is impossible for him to separate himself as a writer from him. "I grew up with Sidney, and what would have happened without him I don't know."[37]

It was a friendship in which Bronk could fortify his own differences. Cox usually reacted negatively; but his insistence on plain speaking and honesty allowed leeway. "Even when we were in disagreement it was a very close disagreement. It was a very intimate disagreement. It was a disagreement in reference to him. I think disagreements can sometimes be as close as agreements can be."[38]

Under Cox's influence, Bronk developed an idiom so

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plain spoken that it might pass for everyday prose instead of poetry, were it not for stanzaic line arrangement and a reserved music. He has a particular genius for putting banal words and phrases of a-hundred-times-a-day use in positions where they pivot with multiple meanings, sometimes diametrically opposed, yet all appropriate. Sometimes Stevens' maxim that, "Nota: his soil is man's intelligence"[39] seems to the point, when Bronk betrays relationship to the apocryphal Yankee farmer. For example, Bronk's version of the world that "Also the Golden Age was a dark time / if there was one"[40] is a sophisticated variant of the farmer's version that, "Times ain't what they used to be, and they never were."

After a struggle to decide whether to major in zoology or English as an undergraduate, Bronk settled on English. He left Dartmouth in 1938 for graduate studies in English at Harvard. After Cox's humanism, Harvard at that time came as a shock. Bronk found it a deadly mechanical atmosphere without any artistic feeling. In the heyday of New Criticism, "The graduate work in English was conducted on a kind of semi-scientific basis that way as though you were studying chemistry. I couldn't do it. I was horrified by the whole thing."[41]

The shock was not unproductive, however. For the second semester, Bronk conceived of an independent studies project based upon the ideas of Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville, which would minimize meetings with professors.

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Although he abruptly dropped out of Harvard at the end of the first semester, the project, once conceived, grew. He worked on it when he moved to Morton Street in Greenwich Village, as he tried unsuccessfully to get a job in the city and establish himself there. After he returned to Hudson Falls, the writing continued until he was drafted in 1941. By then, it was completed except for the last chapter on Melville, which covers Billy Budd. Bronk knew what he wanted to say, but he still lacked the age and maturity to say it with necessary authority. After five years in the army, his first resolution when he returned to civilian life was to complete the chapter. The manuscript lay unpublished for thirty-four years. In 1980 it appeared as The Brother in Elysium.

Written primarily when Bronk was between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-three, The Brother in Elysium already contains many of the ideas that his later work developed. Bronk freely admits that he used these three Transcendentalists' words to say things that he wanted to say himself. "You could say that I had borrowed a lot from Thoreau and Whitman and Melville or you could say I recognized some of my own feelings in all three of those people. And I wouldn't know where to make that distinction."[42] The density of the meaning of silence for Thoreau, of whiteness for Melville, were incorporated into the meaning of "the real world" for Bronk--"the source of all potentialities."[43]

Bronk's army assignments were not the hardest:

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Bermuda, followed by Tampa, Virginia Beach, and finally Governor's Island, New York. His duty on Governor's Island was to write a history of the Eastern Defense Command that he belonged to. It was a nine to five office job that left free time to walk the city. Like Stevens, another country product, Bronk could say of himself, "I walk through city streets as once through woods."[44] One urban magnet was Central Park.

When Bronk left the army in 1945, he taught English for one year at Union College in Schenectady. His father had died in 1941, and the family assets were tied up in the business that he had started. After teaching for one year and finishing The Brother in Elysium, Bronk decided to take over the family business temporarily until he could find a full-time manager. This temporary job lasted some thirty years. He also returned to his childhood home, where he has lived, unmarried, from this time up to the present.

Bronk had resolved against teaching as a career. He loved the one year trial of it but he doubted that he would ever have written a word if he had continued at it. By the end of a day of teaching, he had given out everything that would otherwise have been turned into poetry. As he tries to reconstruct it now, when he returned to Hudson Falls, his probable expectation was that he would soon be such a success as a writer that he wouldn't need to do anything else except write. His observation regarding that ambition is simply, "But we learn."[45] For years he considered running the

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business "temporary"; it imperceptibly slipped into an accepted occupation.

It was not such bad fortune. Business drew on a different set of resources and energies, so that he came home at the end of a day ready for writing. He had begun to publish in the Dartmouth literary magazine. After he was introduced to the poetry editor of The New Yorker in the late forties, he sent him several poems, but only one was ever accepted. Poetry published a poem in 1955. In the early fifties, his old Dartmouth friend Samuel French Morse recommended his work to Robert Creeley, who recommended it to Cid Corman, who began to publish it regularly in his magazine Origins. Corman gathered these poems into Bronk's first published book, Light and Dark. George Oppen, who had been following Bronk's work in Origins, offered to have his sister pick up the publishing, which resulted in The World, The Worldless in 1964. Since then, books of poetry and prose have come out steadily in beautiful small press editions issued by Jim Weil at The Elizabeth Press.[46]

In 1946, when Wallace Stevens' book Parts of a World came out, Bronk sent away for all of his work. It was the first time that he had paid attention to Stevens. "I was overwhelmed by Stevens to the extent that sometime after that I had to stop reading him because I couldn't hear any other voice, or any other way of saying things other than Stevens' way." He particularly liked Stevens' very specific, very objective little poems, as in "The Poems of

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Our Climate," and he believes that that hardness of visual impression turned up in his own poetry for a while. Stevens' example also probably encouraged him to deal with abstraction in poetry.[48]

Although the idea of a fictive world is important to Stevens, Bronk has no conscious recollection of having derived his own version of it from him. Bronk considers it part of the common intellectual property of our time, which could have entered his own mind from many sources. When it was forcefully borne in upon him, it was not through books, but through place. A few years after reading Stevens, his interest in Pre-Columbian civilizations led him twice to South America and three or four times to Central America to visit ruins there. Standing in the middle of cities where "Now trees make up / assemblies and crowd in the wide plazas,"[49] the double vision of seeing the present against a backdrop of infinity was learned unforgettably. The somehow always present presence of art also found a symbol in the stone monuments there. Essays from his travel were collected in the book The New World.

Bronk works untheoretically, without any conscious prescription regarding style or theme. He depends upon ear, and upon the rule that, as he puts it, "I chew the cud all the time."[50] In the process, poems frequently take him by surprise. He writes them down as they come, hardly revising at all.[51] Charges by critics that his poetry lacks time and place or that his diction is not up to date haven't bothered

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him. He purposely avoids theory of such sort since he believes that it brings a self-consciousness that a poet shouldn't have. For himself, "It is this poem and it is that poem. And how it all ties together, I wouldn't know. And I think it is not well for a writer to know things like that. I think we shouldn't be self-conscious about our writing. We shouldn't write about ourselves. We should write about . . . well, you say it's about the world, and a lot of people wouldn't feel that the world I write about is their world, but I suppose it is my world I write about."[52]

It is a method that conforms to his conception of fictional worlds that deny reality and a real world beyond them and his belief that, "Any serious statement, artistic or not, is about the world beyond."[53] It is also in harmony with his phrase that "I am the instrument of the world's passion" (see page 245). In an earlier age, such a method of composition might have been called Dionysian, or in another age, grace. But such a gift has its price. When Bronk was asked when he knew that writing poetry was something that he was going to be doing for the rest of his life, he answered, "I have never known that. I don't know that now. I have the experience almost always with any poem that when a poem is written you feel, 'This is it.' And you're depleted, you don't have another poem in you. That depletion will be permanent. . . . And sometimes nothing comes for a long time, and it's a difficult period."[54]

Aside from his giving memory in a general sense total

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recognition as everything we are, our whole basis of functioning as human beings, specific memories do not serve as conscious points of inspiration and structure in Bronk's poetry. He is not aware of ever making conscious use of early memory. Unconsciously, however, memories of his sense of the world going back to childhood are probably swept in through mémoire involuntaire, in Proust's sense. He believes that memory in this form may be involved in some experiences that have inspired poems. In Bronk's own paraphrase of the significance which Proust attached to sensory experiences that revivify a whole flood of past sensations, "Our only experience of reality is actually through the instrumentality of memory. When we are actively experiencing something it doesn't seem real to us. It is only as we later recall it that it achieves reality. . . . At least that our experience is stronger in memory than it was at the time of the objective experience."[55] This definition of memory could be equally well turned to a definition of art--which Proust did. After years of being unable to get past the first few pages of Remembrance of Things Past, Bronk abruptly rediscovered it, and it became one of his great reading experiences, which he has read and reread. For him, it has been one of the very few great books.

For Bronk, however, there is no firm framework in which visiting memories can lodge themselves. In "Out of Context,"[56] memory is compared to familiar phrases of music.

> The few phrases of music that I heard
> were music I had heard so often they were lost

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> with hearing--familiar sounds, but what they were part of, what they were called, possessed and deserted me.

After the poem asks "What of our days the same way?" it follows ineffectual efforts to place the days' repeated phrases. It concludes:

> . . . The context that the music of our days seems barely out of is one it was never in.

Although Bronk's poems contain the characters of Our Lady, the Baby, Joseph the foster father, and the Three Wise Men,[57] his philosophy makes no room for epiphanies, in terms of crystallized moments cherished intact. Their place is the past; and his sense of the present makes no time for the past.

Yet since Bronk remains where he has been since birth, his surroundings must everywhere recall the past. One enduring feature of his life which has become an enduring metaphor in his poetry is the house. Like "world," it incites ambivalence. An early poem, "Home Address,"[58] expresses most of his childhood feelings for it: a big house, beyond their powers of control, that he and his sisters would not enter when they came home from school on a winter afternoon until there was someone else inside with a light on. To him now, it functions at once as a comfortable place in which to feel "at home" and as a confinement and disability of the sort that made Thoreau feel sorry for a neighbor he passed on the road pushing his house and barn in front of him.[59] "My House New-Painted" expresses the more positive angles of world making. In "The Strong Room of the House,"

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one of Bronk's most terrifying poems, the early menace triumphs and the reality behind world making asserts itself. The burden of the house has increased as it deteriorates at the same time that Bronk finds that he has less and less patience to devote care to it.

Re-experience in a larger sense is central to Bronk's conception of poetry. In response to the observation that many of the ideas that he has developed are already expressed in the very early work, The Brother in Elysium, Bronk added that even today, when he thinks he has come up with a new idea, on closer examination it often reveals itself as another idea that first came to him when he was about twenty. He defended himself, however, on the basis that there is a limited store of ideas in the world, and that each person works with a limited number of these. He disbars the possibility of original ideas--gimmicks, rearrangements, yes, that are sometimes mistaken for ideas. "But if the idea is really valid and has any real strength then it's not new."[60] We are left to re-experience what countless ages of past people have experienced in our own terms and with our own emotions. The only liberty possible is to express it freshly. Memory, or commemoration, in this universal sense can double as a second definition of art.

For many years, feeling awash in the quiet corner of Hudson Falls, unrecognized by the influential publishers and reviewers of the poetry industry, Bronk suffered obscurity painfully. The triviality that he saw go acclaimed often

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shocked him. In time, he came to recognize that his failure to achieve early fame was one of the fairest fortunes of his career. As he observed the work of other artists weaken under the self-consciousness, and perhaps also the slackening of effort, that go with success, he came to value being left to his own integrity.

Keeping geographically distant from the hum and throb of the New York literary world was never a source of conflict. Even when disregard chafed him, he anticipated that he would feel even more lost in the city than he did in his native town. Part of the climate of Hudson Falls, anyway, has been that the city is distant but not inaccessible. Bronk has been able to live in Hudson Falls by free choice, knowing that the city is just a train ride down the river, available whenever he wishes. He has taken advantage of it not only for plays, concerts, museums, and friendships, but also to walk its streets in impunity by both day and night until the recent rise in crime and cautiousness. He makes greater use of its offerings than many of its residents.

He has observed it with a bit of an archaeologist's eye--"a city the world will always remember / as one remembers Babylon or Thebes."[60] One of his great joys is to walk streets that still harbor exhibits of old architecture. Another is to walk along one of the avenues and stop at every cross street and look east and then look west and see the difference in the light from block to block and from one direction to the other. One of his poems tells about such

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a visitor's view:

> Conceded, that all the clocks tell local time;
> conceded, that "here" is anywhere we bound
> and fill a space; conceded, we make a world:
> is something caught there, contained there,
> something real, something which we can sense?
> Once in a city blocked and filled, I saw
> the light lie in the deep chasm of a street,
> palpable and blue, as though it had drifted in
> from say, the sea, a purity of space.[62]
>
> "Metonymy as an Approach to a
> Real World," lines 10-18

This street makes good metaphor, or metonym, for Bronk's own work. Many writers have come up against the chasm, the abyss. Most of them have ranted and railed at it. Bronk's abyss wells up with gentle light.

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Notes

[1]William Bronk, "A Conversation with William Bronk," Credences 1(3) (May 1976):12.

[2]The description of Bronk's birth and his family background on this page and the following page is taken from a personal interview with him in July 1983.

[3]William L. Stone, Washington County, New York: Its History at the Close of the Nineteenth Century (n.p.: New York History Co., 1901), p. 380.

[4]Anne Bradstreet, "Contemplations," The Works of Ann Bradstreet, ed. J. Hensley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 205.

[5]William Bronk, The Brother in Elysium (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Elizabeth Press, 1980).

[6]William Bronk, Life Supports (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 171.

[7]William Bronk to Cid Corman, 18 January 1967, quoted in Cid Corman, William Bronk (Carrboro, N.C.: Truck Press, 1976), pp. 36-37.

[8]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 218.

[9]Ibid., p. 76.

[10]Ibid., p. 35.

[11]Ibid., p. 32.

[12]Bronk, Credences, p. 26.

[13]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 214.

[14]Plato, Five Great Dialogues, trans. B. Jowett (Roslyn, N.Y.: Walter J. Black, 1942), p. 194.

[15]Bronk, Credences, p. 27.

[16]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 33.

[17]Ibid., p. 121.

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[18]Bronk, Credences, p. 30.

[19]William Bronk, "Desire and Denial," A Partial Glossary (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Elizabeth Press, 1974), n.p.

[20]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 39.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Bronk, Credences, p. 20.

[23]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 145.

[24]Bronk, Credences, p. 19.

[25]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 112.

[26]William Bronk, The New World (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Elizabeth Press, 1974), p. 55.

[27]Bronk, Credences, p. 22.

[28]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 78.

[29]Bronk, Credences, p. 24.

[30]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 167.

[31]This statement and all biographical information and self-evaluation which follow are based upon a personal interview with William Bronk in July 1983, except for the few instances when a different source is cited. This presentation keeps to Bronk's own wording as closely as possible.

[32]William Bronk, personal interview, July 1983.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Bronk, Credences, p. 13.

[37]Bronk, personal interview.

[38]Ibid.

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[39]Wallace Stevens, "The Comedian as the Letter C," ed. H. Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 66.

[40]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 154.

[41]Bronk, personal interview.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 18.

[45]Bronk, personal interview.

[46]This history of Bronk's first publishing is taken from Credences, pp. 9-12.

[47]Bronk, Credences, p. 15.

[48]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[49]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 39.

[50]Bronk, Credences, p. 32.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Bronk, personal interview.

[53]Bronk, Credences, p. 25.

[54]Bronk, personal interview.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 86.

[57]William Bronk, "Virgin and Child with Music and Numbers," "Poem for the Nineteenth of March, St. Joseph's Day," Life Supports, pp. 52-53, 216; Idem, "Having come a Long Way, the Wise Men Wait a Minute," Light in a Dark Sky (Concord, N.H.: William B. Ewert, Publisher, 1982), n.p.

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[58]The poems about the house that are referred to in this paragraph are found in Life Supports, pp. 16, 46-47, and 221-222.

[59]The evaluations of the metaphor of the house are Bronk's own, from the personal interview with him in July 1983.

[60]Bronk, personal interview.

[61]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 18.

[62]Ibid., p. 44.

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CHAPTER TWELVE
DAVID IGNATOW

There is more material available to trace the course of thought and feeling in David Ignatow's work than there is for any other writer in this study. In addition to ten books of poetry and two interviews on the occasion of this research, there is the record of The Notebooks, journal selections which cover the period 1934 to 1971, and Open Between Us, a 1980 compilation of essays and interviews. Some more recent essays and notebook excerpts have also been used. Generally recognized to constitute a major contribution to contemporary American poetry, his work has been widely acclaimed and widely distributed.

David Ignatow was interviewed shortly after the section of this study which reviews American poets' philosophies of relationship to the physical world had been written, in April 1983. He gave time for the interviews in his office at York College. Because it was at the outset of this phase of the work, these interviews tended to follow a preset, mental list of questions regarding environmental experience and the development of his career. They did not concentrate upon the questions which his writing itself raised, with the flexibility of conversation which later interviews achieved. They served, however, as a guide pointing the way into his published work.

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Ignatow has reviewed his childhood sense of the world at many different points in his career, which now covers a span of fifty years. Therefore it has not only been possible to consider environmental memory with him at the present time, but to observe his own changing reevaluations of it.

Ignatow's notebooks afford a rare opportunity to follow spontaneous day-to-day reflection regarding the issues of this topic. Therefore they have been drawn upon liberally in preparing this presentation. They reveal one of the characteristics of memory: that it wavers regarding both dates of reference and moods of reference. They also reveal one of the particular characteristics of this writer: an acceptance of unresolvable paradox as the tissue of human life, and a corresponding toleration of shifting, sometimes directly conflicting, conclusions.

By the first notebook entry in 1934, Ignatow had already had a short story placed on the Honor List in the 1933 annual collection, The Best American Short Stories, and he was committed to the vocation of a writer. He traces the roots of his writing primarily to his father. Ignatow was born in 1914 in Brooklyn to first generation Jewish immigrants. His mother was the daughter of an Austro-Hungarian woodsman. His father, Russian, was apprenticed to a Kiev bookbinder at the age of twelve. When the father completed his apprenticeship, he secured work at a Greek Orthodox monastery. In addition to religious books, the monks collected the Russian classics (presumably to keep

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up with the opposition). Besides binding them, the father read them. When he fled Russia in advance of the threat of pogroms, he brought his fondness for the stories with him. Later, in the United States, when he would rest in his easy chair after work in the evening, his son learned how to prompt him into retelling Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Dostoyevsky from memory. They made the most enthralling account the child had ever heard, and they had clearly won his father's deepest admiration. The child quietly resolved that he would become a writer too.[1]

Unfortunately, when the son held to his ambition as a young man, the father's position changed from indirect encouragement to resistance to the death. He expected his son to work for him in his pamphlet binding sweatshop. After the son dropped out of Brooklyn College when an English teacher made an anti-Semitic remark in the first semester, the only job options open to him were his father's shop or similar menial slots. Thirty years of Ignatow's career were spent alternating between work in the bindery and forays for relief in other jobs: night clerk for the New York Sanitation Department, apprentice shipyard handyman, hospital admitting clerk, shipping clerk in the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, messenger.[2] One thing he learned was that one such job was as bad as another.

> I hate the whole fucking shop, its noise, its arguments, its problems, its jealousies and intrigues. I hate the mood of the people, cynical, hard and callous, like the working of a machine. I hate the attitude of the boss, carping and anxious for his money, a sickness, once a game, now a disease eating

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> away life: emptiness growing like spoor over the body. Soon, soon it will reach out for the heart and the brain and Pouf! you see transfigured into stone what once was a breathing man. . . .
>
> My hatred of the shop--because of its disintegrating pressure upon the personality. Stand for one hour at a machine banding folders and you will feel the pounding motors and clack of the folding machine going through you as if to pull you apart. You are caught there at the machine, incapable of moving away from it without losing your job. A person likes to move around a bit after an hour of standing still, but no, you stand there pulling the folded brochures out of the machine and feeling the motors pounding at you. Whatever protest has risen up in you against this regimentation falls down under the pounding and you like an automaton yourself now move from machine to packing table as in a dream, a dream of the dead. . . .
>
> My hatred of the shop is in the grasping money-madness it perpetuates, as if nothing in the world could replace it with the fine and the good. Through the whole shop goes the current of hatred and recrimination, while the machines pound and money, money, money sounds even in the piercing phone ring, hysterical.[3]

Ignatow's feelings for New York City, like his personal ambitions, underwent a parallel transition from buoyancy to frustration and disillusion. The scraps of childhood memories that appear in his writing reveal a natural childish mixture of vulnerability and assurance. In a few, the vulnerability is recaptured; but ease and security predominate.

One of his earliest written memories is a residue of vague sensations that, fifty years later, crystallized into a foreboding vignette. In retrospect, it bridges childhood innocence and adult experience. As a small child, Ignatow lived in Borough Park, Brooklyn, a quiet residential neighborhood. At that time, his father ran a butcher shop. An incident that remained "just as I remember it" was the dis-

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covery of a still small black bird in the snow while he went about his daily after-school routine of delivering meat and chicken and collecting orders for the next day. The routine mingled the friendliness of customers when they opened their doors to him, his father's satisfaction, and fear when his walk took him past a cemetery after dark. "The night and the silence would lead me to think of intangible, unknown things. . . . the mysterious, the something that was always behind me and yet threatened me."[4] He put the bird in his pocket with the hope that warmth might revive it. When the round of deliveries was finished, and the bird was still dead, he solemnly dug a grave and buried it. By the time the memory was written down fifty years later, the feelings it evoked had acquired a familiar meaning.

By his own childhood interpretation, however, the world was a positive presence. "This is how I felt as a child: / I was high on self-delight / at the touch of the mild sun and breeze."[5] The most common elements in his earliest reminiscences are the nature that still fills Brooklyn's streets: sun, wind, and trees. The most common response was at-oneness with a world that seemed animated and benevolent.

> These were among my first thoughts on earth: I had been placed here as some kind of reward, given the gift of being what I was, and I loved my bike, praising it for moving at the command of my pedaling, and steering in the right direction at my touch. The sidewalk lay flat and still, expecting the bike. It, too, cooperated with the powers that be, and no one stood in the bike's path to topple me over. The wind upon my face was like the hand of approval. . . .[6]
>
> "Growing Up," lines 1-8

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The uneasiness inherent in the memory of the cemetery at night and the dead bird was overridden by a more general childhood sense of the world. "In the beginning we think it belongs to us and we belong to it eternally. As children, we feel an immortality clinging to everything including ourselves. . . ."[7]

When Ignatow was nine, his father gave up the butcher shop as a bad business venture and resumed his original trade of bookbinding.[8] The family moved into a nearby neighborhood that turned out to be ruled by bullying gangs. Here where the boy was free to do as he pleased after school, but confined to the solitariness of home, reading became important. A neighborhood Talmud Torah also offered solace. He missed it sorely when the family moved again and he had to leave it behind.

Within two years, the father bought a permanent two-family home in a new development about two miles away in the Park West section of Brooklyn. Most of Ignatow's recorded memories of school, trees, and play in the street belong to this final peaceful period of childhood.

Overarching his childhood feeling for the world was an essential security embodied in his mother. Later, when he was an adult under pressures extreme enough to have driven him near madness, memory of his mother's influence remained a point of calm that could hold everything together.

> I am trying to find out what memories, what experience in the past hold me to life. Not too much hardship. A memory of ease in my childhood. Going to the library, being able to sit at a win-

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> dow and read, being free to leave and enter the house at will. What made me believe life was worth living? My mother's largeness. She wore a corset that reached from her breasts to her thighs. My mother's largeness felt protection for me against harm. I never saw it in violent motion and I imagined all was well.[9]

When Ignatow was told Erik Erikson's theory that the first crisis in human development is whether an infant will absorb a sense of basic trust or basic mistrust, which extends from its caretakers to its expectations of the world, he was sympathetic and receptive. The absolute security that his mother represented overflowed across his surroundings.

In its own right, however, the city that Ignatow first came to know lived up to these expectations. Except for the two years when he stayed indoors to avoid street gangs, it spread out free of fear, open for him to go wherever he pleased, Brooklyn in his childhood was a borough of Gemütlichkeit, of geniality.[10]

When Ignatow came upon selections from Leaves of Grass in a junior high school English anthology, he immediately knew he was on to something. Here was veracity. He sought out the full book and read it through. Whitman remains the great comrade/protagonist that Ignatow's reflections continue to circle around.[11]

The sun, the wind, the trees, the friendly streets of Brooklyn may have offered enough material for Ignatow to recognize his known world in Whitman. But the expanding world that beckoned him was across the river, the New York. Brooklyn was fine for a child. As an adolescent, he

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chafed at it. He had begun to write, secretly, privately, but determinedly. It separated him from his companions.[12]

An image from the close of childhood came to epitomize the situation he found himself in.

> The memory of a dank, shadowy school gym on a hot summer day. I am standing at the entrance looking in, having walked from my house one half mile away in search of friends or of something to do. The smell discouraged me but worse was the fact that no one was present, and I walked back, first beginning to sense being alone and having nothing to do but feel my loneliness. . . . I suddenly saw that empty dank-smelling shadowy gym as a metaphor of my existence, even of me as a person. I became identified in my mind with that image, and I carried it around with me silently and often sub-consciously as the kind of person I was.[13]

He still enjoyed sports and sitting on stoops chatting with friends about baseball teams and local quarrels and rivalries, but "I knew my real self was elsewhere."[14]

A parallel conflict was developing between the two worlds of school preachment and family practice. In school, teachers taught that everyone has an inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, and that it is not to be found in money, clothing, and food alone, but in the freedom of the spirit. Whitman's America. At home in the evening, when Ignatow was presumed to be occupied with homework, he soaked in his parents' America. His father unburdened to his mother the tense drama of the family business, blow by blow, across the kitchen table. School ideas set him apart from his parents.[15]

At eighteen, after he dropped out of Brooklyn College, Ignatow worked in his father's bindery for two years. The

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short story award that he won in 1933 led to an offer to serve as a reporter for the WPA Newspaper Project and to research the literature of cooperative movements. He quit the bindery and his parents' home and moved away to the East Village. He was going to become rich and famous as a writer and find true friends whom he could talk writing over with. For five years, WPA work made it possible to concentrate upon writing and editing and escape grinding labor.[16]

Ignatow initially intended to make his fortune as a novelist and short story writer. After The Saturday Evening Post rejected a story with the observation that it sounded like poetry more than prose, he began to try his hand at poetry. His first poems, unpublished, were in the style of Keats.[17]

Fame didn't fall into his lap. A compensating success, however, was marriage to Rose Graubert, an artist, who became a lifelong reader, critic, and friend to discuss art with as well as his wife.

The image of the gym persisted. First impressions of Manhattan's crowds and movement inspired buoyancy and excitement. It was still Whitman's world. Yet he could not feel part of this world either. He wrote bitter poems, consoling himself that they would lead to "a mosaic of work that would include sweetness and gentleness and compassion for everyone,"[18] like Whitman.

> This was not exactly what Whitman was about, but it served my purposes then, to write so that I could embrace all of life rather than dwell upon my inner

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> sadness and shadow, which, anyway, was so easily refuted by the outward world of sunshine, trees, running water, brilliant skies, laughing men and women arm in arm. I believed in these outer things. They puzzled me in my sadness. I enjoyed them and pursued them for myself also but never quite succeeded in feeling them for myself personally, as I believed others felt it for themselves.[19]

When WPA work ended and he began to move from one unskilled job to another seeking freedom, only to find each become a burden and a threat to his life as a writer, Ignatow began to realize that he was up against a different order of reality, and that the city would never match his expectations. Everyone who bossed and jostled him at work and in the streets was also in search of freedom and happiness, but their pursuit of it endangered his, and they had set about it from a different set of premises. Not only that, but Ignatow began to suspect that despite their apparent success, others were experiencing sadness and a sense of deprivation also. The natural sequel to his childhood sense of the world revealed itself. "As children we feel an immortality clinging to everything including ourselves, but we are here on earth at the price of being alive. We pay for being alive by work and sweat and tears and patience and endurance, with never a permanent sense of relaxing into security."[20]

When, desperate, Ignatow returned to work in Brooklyn in his father's shop, he observed life there with a new clarity. It was Whitman's world turned upside down, and there was poetry in the subject.[21] "Communion" describes his newly discovered America (page 276).

By the time Ignatow wrote "Communion" in the 1950s,

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"Communion"

Let us be friends, said Walt,
and buildings sprang up
quick as corn and people
were born into them, stock
brokers, admen, lawyers and doctors
and they contended

among themselves

that they might know

each other.

Let us be friends, said Walt.
We are one and occasionally two
of which the one is made
and cemeteries were laid out
miles in all directions
to fill the plots with the old
and young, dead of murder, disease,
rape, hatred, heartbreak and insanity
to make way for the new
and the cemeteries spread over the land
their white scab monuments.

Let us be friends, said Walt, and the graves
were opened and coffins laid on top
of one another for lack of space.
It was then the gravediggers slit
their throats, being alone in the world,
not a friend to bury.[22]

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he had gone far from the tentative poetry that marked his tentative beginning as a writer. The most important influence upon the change was William Carlos Williams. Friends had repeatedly told him that Williams was a poet to watch. When Ignatow first read him, in the 1920s after the publication of Spring and All, he found him tasteless. It didn't sound as poetry should, like Keats, Shelley, and Shakespeare, or like Whitman or the Bible. It was flat and ordinary like prose. He was flabbergasted that this man had won a reputation. After years of disillusionment, when Ignatow picked him up again, he understood that Williams had discovered the necessary style for the necessary subject.

> I learned soon enough as I began working in industry and commerce in New York City that this was the contemporary subject. There was no way around it. And if you were going to write about things honestly and what was there you had to write about the city and about the plainness and the ordinariness and the tensions, and you had to develop a style which gave the quality of the city. And I went back to Williams, and I saw he had captured it, he had captured all that, and that was contemporary. So I took my courage in my hands and I wrote straight from the facts.[23]

Ignatow sent Williams a copy of his first published book, Poems (1948). Williams wrote Ignatow two ecstatic letters and then gave the book a rave review in the Sunday New York Times. Ignatow's ecstasy was more than a match. His dedication to being a poet had been confirmed. Williams became a close friend, who pushed Ignatow up on stage when he was invited to give poetry readings himself, who offered criticism and encouragement.[24]

The self-identity Ignatow came into was not just poet,

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but poet of the city. He had written city poems before, but in an exalted style imitative of Keats or Shelley, at odds with their subject. Under Williams' influence he learned how to write about the city so that people would re-experience it. "Which means you have to use the flat line, you have to be direct, and you have to use a certain amount of stress and you have to be specific--the particulars must be very exact and very true. You can't make up metaphors when you're dealing with the city. The city itself is a huge metaphor, and you have to write about it exactly as it is."[25]

The city had made conventional poetic forms obsolete.

> . . . I have only one note to add to aesthetics--about rhythms and diction in poetry, the more or less regular iambic pentameter, the Alexandrine and all the other conventional poetic techniques are the result of an agricultural society which was able to follow the seasons with an assured regularity of necessity, its life depending upon this conformity, whereas in our modern, urban existence neither the seasons nor agricultural influence is felt. The rhythms, the beat spring directly from the excitement, the unpredictableness, the harsh clangor of city life where man is the measure and not the earth or the sky. Man and his consuming drives within a city. The beat we hear is that of a voice in anguish, in conflict with itself and with others, on which it feeds and which it feeds in return, feverish, cruel, hard and loving in one long torrent. The dignity, the poise is gone from man's posture vis a vis himself and which he drew from his respect and awe of nature on which he depended for his life and from which he drew illusory conclusions about himself as one with nature, a child of nature to be looked upon favorably and admired.[26]

In the beginning, Ignatow's discovery of city exigencies meant an objectivist style. Direct use of the city as a metaphor for experiences and feelings, as a metaphor for the society that built it and suffered it, led to picture

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writing, to stringing images. The principle is enunciated in one poem of the 1940s, "Get the Gasworks in a Poem."[27]

To his understanding of the image of the empty gym, Ignatow had now added the perspective that others also stood in a position of loneliness and isolation. "It was then that I began to grow more cheerful in myself, having learned or taught myself to believe that I had all this in common with others and that others were in my predicament too and that I was not so different, after all."[28]

Ignatow believes irrefragably that this common wisdom of our time puts American poets in direct opposition to Whitman, when it comes to transcendent salvation, but that they must maintain strict continuity with him, for salvation as spokespeople of their community. Ignatow's stress upon using the city as a metaphor for the poet and society gave way to the understanding that the poet, singly, is metaphor for the society.[29] It is a metaphor with responsibilities.

> . . . The mainstream in American poetry derives from Walt Whitman. It's not so much a celebration of the country or the people in it, but a celebration of oneself, and not oneself as a self, but as a self which is a personification or a surrogate of another power transcending the individual power. And it's not so much a poetry of optimism as a poetry of self-identification with that which exists above and beyond us, whatever it is. Now that, of course, has come into disrepute in the last one hundred years because we question the presence of any unifying sense or principle in the universe. We question ourselves as being surrogates of any kind of divine energy, and American poetry is grappling with this problem, precisely with this very problem; in other words, our best American poets are sons and daughters of Walt Whitman. . . . Whitman thought he had the answers, and Whitman, as the center of our psyche who also brought us a sense of commonality, is not plausible with what we're going through today. But

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> to give him up entirely is to let ourselves sink into something which we just don't want to imagine.[30]

The answers that Ignatow himself reached for were existentialist. Against Whitman's backdrop of transcendence, Ignatow pinned the backdrop of the immortality of death. This blackness does not engulf the illumination of authentic human action and reflection. He opposes poets like John Ashbery or Charles Olson who have taken the direction of floating from perception to perception and thought to thought without any effort to crystallize individual and social meaning. Instead, he holds to Whitman's line in that he is committed to discovering meaning that can be passed on--even if the meaning is paradoxical. "I don't want to live without meaning. But I am living without meaning, which is the meaning of living without meaning."[31] In other words, "life has to be lived, no matter how meaningless it is. . . . Life still has to be affirmed and expressed in all its ways."[32]

This stronger self-identity was accompanied by changes in style. Objectivist writing no longer seemed tenable. When the poet is central, facts and observed reality become peripheral. "No ideas but in things, and things die, with their ideas."[33] Outward things were too changable, too ephemeral, to put faith in them. In reaction, Ignatow turned his attention inward and concentrated upon observing himself; but he found the evidence there equally changable and deceptive. The resolution he fixed upon was "to merge the internal with the external, that is to write from within

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out."[34] Shifting moods could be embodied in shifting events.

The self revelatory episodes and images that Ignatow has recorded from his childhood are themselves illustrations of this principle. In terms of the practice of poetry, one form that the principle has taken has been the creation of extended surrealist metaphors. They tend to bring him back to the way a young child sees the world. Ignatow recognizes that surrealist disparities are similar to "the child's beginning apprehension of life."[35] He uses surrealism more consciously than usual, however: to communicate rather than to confuse.

In later books, the interplay of internal and external has become more explicit through prose poetry. The notebooks were always, in effect, a sequence of prose poems, which sometimes served as takeoffs for poetry writing itself. Ignatow began to exploit the blurred border between good prose and poetry. "The short poem method was producing a metaphoric free verse poem focusing on an image. It was becoming too easy, too automatic, and finally too restricting. So I broke away into the prose poem to give more emphasis to the intellect, to the search, to the mind, to thought rather than only feeling, only the image. . . . The emphasis now fell on developing the metaphor along with an analysis of the metaphor."[36] Analysis of childhood memory has occupied several prose poems.

Between 1955 and 1965, several events occurred critical to Ignatow as a person and as a poet. In 1955, his only

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son showed first signs of schizophrenia. The father's constant tension in attempting to accommodate writing and supporting a family may have been a contributing factor. Ignatow believed it was. It was the lowest possible point for a life, still remaining alive, after which anything further must represent recovery. Almost simultaneously, Ignatow's second book of poetry, The Gentle Weight Lifter, came off the presses. In 1956 a daughter, a new life, was born. In 1956 his mother died and in 1960 his father died. Ignatow sold the bindery for the price of his father's medical bills and walked away from it for the last time. He found work as a paper salesman to publishers. For the first time, he had what he needed: a job which paid good money in exchange for few hours. He was able to write in between sales visits. He was still alive, and the sun was still shining.

In a notebook entry during this period, Ignatow describes walking from one business account to another, enjoying the skyline, the old brick and doorways, the people. "I love my senses. They give me the complete story. I am partly at play myself, in complete ease, thinking automatically of my next business visit, concerned more with pleasure. I am happy, simply happy to find the sun and I are still together, after all. These years we are not lost to each other after all and a man's childhood can be brought into old age and enjoyed more than ever with a new insight. That adds to the pleasure."[37] The poem "Above Everything"

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"Above Everything"

I wished for death often
but now that I am at its door
I have changed my mind about the world.
It should go on; it is beautiful,
even as a dream, filled with water and seed,
plants and animals, others like myself,
ships and buildings and messages
filling the air--a beauty,
if ever I have seen one.
In the next world, should I remember
this one, I will praise it
above everything.[38]

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captures the same mood (page 283).

Figures of the Human came out in 1964. In 1965, a Guggenheim Fellowship was awarded. It was a one-year grant which did not begin to match earnings from sales commissions, but Ignatow accepted it. Shortly afterwards, Wendell Berry called and asked if Ignatow would replace him for a year while he was on sabbatical from the University of Kentucky. For the first time in his life, Ignatow moved away from New York City. A year in Kentucky was followed by a year at the University of Kansas and a year at Vassar College. In 1969, Ignatow came back to New York City to teach poetry at Columbia University and York College of the City University of New York. He bought a home for the family in East Hampton on Long Island. To minimize commuting time, he kept an apartment for himself near York College, until the trauma of getting mugged forced him to abandon it.[39] With these geographic changes, two elements that had been muted in Ignatow's poetry came to the forefront. One was pastoral nature and one was violence.

Violence entered on two scales. The Vietnam War confirmed Ignatow's misgivings regarding the country as a nation. Since he first came into his own as a poet, he had been trying to hold up a mirror in prose and poetry to the mercenariness, the arrogance, the egotism that powered society. The war proved that his worst doubts were only too true. On this issue, Ignatow had had to separate himself from Williams, who held faith in the power of the individual to regenerate

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society. Ignatow believes that Williams never recognized that Hitler represented an incarnation of evil let loose out of human nature, which could be reduplicated in the United States. He considers the Vietnam War a watershed for American poetry. It showed that the crisis of connection between contemporary poetry and Whitman's heritage reflects a more ominous crisis, as the objections against this country's course that Whitman began to raise in Democratic Vistas took on calamitous proportions.[40]

Ignatow chose a permanent teaching position that would bring him back "home" to New York City over offers that would have kept him in other parts of the country. It was to discover violence on a local scale. The city he returned to was not the city he had left. The city in which he and his wife could quit their Second Avenue apartment to loiter by the East River at midnight or 1:00 A.M., meeting neighbors who were invariably easy-going and agreeable, even if hard pressed, was as dead as any memory. It was a new city that kept him on the alert and guarded. It no longer lavished maternal security. It no longer allowed him to be "the open, affectionate, roving, easy-going son of the city that I was."[41]

Yet Ignatow cannot relinguish the identity of "son of the city." Personally, his interests and friendships remain centered there. Artistically, the city represents the social reality that his poetry must come to terms with. Torn apart as New York City is now by competing minorities and by the

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competing claims of greed and people's needs, it is the practice field for the society's larger resolutions, or war maneuvres.

Therefore, as nature as well as violence have entered Ignatow's poetry as major subjects, nature must be taken with discretion. "The problem I face as a poet is not to lose sight of the city. Because the city is a fulcrum, the city is the very fulcrum of civilization, in all societies. To dwell upon the country is really to lose sight of the most vital information, the whole vital labor of the city."[42]

Nature entered almost despite Ignatow. Teaching in the country or home in East Hampton, "I felt a change coming over me. I was learning to relax, to study the trees, the grass, the sky, and the birds, and to write of them with affection and wonder, asking myself how I could have missed it all."[43]

Nature was new entry only in the sense of a new emphasis and a new use for a feature of long standing. Since childhood, the trees and bays of Brooklyn had offered many opportunities for observation. Until his transfer to Kentucky, however, natural imagery served primarily as metaphor for human feeling. In the honored style of all metaphysical poetry, shriveled trees spoke of spiritual despair ("Autumn Leaves"), land and water of love ("Lovers"), a falling fruit of death ("Three in Transition (For WCW)").[44] The great change was that meditations upon nature itself, as focus itself, magnified from occasional asides to frequent main

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address.

Lines in a verse of the early 1940s already anticipate the major theme.

> . . . I feel through my cricket-singing
> blood and rest my underlying constant affair
> with earth . . .[45]
>
> "Money and Grass," lines 41-43

It is already a familiar affair. As Ignatow develops it, it is a replay of the title theme of Leaves of Grass. The distinction is that the transcendent halo has been smudged off.

The different roles that nature assumes in Ignatow's poetry can be read as continuing confrontations with Whitman. With each new position that he took in the confrontation different aspects of his childhood sense of the world returned to him.

Initially, existentialist wisdom tapped the darker side of childhood memories. As a young child, Ignatow pondered the mystery of how God, who he was told was a fountain of joy and pleasure and in Himself perfect, could have created such suffering, imperfect children. In maturity, when he set over against Whitman Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard, he was left with a chaos similar to his childhood vulnerability.

> . . . What could exist for me with which to make life bearable and worth living in its confusion? I was fearful of the answer that already I could sense in the life around me that yet persisted in its headlong, mindless way in the manner that I lived through as a child. There had been no reasoning to it then, and never an argument or plea that could persuade it from its impulsive, terrifying

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> path. The present was my childhood lived all over again but even worse now because it was without hope for relief.[46]

His first answer, corresponding to his discovery of objectivist poetry, was to glorify image and action alone, since there was no idea or belief to put faith in.[47] Whitman's belief in a binding beneficent force then became material for irony. For example, in "Turnings," different passages in which Whitman avowed optimistic faith are echoed, turn by turn, in deflated form. The ocean of the All that lapped at Whitman's feet as a young child in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" has changed into a stagnant pond.

> It is a silent pond surrounded by silent
> woods and shore no animal or man in sight
> Here as a child I tossed my pebble
> and now my stone
> and the ripples fade
> my glance as vacant as the smoothness of the pond[48]
>
> "Turnings," lines 66-71

This isolation within nature led Ignatow to a conclusion close in spirit to empiricism.

> . . . I have been trying not to draw sweeping generalizations about man, nature, etc. I have been trying to see them all as simply animal acts that we are called on to perform by the nature of our makeup. . . .
>
> I am wrestling with the idea that this exaltation that we feel is nothing more than physical. It has its defined limits. It is not an extension or hint of God. It is not an intimation of divinity. I am in complete rebellion against the use of man as a metaphysical object. He is man, a body with a brain, giving him his correct signals for living, after which it counts for nothing else. It cannot ever be ascribed to sources outside himself, unless we say man is made of the earth. This is the only fact of which we are certain and it leaves us where

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> we have been all the time, on earth exactly, nowhere else, going nowhere but back to earth after we die of the exhaustion of the materials of which our bodies are composed. I am fighting for a philosophy of oneness of man, of singleness of man, man related simply to earth and to the cosmos which we believe is made of the same stuff. There is no heaven and no hell. There is no future after death. There is no intimation of divinity in even the most exalted and mystical moments. There are merely physical reactions to certain states of mind while the mind is a function of the body so that what happens to the mind or the body is an interaction. I am fighting for the scientific view of man.[49]

This spirit of realism denudes childhood animism of its magic. Under its analysis, his childhood memory of feeling at one with bicycle, sidewalk, and wind has suffered a change.

> I never thought the bike betrayed me, nor the sidewalk, nor the wind, but now I see them simply as means, and the betrayer is me. I cannot call the bike an emissary. It is a tool, the sidewalk a path, the wind a current of air. We are no longer communicating that I'm aware of, but what does it matter, I tell myself, so long as I am free to use all these for my delight; but I am alone in my pleasures. I am not the child of anyone, for, as I watch myself growing up, the bike shrinks in size and the sidewalk fills with cracks and bumps; the wind on my face in cold weather chills me, and when I eat I know it is because of appetite.[50]
>
> "Growing Up," lines 10-20

In his 1978 book Tread the Dark, Ignatow submitted a childhood sense of immortality to existentialist dissection in the opening poem, "Brightness as a Poignant Light."[51] It is counterstatement to one of the principal statements of the Romantic-Transcendentalist connection, Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." Wordsworth's "clouds of glory" and "celestial light" have become a field of light and dark, of conscious-

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ness and oblivion. The joy that Wordsworth found prompted by early "obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things" no longer gushes from "the immortal sea." It has given way to the "ghostly joy--wildly / free" of knowing that a man engenders himself by treading the waters of darkness.

A seesaw of paradox in Ignatow's poetry has resulted. He has never lost the impulse of animism. Trees, sky, furniture and walls still appear like speaking spirits; but his reason knows better. This dynamic tension has given impetus to a major body of poetry since Ignatow's first move from New York City and relaxed introduction to the country. He has contented himself with presenting the unresolvable paradox that his feelings intractably form kinship and communion with inanimate things, which can never answer back.

For Ignatow, this ambivalence is another demonstration of the more basic paradox whose social side he discovered long ago: that we know our individuality only through relationship with others; but our communication with others is always really communication with ourselves.[52] The distinction is that his poems addressed to walls, chairs, typewriter, and trees get published and read by people.

The latest point in Ignatow's confrontation with Whitman is a point of balance. Adhering to plain practical explanations, he attributes the serenity and peace that have visited him in old age to his having achieved recognition as a writer, a satisfying job, fond family life, and a safe home. This hard-won security recreates continuity with his

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first security as a child. "I enjoy this world in its squirrels and cats and birds, its silence after dark, its darkness outside my window and the peace with which it is happening. In other words, that part of my life which I remember from childhood that I love has been returned to me and through my efforts at getting it back."[53]

This new voice in Ignatow's poetry might be called the voice of wisdom. "What's that?--acceptance of natural processes and events, setting history, the city, culture, work, angers and fears, ambition, love and sex in a natural order that I sense--can that be called transcendence?"[54]

In this mood, Whitman's assurance that if you want to find him, look for him under your boot soles, no longer makes material for mockery. In the latest published excerpts from the notebooks, Ignatow has written a passage that could have been written by Whitman. He opposes to Stevens' separation of imagination and reality the accommodation that reality and imagination are united in one common principle of metamorphosis. There is only one principle for both reality and ego "and that is change, renewal, reassertion, reaffirmation of itself in constantly emerging new forms."[55]

It is nothing new to compare the principle of artistic creation to natural creation, as this passage does. All modern poets must position themselves either for or against Romantic organicism, which made the most of the analogy. Creative metamorphosis as a universal principle embraces much more, however. Ignatow extends it beyond art to all

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human endeavor. He shares a growing company in pointing out that it is how science works as well as art: by metaphor, by imaginative association, association superseding association.[56] One of Ignatow's distinctions is that he is one of a smaller number who extend the principle to politics as well. It gathers up his original criticism of society and American democracy, over which he first broke with Whitman. Despite lapses in practice, the pressure of the democratic ideal is in the direction of creative change, of successively realized phases of individuality. Because politics and art have the same foundation, open form in poetry and open society are irrevocably linked. When one or the other lags behind, the other must lead the way.

Socially, politically, materially, individually, and artistically, the great modern discovery is that what we have is "not the imagination as some sort of artifact, but the imagination as a way of relating to the universe. It can't be any other way. You can't relate to the universe in any routine manner and still feel that you are living a significant life. You're living significantly if you recognize that the whole world is in process and you recognize that somehow you're contributing, there is something new that is contributing to this process."[57]

On this note of reconciliation that Ignatow has achieved, there is freedom for the child in himself to come back on terms of peace.

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"In My Dream"

I've made an order for myself and it is through its tightly fitted parts that the child returns. He keeps sneaking back and running gleefully from one statue to the next, smearing each with crayons and muddy fingers. As I chase after him to drive him out, he hides behind my great, stone monoliths. He can dash from statue to statue before I even start to run. He holds in his hand a doll that squeaks when he squeezes it. He fondles it and croons to it that it belongs to him. It's all his; he will let no one touch it, and he sticks out his tongue at me as I reach to grab the doll from him so that he might grow up and become as I am, stolid, stoic, enduring.

He escapes me with his squeaking doll, and I begin to see the humor of it. I'm sorry for him trying to return after I excluded him. He must see something to want to come back, so now I let him play around with my most valued art: the statue of respectability, that of congeniality, that of cooperativeness, of the concerned citizen and many, many others that I wander among in admiration of my sculptural talent, living among the evidence, eating my bread at their feet and making my bed against the gallery wall, becoming in sleep the figure of peacefulness and fulfillment. The child tickles me on the nose as I sleep, and I rub my nose sleepily, knowing dimly in the back of my mind that it is he teasing me. I don't mind; he loves me with all my self satisfactions. He needs me, apparently. He needs someone to play with; he will play with me in these circumstances, and I tell myself, Why not, he gives me affection. All my statues are silent. When I speak he mimics me. When I raise my hand to begin a new work he mocks me with his doll that he pretends to shape with his finger and with solemn face. I shall be making new statues of all kinds: to goodness, to contentment, to pleasure, to happiness and so on but each now will have the child's influence, just that touch of humor by which I will be separated from the thing itself, and the child and I will enjoy ourselves together, and the old silence within me that made me uncomfortable and drove me to forget myself in work will have vanished in laughter between us.[58]

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Notes

[1]Ralph J. Mills, Jr., ed., Introduction to The Notebooks of David Ignatow (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973), p. xiii.

[2]Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.

[3]David Ignatow, The Notebooks of David Ignatow, ed. R.J. Mills, Jr. (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973) (1940 entry), pp. 9-10.

[4]David Ignatow, Open Between Us (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1980), p. 269.

[5]David Ignatow, Whisper to the Earth (Boston: Little Brown, 1981), p. 16.

[6]Ibid., p. 23.

[7]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1961 entry), p. 237.

[8]The record of changing neighborhoods in this paragraph and the following paragraph is taken from a personal interview with David Ignatow on April 18, 1983.

[9]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1961 entry), p. 238.

[10]David Ignatow, personal interview, April 18, 1963. The theory referred to is found in Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), pp. 247-50.

[11]David Ignatow, personal interview, April 11, 1983.

[12]Ibid.

[13]David Ignatow, "From the Notebooks (1972-1974)," Ironwood 21 (1983), pp. 104-105.

[14]Ibid., p. 105.

[15]David Ignatow, "In the Beginning," American Poets in 1976, ed. W. Heyen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976), pp. 130-142.

[16]Mills, Jr., Introduction to The Notebooks, p. xiii.

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[17]Ignatow, Interview of April 18, 1983.

[18]Ignatow, Ironwood, p. 105.

[19]Ibid., pp. 105-106.

[20]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1961 entry), p. 237.

[21]Ignatow, American Poets in 1976, p. 133.

[22]David Ignatow, Poems 1934-1969 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), pp.66-67.

[23]Ignatow, Interview of April 11, 1983.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1964 entry), p. 258.

[27]Ignatow, Poems, p. 51.

[28]Ignatow, Ironwood, p. 106.

[29]David Ignatow, Open Between Us, p. 28.

[30]Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[31]Ibid., p. 90.

[32]Ibid., p. 91.

[33]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1961 entry), p. 235.

[34]Ignatow, Open Between Us, p. 89.

[35]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1960 entry), p. 239.

[36]Ignatow, Open Between Us, p. 105.

[37]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1961 entry), p. 239.

[38]Ignatow, Whisper to the Earth, p. 48.

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[39]The sequence of transitions from the Guggenheim Fellowship through college teaching positions is taken from Mills, Jr., Introduction to The Notebooks, p. xix. The apartment in Queens and the mugging were described by Ignatow in a personal interview on April 11, 1983.

[40]Ignatow, interview of April 11, 1983.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid.

[43]David Ignatow, "Living with Change," Literature and the Urban Experience, ed. M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1981), p. 203.

[44]The three poems referred to are found in Ignatow's Poems, pp. 8, 20, and 248 respectively.

[45]Ibid., p. 22.

[46]Ignatow, Open Between Us, p. 288.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ignatow, Poems, p. 79.

[49]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1962 entry), pp. 247-248.

[50]Ignatow, Whisper to the Earth, p. 23.

[51]David Ignatow, Tread the Dark (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), p. 3.

[52]Ignatow, interview of April 18, 1983.

[53]Ignatow, The Notebooks (1970 entry), p. 332.

[54]Ignatow, Open Between Us, p. 58.

[55]Ignatow, Ironwood, p. 98.

[56]Ignatow, interview of April 18, 1983.

[57]Ignatow, interview of April 11, 1983.

[58]Ignatow, Tread the Dark, pp. 57-58.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AUDRE LORDE

Audre Lorde was the last poet to be interviewed for this study. Because her schedule is full during the school term when political travel and speaking are combined with full-time teaching, the one interview with her was held during mid-semester break in January 1984. By this time, the presentations of three poets had already been written and the work had already taken a definite form.

Audre Lorde defines herself as a black feminist lesbian poet. She has published eight books of poetry. Since 1964, when Langston Hughes chose several pieces by her for a collection which he edited shortly before he died (New Negro Poets), she has been one of the most anthologized black woman poets in this country. She is the only participant in this study who has written a formal autobiography--or, as she calls it, biomythography (Zami: A New Spelling of My Name). She has also written essays, published an account of her survival of cancer (The Cancer Journals), and given other interviews which have appeared in journals. All of this material answered many of this study's questions in advance. Over lunch in a Greenwich Village restaurant, we went over a few questions which her writing had opened up but not explicitly addressed. We also discussed the orientation to

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childhood memory and to nature which she believes women's writing reveals in general. These final observations will be included in the last part of this paper.

Audre Lorde was born in New York City in 1934. Her parents had come from Grenada in the 1920s. In the beginning, they worked as chambermaid and laborer in a mid-Manhattan hotel. Later, her father went to real estate school and found a steady job managing small Harlem rooming houses. Her mother helped with the work. She was the only woman her children knew who had the stature that she "went to business." Through the years of the Depression, they were one of few Harlem families with security that assured food, clothes, parochial school attendance, and some summer visits to a hotel on the Connecticut shore which belonged to a real estate friend of her father's.[1]

Both within the small circle of the family and the larger sphere of the city, the primary lesson of Audre Lorde's childhood was survival. When you are born "Fat Black Female and almost blind"[2] in Harlem in the Depression, "survival is not theoretical. It's a day-to-day living decision and it's one you make over and over and over again. You can't be theoretical about survival. You live it too often in too many ways."[3]

When her parents arrived from Grenada and encountered American racism, they bought survival by keeping within the lines drawn and denying the price. The underlying message was that survival "meant being White or as close to White

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as possible."[4] But the message beneath that was more basic. By itself, "survival was programmed into me as essential."[5]

At the outset it was programmed in as equivalent to self-definition. Even as an infant, survival required defining herself on her own terms in resistance to her parents. As the youngest daughter in a West Indian family, she was the most strictly supervised. One symbol of her position was that she was denied privacy. Unlike her two older sisters who had the privilege of their own room, she was restricted to the public parts of the apartment under "the eternal parental eye."[6] She was never allowed to close a door behind her. Another aspect of her position was that her mother guarded herself against any inclination to spoil her youngest child by demanding absolute conformity to parental rules and views. If defiance meant instant punishment, at least it salvaged self esteem. The child swam into punishment in the spirit that, "If this is the only way you're going to deal with me, you're gonna have to deal with me this way."[7]

When Audre Lorde was three, she was diagnosed as nearly blind and fitted with eyeglasses. She remembers the moment when she looked up and discovered that the puffy swirl of green in the playground was an aggregate of single, particular, precisely shaped leaves.[8] Her second childhood handicap was that she did not begin to speak until she was four. Beginning to speak came almost concurrently with learning to read under the direction of the local librarian. The means

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for survival through self-definition began to come under her control. Self-definition depended upon perceiving and naming the world that outlined her with greater and greater accuracy.

She was both shielded from accurate perception and naming of her world and disposed to it through her family's status as West Indians. "We were sojourners in a place that was not our own."[9] Her parents left Grenada for New York City planning to work, save money, and return "home" as soon as possible. They never saw Grenada again; but they never lost faith that they would. The children grew up under the expectation that someday they would all pack up and return "home," to the good place. New York City and America never merited better referral than "this place." As a line in one of her poems later put it, "This is a country where other people live."[10]

This background left Audre Lorde with the permanent sense of being an outsider, which was both a liability and a strength. In one way, it worked against clear perception of where she was by interposing the dream called "home." In another way, it facilitated perception by giving a standard of comparison, "the sense that this was not all."[11]

Her mother provided rich resources for fabricating "home." Most specifically, home was the little island Carriacou off the shores of Grenada, where she herself grew up on a hilltop overlooking the Caribbean. Every native tree, fruit, and flower was described to the children in detail. They learned the medicinal uses of plants they

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never saw.[12] Every daily custom was recounted. For example, she told how she and her sisters drew buckets of water in the evening so that they could sit in the night air, growing cold and beaded with dew in time for morning use.[13] Her daughter lay in bed at night piecing the details together.

One result of these examples was that the child learned that nature was something magical to seek out. On her way home from school or errands, she picked blades of grass that grew between paving stones and tied them into bouquets, like the pictures of flowers that she saw in books, as a present for her mother.[14]

The children were never allowed to go out to play in the street; but there were two special places where their mother would take them, where she herself could look at the water and remember home. When they lived on 142nd Street, she would take them down to the edge of the Harlem River, which was not closed off by the Harlem River Drive then. When they moved to 152nd Street, she would take them to nearby Project Park, one of the first projects in Manhattan, which had a little greenery and which banked on the river.

> That place, the green, the trees, and the water, formed--all through high school I would write about it--my forest of Arden. I would write about beautiful scenes. It was the only green place I ever saw. . . . I will never forget, after my first book, some students said, "Miss Lorde, would you call yourself a nature poet?" And I thought, "What? Me?" And then I realized how wedded to these images I was. And they come from this pocket park. I would fantasize about sun on a red brick roof. It was the shards of sun against the wall, with this new kind of brick that they build with now, but which was totally unlike most New York architecture in the forties. And that became entrenched in my mind as

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> beauty. The sun on a red brick roof. And a rose trellis. . . . I never found the rose trellis. I don't know where that came from. I think perhaps there may have been a white structure through which you went into this park. And I fantasized a rose trellis, because I had never seen one.[15]

Reading gave inexhaustible material for fantasy. At the age of four she began to work her way through the local library children's room collection. Along with pictures of fabulous lands and fairy tales bound in every color but black, it held poetry anthologies. She soon carried a store of favorite poems in her head.[16]

She had been prepared for poetry by her mother's special relationship with words. When her mother described West Indian fruit, she savored the words like poetry. When she had something particularly firm to say, or, on rare occasions, something particularly tender, it was poetry of another kind. (If you go out "in next kin to nothing"--dressed too lightly--you risk getting "co-hum co-hum"--catching a cold, and then the world turns "cro-bo-so"--topsy turvy. But the risk is worth it if it becomes occasion for your mother to "raise your zandalee"--massage your backbone.)[17]

On the other hand, the child needed poetry because her mother and others around her often buried their words' true intent. Her mother presumed that her children knew what they were expected to do without being told. Deciphering the real message beneath unspoken or masked words was a general rule of conduct. "Don't just listen like a ninny to what people say in their mouth," her mother taught.[18]

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She herself gave plenty of practice. From earliest childhood, Audre Lorde remembers, "I was really busy feeling out other ways of getting and giving information and whatever else I could, because talking wasn't where it was at." Even at the stage of nursery rhymes, she sensed that poetry was one way of conveying essential information. As a young child, "When someone said to me, 'How do you feel?' or 'What do you think?' or asked another direct question, I would recite a poem, and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, somewhere in it would be the piece of information. It might be a line. It might be an image. The poem was my response."[19]

Growing up black in Harlem, she found herself surrounded by unspoken words. There was no one to help her with them. Books of black poetry which might have begun to break the conspiracy of silence were not in the library. Her parents never explained what "colored" meant, other than clothes which don't take bleach. It was never explained to her why the white children in school never invited her to their homes. When she lost a class election designed to go to the smartest girl in the class, she thought the world had gone mad, since she obviously should have won hands down. Childhood came to an end still muffled in awkward innocence.[20]

The final episode of childhood came on a family trip to Washington, D.C. in her thirteenth summer. The family made the trip because an older sister had been omitted from a senior class trip to the capital with the words that "she would not be happy" going. The father swore that he would

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take her himself. On a hot afternoon, dazed from staring up at too many monuments, the family gratefully sought relief at an ice cream counter. When the waitress refused to serve them, they staggered out again, her parents silently raging against themselves because they had not foreseen the confrontation in time to avoid it.[21] Audre Lorde came of age in a world she was forbidden to name.

She was introduced to the principle that the world, that language, have two levels from the very beginning. On one level, poetry was learned "out of my mother's mouth."[22] There was a world and a language of love and spontaneous accommodation. Soft-eyed reminiscences of Carriacou. Protective indulgences. There was another unadmitted world and unspoken language of hurt and rage.

> In the center of a harsh and spectrumed city
> all things natural are strange.
> I grew up in a genuine confusion
> between grass and weeds and flowers
> and what colored meant
> except for clothes you couldn't bleach
> and nobody called me nigger
> until I was thirteen.
> Nobody lynched my momma
> but what she'd never been
> had bleached her face of everything
> but very private furies
> and made the other children
> call me yellow snot at school.[23]
>
> "Outside," lines 1-14

In high school, the rift in experience and language began to draw together. As a freshman at Hunter High School, she met Genevieve, a young black dancer. Genevieve gave her poetry's two great sources of inspiration, love and death. As for love, they were inseparable and irrepressible.

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Together they took possession of the city. The whole city was their playground. To this day, every twist and turn in Manhattan's streets, the details of a multitude of building fronts, remain imprinted in Audre Lorde's memory as a result of their roamings.[24] As for death, Genevieve committed suicide at the age of sixteen.

Audre Lorde had begun to write poetry in seventh grade. In high school, it became a customary activity. White classmates still did not invite her to their homes, but they did elect her literary editor of the school arts magazine. The acceptance of diversity that still distinguishes her as a militant black feminist was already demonstrated by her first three models: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Pablo Neruda, and T.S. Eliot.

Near the end of high school, she was introduced to the Harlem Writers Guild. When she moved out of her parent's home into the East Village after graduation, she began to attend weekly Guild meetings. She met Langston Hughes; but the primary influence on her was John Hendrick Clarke. He was the first person to extend encouragement. "Hang in there, you're a poet," he said. "Someday, someday, you're going to win the Yale Series of Younger Poets." "Huh?" she said. It may not have been one of her eventual prizes; but making contact with the tradition of black poetry and the faith placed in her were critical to her growth both as a person and as a poet.[25]

Ever since elementary school, Mexico had captured her

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imagination. It promised the sun on a red brick roof and the rose trellises that she had daydreamed about. She saved money and left New York to study in Mexico City when she was nineteen. She had not known how to anticipate such exhilaration. For the first time in her life, through contrast, she recognized that existence in New York City had been a limbo of salience, as a black person, and invisibility, as a depersonalized person. For the first time, she found herself in a paradise where she was recognized simply as a friendly individual among other friendly individuals. "Mexico was wonderful for me. Wonderful in so many ways. It was so beautiful . . . so beautiful. So open. So self-affirming. All of these brown people in the majority was very very wonderful for me."[26]

Mexico was also wonderful because her love for women rather than men, which she had already come to acknowledge, matured through love for a newspaperwoman who was a political expatriate from the America of the 1950s. The woman had made the history and folkways of her adopted land her own, and she passed them on through talk and trips into the mountains and ruins. She pointed out archaeological evidence for ancient contacts between Mexico and Africa and Asia.[27]

Audre Lorde made her home in Cuernavaca, which was an easy commute from the University. One morning on her way to the bus to Mexico City, she walked over a hill into an epiphany that became a turning point in her poetry.

> . . . In order to get to my early class I would catch a six o'clock turismo in the village plaza.

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> I would come out of my house before dawn. You know, there are two volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtacuhuatl. I thought they were clouds, the first time I saw them through my windows. It would be dark, and I would see the snow on top of the mountains, and the sun coming up. And when the sun crested, at a certain point, the birds would start. But because we were in the valley it would still look like night. But there would be the light of the snow. And then this incredible crescendo of birds. One morning I came over the hill and the green, wet smells came up. And then the birds, the sounds of them I'd never really noticed, never heard birds before. I was walking down the hill and I was transfixed. It was very beautiful. I hadn't been writing all the time I was in Mexico. And the poetry was the thing I had with words, that was so important. . . . And on that hill, I had the first intimation that I could bring those two together. I could infuse words directly with what I was feeling. I didn't have to create the world I wrote about. I realized that words could tell. That there was such a thing as an emotional sentence. Until then, I would make these constructs and somewhere in there would be a nugget, like a Chinese bun, there would be a piece of nourishment, the thing I really needed, which I had to create. There on that hill, I was filled with the smell and feeling and the way it looked, filled with such beauty that I could not believe--I had always fantasized it before. I used to fantasize trees and dream forests. Until I got spectacles when I was four I thought trees were green clouds. When I read Shakespeare in high school I would get off on his gardens and Spanish moss and roses and trellises with beautiful women at rest and sun on red brick. When I was in Mexico I found out this could be a reality. And I learned that day on the mountain, that words can match that, re-create it.
>
> . . . When I tried to write a poem about the way I felt that morning, I could not do it, and all I had therefore was the memory that there must be a way. And that was incredibly important.[28]

The inability to immediately translate such sensuality and emotion into words, combined with faith that words could recreate it, kept the memory a fresh vision of words' potential. If she had already known how to apply the revelation,

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or if the overwhelming feeling had induced despair that words could ever match it, the memory would not have had such force.

The memory preserved its potency for another reason also. When she returned to New York City at the end of the year, she was no longer in a world of welcoming beauty. If the principle of the revelation was that words can recreate feeling, then the memory staked a risk at the same time that it claimed earthly boundaries for paradise. To believe in earthly paradise and to believe that words and feelings can conjoin within an inferno where such words and feelings are forbidden required accommodating the vision to a tension similar to the status of outsider that she had known since childhood: a double vision in which alternate possibilities intensify painful realities.

> . . . That simple, apparently ordinary connection between poetry and feeling was terribly threatening, and very very dangerous. I am black and I am a woman. I took the next step in poetry with the feeling that automatically I was committing myself to exploring a kind of fury that could be totally destructive. How to keep that alive and not be destroyed by it is a tension that runs through all of my work, and I believe the work of every serious black woman poet, every outsider poet in America. I think that is what lends a kind of power and reality to our work. And I think we have reclaimed poetry as a result.[29]

The hill in Mexico remained a vision to be gradually tapped.

> I began to bring my writing and the things I was feeling very slowly together. It was a gradual process. For instance, I can remember, the next poem that I wrote was "To a Girl Who Knew What Side Her Bread Was Buttered On." Which in a sense is a fantasy, but which also brings stuff close,

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> like people who I knew on the Lower East Side. But it was a very gradual process. I knew that that was possible. I knew the way it felt when it happened, in a line, in a verse, in a piece. I didn't know how to do it, but it was like bio-feedback. When it happened I knew it had happened. And the more it happened the more I was able to do it.[30]

Audre Lorde returned to New York City to get a bachelors from Hunter College in 1959 and a masters in library science from Columbia in 1961. She married and had a daughter and a son, who are frequent subjects in her poetry. In 1961, Langston Hughes included several of her poems in his anthology New Negro Poetry. In 1968, she left a marriage that was falling apart to give a workshop as poet-in-residence at Tougaloo College, Mississippi. It was her first taste of teaching and it showed her that she wanted to teach as well as write. While she was in Mississippi, her first book, The First Cities, came out. Many of the poems in it were written in high school.

When she came back to New York she began a career of teaching Black Studies and English which led her from the City College of New York and Lehmann College to John Jay College, to Hunter College where she still works now. A steady succession of books of poetry has followed. As a side effect of teaching her own students grammar, she taught herself to think in methodical prose in addition to "bubbles up from chaos that you had to anchor with words."[31] The newly won skill has resulted in a series of essays and two autobiographical prose works.

In the 1970s, travel again brought opportunities to

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chart herself, "this place," and her writing from new perspectives. As part of the spirit of Pan-Africanism that was infusing the Black Movement with new self-identity,[32] she began to go in search of that simultaneous identity, her self and home. In 1973, she made her first trip to the West Indies, to Barbados. Soon afterwards she visited Africa. Her focus was Dahomey, now Benin. The facial features that she inherited from her father suggest a Dahomean origin. Scholarship had also revealed that the persona of an Amazon which she had adopted as a young adolescent, which had continued to strengthen her as a grown woman, was not fantasy but Dahomean fact. The historical Amazons were black women outriders who guarded the frontiers of the kingdom of Dahomey. Since women in Dahomey had the status of Creators of Life, they were also accorded the power of shedding blood in defensive battle.[33] In Dahomey she also encountered Seboulisa, "the Mother of us all."[34] She returned from Africa to study the history of what she had seen more intensively. The Black Unicorn, published in 1978, incorporated Africa and her new self-understanding into her vision of New York City. The overlay is explicit in "125th Street and Abomey" (page 311).

In 1978, she visited Grenada for the first time. She was struck by how African it was. Her family background was illuminated. The customs, the family relationships, the comportment which characterized her family home turned out to be essentially African. Zami, an autobiography of her

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"125th Street and Abomey*"

Head bent, walking through snow
I see you Seboulisa
printed inside the back of my head
like marks of the newly wrapped akai**
that kept my sleep fruitful in Dahomey
and I poured on the red earth in your honor
those ancient parts of me
most precious and least needed
my well-guarded past
the energy-eating secrets
I surrender to you as libation
mother, illuminate my offering
of old victories
over men over women over my selves
who has never before dared
to whistle into the night
take my fear of being alone
like my warrior sisters
who rode in defense of your queendom
disguised and apart
give me the woman strength
of tongue in this cold season.

Half earth and time splits us apart
like struck rock.
A piece lives elegant stories
too simply put
while a dream on the edge of summer
of brown rain in nim trees
snail shells from the dooryard
of King Toffah
bring me where my blood moves
Seboulisa mother goddess with one breast
eaten away by worms of sorrow and loss
see me now
your severed daughter
laughing our name into echo
all the world shall remember.[35]

---

*Abomey: The inland capital and heart of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey.

**Akai: Tight narrow braids of hair wrapped with thread and arranged about the head to form the elaborate coiffure of modern Dahomean high fashion.

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beginnings which appeared in 1982, traces an African way of development which has run from Africa to the West Indies to Black America. The insights gained from her travel made it possible to write the book.[36]

In 1978, her identification with the Amazons and her reverence for Seboulisa were involuntarily deepened. The Amazons cut off their right breast so that they could draw a bowstring unimpeded. Seboulisa had "one breast eaten away by worms of sorrow and loss." In 1978, Audre Lorde underwent radical mastectomy to arrest cancer in her right breast. For blacks, the prognosis for survival is thirty percent. She does not consider her recovery accidental luck. "I had been in training for a long time."[37] She has come out of the confrontation with death with a profoundly integrated sense of what survival requires and what it is for.

Women, children, blackness, and the earth are the elements of integration. They function because they reduplicate and support the essentials of each other. Each is a source of poetry.

Women's bodies are paradigms of earth. "My body, a living representation of other life older longer wiser. The mountains and valleys, trees, rocks. Sand and flowers and water and stone. Made in Earth."[38] Through centuries of disenfranchisement and denial of power, women's spirit has preserved itself underground, in blackness, like dormant seed.[39] Their bodies' similarity to earth is that, like earth, they function to bring new life to light and nourish

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it. Through their identification with children, women carry the potential of a power that transcends sex, race, or age.

Woman power
is
Black power
is
Human power[40]

"Now," lines 1-5

Children melt all distinctions down to one principle of universal need. Women together with men bear both sons and daughters. Together they are responsible for their present and their future. Yet the history of children has been most closely tied to the history of women. Children live at the edge of blackness, since growing is a task of transforming chaos into articulation. They are associated with flowers and young green things that come out of the earth.

Blackness is the chaos that recycles material for creation and material from dissolution. It is the color of possibility. A mine for jewels must dig into blackness. A fetus is conceived and grows in blackness. Blackness can also be the color of terror, of suppression, of everything feared. It is the climate for both love and death.[41]

The earth lies at the base. Without it, there would be nothing else. The earth nurtures life because it itself lives. Audre Lorde was presented the statement by Alice Walker that, "If there is one thing African-Americans have retained of their African heritage, it is probably animism:

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a belief that makes it possible to view all creation as living, as being inhabited by spirit." Her response was, "I absolutely agree."[42] When she visited Africa, she found this belief that everything is alive and everything is connected very strong. "And it resounded. It hit something deep inside of me. The whole book The Black Unicorn comes out of that consciousness."[43]

Poetry rises in response to each element. Poems of particular love or rage rise from a convergence of all together. One short simple poem in which all of these considerations come together is "Coping" (page 315).

Audre Lorde finds the roots of poetry within each element. It is unitive, like the spirit that inhabits and binds everything on earth.[44] It is primal, the natural mode of thought we are born into. When children make their own attempts to put the world together, they open their mouths and out comes poetry (as in the example of "Coping").[45] It is emotional and intuitive, motivated by aspirations for human fulfillment "beyond what is now called possible."[46] Audre Lorde believes that such a cherishing of human potential "is the name for a humanity that men are not without," but it is considered a preeminently maternal quality.[47] As a process, it materializes in blackness, because it works at the border of understanding where experience and feeling first birth concepts, ideas, and knowledge.[48] For all of these reasons, it can be said of the source of poetry, "it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep."[50]

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"Coping"

It has rained for five days
running
the world is
a round puddle
of sunless water
where small islands
are only beginning
to cope
a young boy
in my garden
is bailing out water
from his flower patch
when I ask him why
he tells me
young seeds that have not seen sun
forget
and drown easily.[49]

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These terms invite comparison with popular terms from the psychology of creativity: subconscious, preconscious, intuitive, archetypal. The theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny supplies two other comparisons: primitive and childlike. As Audre Lorde chooses her words, however, she means more than any one of these traditional psychological usages, or all of them together.

The psychology of creativity usually treats the dark side of the mind and the childlike phase of development as anterior assembly points for a finished rational product. The literature of creativity remains deeply marked by its history. Modern psychology itself began when the model of ultimate development was a man, like Wundt or Freud, who could create a science. The psychology of creativity, specifically, burgeoned under post-Sputnik funding when the model of ultimate development was a man or woman who could create military technological innovation.[51] Audre Lorde applies the words dark, ancient, and deep to the final product that she would like to see come to light and cover the surface of the earth as well as to the preliminary activation of creative raw material. She opposes deep, dark, and ancient to surface, white, and European used in a privative sense: superficial, racist, and oriented to conquering crises instead of experiencing living.[52] Her usage of creativity connotes opposition between things as they are and things as they could be.

Women, children, blackness, and the earth--when poetry is integrated, it not only rises out of these elements but

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it comes to their defense. They are not only requirements for survival, but the objects of love that survival is for. Audre Lorde still goes by the identity of an Amazon; and they are the territory and the citizens that she works to arouse and protect. Her sense that the victimization of the earth is aligned with the victimization of women, children, and minorities has been intensified by the experience of cancer, which she considers a by-product of environmental poisons thrown off in the course of a profit madness which exploits everything vulnerable.[53]

It would seem to follow from these convictions that she should dispatch her poems from a farm somewhere and that she should have demonstrated that she is, in truth, a nature poet. Instead, her home remains New York City, and she has established a reputation for her use of city imagery.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, when people all around her were quitting the city to go back to the land, she deliberately resisted the temptation to join them. The basis of her decision was that her son and daughter should have the same privileges that she has had by growing up on the line of battle.[54]

Like David Ignatow, Audre Lorde has a strong sense of the city as the site where a civilization's fortune is cast. She believes that this country's viability depends upon whether or not it can resolve the problems of its cities. In particular, she sees the older industrial cities, such as New York, as such condensed centers of this country's

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pressures and oppressions that they have become symbolic of them. She determined that her children should not grow up out of touch with the city's realities. Armor may weigh heavily at times, but it can make the difference between the role of a warrior or the role of a sacrifice. Beneath the decision, there was also a hope that they might conceive a new love and faith in the city, just at the point when her own attachment to it was wearing thin. In this moment of resolution, she wrote the poem "New York City" (pages 319-320).[55]

Most of the city images in Audre Lorde's poetry are deliberately harsh. The subway epitomizes city pressures for her. Yet, as an example of the law which she holds to that the center of our vulnerability is also the center of our strength, the subway has either functioned as a primary image in some of her most powerful poems or served as the place where they were written. "Coal," "To My Daughter the Junkie on a Train," and "New York City" all had their beginnings on the subway.[56]

A more explicit representation of the principle that the center of our vulnerability is also the center of our strength and power is her one unfailingly gracious city image, the bridge.

> In curve scooped out and necklaced with light
> burst pearls stream down my out-stretched arms to earth.
> Oh bridge my sister bless me before I sleep
> the wild air is lengthening
> and I am tried beyond strength or bearing
> over water.[58]
>
> "Bridge Through My Window"
> lines 1-6

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"New York City"

I

How do you spell change like frayed slogan underwear
with the emptied can of yesterdays' meanings
with yesterday's names?
And what does the we-bird see with
who has lost its I's?

There is nothing beautiful left in the streets of this city.
I have come to believe in death and renewal by fire.
Past questioning the necessities of blood
or why it must be mine or my children's time
that will see the grim city quake to be reborn perhaps
blackened again but this time with a sense of purpose;
tired of the past tense forever, of assertion and repetition
of the ego-trips through an incomplete self
where two years ago proud rang for promise but now
it is time for fruit and all the agonies are barren--
only the children are growing:

And how else can the self become whole
save by making self into its own new religion?
Yet I am bound like an old lover--a true believer--
to this city's death by accretion and slow ritual,
and I submit to its penance for a trial
as new steel is tried
I submit my children also to its agonies
and they are not the city's past lovers. But I submit them
to the harshness and growing cold to the brutalizations
which if survived
will teach them strength
or an understanding of how strength is gotten
and will not be forgotten: It will be their city then:
I submit them
loving them above all others save myself
to the fire to the rage to the ritual sacrifications
to be tried as new steel is tried;
and in its wasting the city shall try them
as the blood-splash of a royal victim
tries the hand of the destroyer.

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II

I hide behind tenements and subways in fluorescent alleys
watching as flames walk the streets of an empire's altar
rage through the veins of a sacrificial stenchpot
smeared on the east shore of a continent's insanity
conceived in the psychic twilight of murderers and pilgrims
rank with money and nightmare and too many useless people
who will not move over and die, who cannot bend
even before the winds of their own preservation
even under the weight of their own hates
Who cannot amend nor conceive nor even learn to share
their own visions
who bomb my children into mortar in churches
and work plastic offal and metal and the flesh of their enemies
into subway rush-hour temples where obscene priests
finger and worship each other in secret
They think they are praying when they squat
to shit money-pebbles shaped like their parents' brains--
who exist to go into dust to exist again
grosser and more swollen and without ever relinguishing
space or breath or energy from their private hoard.

I do not need to make war nor peace
with these prancing and murderous deacons
who refuse to recognize their role in this covenant we live
upon
and so have come to fear and despise even their own children;
but I condemn myself, and my loves
past and present
and the blessed enthusiasms of all my children
to this city
without reason or future
without hope
to be tried as the new steel is tried
before trusted to slaughter.

I walk down the withering limbs of my last discarded house
and there is nothing worth salvage left in this city
but the faint reedy voices like echoes
of once beautiful children.[57]

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Concretely, bridges made the determination to remain in New York City supportable. Audre Lorde and her family moved to a house on Staten Island, a few minutes distance from the Verrazano Bridge. Here she is in close touch with Manhattan, but it is possible to have space, trees, and a garden. Here more open views of the water remind her that whether her imagination dwells on Carriacou, Manhattan, or Staten Island, she remains an island poet.

Literally, bridges function as metaphor (meta pherein, to carry change across). They are the symbol of her fascination with differences (dis pherein, to carry apart). Although she shares the same complex of concerns as many other feminists or black militants, she has distinguished herself by her faith in reconciliation. She has aligned herself with black men to fight racism and with white women to fight sexism. She has survived and grown strong on differences since childhood because she has drawn from them the lesson that they can be turned to serve self-definition and relationship instead of isolation. She considers this principle the vital lesson that the city impresses.[59]

To put this lesson in practice, the real substance for which a bridge is metaphor is words and action. She does not separate the two. Poetry is the bridge between the felt but formless and the articulated. It also serves as the bridge between need and action, because action has no direction until need has been named. Finally, it is the bridge that can join people of different backgrounds and

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experiences in coordinated action in one direction. Today, poetry is an Amazon's basic equipment.[60]

Rationality cannot replace poetry in this function because it does not spring from the deepest source of power from which revolutionary knowledge comes. "Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from some place to some place."[61] "But that is like--if you're traveling a road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere, the ownership of that road is meaningless. If you have no land out of which the road comes, no place that road goes to, geographically, no goal, then the existence of that road is totally meaningless."[62] Only poetry can voice the beginning and the ending of the road.

Silence, in Audre Lorde's work, is a negative word which signifies resignation to exploitation, in place of action. "The way to get people to testify against themselves is not constantly to have police tactics and oppressive techniques. What you do is to build it in, so people learn to distrust everything in themselves that has not been sanctioned, to reject what is most creative in themselves--to have <u>them</u> reject it to begin with, so you don't even need to stamp it out."[63] Silence, to her, means the silencing of legitimate needs and emotions.

When Audre Lorde has attempted to characterize the essential quality of deepest needs, she has chosen the term "erotic." She uses it in the very broad sense of the Greek

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Eros, born of Chaos, which personified all aspects of creative power and harmony.[64] Therefore it can apply not only to interpersonal love but to dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, or examining an idea. It applies to the quality of physical surroundings as well as to human relationships. She believes that the term erotic has been narrowed down, and even then misrepresented, because its demands are potentially explosive. "For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our lives' pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves capable of."[65] Then it is impossible to work at dehumanized jobs, let children starve, poison the earth, or build arms for police states.

When Audre Lorde talks about poetry as a bridge, she has in mind a coalition across time as well as within the space of the present. She firmly believes that the human race is evolving as a species. Whether or not it survives, she believes, depends upon whether or not women come to assume greater power on all levels, in the name of all creatures.[66] Although the future must make a fresh beginning, she sees it as a bond, rather than a break, with the past. It will not be based upon new ideas or new needs, because there can be none. The dark, deep sources of creative power are ancient; and they have been held in reserve across a history that transcends any individual or any single generation.[67]

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Moving into the future, therefore, requires moving in three simultaneous symbiotic dimensions of time. It requires honoring and attending to all the past generations of pain and love.

> and through my lips come the voices
> of the ghosts of our ancestors
> living and moving among us[68]
>
> "Prologue," lines 19-21

The necessary prologue to amplifying the past is the courage to affirm present feeling, one's own individual moment of time.

> I speak without concern for the accusations
> that I am too much or too little woman
> that I am too black or too white
> or too much myself
>
> "Prologue," lines 15-18

The sequel from this effort is that the message that can nourish the future is preserved.

> Here my heart's voice as it darkens
> pulling old rhythms out of the earth
> that will receive this piece of me
> and a piece of each one of you
> when our part in history quickens again
> and is over
>
> "Prologue," lines 22-27

The necessity of faithfulness to the past in order to move fruitfully into the future applies to personal memory as well. Zami, Audre Lorde's autobiography, is a document of continuity more than change. She has a sense that herself and those she loves are always in movement through myriad selves, but they are skin sheddings by one long lizard.[69] It is a case of "putting the past together / pooling every-

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thing learned / into a new and continuous woman."[70] Honesty in the present depends on not blurring past gains and sacrifices; and she has known since childhood that honesty to her own feeling is the paramount condition for survival. "The one thread I feel coming through over and over in my life is the battle to preserve my perceptions, the battle to win through and to keep them--pleasant or unpleasant, painful or whatever. . . . and however much they were denied."[71]

The history of her own personal life is thus a critical link in the history of the Women's Movement. Such an identification of interests means that her own self-identity extends forward and backward beyond the limits of her own individuality. One of the powers of this liquid identity is that it softens the hard edges of death. She is able to elaborate a description of fishing on a river at dawn with the expected phrase, "tasting the green silence" . . . and then add the exceptional phrase, "knowing that this beauty too is mine forever."[72] Experience of the sweetness of life has acquired the dimension that "I could take this in, and I could own it, and use it wherever else I was for the length of my time that is coming to me, and someone else, my children, my children's children, and someone else's children, could stand on that place and see that sweetness also."[73] Since a part of herself is invested in all women and children, a part of herself will remain present in them.

Audre Lorde did not come to this position lightly. The Cancer Journals is a record of battle against successive

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waves of despair. She does not discount death; but for someone who works within the context that the severest death is silence in the middle of life, the fact of death can have the positive effect of paring priorities down to essentials.

Now that her children are grown, it is possible that she may finally leave New York City. It is difficult to have to be a warrior each time you step out the door, and the city exacts it.[74] Also, she is still statistically a high cancer risk, in a location where "sulfur fuel burns in New Jersey / and when I wash my hands at the garden hose / the earth runs off bright yellow."[75] If she does leave, she will keep the sense that all places on earth are connected, even islands. She has weighed the prospect of this change of place in one of her most recent poems. It was scribbled down on a plane that was to take her to explore a new home, when the plane got caught in an air jam and began to circle, over and over, directly above her Staten Island house, before it was able to take off.[76] After sweeping in imagination from her own home to continents of the oppressed, the poem closes by reaffirming past, present, and future.

> history is not kind to us
> we re-stitch it in living
> past memory
> forward into desire
> into the panic
> articulation of want
> without having
> or even the promise of getting.
>
> And I dream of our coming together
> encircled
> driven not only by love
> but by our lust for a working tomorrow

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the flights of this journey
mapless, uncertain
necessary as water.[77]

"On the Way Out I Passed Over You
and the Verrazano Bridge," lines 101-115

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Notes

[1]Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1982), pp. 15-48, passim.

[2]Audre Lorde, The Cancer Journals (Argyle, N.Y.: Spinsters, Ink, 1980), p. 40.

[3]Audre Lorde, personal interview, January 1984.

[4]Audre Lorde, "An Interview with Audre Lorde," American Poetry Review, March/April 1980, p. 19.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Lorde, Zami, p. 43.

[7]Audre Lorde, "An Interview with Audre Lorde: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich," Signs, 6(4) (1981):714.

[8]Lorde, Zami, pp. 31-32.

[9]Lorde, personal interview.

[10]Audre Lorde, Chosen Poems Old and New (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), p. 55.

[11]Lorde, personal interview.

[12]Lorde, Zami, pp. 9-14.

[13]Lorde, personal interview.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Lorde, Signs, pp. 714-715.

[17]Lorde, Zami, p. 32.

[18]Lorde, Signs, p. 715.

[19]Ibid., p. 714.

[20]Lorde, Zami, pp. 58-65.

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[21]Ibid., pp. 68-71.

[22]Lorde, personal interview.

[23]Audre Lorde, The Black Unicorn (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 61.

[24]Lorde, personal interview.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Lorde, Zami, pp. 169-170.

[28]Lorde, Signs, pp. 716-717.

[29]Lorde, personal interview.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Lorde, Signs, p. 719.

[32]For a discussion of phases in the Black Movement that correspond to phases in Black poetry, including Pan-Africanism, see Stephen Henderson, Understanding the New Black Poetry (New York: William Morrow, 1973), pp. 14-16.

[33]Lorde, The Black Unicorn, p. 119.

[34]Ibid., pp. 120-121.

[35]Ibid., pp. 12-13; notes from p. 119.

[36]Lorde, personal interview.

[37]Lorde, The Cancer Journals, p. 40.

[38]Lorde, Zami, p. 7.

[39]Audre Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," Chrysalis, no. 3 (1977), pp. 7-8.

[40]Lorde, Chosen Poems, p. 88.

[41]Different facets of blackness are the subject of Audre Lorde's most widely anthologized poem, "Coal" (Chosen Poems, pp. 10-11).

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[42]Lorde, American Poetry Review, p. 20.

[43]Lorde, personal interview.

[44]Lorde, American Poetry Review, p. 20.

[45]Lorde, personal interview.

[46]Lorde, Signs, p. 729.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," p. 7.

[49]Lorde, The Black Unicorn, p. 45.

[50]Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," p. 8.

[51]Consider C.W. Taylor and F. Barron, eds., Scientific Creativity: Its Recognition and Development (New York: John Wiley, 1963).

[52]Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," pp. 8-9.

[53]Lorde, The Cancer Journals, pp. 60, 74.

[54]Lorde, personal interview.

[55]Ibid.

[56]The three subway poems referred to here are found in Audre Lorde's Chosen Poems, pp. 10-11, 79-80, and 73-75, respectively.

[57]Ibid., pp. 73-75.

[58]Ibid., p. 17.

[59]Lorde, personal interview.

[60]Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," pp. 7-9.

[61]Lorde, Signs, p. 729.

[62]Ibid.

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[63]Ibid., p. 730.

[64]Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power (Brooklyn: Out & Out Books, 1978), p. 3.

[65]Ibid., p. 5.

[66]Lorde, American Poetry Review, p. 20.

[67]Lorde, "Poems are not Luxuries," pp. 7-9.

[68]Lorde, Chosen Poems, p. 58.

[69]See "Solstice" by Audre Lorde in The Black Unicorn, p. 117.

[70]Lorde, Chosen Poems, p. 56.

[71]Lorde, Signs, p. 714.

[72]Lorde, The Cancer Journals, p. 17.

[73]Lorde, personal interview.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Audre Lorde, "On the Way Out I Passed Over You and the Verrazano Bridge," Contact II, 5(27/28/29) (Fall-Winter 1982/Winter-Spring 1983):49.

[76]Lorde, personal interview.

[77]Lorde, Contact II, p. 51. Revised in a personal letter of March 10, 1984.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN
HENRY WEINFIELD

Henry Weinfield has published three books of poetry: The Carnival Cantata (1971), In the Sweetness of the New Time (1980), and Sonnets Elegiac and Satirical (1982). Between 1972 and 1976, he edited a New York City journal of the arts, The Mysterious Barricades. He is currently completing a dissertation on Thomas Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard. In his thirties now, unlike the other four poets in this study who have already been at their work for many years, he has only made a beginning to his. Therefore there has been less material to draw upon in following the subject of memory and poetry with him. Childhood is also less distant in his case, and reconnoitered from a different point. His work is equally important to this study, however. It presents a critical perspective for considering both memory and place.

He is also distinct from the other four poets because he spent his childhood not in this country, but in Canada. The result is a measure of independence from the claims of contemporary American poetry. Through comfortable incorporation of the English poetic tradition, he has never left this territory of the commonwealth, at least. Through his contrary position, he demonstrates how deeply American political

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defiance of England continues to govern the practice of its poetry as well.

Henry Weinfield was interviewed immediately after David Ignatow, when this work was still at an early stage. The interviews were done at the City University. A first interview which concentrated upon his beginnings as a poet was followed by a second one which took the form of a shared conversation regarding memory and poetry. Because he is at a similar point in his own dissertation here at the same place, a number of short informal meetings have made it possible to continue to bring up observations and questions as they have arisen. A first draft of this presentation led to a final short interview in which some of his beliefs regarding poetry and place became clarified. He has also shared reviews which he has written, as well as some unpublished poetry, which have helped in understanding his position.

This writer's first impulse was to designate Weinfield as a philosophic poet or a scholar poet. He would reject either designation on the grounds that they are tautologies. Like Wordsworth, he would hold that anyone who is a poet must have thought long and deeply[1]; and this process of thinking inevitably involves both philosophy and scholarship. If pressed to give himself a name, for the present he would call himself a lyric religious poet who is an atheist. The key to understanding the role of place in his poetry is contained in this paradox.

Weinfield was born in Montreal in 1949. His father's

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family was well settled in Canada. His paternal grandfather had come from Austria early in the century. His paternal grandmother's family had already been in the province of Quebec more than one hundred years. In the 1840's, they were among the first Russian Jews to settle in Canada. In a sparsely populated region, making their way required a good deal of assimilation into the local culture. His grandmother, for example, was educated in a Catholic convent school because it was the only decent school for girls available. Weinfield's mother was European. She emigrated to Canada from Nuremberg, Germany just before World War II. She came from a very wealthy Jewish family which had moved within the Imperial circle. They had a castle and a colorful history. She saw the total destruction of her world by the Nazis. For her, coming to Canada represented a tragic uprooting.[2]

English was the language used at home. French was a second language heard everywhere. Through stories recreating her family's past, his mother also gave the children a sense of connection to Germany. Weinfield inherited a culture dominated by English influence, but open to Continental language and history as well.

His father was a lawyer who came home from work to play the piano as a serious avocation. A brother also became a pianist. Weinfield is a poet in a family of musicians. Like Bronk, he loves music deeply and it is a common figure in his poetry. Unlike Bronk, he also knows it well technically, so that it often serves as pattern as well as figure. He

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can use with facility sonnets and other metrical forms, whose roots go back to music and dance.

Poetry was another art the family savored. His father read poetry out loud to him and recited pieces from memory. Gray's Elegy, the subject of his dissertation now, was a favorite of both his father and his grandfather.

Since Weinfield was a very early reader, he soon added to his experience of poetry wide reading on his own. By kindergarten or first grade, he began producing his own versions, which were usually limericks and ditties that played with the language. Versifying for the pleasure of it continued through grade school and high school, when it produced a short romance. Yet it never occurred to him to think of himself as a poet. Poetry was another amusement "out there," still disassociated from his sense of himself.

Besides voracious reading, play outside was equally important. The city of Montreal was freely accessible. The only restriction ever imposed was to be home by meals. A bicycle soon increased his range, and sports kept him outdoors even through Montreal winters.

Montreal is still loved without qualification. It is described by contrasts to New York City: a very lovely city with a tremendous sense of freedom, plentiful in houses instead of apartments, with beautiful parks everywhere. Despite greater openness in the sense of freedom, air, and sky, he describes it as more "closed" than New York City in the sense of being more private, more vieux faubourg,

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composed of small streets instead of vast public avenues. If family ties did not now keep him in New York City, he would gladly return to live in Montreal again.

Every summer he was sent to camp, so that Canada's woods and lakes also became important to him. As important as actual experience, however, were the imaginary worlds encountered in books. All through childhood books transported him into plots and settings that were tremendously magical and very deeply felt. The sea, for example, became a locus of resonance through reading even though it was seen only briefly on one or two trips to Maine as a child. From the beginning, its principal bed was the imagination.

As in Bronk's case, a central feature of Weinfield's childhood was a large Victorian house. Unlike Bronk's house, this one lent itself to comfortable possession. When Weinfield was nine, his parents divorced. They never enjoyed enough harmony to turn the house that they shared into "home"; so that the place that assumed the security and stability of home was his paternal grandmother's house. It was the childhood place felt to be <u>his</u> in a special way.

Every Friday night, the family gathered there for dinner. Afterwards, his father and other relatives gave informal piano recitals. It was a house saturated with music.

Besides his grandparents, two great-uncles lived there. It was the center of gravity for the whole family. The house was spacious enough to accommodate a mixture of private and public moods.

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> My uncles would be reading, and then somebody would look up from his paper and start a conversation--they would talk about it; and then somebody else would be playing the piano. Somebody else would go upstairs in the library. People would wander around. It was a relaxed situation, but . . . everybody was well dressed, everybody was engaged.[3]

Weinfield would trace his own orientation that poetry is public discourse, even though it is often made of very personal material, to these social relations which he absorbed as a child in which privacy coexisted with public self-presentation.

The backyard gate of his grandmother's house opened onto a path that made its way up to the summit of Mont Royale. It was an exquisitely beautiful path with a strange semi-rural feeling in the middle of the city. He took the walk often with his great-uncles.

The terms that would summarize this reminiscence of the house--formal, private yet civil, filled with music, opening onto graceful excursions--can be equally applied to the ideal that Weinfield's poetry has kept to. His description of the house makes a metaphor for his own poetic style.

When Weinfield was sixteen, his mother decided to make a new beginning in New York City. Therefore he came to New York City not by choice, but--at an age when life is ready to open out--neither with reluctance. The family settled in Rego Park, Queens.

Weinfield went to the City College of New York. Work on the college literary magazine, the Promethean, led to his friendship with a number of other poets. Indirectly, it led

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to his friendship with William Bronk. One of his teachers was Paul Blackburn, the authority on troubadour poetry. Among modern poets, Weinfield came heavily under the spell of William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot.

In the first year of college, writing poetry ceased to be casual diversion. With the caveat that it is something of a fiction to impose an abrupt beginning upon a history of steadily developing involvement, he traces consciousness of becoming a poet to a space of eight lines. The sources of inspiration of his first "real" poem were human creations--film, music, and language itself. It had nothing to do with any childhood sense of paradise. It was sparked by the film Les Enfants du Paradis. Caught up by this film, he saw it several times. Concurrently, he had been listening to a Bach cantata which contains music suggestive of a carousel. The images of the carousel and the actors and actress in the film fused into a poem called "The Carnival Cantata." The decisive lines are:

> The little mimist with the hands,
> And the boisterous tragedian
> are
> vying for position
> though
> she is dead
> no
> always dying.[4]

It was not what he had intended to write when he began. It was as if the poem itself took over, contradicting his own intentions with the play of the words "though" and "no," and then proceeding to write itself.[5]

Elizabeth Sewell has described this totally consuming

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experience of creation as an exchange between "you" and "not you."[6] Poetry was no longer "out there" regardless of him. It was out there face to face. (Unless, as Elizabeth Sewell has reminded, the Greeks were more exact in situating a guiding genius behind the shoulder, where everyone else in the world can see it except the person in question.)

The title The Carnival Cantata was borrowed from this poem to name his first book, which was entirely an undergraduate collection. The vocation of poet had been accepted like admission to a métier. "I wasn't even trying to express myself. It was something outside and I could do it, and I was aware that I had something there. It was some kind of work that I understood that I had."[7]

Weinfield would accept the position of the critic Harold Bloom--particularly with respect to the beginning of a career--that a poet develops through other poets. "I really love poetry, and I love English poetry, and it's my language. I am very moved by it. And I develop that way."[8] The consuming exclusiveness of this identification, and the line of succession it creates, is presented in the refrain of one of his poems. Between vignettes of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Chatterton, and Shelley, it repeats:

> The lives of the poets are my life--
> I am the lives of the poets.[9]

(Note: it is not an American line of succession.)

One feature of Weinfield's method of work is an unusually retentive verbal memory. Favorite, reread poems by other people automatically impress themselves on his memory,

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so that now he carries a stock of many thousands of available lines. Alongside this store of poetic form and content is a store of musical forms. His own work develops within this existing community of artistic commentary.

Yet he discredits conscious technique. "Poetic technique doesn't exist in itself. You abosrb certain things by osmosis, and you either have a good ear and you either know what's right or you don't. But there is no such thing as poetic technique in itself as something you can isolate and point to. It simply doesn't exist.[10]

His poems, correspondingly, must begin spontaneously. After the first spark of idea, words, and sense of form, he can enter the poem consciously. Conscious development has played a greater part in recent poems than in early ones. This stage of the work remains entirely mental. Even a poem of a thousand lines is carried in his head for reshifting and refining. Committing it to paper is the last step that signifies that it is complete. Sometimes the process of thinking through the line that a poem has begun, still not knowing exactly where it is going, still struggling with the language, extends over a period of years. That the language must ring right is primary.

He is not, therefore, a "writer" in the physical sense. This process of composition is probably closer to musical composition than a system of successive written revisions. It also appears to be close to the method followed by early lyric poets. Unfolding a music of language

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and ideas is primary to his poetry. Through the span of time that creating poems may cover, through their musicalness and their cerebralness, they have less tie to immediate, day-to-day experience of the world than poems written as a day-to-day discipline.

One impulsion in writing is to move on to new styles and subjects not addressed before. When this interviewer presented Elizabeth Sewell's position that the basic constellation of what a poet is is evident with the first book, he was willing to accept the possibility; but he added: "There are different ways of going off and you do different poems and you're always trying to do something new. I don't want to repeat myself. . . . For me every poem is something new. Maybe you can think of it as the unwinding of a spool. But it very much is something new."[11]

Of course, moving on involves loss as well as gain. The interview continued: "Over the years I have developed different resources that I didn't have in the beginning, but I have lost some too. . . . There are certain kinds of poems that I could write, for example, that I would never be able to write again. Because that is what happens when you do it--you have completed something, and then, you know, you have lost something. Just like life in general."[12]

Having turned a passing aspect of life into poetry, having created something for someone else to pick up and absorb, is not a light loss. Sonnet X of Sonnets Elegiac and Satirical presents a recurrent statement in his writing

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(page 343).

The impulsion, and inevitability, of moving forward create a mood that is directly antithetical to the reminiscence cultivated by Wordsworth in The Prelude.

> Wordsworth begins with this whole presence from childhood and all this material and he wants to get it out. It's like the poetry is back here in childhood and he wants to get it out. Not me. Maybe I'm the opposite. Maybe the poetry is here (reaching ahead of himself), and when I get out the poetry then I restore something that was missing. It's not like the thing was there and it just comes up, but maybe there's some kind of restoration of meaning with the poetry.[13]

Poetry that is helpless to contain the person, perceptions, and things of lived experience, that substitutes words for personal life, cannot offer meaning with any material substance. In place of matter, however, it can offer something much more meaningful, which is spirit. For Weinfield, poetry is the language of the spirit; and, if there is to be any hope for it, the spirit will find itself inevitably at odds with the constraints of the physical reality around it.

This tension between reality and desire is the force which animates Weinfield's poetry.[14] It is already evident in his earliest work in The Carnival Cantata. In his twenties, Weinfield discovered Marx, Engels, and Hegel. In their philosophy of nature and spirit, he found a systematic exposition of many of the conclusions which he had already arrived at on his own. In his later books, this line of German idealism has often served as a point of departure for his own reflections. It forms a point of departure in two senses, however: sometimes his references to it reveal

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"Sonnet X"

For years I sojourned in the Land of Prose;
With other sojourners I sojourned there.
It was a land of plenty, I suppose,
But in the end I was a sojourner.
I was a person then, a character,
And so I happened to encounter you.
It seemed that I had known you once somewhere,
Though both of us were merely passing through.
How long ago it was I cannot say
That I departed for the Land of Rhyme;
But it was long ago and far away,
And I am finished now with space and time.
When I arrived, I learned that I was dead--
And I am nothing now but what you read.[15]

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sympathetic agreement; at other times, they reveal wry difference.

At the basis of the conflict between reality and desire is language. For Weinfield, language divides the self from the world around it. It may appear to relate the spirit to the world; and in some practical ways it does. It can focus attention and direct behavior. Nevertheless, it also creates an alternate world which is irrevocably separate. To express his own sense of the relationship of words and world, Weinfield has referred to the opening chapter of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, on "Sense Certainty: Or the 'This' and 'Meaning.'" With this aspect of Hegel's philosophy, he is in complete agreement. Regarding the desire to speak of actual things, Hegel draws the conclusion: ". . . this is impossible, because the sensuous This that is meant cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e., to that which is inherently universal."[16] Language appears to point people into the world, but it actually takes them out of it.

Language creates tension between desire and reality because it magnifies desire itself. Beyond contingent, passing desires which people share with all animals, it can elaborate intricate realms of possibility. By creating the faculty of imagination, language makes humans both beneficiaries and victims of a radical separation from the natural world. For example, language makes it possible for people to do what no animal can do: to imagine that someday they will die. It also makes it possible for them to imagine that

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perhaps, by some chance, they won't. Language takes people out of the world by opening doors to an infinite variety of heavens and hells.

Weinfield parts with the philosophy of Hegel because he believes that there is one more inevitable tension between desire and reality. As he has put it, "Hegel confuses harmony with history." Hegel looked backwards to the Golden Age of Classical Greece, and ahead to some future age when spirit will realize itself in a perfect reconciliation with itself. Weinfield has no such faith. Looking backwards:

> Hegel confuses harmony with history; he seeks
> That beautiful illusion in the slave-states of the Greeks.[17]
>
> "The Spirit of Utopia," lines 17-18

Looking into the future:

> In Capetown and Johannesburg, when prisoners are condemned,
> They all go to the gallows singing Jerusalem:
> "Till we have built Jerusalem"--which now has arms for sale
> To fascists in South Africa--and thereon hangs a tale.
>
> lines 27-30

In the interim:

> Till we have built Jerusalem the poet spins out rhymes
>
> line 31

Like Hegel, Weinfield believes that poetry exists in the absence of reconciliation between desire and reality. Unlike Hegel, he does not believe that this reconciliation will ever be achieved. "Till we have built Jerusalem"--in the interim, there will be poets to spin out rhymes as long as there will be people.

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As a result of these convictions, Weinfield's poetic theory runs counter to the great body of American poetics. It denies any possibility of connecting poetry and things. Woven into poetry itself, his philosophy has resulted in "The Unicorn Tapestries" (pages 347-8). They make for a very different viewing than Williams' version in Paterson V.

Spirit, that leaves matter behind, inhabits its own landscape. Landscape imagery is an important element in the fabric of The Carnival Cantata and In the Sweetness of the New Time. Instead of real reference, however, landscape images function as evocations of certain qualities of feeling, or, in similar style, as settings for allegory. If one were pressed to choose between a dichotomy of nature and city, they conjure up the more softly landscaped experiences of his childhood instead of the current hard fact of New York City. Yet rather than either of these, they conjure up a world that is already literary. More than anything else, this geography "where mountains barricade the sun," where "trees cleave to the wind," where "the moon casts their shadows on the sand," takes its example from storybooks of the type that both children and adults can profit from, each in their own way. These images are the words of a world already created out of words.

Although such a use of imagery is almost unheard of in American poetry, it has clear precedents in English poetry. A similar atmosphere of medieval romance, for similar reasons, has been exploited by Coleridge, Keats, and Tennyson. It is

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"The Unicorn Tapestries"

I

Bereft of nature, consciousness must weave
A tapestry of loss through which to grieve;
Through loss to find itself, through death to live.

For consciousness, arising from the womb
Of nature, natureless, is its own tomb:
Unless the skein be woven on the loom,

It is a ghost that does but weave the wind.
And history, which is the struggle of the mind
To realize itself, can only find
Itself through nature, which as such is blind

Until, renatured in antithesis
And conscious of itself as consciousness,
It sees itself in what is imageless.

II

Seeking itself, through its activity
To subsume nature into subjectivity,
Freedom must itself endure captivity

And dissolution through its sufferings.
It must be torn asunder by the slings
And arrows of outrageous priests and kings,
Whose creed is, 'No ideas but in things'.

Because its truth is antithetical
To nature. It must be deemed heretical
And crowned with thorns, enclosed behind a wall

Of terror, falsehod and perversity.
All this must freedom of necessity
Endure, for thus it comes itself to be.

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III

To be is but the form of to desire,
And spirit, though its breath the flames inspire,
Wherewith it is consumed on its own pyre,
Shall not forbear to fulminate the fire

Because it lights the passage to its womb.
To be is but the form of to become,
And spirit, though it come upon the tomb

Of all it was and all it once enjoyed,
Shall not forbear to be itself destroyed
Because it is upborne against the void.

To be is but the form of to be free,
And spirit, though its wings loose entropy
Upon itself, shall not forbear to fly.

IV

Because its flight is fate, because its fate
Unfolds through what it labors to create,
Time forms the state, and yet it flies the state

Of things as they are. For how should time attain
Unto itself, if things as they are remain?
It would be turned into a beast again,

And as a beast to nothingness descend.
Because it seeks itself to comprehend,
Therefore must time the things of time transcend

Until such time as time shall cease to be--
When having passed into eternity,
It recapitulates its destiny;
For then the state shall wither, and so die.[18]

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symptomatic of a major division in poetic theory and practice, which can be traced through all of modern poetry. It corresponds to the division which was first clearly demarcated in the Lyrical Ballads. As Coleridge has described the book's plan, he himself was to create characters romantic or supernatural,

> . . . so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, . . . by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.[19]

American poetry has predominantly followed Wordsworth's method of concentration upon the world before it. European poetry has more frequently taken liberties similar to those shown by Weinfield's work, by investing the shadows of the imagination with poetic faith.

If poetry is not to become a dream world of idle desires, however, it must reflect back upon reality. In rare moments of accord, physical actuality and desire may harmonize. Reality rolls on, however, and these moments of harmony give way to loss. Poetry then becomes elegiac. In moments of disaccord, desire holds reality accountable for what it is. The result is satirical. Sonnets Elegiac and Satirical combines an interplay of both modes.

The alternate world of desire which language makes possible can go by many names. Some possibilities are "utopia," "home," or "heaven." In this sense, even a nonbeliever

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can believe in heaven. Weinfield may be an atheist because he rejects dogma which would situate God, heaven, and hell in some aerial geography. The faith which he puts in poetry itself, however, is religious. Poetry is the language of the spirit, and at its best the human spirit can reveal intelligence, purity, innocence, and a force of love which gods and angels, if they were ever to exist, would have to model themselves after.

To nurture the human creation of heaven, an aspiring poet must draw upon the environment of poetic tradition itself. Here a map has at least been outlined and colored in. In the surrounding physical environment, it manifestly does not exist.

Weinfield has summarized the separation of the spirit and reality in the following terms. "The poetic self is the soul. In certain ways the environment of the soul is different for me than the environment of the body. The soul has desires and memories which the body doesn't have."[20]

Poetry may be called the history of the soul. Factual autobiography is the history of the body. There is no more reason to draw autobiographical memory into poetry than there is to draw in the physical environment. A few images have had a symbolic force since childhood, so that they may be said to be a legacy from childhood--for example, the sea. Otherwise, Weinfield's childhood environmental memory never forms the subject of a poem.

For children themselves, Weinfield has great appreciation.

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The innocence which adults must struggle to retain, through the trials of experience, is natively children's. In his own young son, he sees every sign of an angel. Once childhood is over, however, an adult's focus must be ahead, in aspiration, rather than backwards, in retrospection.

In the second interview, Weinfield reflected upon general cultural trends which have attempted to connect childhood and poetry, or which have distanced them. He believes that there are three main reasons why poetry does not need to seek illumination in childhood memory.[21] 1) There is no going backwards. The cherishing of childhood memories is symptomatic of an idealization of the state of innocence that children seem to personify. Yet it takes a background of experience to be able to perceive innocence. Children themselves have no appreciation of the angelic sweetness that they often exhibit.

Corollary a) This rule can be applied to cultural history as well as personal history. If, as Stevens observed, one of the central changes in the modern imagination "is the movement away from the idea of God" (see page 114), then it involves parallel recession from the injunction, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Innocence is no longer a matter of faith, as it was for Vaughan, Traherne, and Wordsworth.

Corollary b) From a Jewish stand point, innocence never was a matter of faith. The ideal never was to be a meek

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child before a heavenly father. It has always been expected that a person will grow into mature adulthood, which is a state clearly distinct from childhood. There never was heaven to lose.

2) A second common claim for associating childhood and poetic mind has been common use of metaphorical thinking. The observation has often been made that children think like poets, or vice versa. It is said that they share a joint stock in trade in myth, metaphor, and animistic fancy. The argument runs (see Part I, pages 19-20) that poetry therefore maintains continuity with a childhood sense of the world. The presupposition behind this argument is that metaphorical thinking can be contrasted to standard prosaic thinking, that there is a literal language that makes metaphor stand out as a special construct.

The fiction in this account is that there is any such thing as a literal language. Even casual examination of everyday speech--or even the most advanced scientific writing--reveals that it is studded with metaphor. When the thinking of anyone who thinks in language is metaphorical, then children and poets lose their special preserve.

3) The third good reason for not seeking inspiration for poetry in childhood memory is that children don't write great poetry.

Weinfield's charge is that modern industrial society has attempted to group poetry with childhood and partition it from adult activity because it perceives both poetry and

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childhood distortedly. The cause of the distortion is its own rampant childishness. True children expend their best resources trying to understand the world, trying to piece it together logically as well as they can. Poetry, used sincerely, is a method for struggling for truth or meaning of an adult kind. The society that would collapse these similar commitments to a similar level has exempted itself from the honesty of either effort. Instead it has turned life into a shoddy game marketed under a pretension of sophistication. Under such rules, people feel free to pursue their own self-indulgence like spoiled children. When poetry is practiced under these rules, it is turned into an end in itself, often a shallow performance, often a flirtation with irrationality. An appreciation of life, including poetry, as a striving to secure an elevated level of beauty or truth has been dropped. In this society that is already primitive, irrational, and immature, poets and other artists have felt that they must break out and make something new; but they have mistaken their direction and followed in the established path by cultivating greater primitivism, irrationality, and childishness.

How does a poet speak for a society that is childish, but not innocent, having disregarded the injunction to grow up? Under such a society, Weinfield feels no obligation to learn its tongue and speak its parts, in the manner of Williams' mandate. Instead, he seeks a style that will be conserving of former achievements of beauty, that can offer

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an alternate example. To this end, he takes to heart as intently as Williams that poetry must purify the language, must save it from abuse. But he does not seek the saving words in a strict study of contemporary idiom. English is the common language of every poet who has ever written in English, regardless of date or address. With the trust that, "It is impossible not to be a contemporary,"[22] the resources of every period of English poetry become accessible for assimilation into the contemporary labor of creation.

There is then no forbidden territory.

> I was thinking about this yesterday, because I was listening to some Dowland lute songs, and I was thinking of some things they could do with the language . . . certain kinds of forms, certain things they could do with polysyllables, for example. They used trochaic meter, in a way that is almost never done, with feminine endings. Certain things that they did are very very beautiful, that we either cannot do . . . well, the contemporary stance for that would be, "It can't be done anymore. It's old fashioned." I don't think that it's necessarily true that it can't be done. The truth of the matter is that nobody's doing it. I take a more provisional stance to it. I would say, "What kind of society, what kind of use of language is this? What kind of relationship?" There is a certain kind of very pure relationship to the language that they had there. Obviously it can't be replicated exactly now, and it shouldn't be. But it is important to me as a human being to be in touch with language like that.[23]

Such a relationship between society and language can never be exactly replicated; but it can be listened to and learned from. If learned, it can make a contribution to contemporary form.

In his development of open form, or composition by field, Williams felt a mission to forge <u>the</u> style for his time and

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place. Weinfield's position provides for a multiplicity of styles. Before the challenge faced by every new poet to find a personal style, the field is open.

Such a consideration of language does not treat it as something empty or unfulfilling. Language as Henry Weinfield describes it may be likened to the barefoot Eros, the offspring of both Poverty and Plenty. Language may be meager and bleak compared to the full richness of experience. It is empty to the extent that it cannot actually contain the times and places of any life. Yet ordinary contingent day-to-day reality usually yields a sense of emptiness. Poetry then has the power to restore missing meaning. Eternity, which measures our time and place, may not be the eye of a benevolent father. Dead may be dead. But within the space and time we have, each successive point in life can carry its own weight of fullness. And poetry is not irrelevant to it.

> The truth of the matter is that the existence of God was never really a problem to me. I never really cared one way or the other. . . . In a certain way, art is sufficient, music is sufficient to me. I don't experience that kind of emptiness. . . . When you're full . . . I think people do experience fullness, and when they experience fullness it's not a big deal if God doesn't exist.
>
> There is some way in which art brings us closer to home, whatever that is. So therefore to the world. It brings us closer to Being. That is what I feel about it. It's a question of getting closer and closer to reality. Not that you substitute one world for another world. It's that you're trying to get closer to reality, to the world itself.
>
> Interviewer: Is reality a certain sense of the world, a full sense of the world?

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> Yes, yes. Assuming that reality is a fullness. If we say that reality equals fullness in some way. And I guess that is my only definition of reality. . . . I define reality in terms of fullness, in terms of meaning, plenitude.24

Language is part of the world's plenitude. Weinfield has put the competing claims of the loss and gain of paradise in other terms, in poetry. The poem begins, as usual, with a world of words. The words come from what we have left of Milton, a man of some experience, who said that the finest estate of heaven is found within. The meditation weaves around the concluding lines of Paradise Lost, just at the point when the first children of paradise must leave it, their first home, when it opens out upon the world.

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"Adam and Eve"

Because it is perfect, it encompasses us. Then why
do we think always of what lies beyond its boundaries?
And having become conscious that what they evoke
is ourselves, we begin to yearn for something
which is only a dim intuition: its location
unknown to us--far beyond the reaches of experience.

Far beyond the reaches of experience, we imagine
ourselves there, having invented the power to imagine.
And with no other images, how should we imagine ourselves
but as we are? We think of ourselves as being
there, and it is perfect because it encompasses us.

"The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide"*

Because it no longer encompasses us, we think
back upon that time--when we were there.
And having become conscious that what we have lost
is ourselves, we begin to grieve for something
which is always behind us, and as we go forward
to where we are not--far beyond the reaches of experience.

Far beyond the reaches of experience, we remember
ourselves there, having invented the power to remember.
And with no other memories, how should we remember ourselves
but as we are? We think of ourselves as being
there, and it is perfect because it encompasses us.

"They looking back, all th'Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happy seat"

---

*The lines of Milton that have been put in quotation marks for this copy were italicized in the original edition.

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Because it can never encompass us, we are always
alone, we inhabit the spaces before us.
And having become conscious that all that there is
is ourselves, we begin to think of the world
as the meditation for desires that give birth to themselves,
unfolding--far beyond the reaches of experience.

Far beyond the reaches of experience, we are conscious
of ourselves as the boundaries of our own self-consciousness.
And with no other boundaries, how should we be conscious
of ourselves
but as we change? We think of ourselves as becoming
ourselves, and as encompassing what lies beyond us.

"They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow
Through Eden took thir solitary way."[25]

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Notes

[1]William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads," The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. T. Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 735.

[2]The childhood biography that follows is drawn from a personal interview with Henry Weinfield in April 1983, with only two exceptions. References to his parents' European background and the public but private quality of his grandmother's house are from an interview in May 1983.

[3]Henry Weinfield, personal interview, May 1983.

[4]Henry Weinfield, The Carnival Cantata (Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1971), p. 18.

[5]Henry Weinfield, personal interview, April 1983.

[6]Elizabeth Sewell, personal interview, April 1982.

[7]Weinfield, interview, April 1983.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Henry Weinfield, In the Sweetness of the New Time (Atlanta: House of Keys, 1980), p. 43.

[10]Weinfield, interview, April 1983.

[11]Ibid. The position of Elizabeth Sewell that Weinfield is responding to is from the researcher's personal interview with her in April 1982.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]The following interpretation of Weinfield's poetry which proceeds by discussing desire, reality, and language, draws upon a third personal interview with him in April 1984.

[15]Henry Weinfield, Sonnets Elegiac and Satirical (Cincinnati: House of Keys, 1982), n.p.

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[16]G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 66.

[17]Henry Weinfield, "The Spirit of Utopia," unpublished manuscript.

[18]Weinfield, In the Sweetness of the New Time, pp. 47-50.

[19]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 2 vols., ed. G. Watson, Everyman's Library (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1956), 2:168-9.

[20]Weinfield, personal interview, April 1984.

[21]The argument that follows is taken from the personal interview with Henry Weinfield in May 1983.

[22]Weinfield, "Theses on Poetic Diction," unpublished manuscript.

[23]Weinfield, interview, May 1983.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Weinfield, In the Sweetness of the New Time, pp.45-46.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MARIE PONSOT

Marie Ponsot has been publishing poetry since the age of eight. It presently means that she has more than fifty years of experience writing. After her first book, True Minds, however, she wrote for more than twenty years without any attempt to distribute her work. The interviews for this study come at a time when active publishing once again reflects at least some measure of her productivity. A large book, Admit Impediment, came out in 1981. A book which she co-authored on the art of teaching writing, Beat Not the Poor Desk, won a Modern Language Association prize in 1983. She has given numerous contributions to journals recently; and the manuscript for a new collection of poetry has just gone to the publisher. Two published interviews were also available in preparing this presentation.

When Marie Ponsot was invited to take part in this study, she replied that she would be glad to, particularly since she was in the middle of a long poem about memory and place, and poets' use of city experience was a long-standing interest of her own. She was the fourth person to be interviewed. The interviews were held in her home. By this time, out of familiarity with all five poets' work, some of the observations which will compose the final part of this paper had already begun to take form. Therefore the interviews with her

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included a new dimension of general reflection. They were able to combine questions regarding her own development with some discussion regarding different interpretations of life history and memory which tend to go with different world views and schools of poetry. This second aspect of the interviews will be reserved until the final part of this paper. The presentation given here focuses upon her own work and considers broader movements within the history of poetry only as they relate to it.

Marie Ponsot's participation was recommended by Jane Cooper. At this time, William Bronk had not entered the study. The work was still guided by the assumption that, if its intention was to explore contemporary versions of environmental memory distinct from Wordsworth's, the best stratagem was to speak only with city poets. Jane Cooper could not help herself, she explained, because she had a Wordsworthian childhood and it is evident everywhere in her poetry. As a good candidate, she recommended Marie Ponsot, who is definitively a city poet since she grew up in Queens, New York and still lives only a few minutes from her childhood home. The folly of arbitrary distinctions like city poet or country poet, which leave out the creating half of what we "half create and what perceive,"[1] as well as finer background details, could not have been better demonstrated.

Marie Ponsot was born into the Wordsworthian environment of a middle class family in Jamaica Estates, Queens.[2] In the early 1920s when she was born, the neighborhood was predomi-

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nantly Catholic. It boasted shops for discriminating customers, a nice park, a large monastery and convent school, and fine public schools, which she attended.

Her father imported wines and liqueurs for the very wealthy. His work put him in touch with political émigrés from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Some French, Belgian, and Spanish associates became friends who were almost like family. They brought their languages into the home. French was often the common language of exchange.

Language, in general, was a rich childhood endowment. Both her father and her mother were accomplished storytellers. Poetry, both oral and written, was another family tradition. Her mother found occasion to recite Wordsworth's "Ode to the Daffodils" "about ten thousand times." Her grandmother's favorite was Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." Both her mother and her grandmother wrote verses when they had something especially affectionate to say, or especially poignant. Her father contributed to birthdays by writing rhymes for home-made cards. Poetry was a taken-for-granted strand in the warm weave of everyday life.

It was a strand of everyday life similar to the contemplation of nature. Her mother loved both to walk and to find a beautiful place and sit still in it. Particularly before the birth of a brother when Marie Ponsot was six, mother and daughter often went off exploring together. The mother taught that part of the pleasure of noticing details of plants, birds, animals, and rocks was naming them. She

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enlarged the sense of the area by sharing geological history, as well as informal stories about changes in her own lifetime. For example, she described the trillium and dogtooth violets that once grew in wild corners in Queens. At home, a set of the Burgess nature books for children reinforced the lessons. They were filled with the habits and adventures of animals and birds who were presented as if they stood always ready to explain themselves to any child who was sharp-eared enough to listen.[3]

One reminiscence from childhood will show how a sense of the sacred in nature was shared by the whole family.

> I do remember it would be clearly exhibited by just stopping and looking at things. I can remember a field of daisies on Long Island somewhere. We had driven out to The Hamptons, and on the way back my mother said, "We don't really have time to stop." But then we came to a field of flowers and we stopped. It was a total field of daisies--I can still see it. Everyone got out of the car and just stood there, looking at the daisies in the late light of a summer's day. Not to pick a lot of them, but just to look at them.[4]

Queens in the 1920s was a peaceful, secure environment. Besides introductions to her surroundings on walks with her mother, she was free to explore as far as her feet could take her on her own.

Another expansion of her world came every evening when the family drove over the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan to pick up her father at the office. It would be just in time to catch sunset behind Manhattan, when the city was transformed by radiance and the air and river had a softer, more floating quality. "And that was a holy city, no question about it."[5]

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It embodied a sense which grew with her as she grew, that the aggregation of human beings that the city sheltered was somehow inherently holy. If you feel "that if anything is holy it is the human face,"[6] then the city is holy in any condition or at any time of day. But sunset confirmed it.

Before Christmas when Marie Ponsot was eight, her mother allowed her to go into Manhattan by herself for the first time in order to shop for presents. It was an intoxicating adventure. From that time, she had free access to any part of the city.[7]

Like Audre Lorde, Marie Ponsot has a great sense of New York City as water garlanded. It is "my many-voiced harbor city."[8] Not only the daily drives across the East River revealed it. Before her father went into the wine business, he had worked in the old Customs House at the tip of Manhattan. When he went back to visit friends there, he often took the children with him. The building commanded a view of the entire harbor. A paternal aunt who worked on John Street arranged other trips around this oldest part of Manhattan where city, sky, and water meet. To this day, whenever she thinks of Manhattan, she thinks of this point of conjunction.[9]

Beginning when Marie Ponsot was nine or ten, mother and children began to spend every summer as paid guests on a farm outside of Newburgh, New York. It was a 220-acre working dairy farm. The first order of the day was a farm breakfast that could fill you up just at the sight of it. There was no other order of the day. The day stretched ahead with

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absolutely no claim or responsibility. As it stands out in her memory, she spent most of the time wandering by herself. There were always things that she was looking for. The Indian burial that was rumored to be on the property was never found, but it made good looking. There was a "fossil field," with boulders with fossils in them. There were paths and stone fences to follow, an apple orchard, pastures, corn fields. In August the thistles along the fences meant flocks of goldfinch.[10]

Today Marie Ponsot has a cabin outside of New Paltz, not very far from the site of this farm, where she can spend whole summers again. She has remained grounded in her two childhood centers. Therefore she can say, "I am not a city person."[11] At the same time, she is so much a city person that she must also say, "I am not a country person."[12] Like the river at sunset reflecting both skyline and sky, her poetry mingles both city and nature. Yet if the balance of her poems' images must be admitted, like the river itself, it falls on the side of nature.

From the age of eight through the end of childhood, she published poetry in The Brooklyn Eagle, in the children's column edited by Aunt Jean, "that patient lady." It was Whitman's old house organ; but the children's column, at least, had not maintained the same pitch of revolutionary fervor. In retrospect, Marie Ponsot believes that the advantage of writing assiduously as a child was that it gave her the opportunity to write every possible cliché out of her

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system before she knew that the word cliché existed. Her parents thought that her writing and publishing poetry were "nice," but nothing special to fuss over.[13]

Given a mother who recited Wordsworth every night as she put her to bed, the child deduced that the connection between nature and poetry must be pretty tight. Nature was her most popular topic. She still remembers the beginning and ending of her first offering to the Eagle. The usual technique of the time was rhymed quatrains. ("Hit them over the head.") So it opened:

> The dark clouds of night
> Have taken afright.
> The bright clouds of day
> Have flushed them away.

After more of the same, it arrived at a conclusion which took her by surprise, in which the rhyme was more subtle:

> Dawn's tapestry
> Defies imagery.

Such finesse absolutely knocked her out. She can remember repeating the lines over and over to herself.[14]

As she grew, she learned to practice a more agile repertoire than rigid metrical rhyming. Free verse was the dominant convention by this time. Free verse was accepted as only one possibility, however. It was never allowed to exclude older conventions. When she was about twenty she read somewhere that every aspiring poet should write a sonnet a day. So she wrote a sonnet a day until they were second nature. She went on to villanelles and each of the other "mean" forms.[15] Regardless of fashion, she has never given up the position

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that the mastery of all of these alternatives is an enlargement of freedom rather than a constriction.

She did her undergraduate work at St. Joseph's College for Women in Brooklyn. Beginning in her junior year, she volunteered to staff a storefront canteen that had been donated to the local parish. It was in the first Puerto Rican neighborhood in Brooklyn. For three years she spent her Friday nights and Saturdays there, keeping a place open where people could come in off the street and get a free meal. It removed the blinders she had grown up with, as she discovered that stories such as Dickens told were not only in Dickens. It increased her identification with New York City, as the population of poor surrounding her amplified from two dimensions to three.

The next step was a masters in English at Columbia University. George Herbert, the Metaphysical poet, was the subject of her thesis. While she was at Columbia she came close to completing another project that she had set herself, to walk every block in Manhattan from Battery Park to the Harlem River.[16]

After graduate school she found work in a publishing company. When she took stock within a few years and realized that the job that she had taken off-handedly as a job threatening to turn into a career, she resigned and left for France. The country had just opened up again after World War II. A fellow passenger on the boat crossing the Atlantic was Lawrence Ferlinghetti. They became friends and exchanged work.

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They continued to see each other in Paris, and continued to correspond and share work later.[17]

Marie Ponsot lived in or around Paris for three years. It was the second city that took possession of her. She was young and in love in Paris. She married a French painter, Claude Ponsot. Many years later, when she put some of her feeling for Paris in a poem, she embodied its beauty in the tiny park at the tip of the Ile de la Cité, the Vert-Galant.[18] In the middle of the interview, as she was describing it, she realized that this multiple refraction of Seine, island and sky is the Parisian equivalent of lower Manhattan that represented New York City to her as a child.[19]

Just before the birth of a second child, the family returned to settle permanently in New York City. In time six sons and one daughter were born. Because her husband learned English only grudgingly and gradually, for many years French remained the language spoken at home.

Meanwhile Ferlinghetti moved to San Francisco and started the City Lights press. He asked Marie Ponsot to contribute a book. True Minds, published in 1957, was fifth in The Pocket Poets Series, in between Allen Ginsberg's Howl and Denise Levertov's Here and Now. The back cover of the book announced: "Marie Ponsot will certainly become known, in the years to come, as one of the most important young Catholic poets of the post-World War II period."

The denomination of a Catholic poet is everywhere evident. The treasury from which she draws most of the poems'

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titles and their main body of images and allusions is the great fused tradition of Platonism and Catholicism. The subject is always present circumstances and surroundings, but seen through these two thousand years of philosophy and faith. Everything is heated to a sunset intensity. For example, the first few pages yield the phrases "intemperate told truth," "passion, miracle, incautious faith," "forever perfected," "forever alive," "the golden diametric," "the danced dimension of the good true beautiful."

When abstract terms are examined, the word "love" or its derivatives dominates. It appears three times more often than the next most frequent abstractions, which are "truth" and "freedom." A simple counting of these words is misleading, however; because even when they are not directly named, they are addressed in every poem in some form. The shifting identities among love, truth, and freedom, along with the shading of their opposites, create tensions that save the poems from a docile faith. "Pain" and "peace" are other recurring words.

Marie Ponsot believes that New York City does not appear in True Minds in any measure equal to its influence because it was so intimately part of herself that she could not step outside of it to talk about it. To describe it would have been as elusive as trying to describe herself.[20] Yet it enters several poems. The second verse of the opening poem begins with the invocation, "Bring me that truth love-ridden whose black blaze makes / A comfort in the ice-bitten ghettos of cities."[21] "Peine Forte et Dure" and "Circle, of Friends"

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expand this simultaneous reference to suffering, darkness, radiance, and love.[22] They express the holiness that she had always felt to be inherent in the city's compressed population. The poem "Downtown" is of a piece (page 372). It was touched off by sunset (again) in downtown Manhattan (again).

By the time Marie Ponsot assembled True Minds, five children had been born in less than five years. In time, two more were born. Writing poetry had to subsist in the margin left after mothering. As her marriage began to dissolve, the responsibility of supporting the family also fell to her. She took on translating which could be done at home. She eventually translated thirty-two books. They bound her even more closely to children's interests, since they include many collections of fairy tales.

It was a valuable apprenticeship. From the Fables of La Fontaine, especially, she learned how art can have the effect that "its limits are the limits of a small world, but that world is full."[24]

As she described conditions for personal writing during these years, "the routine would be to get the babies into bed, do twenty pages of the work--that of doing translations, and then whatever energy I had left was mine."[25] Somehow, after only a brief interruption, she found the energy for poetry again.

She did not, however, find energy for publishing. Between True Minds and Admit Impediment, her next book, twenty-five years intervened. It was time enough for gradual changes to accrue into considerable change. At first glance, it is

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"Downtown"

Surprised, the pursey woman sees, pauses to sham
Disdain for my folly who am laughing still
Because the sun's fierce glory roared, to damn
All murk forever, an instant before it fell.

The street is a passageway dedicated to the alive,
The being beauty of man and child; I take
Toll of their lived-in walking; I thrive
On the grace and gaucherie they, moving, make.

Always among them there is one whose glancing face, unasked,
Fantastic, says, here is a friend of angels; masked,
Yet unmistakable the bright middle creatures move ablaze
About us; and make the intelligence leap with praise,
Rush to claim a breaking joy from joy's created trace.

O good world, God's work, turn, turn, turn in place
Wide in the wild eternal air of His embrace.[23]

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easy to mistake True Minds and Admit Impediment as the work of two unrelated authors.

An illustration of the difference between the two books is "Unabashed" (page 374). It is kin to "Downtown" in some of its ideas, but even they have undergone some removes and reversals.

The watershed in the development of her poetry was a divorce. With only two exceptions, the forty-nine poems in Admit Impediment were chosen from work done during the eight years following her divorce. The criteria for selecting poems from this period and rejecting earlier ones relate directly to the subject of this study. They concern the proper connection between words and things, and memory.

Marie Ponsot has described the alteration in her conception of language through reference to an essay by Northrop Frye.[27] It discusses two basic modes of word use: charms and riddles. Parallel antinomies are rhyme and reason and sound and sense. Charms are part of the stock of the art of magic. The word's root is carmen, meaning song. "The rhetoric of charm is dissociative and incantatory."[28] Its devices are rhyme, refrain, alliteration, pun, assonance, antithesis. "Such repetitive devices break down and confuse the conscious will, hypnotize and compel it to certain courses of action. Or they may simply put to sleep. . . ."[29] The language of invocation, which seeks to remove the speaker's own resistance to the influx of a greater power, follows the same mode. True Minds is charm poetry.

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"Unabashed"

Unabashed
as some landscapes are
(a lakeshape, say,
lying and lifting
under a cupping sky)
      so angels are,
entire with each other,
their wonderful bodies
obedient, their strengths
interchanging--
      or so
we imagine them
hoping
by saying these things of them
to invent human love.[26]

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The word "riddle" comes from the same root as "read." Riddles invite the reader to break the spell of charms. They demand intellectual detachment. They turn concentration from sound to sight, to attention to the given world. Admit Impediment is guided by the principles of riddles.

Marie Ponsot has rephrased these aspects of the art of language in terms of two elements that she now seeks to combine within each single poem. Charms are comparable to a hum, or bass line, or expected rhythm. "I try to do that because I like the sound of language a lot. When I write a first draft it has something in it that I call a hum. It goes Mmmm, Mmmm, like those things of Swinburne's when you can't even remember what he's talking about. There's a big hum. It's great! But what was he talking about?"[30] Riddles are comparable to the intellectual scrunity that the poem initiates and seeks to evoke. "So when I rewrite I try to cut across the hum, both with the idea and with the cadence of ordinary talk."[31]

Charms originate in the faith that world and word are intrinsically connected. Therefore words can bend things as well as people to the speaker's will. Marie Ponsot does not repudiate the tradition that in the beginning was the Word, but she does repudiate any exercise of persuasion. She has rejected incantation in favor of discrimination and alertness.

The principle of riddles is closely related to the principle of memory that she has adhered to in Admit Impediment. Memory is the medium all poetry must travel through. It is

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impossible to write of anything that has not first been committed to memory. But memory conceals as well as preserves. For Marie Ponsot, the process of appealing to memory is integral to the process of rewriting, when reason counteracts rhyme. She has described the correspondence in an interview.

> Of course memory has a tendency to both review and revise. Memory edits before you even get to it. So that if you are writing there is a danger in writing too quickly. The thing is to try to get down to wherever that sort of shaped memory is edited and changed. I think then you have to meditate on it a little bit, think about it, puzzle over it, until you get back to the fresher memory. To the less edited version of what really happened. Because somehow . . . clichés must be useful to us. And they will sneak in and blanket things. I'm not sure if any of the Freudian reasons are any good, but they're probably part of the picture. And there are probably just reasons of efficiency, the way a computer can only deal with two poles.
>
> Interviewer: Are you talking in terms of proceeding from one draft of a poem to another?
>
> Yes. And I think that is why, unlike some people who are able to write final versions very quickly, when I write I like to write something and then leave it alone for awhile. I may go back and work on it two or three times and then leave it alone, but there is a middle point when I let it sit for awhile. I go back through it and can then do that kind of thing I was talking about. See where it doesn't quite ring true somehow.

Marie Ponsot explained that the many years when she wrote without publishing gave her freedom to look back upon poems as still drafts, and repeatedly restart in a search for greater fidelity of feeling and language.

> Interviewer: That is like taking memory as a guide ultimately to what is true if you go low enough, go down deep enough.

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> Yes, and that means taking experience as a guide, because it is experience that produces memory. . . . Whatever the role of the imagination is in that kind of shaping and reperceiving of memory, I'm not sure; but I know it's an important one, because that is the faculty that is working on memory. To try to push it back toward what you really remember you have to reimagine the first level of memory, and then see the holes in it, and press through the hole and see if it gets somewhere. . . .
>
> The informed imagination gets to know the tricks of the mind, gets to know the bank of your own thought. For example, I am in some very deep way optimistic. Every bottle is half full. And when I am remembering something I have to remember it the way I remember it, and then go back and look at the empty half of the bottle. It's funny the way significance emerges when I do that. I begin to see why I remember what I remembered, and I begin to see something more, or something else, something that completes it all or informed it in some different way.[32]

For Marie Ponsot, memory is a riddle worth guessing.

Overwhelming emotion may cut through the necessity of revisions and go straight to the truth. For example, "Sois Sage O Ma Douleur,"[33] a long elegy to a self-effacing friend who died without fulfilling her own literary promise, was written in one sitting and defied retouching.[34] For daily writing, however, this probe for truth is a guiding rule.

For the purposes of this study, unfortunately, the poems in Admit Impediment which illustrate her use of memory best are too long to reproduce here. It is a process of many pages to unfold the accrual of insight in poems that begin with a phrase, or the back and forth musical descent into memory in poems that begin with a strict form. As an example of the second method, the reader is referred to the sonnet series to her mother, "Late,"[35] which weaves together her early childhood, her mother, and the nature that her mother

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led her to. As a partial example of the first method, the opening of "Field of Vision: A Map for a Middle-Aged Woman," is given here (page 378). The setting is an old farm orchard very much like the one she knew as a child.

From time to time an early poem achieved an authenticity that pointed her in this new direction. "Multipara: Gravida 5" in True Minds, written just after she gave birth, served as a talisman across the years because it was the first poem in which she tried to be literally accurate about her perception of an experience. "For a Divorce," which opens Admit Impediment, marked the transition when precise memory became a conscious principle in her conscious control.

The change in the role of memory and language between True Minds and Admit Impediment involved a change in the way that the physical world enters the poems. In Admit Impediment, physical objects are no longer named as symbols of something more significant. They are named for their own sakes. Settings and things in True Minds are transfigured by the force of words, as if they had to be artificially illuminated through poetic virtuosity. The actual world is sacrificed on the altar of the ideal. Things remain consecrated in Admit Impediment, but now it is understood that they are so simply by being themselves. When this difference in the tone of the two books was remarked upon, Marie Ponsot was pleased that this deliberate reversal was evident. Between the first book and the second, she exchanged "the truly vain idea that I could create something" for a desire

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"Field of Vision: A Map
for a Middle-Aged Woman"

I, lines 1-31

The wind changes; I slept in it
Like a stone awash at the bottom of the stream.
With the sun, the mist and I rise.
I fall upward to wake outside
The numbered myths of measure
Into real time.
I fall awake beyond
The distancing myths of memory
Blinking to see
Measurelessly.
Mortal eyes, mine, seeing almost
A hemisphere at a time, here see
It is late summer, a shimmering.

At my foot, flat up to face the sparse
Light of the clifftop orchard, grow
Furred, rounded (feel!) leaves
In the lee of a sitting stone; overhead
Among old boughs a few apples gleam.

I have never seen anything like it.
It is lonely (lone in likeness, singular),
Lovely (that is, like love). Orphan
I know no other seasons; unlicensed,
I am not a country person; what I see
Is that nothing real happens twice.
Twice, nothing happens. Grasshoppers' angles
Differ; each jump of theirs links known to new.
My childhood Flying Dutchmen are no clue to these.
Memory's to think with, not daydream absently--
It should be like light on leaping, rain on water,
To make the mind run richer, a brilliance
Merging emerging in the shimmering interchange.[36]

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to make "the importance of things and our connectedness, and the use they are to us, the incredible use that things are to us . . . to stand for itself by itself."[37] Admit Impediment attempts to draw closer to things rather than to transcend them.

Unlocking images of things is like unlocking memory. Discovering an image that corresponds to something else, whether it be a symbol or an objective correlative, is like keeping within the confines of edited memory. It is a case of producing just what one expected to find. She distinguishes this practice from the discovery of metaphors when images unexpectedly reveal a significance which simultaneously corresponds to a new self-understanding. Metaphors of this kind can emerge from memory when it is trusted to disclose the meaning of experience through patient surveillance. The first use of images, and memory, is consciously controlled. The second can only be learned from.[38]

Marie Ponsot assigns natural things a privileged status. They have an essential aspect of surprise which defies prediction and control. Not having been brought into being by human hands, they contain an unexplainable dimension. On a walk in the woods, nature displays a degree of design and detail which staggers the perception. On a city street, the human face dominates. Although human beings may produce surprising results too, the surprise is always partly self-directed, because we misjudged someone whom we expected to be essentially like ourselves.[39] Therefore, although a city street may embody her sense "that if anything is holy

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it is the human face," to try to express something as mysterious as holiness she is cast upon natural things. Like people, they have the mystery that they are not man-made. Nature remains the best metaphor for the Mysterium Tremendum.[40]

As a result of such reflections, "Unabashed," despite its name, is more reticent than "Downtown." It does not begin assuming angels, but looks into the process of their creation. Not being sufficient unto ourselves, to invent what we lack but desire--like perfect love--we imagine angels. They show us how to do what we fail to do by ourselves. To imagine angels, we abstract from whatever we can find--"a lakeshape, say."[41]

Through this approach to common things, with special honor given to natural things, Marie Ponsot has declared her sympathy not only with Wordsworth but with a deep Romantic trend. Appropriately, English Romantic poetry constitutes her personal "pleasure plot." Not only Wordsworth but Keats, Shelley, and Blake remain key figures whom she fondly returns to read.[42] Wordsworth most earnestly developed a conception of the imagination as the power to see more deeply into the life of things (when the life that he wanted to see into was best found in natural or rustic things). Yet each other poet wrote variations. In Coleridge's landmark attempt to define the imagination, making terms of peace between the ideal and the actual is the most recurrent consideration.

> . . . This power, first put into action by the will and understanding . . . reveals itself in the

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> balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and ready self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and the admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.[43]

Marie Ponsot herself traces the reliance upon concrete things further back to the Christian doctrine that time is what is given to humans, and the real is what is time bounded. In this context things "keep us sane," "keep us from getting lost," "identify us," "move us to act." But as the doctrine adds . . . the real can only be synthesized and analyzed by the ideal.[44]

The American Transcendentalists read both Coleridge and theology. They took note, and wrote addenda. An attentive orientation to real things has been an abiding strain in American writing. As a result, Admit Impediment has brought Marie Ponsot within the current of American poetry's predominant involvement in describing concrete experience and surroundings.

Nonetheless, she continues to feel alienated from many of the major figures in American poetry. One point of difference is the method that she follows to discover telling images. Sometimes she begins with a phrase, and builds up a poem by association around it. This method may not be unlike that followed by many of her contemporaries. At other

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times, however, she begins with a strict imposed form. She is convinced that it taps a level of discovery, of memory, that cannot be reached in any other way. "The information you get when you are obeying one of these forms, either the sonnet or a sonnet-like form with rhyme, or the sestina where the turn is of a different weaving kind . . . it pulls material out of your head that you can't get out in any other way. You don't 'think.' It does not 'occur to you.' It doesn't 'reveal itself to you.' You draw on a different matrix of language. You do. And it is a way of discovery."[45] Free verse, which makes each step an act of conscious decision, is psychologically much less free.

To the popular position that metrical forms are now outdated, superseded by the rhythms of modern speech, she opposes a second conviction that the level of insight that they tap is primal, and therefore timelessly human. In her love for strict forms, she has not budged between True Minds and Admit Impediment. Few American poets today share this enthusiasm.

Another point of difference between herself and much American poetry hinges on the final clause in Coleridge's definition of imagination, that it should subordinate "admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry." She feels that much American work plays upon an identification between the poet as a public figure and the poetry itself. Regardless of their feelings for Whitman otherwise, many poets have readily accepted the position of public bard that

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he left vacant. After True Minds came out, she looked at Allen Ginsberg's Howl that preceded it and at other books in the City Lights series around it. She listened to Ferlinghetti read poetry to jazz. She knew that, "I couldn't possibly do any of that. I couldn't assert myself, publically, as 'I am the poet.' I didn't feel like a prophet. I didn't have a definite message that I felt had to be spread."[46] In contrast to poets who seem driven by a mission to persuade others to their opinions, she is moved by questions, by riddles, instead of answers. Therefore, although she had known since early childhood that she would always write poetry, as she continued writing the work was put to bed in drawer after drawer.

Just as the publication of True Minds was due to her friendship with Ferlinghetti, the publication of Admit Impediment is the result of her friendship with Marilyn Hacker, one of this country's most widely recognized woman poets. After years of exchanging work, Marilyn Hacker finally added to the refrain that "You've got to get those poems out," the conclusion that "I'll be there next Sunday to pick up a manuscript--you better have it ready."[47]

Understandably, women's silence is a major theme in Marie Ponsot's work now as well as in Audre Lorde's. They use the word in many of the same senses. It signifies being frightened into silence, being shamed into silence, or keeping silent because no one will listen.[48]

Under the issue of silence, then, the terms that drew

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attention in True Minds--freedom and truth--reappear. Reconsideration of silence according to these terms, however, highlights the paradox inherent in it. To be forced into silence is undeniably a negation of liberty. Yet as long as public self-marketing or stylistic conformity is required to get work distributed, silence is closely allied to qualities Marie Ponsot cherishes.

Her involvement in poetry as one daily activity among others rather than an all-consuming career, and her humility that it is an essential human function rather than a rare distinction, are perilous for publishing as long as it requires aggressive promotion. She is well aware of this dilemma. Since she is not willing to modify her own beliefs, she has not found a solution for it.[49]

For Marie Ponsot, rejecting pressures that would turn being a poet into a public role is critical to the exercise of truth and freedom. Therefore it is also critical to the exercise of memory.

She feels great sympathy with Wordsworth's description of memory as "spots of time." Through these "spots," time is preserved through localization in space. The places that contained experience and feeling remain in the mind, continuing to contain them and give them immunity against time. Places preserve memory; and memory, in turn, makes places sacred.[50] Like Wordsworth, and unlike most Americans, Marie Ponsot experiences spots of time in the double sense that she repeatedly revisits past places in fact as well as in memory,

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since she continues to live close to her childhood origins.

Marie Ponsot would add to Wordsworth's philosophy, however, that these spots in time, being in time, are also in motion. As the second line of Admit Impediment avers, "Lives change places."[51] "Places," here, has many meanings; but physical place is the word's first referent. The rule stands regardless of length of residence, due to the basic ground rule stated in the opening line, that "Death is the price of life." This inexorable change applies not only to the future, but to each successive moment that sees the past die and the present come into being. Through the offices of memory, the past may keep being resurrected in the present.

Spots of time, once crystallized, are never lost to an individual; but they still must stand a test. The challenge is which form of memory will preserve them.

The easiest answer is memory the ever-ready editor, the cliché dealer, the stereotype seller. Marie Ponsot believes that the great risk incurred in taking the position of the poet as a public figure is that the pose may freeze. Public postures make perfect copy for memory the editor.

The more strenuous answer--in so far as questions can be an answer--is memory that seeks truth. This memory may function like either method of her writing: adding both new and old associations to new phrases, or following old forms into new figures. A process occurs then that Marie Ponsot's

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recent writing illustrates most often through the example of the death of family members and friends. It applies, however, just as much to places. Every new experience (of death, of a favorite place, of anything important to her) rearranges perception of the present and the past. "Very intensely, something in the moment changes the way you remember the past, and then the way you remember the past informs the way you're seeing the present. None of it stays the same. It jumps around."[52]

Around these two possibilities of memory, the sensitive terms in Marie Ponsot's work--truth, freedom, silence--coalesce. Memory is integral to identity. Whether our identity is free or conscripted depends upon the use of memory. If the truth is kept silent because memory declines to probe for it, either through fear or through accepting clichés, freedom is forfeited. Freedom of identity she defines as the ability to keep faith with memory, with the roots of our identity, by keeping in time with its changes.

Like Audre Lorde, Marie Ponsot's primary example of change is the cycle of generations. As with her, also, it involves a succession of receiving something precious and passing it on. For both women, the same image serves to represent it. The first in a series of three long poems that Marie Ponsot wrote for her children begins:

> The water:
> I pour it
> with care
> into these seven jars for
> you seven,

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sacred voyagers
soon to be launched.
     One of you will
one day need it;
I have seen signs
     in your faces; one
     will need it.
Each of you is
I judge able to need it.[53]

It ends:

What we know for certain
is that this is water
--mine to give you
what I may of it--
that nothing
can spoil.[54]

Within the limits of her own life, an ideal of the same fluidity prevails. Child, mother, grand mother, each holds form by flowing freely into the other.

What has become of the preeminent term in True Minds--love? The titles True Minds and Admit Impediment are taken from the opening declaration of Shakespeare's Sonnet 116: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments." By itself, the second title may seem a wry comment upon the first. The choice "Admit Impediment," however, was never meant to mock the sonnet's full intent. It is Marie Ponsot's observation that a marriage of true minds is only possible if impediment be admitted and attended to.[55] Only then can love remain "the star to every wandering bark / Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken"--as the sonnet proceeds to say. Her work conveys the trust that her memory, if it follow the same course of honest admission, will be found to navigate by the same mark.

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Notes

[1]William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (lines 106-107), The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed. T. Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 165.

[2]The description of Marie Ponsot's childhood neighborhood and the importance of language and poetry in the home, on this and the following page, is taken from a personal interview with her on November 3, 1983.

[3]Marie Ponsot, personal interview, November 28, 1983.

[4]Marie Ponsot, "Interview with Marie Ponsot," Woman Poet: The East (Reno, Nevada: Women-in-Literature, 1980), p. 48.

[5]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[6]Marie Ponsot, personal interview, November 3, 1983.

[7]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[8]Marie Ponsot, Admit Impediment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 117.

[9]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, p. 106.

[12]Ibid., p. 101.

[13]Ponsot, Woman Poet, p. 48.

[14]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[15]Ponsot, Woman Poet, p. 48.

[16]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, pp. 94-96.

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[19]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[20]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[21]Marie Ponsot, True Minds, The Pocket Poets Series: Number Five (San Francisco: City Lights Pocket Bookshop, 1956), p. 5.

[22]"Peine Forte et Dure" and "Circle of Friends" are found in True Minds on pages 17 and 12, respectively.

[23]Ponsot, True Minds, p. 25.

[24]Ponsot, Woman Poet, p. 49.

[25]Marie Ponsot, "Interview with Marie Ponsot," Dialog 1 (2) (April 1983):3.

[26]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, p. 64.

[27]Northrop Frye, 'Charms and Riddles," Spiritus Mundi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 123-147.

[28]Ibid., p. 126.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ponsot, Dialog, p. 3.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[33]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, pp. 31-37.

[34]Ponsot, Dialog, p. 4.

[35]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, pp. 70-73.

[36]Ibid., pp. 101-102.

[37]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[38]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[41]This paragraph follows Marie Ponsot's own interpretation of "Unabashed" in Dialog, p. 4.

[42]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[43]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 2 vols., ed. G. Watson, Everyman's Library (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1956), 2:174.

[44]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[45]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ponsot, Dialog, p. 5.

[50]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

[51]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, p. 3.

[52]Ponsot, interview of November 28, 1983.

[53]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, p. 109.

[54]Ibid., p. 113.

[55]Ponsot, interview of November 3, 1983.

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PART V

DISCUSSION: MEMORY AND METHOD RECONSIDERED

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION

Up to this point, this study has been primarily occupied with re-presenting poets' own presentations of their involvement with memory and the physical world. If the conceit of a presentation is followed through, then the earlier chapters of this study could be billed as a general review, or revue, with a large poetical cast, followed by five soloists, and interrupted by occasional announcements by the producer. Now it is time for the master of ceremonies to wrap it all up and send everyone happily home. If previous performances were judged successful, the last act is in a difficult position. If they were not, it is even more difficult.

For critics who may object that the program was padded with odd performances which departed from the theme of childhood memory which was advertised, this conclusion must now persuade them that irrelevancy may turn out to be most relevant of all. (Otherwise, how could this study within a discipline of science have focused upon poetry in the first place?)

The first part of this study considered different interpretations of memory. If they are all added together, the sum is so integral to human life that, if we could theoretically partial it out, the definition of what it is to be human

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would have to be erased. Correlatively, all the different aspects of a human life fill in and define the meaning of memory.

Memory of childhood places also cannot be considered apart from other facets of life, such as those which this study has looked into: individual history, cultural history, philosophy, and language. This last chapter will show show these factors are necessary to the derivation of memory. They have not been diversions.

Yet before proceeding to this final section of the study, a serious reservation must be registered regarding just these aspects of life which have been connected to the memory of places; for the physical world, by itself, transcends what is human. To some degree, experience of it also transcends our most distinguishing human feature, language, and all the constructions that we make with it, such as individual history, cultural history, and philosophy. This discussion will continue to represent environmental memory through these more articulate activities, since it too is restricted to words. Since memory is so intertwined with words, there is some defense for this procedure. Memory is sensory as well, however. Therefore it has another dimension directly tied to physical experience of the world, which individual history, cultural history and philosophy may sometimes try to recount, but which is not primordially theirs.

In terms of childhood experience of the world, this warning is particularly critical. The research reviewed in

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the first part of this paper revealed that memories become more frequent and coherent as language develops. Memories from early childhood, when language is not yet facile, are not often recoverable (see page 14). We can only conclude, however, that they are not recoverable in the sense that they are not repeatable in language. It does not follow that they cannot exist in any other form. Later discussion of mémoire involuntaire--which Proust saved from forgetfulness by giving it a name, and which several of the poets in this study have described--will return to this point.

This reservation regarding experience and language also applies for a second critical reason. Environmental memory sometimes involves experiences which must be described as transcendent, if for no other reason than that they transcend ordinary experience, and with it ordinary language usage. Accounts of what now go by the scientific term of "altered states of consciousness" are primarily accounts of altered environmental perception.[1] Although the drug culture brought them new scientific attention, there is plentiful evidence that they did not wait upon the discovery of drugs. There is also evidence that they do not necessarily wait upon the attainment of maturity.[2] To what degree some of the Metaphysical and Romantic poets' cherishing of childhood perception may have been due to such experiences must remain an open question. How "visionary" was Wordsworth's "visionary gleam"? Traherne's descriptions of his childhood sense of the world have perhaps gone as far as language can go in

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suggesting altered consciousness. To what degree such experience may figure in the lives of the five poets studied here is also an open question. They have described important experiences as well as they have been able to, or have chosen to. Language cannot settle questions transcending language.

These reflections lead to what may be the most critical reservation of all. What comes first, philosophy or feeling? The main mode that we use to share cerebralizing, language, is the only mode we have for building systems of philosophy, which attempt to give feeling and observation coherence. (The major occupation of twentieth century philosophy may be described as the effort to disentangle this entanglement--through language.) Language is also the almost exclusive mode for conducting academic business. This engagement in cerebralizing through language which academia and philosophy share has led to a second common bond between them, the assumption that the particular mode of cerebralizing which they are partial to and which language tends to suggest--logic--necessarily applies to extracerebral, nonlinguistic experience as well . . . such as the way we experience the world. The logical form for a logical argument is that philosophy of such and such a kind should lead to perception of the world in such and such a way.

An alternate possibility is that the way we experience the world is primarily physical, primarily sensory. Once the world has been felt in a certain way, we construct philosophies, and academic studies, to support our mode of experience.

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Social influences beyond language, such as maternal influence in Erikson's theory of the learning of basic trust or basic mistrust, may condition physical experience.[3] The directives of language may further condition it. Yet it cannot be ruled out that experience of the physical world may not have an important element which is irreducibly environmental which leaves an influence in its own right--in ordinary moments as well as in moments of transcendent intensity.

In putting forward such a possibility, there is no need to deny the powerful influence of the combined forces of language and contemporary philosophy or world view. Both languages and world views, however, contain enough diversity to provide liberty for contradictory conclusions. Cultural histories which record a changing succession of dominant dogmas may tell an important truth. Unquestionably certain philosophies predominate during particular periods of history; and a philosophy, once established, reinforces certain perceptions and interpretations of experience. A close look at any one time and place, however, becomes a record of disagreements and competing views. Therefore individual history includes an element of choice among philosophies.

Freud based his work upon this less logical, more physical, prelinguistic line of reasoning: that feeling comes first. He applied it only to prelinguistic social experience, however. When he did consider experience of the physical environment, he always interpreted it socially. For example, "oceanic" transcendent experience was explained by him as yearning to

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return to oneness with the mother's breast.[4] Erikson, a personal student of Freud, gave more attention to the shaping of social experience by general cultural modalities. When he turned his attention to environmental experience, it was to interpret it in these terms.[5] To this writer's knowledge, Harold Searles is the only psychoanalyst who has suggested that "the nonhuman environment, far from being of little or no account to human personality development, constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human existence."[6]

As the preceding presentation of five poets has shown, the relationship between language and physical experience is as vexing for poetry as it is for philosophy or psychology. Poetry is not required to present an appearance of logic in the same way that philosophy or academic studies are, however. It is able to state environmental experience without being required to explain it.

This concluding discussion will attempt to pick a middle course. It will look for some kind of logic within the personal backgrounds, philosophies, and memories of places which these five poets have described. At the same time, it will not make a causal argument that personal backgrounds or philosophies have logical priority and dictate the significance given to environmental memories. The option must be left open that a sense of the world that was originally prelinguistic may have led to a choice of words and to a philosophy which conform.

Thinking may go around in circles, as hermeneutic

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phenomenology argues and as a close look at history shows, because it represents certain basic human modes of response to the surrounding world and to one's place in it. The terms "forward-looking" or "conservative," when they are used to trace intellectual history, depend on the point of judgment as the circle of thinking, or the circle of history, turns.

It should be noted that none of the positions that these people have taken is "new." Even the limited intellectual history familiar to this researcher would support the observation by Bronk, that "if the idea is really valid and has any real strength then it is not new" (see page 259). These are not passing fashions of perception that these people have expressed. Audre Lorde's animism and racial consciousness and Marie Ponsot's Catholicism have patent roots. Henry Weinfield has traced his deep indebtedness to Hegel and to other nineteenth century thinkers. At first glance, David Ignatow and William Bronk would seem to qualify as representatives of a twentieth century world view: Ignatow an avowed existentialist, Bronk a spokesperson for the conclusions that logically follow from science's glimpse into infinite space and time. Even a little reading of the past, however, shows that it is no new exercise to meditate upon time and space, nor to conclude that "le silence de ces espaces infinis m'effraie" (to use the words of Pascal, circa 1650). Nor is it new to find the human individual lost in space, unprotected by faith, left on his own to invent life's meaning.

Hannah Arendt has explored classical and early Christian

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passages which reduce human activity to an insubstantial flurry, relative to nature's vast spaces-- to something very like the modern existential crisis. In the dream of Scipio which Cicero relates, an ancestor appeared with the following teaching, shortly before Scipio vanquished the city of Carthage and won fame and glory. The ancestor invited him to look down at the earth from high up in the heavens. Scipio "was pained to see our empire as a mere dot." To retain this perspective, he needed afterwards only look back up at the stars. "If you raise your eyes you will see how futile all this is; fame was never eternal, and the oblivion of eternity extinguishes it."[7] It is perhaps significant, however, that in this earlier age founded upon ideals of honor and public duty, this observation was kept within the safe soft boundaries of a dream.

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Notes

[1]Charles T. Tart, ed., Altered States of Consciousness (New York: John Wiley, 1969).

[2]The artist Frederick Franck reports such an experience which he can date as having occurred when he was five, in The Awakened Eye (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

[3]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 247-250.

[4]Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. J. Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 11-15.

[5]Erikson, Childhood and Society. The book combines anthropological study and psychoanalytic theory. It includes analyses of different societies' orientations to nature and object use.

[6]Harold F. Searles, The Nonhuman Environment: In Normal Development and Schizophrenia (New York: International Universities Press, 1960), p. 5.

[7]Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Thinking, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 1:158-162.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FIVE POETS: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

This research began with the expectation that answers to questions regarding childhood environmental memory would primarily depend upon individual temperament and social and physical background. As reading progressed and interviewing began, it became apparent that strong currents of intellectual history were blowing through these people's answers. As reading and interviewing continued, the realization that intellectual history has always presented coexisting cross-currents which create a measure of individual choice, rather than an inexorable Comtean progression, shifted attention back to individual factors again. The discussion that follows is written at this stage in this study's own history.

In following through these transitions, Edith Cobb's theory of environmental memory--that it serves as a point of return "to renew the power and impulse to create at its very source"--soon fell behind. Her theory of the influence of early memory no longer appears a statement of fact, but a selection of only one possibility. Many other sources besides environmental memory have emerged as these five poets have attempted to reconstruct their beginnings. Whether it be the beginning of a career or the beginning of an individual poem, their first sense of the world has had to take its place

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beside other influences and impulses. Sometimes it has almost been crowded out.

The one common source that runs through each poet's story is the critical importance of another person's teaching and encouragement. Ignatow and Weinfield had fathers who set the example that storytelling or poetry was something to be cherished and imitated. Lorde and Ponsot can say that they learned poetry out of their mothers' mouths. Bronk feels so indebted to his teacher Sidney Cox that he cannot imagine how he would ever have written without him.

Once started, what these people commit to paper is their world in its most general sense. The comparisons that follow will focus upon one bounded area which is their early physical environment. As with all mergers of local regions under one rule, it may be bounded but it is not discrete. All limited areas have become constituted under one government and all official communiques are now released in one language. In other words, their worlds cohere.

In reviewing this study's interviews, it was apparent that questions and responses covered two different aspects of childhood memory and poetry.

1. The appearance of specific memories of childhood places in poems
2. The general influence of a childhood sense of the world upon an adult world view

As this discussion has already observed, this second aspect is difficult to disentangle from its reverse, the general

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influence of an adult world view upon memories of a childhood sense of the world. As much as possible, however, an attempt will be made to follow the first direction as well as the second.

Particular childhood places and experiences are addressed explicitly in poetry by four of this study's five participants: William Bronk, David Ignatow, Audre Lorde, and Marie Ponsot. Nevertheless, poems which overtly involve childhood memory compose only a small part of any one of these poets' work--no matter how persistent a part it may be. It was the general influence of childhood experience, and its reverse, which evoked greater attention in interviews. Therefore the following discussion will stress this second aspect of memory also. Specific memories will be related to the general quality of environmental memory.

To review these five poets' positions, categories of comparison will be adopted which parallel standard approaches to literary biography and criticism: place of origin, social and political concerns, style, and philosophy. These categories that would be used to consider their work serve equally well to consider the relevance of memory to it.

A reservation expressed in the introduction to the five presentations should be repeated here. These five poets vary according to age and according to the amount of material available for consideration. Each poet contributed at least one interview and some published poetry. Other material that was equally useful in preparing the presentations existed for

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some poets but not for others.[1] The result is that the comparisons that follow must be read provisionally as comparisons given the information that was available. With a more equal balance of sources, surely more points would have emerged on which these people would have said Yea to each other, or Nay.

What is observed here, however, should have the merit that it derives directly from available material itself. It is an attempt to question and listen, rather than impose a predetermined theory. Sometimes it has been necessary to read between the lines or to overhear nuances of conversation. Gestures, expressions, and tone of voice in the interviews have definitely been drawn upon in seeking understanding. Most interpolations have already been suggested in the individual presentations, where they have been read and checked over by the people involved. As much as possible, the Yeas and Nays that follow will be taken from these people's own words.

Place of Origin

Four of these five poets remain geographically close to their place of origin. William Bronk remains in the same town, in the same house that he moved into at the age of two. Audre Lorde has moved one borough. Marie Ponsot has moved a few blocks, and has bought a country cabin close to the site of her childhood summers. David Ignatow has settled in the suburbs, but his teaching and his interests and activities have kept him in the city several days each week. Their geographical stability has its counterpart in the commitment

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to their place of origin that shows in their work.

These lifelong places continue to enter their work with deep feeling, even if the feeling is sometimes anger. Part of the attachment is an instinct of defense. Bronk's work emphasizes the beauty of his locality. He recognizes that to most outsiders it would appear trashed and ugly, but he would close ranks with his townspeople if any visitor dared to belittle it.[2] Marie Ponsot says that her first response to any news of local crime and corruption is always "My city! My poor city!"[3] In David Ignatow's and Audre Lorde's case, sometimes their loyalty takes the form of anger that demands trial by fire, but its source is a cherished vision of what the city should be. In interviews, each person traced this level of identification back to childhood.

For Henry Weinfield, who came to New York City at the age of sixteen, "home" in an emotional sense remains Montreal. He stays in New York because of personal ties; otherwise he would readily leave. Although there are additional reasons why New York should rarely appear in his work, one factor may be that it is not home.

William Bronk began his observations regarding memory with the qualification that, in a general sense, memory is everything we are. Marie Ponsot began with the qualification that it is everything we write. Broadly speaking, memory and identity are identical. Within the limited area of early environmental memory, this equation takes a more limited form; but a particularly close conjunction may occur here.

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Like identity, home is where we find ourselves. No matter how many homes we may move through, or where we hope to arrive, home is first of all the place where we begin.

Bronk, Ignatow, and Lorde have each chosen elements of their personal world which can be traced back to childhood as metaphors for their position within the world at large. Through metaphor, the microcosm may still serve as model for the macrocosm. The element home plays this dual role.

In Audre Lorde's case, at issue is the sense of home itself. For her it has been a sensitive term since childhood. Her work has never ceased to explore the meanings which she first inherited: the position of an outsider, dreams to feed on, the determination to find her way "home" at last. David Ignatow has invested the whole of New York City with the significance of home. The clash between his childhood expectations of the city and his youthful reality has made the city a charged term. For William Bronk, the concept of home is embodied in the house which figures prominently in both his life and his poetry. His first sense of it as a child already contained the ambivalence of comfort and foreboding which the concept "world," in his mature work, has expanded.

For each of these people, home is a term with two poles. There are vulnerability and fear, pain, or anger in the face of some of the realities that home delivers. There are also resting places of peacefulness, accord, or vision that it bestows. Its endurance in their work as a metaphor that requires recurring reanalysis may be due to this duality.

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If it were a simple term, it might not solicit such frequent returns.

Henry Weinfield defines home according to an abstract dialectic of movement from what is lost to what is sought. "Home is just a metaphor / For everything that we must leave behind."[4] Therefore it doubles as a realm of aspiration, or as imaginative creation. Like home, these alternate worlds offer points of rest--but only temporarily. Abstracted in this way, home does not appear in his poetry as a concrete metaphor, as the physical place where he has come from or the place where he lives now.

Marie Ponsot's work brings us back to the original creators of our home. Whenever a poem makes a conscious return to her childhood sources, places get intertwined with people there. Home, for her, appears as people, associated with their place: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles . . . but most of all the person who most of all makes home, her mother. In the sonnet series to her mother, "Late,"[5] birds, books, gardens, sunlight, dusk, and the diamond she inherited are interchangeable images which embody the identities of both herself as a young child and her mother, in their first years of unconsidered trust and mutuality. A grown woman now, she has come to learn the meanings of these things, as she still moves among them; but the key to their meaning was given to her, in fact, in these first years. These memories, and meanings, were never fully opened until the key was turned by the force of her mother's death. Home, which signifies

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general loss and gain in the other four poets' work, derives its significance directly from death and memory in Marie Ponsot's work.

Looked at again, the other poets' metaphors of home can also be seen to be as much social as physical. The "home" which Audre Lorde imagined lying in her bed in a Harlem tenement, the city of broken promises which David Ignatow came to know, equally well represent the conflicts between the aspirations which their parents held up for them and the frustration which they imposed. Their parents, in their own turn, were caught up within their own limits of dream and disillusion by their minority immigrant status within the society as a whole. At the same time, as poor immigrants, they showed a determination to make a place for themselves here against all odds. This determination is still reflected in their children's commitment to remain in, and write about, "this place."

Marie Ponsot and William Bronk were born into worlds that already belonged to their parents, where they already "belonged." This comfortable position is reflected in their poetry. Where they are may be the subject of fond reference, in Marie Ponsot's case, or acute analysis, in William Bronk's case, but it is never questioned that it <u>is</u> home.

For Henry Weinfield's mother, home meant precisely everything that she must leave behind. As an upper class refugee, she was thrown out of the world where her family had always belonged, an already achieved world. It was obliterated,

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only to survive in the stories which she passed on to her children, and in their identities. Her son, in turn, left the world that had been home to him. Out of loss, Weinfield has abstracted a general rule which illuminates not only his, but all five poets' work: loss can be turned into a positive force, if it is turned into potential and possibility.

As to the actual content of these poets' place of origin, two observations need to be made. Two elements of memory turned out to have shared salience: freedom and nature. They came out in each person's speech and writing.

Remembered freedom in the city transcended any distinction of color, class, creed, age, or sex. Every poet's early accounting of the city was conditioned upon total freedom to go anywhere at any time at will. Weinfield, Ignatow, and Ponsot felt their city open at their feet since early childhood. Lorde took it over as a teenager. Ignatow lingered by the river on the Lower East Side, and Bronk traversed Manhattan, in the dead of night. These matter of fact memories of cities that could be covered from top to bottom by night or day without a thought of danger appear audacity now. The social change that they imply has even reached Hudson Falls. When Bronk described the changing meaning of the house to him, one reason why it increasingly represents a burden is that he can no longer leave it without a second thought, without even stopping to lock the doors. Theft and vandalism have changed his world as well.

A second observation is that nature figures prominently

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in the earliest memories of all four city poets. Stone and concrete composed their cities too, but the elements of their childhood that they singled out in talk, which also form persistent images in their writing, are sun, water, trees, and other growing things. Under necessity, this focus has been as tenacious as the blades of grass pushing out of sidewalk cracks, which Audre Lorde was left to garner. These elements have also defined each poet's final choice for home. After spending mid-life in Manhattan, Ignatow, Lorde, and Ponsot have each settled where grass and trees have been returned to them. Weinfield would like to someday regain a city of parks like Montreal.

Social and Political Concerns

Loss and possibility, which defined these poets' sense of home--as soon as they are extended beyond the self--bring us to social and political concerns. Social ambiance and political events shaped early environmental experience. In turn, when these writers have expressed their social and political positions as adults, they have drawn upon this childhood material. It has served either as an example of possibilities or as a reminder of loss.

The greatest significance which Audre Lorde would give to remembered childhood places is that we use these pieces of the past in composing visions for the future.[6] In their conversation and writing, three poets have expressed a faith that their social and political vision may be achieved in reality: Lorde, Ignatow, and Ponsot. To describe their hopes,

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they have dipped into the two heritages of environmental memory that have just been found salient--freedom and nature.

The peace that David Ignatow hopes this country may achieve is that it may again create cities of conviviality, like his childhood Brooklyn streets.[7] When Audre Lorde attempts to describe how an erotic world must be, it corresponds to the Carriacou which she fantasized as a child and the Mexico which she discovered as a teenager by offering the same freedom of social tolerance and the same natural beauty.[8] When Marie Ponsot alludes to regeneration, either for herself or for society, her most frequent images are from nature: currents of water, gardens, and self-seeding fields and orchards like those she first came to love as a child.[9]

These uses of early memory in creating new visions for the future conform to theories presented in the first chapter of this study. They are similar to Wordsworth's use of memory to restore his sense of balance in the midst of London, or more generally, the larger Romantic scheme that both individual and political progress require a conscious return to harmony with the world like that enjoyed unthinkingly as a child. They also conform to the theory which Marcuse derived from the work of Freud, that childhood represents a period of freedom and sensory enjoyment that stands ever afterwards in opposition to the blunting of life by oppressive social and political regimes (see pages 43-49).

These few poets' work suggests that it is not so simple, however. Early experience may represent loss and limitation

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as well as possibility. The poets who have suffered most under the weight of the city, Lorde and Ignatow, have taken opposite positions regarding the connection between their early memory and their political conclusions. They stand together, nevertheless, because both have given childhood memory meanings which contrast with those which Wordsworth assigned to it.

David Ignatow remembers security and self-delight: for this reason his childhood sense of the world became subject for irony rather than a balm in times of trouble. Like Wordsworth, he may have rallied his spirits from the depth of depression by recalling early peace and accord with the world. Now, however, these memories are no longer testimony to "a sense sublime" that "rolls through all things." They may strengthen him individually, but they have no greater significance. After his clash with the realities of society and politics, his early childhood memory came to appear naive illusion. Disquiet and self-doubt in adolescence, captured in the image of the empty gym, became a more accurate representation of existential reality. His reconciliation with his sense of himself as a child, which enters his latest writings, is provisional. He can again experience the world with the same detached spontaneity, but he does not project this serenity onto the cosmos.

For Audre Lorde, first memories reveal anger, defiance, and the struggle to survive as an intact person. There was never any early illusion of peace and accord. Therefore her

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own memory represents a political truth, to be preserved, rather than something to be disclaimed. She sees her vulnerability as a child in New York City as a symbol of the political status of all minority women and children. She survived by learning defiance combined with respect for differences: what she has called "the vital lesson that the city impresses," and her own fixed formula for political activity. Keeping the faith requires keeping in touch with her own beginnings.

The same statement can be applied to Wordsworth. He also interpreted retrospection as a matter of "keeping the faith." Accordingly, he revised The Prelude to keep the past in line with changes in his faith. There is a world of difference, however, in the two applications of the word "faith." Used politically, as in Audre Lorde's case, keeping the faith implies remembering discord more than harmony with things.

Marie Ponsot, like Audre Lorde, identifies herself as a feminist writer. Despite her many affinities with Wordsworth with regard to environmental memory, her use of memory has a second, social side comparable to Audre Lorde's. She may not speak for minorities, but she may speak for women. In this context, her aspirations as a child and a young woman, her trials as a single parent and unpublished poet, also make a critical record. When her personal history is put under scrutiny, it signifies something to learn from, to pass on.

Not all political programs foster connection with early

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memory. Ignatow's discovery that political perceptions and childhood memory conflict is an example of a case in which they don't. In fact, most political programs are future oriented at the expense of the past. Although the Romantic model of simultaneous self-development and political development defined progress as reinstitution of a childlike unity with things, writers of the period who were more overtly political than Wordsworth emphasized that it is a return with a vast difference. Schiller exhorted poets "not to lead us back to our childhood" as a political appeal. He warned that the way back to an unquestioning intuitive immersion in nature's whole is forever closed. "That nature which you envy in the non-rational is unworthy of your respect or longing. It lies behind you, it must ever lie behind you."[10] The only possible direction is ahead, through reason and culture to higher individual and political integration. This position can still be heard reverberating through Henry Weinfield's rejection of the possibility of any return to childhood, or any association of childhood and poetry.

When the political movement is the Women's Movement, however, association with children is intrinsic to it. It follows that, just as children must be preserved, so must an individual's own childhood. It is a political movement that knits up the past and allows return.

These contrasting conceptions of individual and political progress lead to a contrasting use of terms. For example, Henry Weinfield and Audre Lorde have both been quoted reacting

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to the blind consumerism and human and environmental exploitation which they see in our society. He denounced it as childishness which disregards maturity, and she as the work of adults who have lost their connection to children and to the child in themselves.

Besides childhood, one other term that has proved relevant to this study is critical to the consideration of poetry and politics. It is "silence." The political concerns and sense of history which Lorde and Ponsot share are encapsulated in their common usage of this term. For both women it is a highly charged social term. It denotes the suppression of women's, children's, and minorities' voices and needs.

Silence is not a political term for the three men. When it figures at all, it is environmental. It is a dominant theme in Bronk's writing, so dominant that, in the face of nature's silent indifference to human exertion, all political ambitions fade and stand exposed as vanities. For Ignatow, it is a similar theme: the silence of trees and walls which never respond to his persistent communing.

Communication, not silence, is the social and political term which the three men find they must navigate. Bronk takes it up as a social universal, as language itself. He weighs language against an ideal of adequate communication, and finds it wanting. Ignatow and Weinfield are more political in their analysis. They are both keenly sensitive to a paradox which Weinfield has summarized: "The poet qua poet must exist both as a separate consciousness, with the capacity

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to impose his signature on the world, and as a spokesman for humanity as a whole."[11] In modern society, the two conditions tend to cancel each other out. Representing humanity incurs the danger of undifferentiated conformity; and existing as a separate consciousness incurs the danger of solipsism.[12] To complicate the situation, both men have noted that only a tiny segment of the American population reads its poets to begin with.

The women do not express these conflicts. Lorde, as a Black and as a woman, and Ponsot, as a woman, write with the assurance that they are being read, attentively, by the very audience whom they first wish to address, that it does make a difference politically, and that the political difference matters. Given such a sense of an audience, and such an underlying political optimism, they are--to use one of Audre Lorde's favorite words--empowered. They see themselves as vital links, as individuals within a collective effort. For this reason their personal memory is equally vital.

Literary Style

In an absolute sense, every written word is a memory. Literary style, which guides the choice of words and how they are set down, is therefore not least among the determinants of the use of childhood environmental memory in poetry. Of the two questions which the interviews covered--the appearance of specific place memories in poems and the general influence of a childhood sense of the world on the poet--literary style is coterminous with the first question. Whether memory is

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accepted as material for poetry and the way in which it gets used come under the heading of style.

Style may have the fundamental function of determining whether childhood memory is material for poetry at all. One aspect of style is the poet's voice. Voice relates to what the poet commemorates. Some poets commemorate themselves and some do not.

If a poet strictly pursues the orientation which Bronk advanced, that he should not write about himself, it follows that autobiographical memory will rarely explicitly appear. According to the classical view, a poet is a thing possessed--a condition immortalized in Socrates' satire-dipped homage that "there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him."[13] Bronk's statement that "I am an instrument of the world's passion" echoes the classical view (although he allows this instrument greater benefit of reason). If, at its peak, creativity is an ecstasy, it means it is a standing outside of oneself. If it is a possession, or a visitation, it means being taken over by a power greater than oneself. According to any one of these terms, autobiographical memory would be irrelevant. Even according to the modern revision of this theory--that creativity is an eruption of primary processing--memory overcomes the writer and has its own say cloaked in symbols that he or she may voice but not divine.

These observations suggest that it is possible for the two dimensions of memory's significance--the appearance of

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specific memories in poems and general influence on the poet--to be discrete. There is no reason to assume that poets who lack an autobiographical voice might not, at the same time, be critically influenced by early experiences of the world. If first memories still inform a poet's whole way of being, the influence could be profound, although unstated. This possible disparateness is the reason why interviewing seemed indispensable for pursuing this study's questions.

Wordsworth worked at the beginning of the modern, more self-oriented age. His heritage, however, was still classical and attuned to powers outside the self. Before making himself the subject of a poem, therefore, he had to begin with a self-justification.

> . . . . if with this
> I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
> Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
> Contemplating; and who, and what he was--
> The transitory Being that beheld
> This Vision; when and where, and how he lived;--
> Be not this labour useless.14
>
> "Preface to The Recluse"
> lines 93-99

By now, it is customary for a poet to describe who and what he was, and when and where and how he lived. Whitman may be taken as having experimented with a compromise (or, some people would have it, a conflict): alternating between losing himself in the All of the world or locating the All of the world within himself. Like Wordsworth, he made himself subject of his song; but he dared to suggest that this subject was sufficient because it embraced everything else.

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As David Ignatow has observed regarding the history of American poetry, with a loss of faith in the All American poets have been left with themselves alone. To give up à belief in any unifying principle in the universe, however, "is to let ourselves sink into something which we just don't want to imagine" (see page 280).

A more reserved approach, which Ignatow and many other contemporary poets have taken, is to call the self a metaphor for a world that is greater than the self. It is, as an individual with an individual history, to epitomize the history of Everyman or Everywoman, or more circumspectly, subspecies such as Every Man of Letters or Every Woman of Color. Personal memory is definitive for what such poetry says. It is the very medium for the message.

Although transcendence may not be this poetry's point of origin, nonetheless it may be its goal. This poetry may begin with the self, but in the process of discovering points of commonality with other selves, it may yet set the goal of finding itself taken over by voices greater than the self again.

After these preliminary observations, the appearance, or non-appearance, of childhood environmental memory found in these five poets' work seems a logical consequence of the initial voice which they adopt.

Neither William Bronk nor Henry Weinfield begins with a history-bound, body-bound self as a starting point for composition. Bronk, who in the face of the world finds

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that, "I am wholly absorbed in it, am nothing more,"[15] can find none. His poems are spontaneous meditations which describe the Mind with the thing contemplated, but not the Man. They are written in a plain conversational tone which gives the reader the impression of overhearing his mind at work--which is exactly how Bronk summarizes his writing method, as ruminations which he pursues and copies down, without any conscious design or theory.[16] They may be an autobiographical history in the sense of a record of a man's mind, but this mind has no solid casing. Whatever he is, it is "to be as the Jews say God must be, without an image."[17] In keeping with this "selfless" voice, his childhood explicitly appears only once in his work, in "Home Address" which explores the metaphor of the house through his childhood sense of it.

Unlike Bronk, Weinfield rarely connects his thought to an immediate experience, an immediate perception of the world in which he finds himself. His poems almost always begin with a thought or imagining "far beyond the reaches of experience." He transcends his individual history by dwelling within poetic thought, imagery, and form itself. Music, which is autobiographically mute, is both a guiding metaphor and a guiding principle for his composition. He does not lose himself in the world before him, but, supraindividually, in poetry, or, to be individual, "in the lives of the poets." He can identify only a few rare childhood images which have entered his work.

In William Bronk's poetry, everyday space and time

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break down. Space and time in Henry Weinfield's poetry are somewhere beyond the everyday.

In the work of David Ignatow, Audre Lorde, and Marie Ponsot, we come back to a familiar world. The explanations which they give for staying here differ, but in each case the result is a similar speaking voice: the individual person identified by a personal history. They may contrast with Wordsworth in where they come from or in what they conclude, but all three have committed themselves to the same deliberate mining of memory to chronicle who and what they are, and when and where and how they live.

Throughout his long career, Ignatow has adhered to the position passed on to him by William Carlos Williams, that the poet has a social obligation to speak for his time and place. In his early objectivist style, he made the city metaphor for his society. When he came to the conclusion that the poet, singly, is sufficient metaphor, he did not lose sight of his surroundings. He endeavored to put himself into his poems in his full physicality: intelligence, feelings, and body. "The lines, the language, the rhythm, the syntax should recreate the physicality of the body at the same time they are being employed to create an insight, an idea."[18] Since the body is organic, this poetic prepared the way for entry of the new theme of nature in his work. Nevertheless, no matter what subject he may write about, Ignatow finds that the modern civilization that surrounds him, that he reacts to with his body as well as his intelligence and feelings, is

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indelibly urban rather than agricultural. It is dominated by "the excitement, the unpredictableness, the harsh clangor of city life where man is the measure and not the earth or the sky."[19] As metaphor for his society, he can never lose the city beat.

Ignatow's conclusion regarding style was to learn a method of writing "from within out," of showing the interaction of himself with outward things. Not only has he reflected extensively upon his own personal history in both poetry and prose, but his changing interaction with the physical world has been an important theme within this history.

Audre Lorde also works with the conviction that her personal experience has a wide social meaning. Self-definition, the challenge that she has faced as a person, also describes her role as a poet and as a political person. Childhood memories are an important part of her record. The discovery that a key to her self-understanding is African culture and history resulted in a strong element of African vocabulary and imagery in The Black Unicorn. Her latest work shows a communal voice, but it is still interwoven with her own experience.

Marie Ponsot insists that she speaks only for herself. She disclaims any other calling, and she fears that to adopt a public role would curtail the liberty of her identity, including liberty of memory. Her adherence to an individual voice is not a private persuasion, however. It is founded upon a Christian morality which teaches the sanctity of

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individuality as a universal principle. In her work, she has come to apply this principle not only to herself and other people but to things. She writes through images that are precise and particular, observed with the fervor that "twice, nothing happens." Her personal voice may claim to present only her own search for meaning as she follows the course of her own history through its intersection with other unique histories. It is, at the same time, testimony to a belief that everyone must discover meaning through the real which is time-bounded; and that, in this common effort, what she herself has discovered will not prove meaningless to others.

Marie Ponsot distinguished between memories uncovered through metrical poetry and memory that more self-conscious open form picks its way through. This observation points to an important interactive aspect of memory and form. Once memory has entered as material for a poem, writing digs into it deeper and deeper, in more or less conscious ways. Working over memories while writing, as a creative act, is also a transforming act. It gives material form which it did not have before. As a memory gains form, it sharpens, gains depth, and all parts become related.

Whether or not poems tap childhood memory at all, however, depends upon voice, not form. The most fundamental link between memory and poetry may be put in one word, desire. Before a poem can tap early memory, in any form, the poet must start with a desire to invite these memories in.

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Philosophy and Metaphysics

First Reflections

In coming to the subject of philosophy and metaphysics, this study is circling back to its beginnings. It is just as the metaphysics of the circle, which we have encountered and reencountered, says it should be--if this work has made any progress. This study began by reviewing classical, Romantic, and modern conceptions of memory. In this section, they will present themselves again, in relation to these five poets' work and thought.

It has already been noted that this research began with the expectation that descriptions of childhood places would form the focus of interviews, and that a principal determinant of the significance of environmental memory would be the physical characteristics of places. Instead, whether a poet was born in city or country, and the physical actualities of the surroundings, have come to appear a kind of unordered alphabet, a medium with a character of its own, no doubt, but no meaning until it has been worked upon. The hands that spell out words move under the tacit influence of social background, sex, and age, and the acknowledged influence of political commitment, artistic style, and metaphysical belief.

Drawing this simile is a way of repeating the observation with which this final discussion began: environmental memory has a primary sensory dimension which custom, reason, and belief interpret. The unordered alphabet has a character of its own, but we can only record it through the conventions

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of language.

When it comes to fundamental reasons and beliefs, that language is metaphysical. When this research took an unexpected metaphysical turn rather than emphasizing physical variables, three complementary explanations for this result suggested themselves.

1. Western society is defined as "secular" today because it has been overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian for most of the preceding two millenia. Even this self-definition presumes a religious heritage to define itself against. Pierre Proudhon, dedicated to becoming a thoroughly modern man, an advocate of "humanitarian Atheism," concluded in frustration, "We are full of the Divinity, Jovis omnia plena; our monuments, our traditions, our laws, our ideas, our languages, and our sciences--all are infected with this indelible superstition, outside of which we are not able either to speak or act, and without which we simply do not think."[20]

2. Metaphysics is the science of first principles, or, when principles are hard to come by, at least first questions. As soon as it was realized that in asking questions about autobiographical environmental memory, "autobiography" questioned these poets' sense of "self," "environment" their sense of "world," and "memory" their sense of "time"--and that together the subject asked them to interrelate all three--it no longer seemed surprising that thinking on the subject should revert to metaphysics.

3. Perhaps more than any other aspect of the world,

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the physical environment tends to evoke a sense of presence. In descriptions, this numinous sense is usually associated with solitude. It means that it is associated with moments when the physical world, rather than the social world, is all encircling and dominates the attention.

There may also be something in the memory of childhood itself which solicits metaphysical reflection. In Ignatow's prose poem "In My Dream," the basis for the mutually enhancing interchange between himself now and himself as a child is their very disparity. As a child, we were so obviously "not ourselves" in so many ways. Yet, in some way, we were the same. The difference between our present self and all the other persons who we have been requires accommodation of differences into unity; but the dramatic disparity in size and situation between childhood and maturity seems most given to compel bemusement.

The splitting of ourselves into child and adult also sets up a condition for detachment. Just as detachment is a prerequisite for the free play of thought, it is also a prerequisite for the free play of humor. One of the benefits which Ignatow as a child brought to Ignatow as an adult was not to take himself too seriously.

Before lifting off into metaphysics, it would do well to stay a moment longer on the terrestrial subject of age. According to Erik Erikson's theory of life stages, reconsideration of one's past, in order to integrate all parts of it including childhood, is the challenge of old age.[21]

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Longitudinal research supports Erikson's theory. A study of men who are now in their fifties has shown that they distanced themselves from childhood memories in their twenties and thirties, but began to draw closer to them again beginning in their forties.[22]

The ages of these five poets at the time of the interviews ranged from Weinfield's age of thirty-four to Ignatow's age of sixty-nine. That Weinfield shows little interest in his childhood, but Ignatow, at twice his age, shows integration of his present and past, is in keeping with these research results. Certainly, if these interviews had caught Ignatow in his mid-thirties, he would have shown a much stronger rejection of childhood memory than Weinfield's general dissociation of childhood and poetry.

The longitudinal study also supported Erikson's suggestion that people return to the past in memory when past ways of thinking, feeling, and acting are adaptive and relevant to their current life situation.[23] Ignatow began to make peace with his childhood sense of the world when he once again found himself in a similar state of security, with similar leisure to enjoy simple everyday experience again.

Women in the longitudinal study never showed a clear pattern of disengagement from early memory. The researchers suggested that women's involvement with children makes their early sense of self remain relevant into mid-life. Marie Ponsot's and Audre Lorde's writing shows just such continuity.

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Fundamental Reflection: The Self and Nature

The subject of environmental memory requires relating two primary entities, the self and the world, through the medium of autobiographical time. It is necessary to review how these five poets describe this relationship, before considering how they extend it through time. Their different spans of life have given them different opportunities to make adjustments in their philosophy, as well as in their memory. As men or women, their role in life also appears to have pointed them to philosophies which relate self and world differently.

Indeed, it is necessary to write this section on philosophy essentially according to differences between the three men and the two women. This researcher also found herself caught in these differences. A surprise during the first interviews with Ignatow, Weinfield, and Bronk was that it was necessary to learn to see the world in a new, unaccustomed way. Reading and interviewing Marie Ponsot and Audre Lorde was an experience of coming back to a familiar way of feeling again.

The new perception of the world which this researcher had to learn was to think of nature as something set over against oneself. This statement sounds paradoxical. Each man's poetry reveals the conclusion that there is no self that can survive in the face of nature. The difference is that they first introduce the supposition that there might be one. A conflict between the self and nature never enters the women's work. They define themselves as existing and working

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in alliance with nature, which exempts them from the men's tragic opposition.

This observation came with a great surprise because interviewing was proceeding side by side with attempts to piece together the main course of Western intellectual history. How people interpret the significance of environmental memory seemed to depend upon how they relate themselves to nature; and intellectual histories converged in diagnosing this aspect of existence as the critical epistemological and existential tale to be told. All recounted a rise and decline of a religious world view which set self and nature upon a common firm foundation, followed by Cartesian dualism which separated the thinking self from the surrounding world. Romanticism protested against dualism, and Romantic thinkers tried to effect a reconciliation between the self and the world. Depending upon the historian's viewpoint, the Romantics now appear past history, or initiators of a conflict which remains unresolved.[24]

This historical scheme illuminated the poetry of the men in this study. They have inherited the struggle of reconciling the self to nature now that the two have been taken apart. There seemed two possibilities regarding the women's work. Either the women have dodged the last three and a half centuries of intellectual progress, or intellectual history as it has been told never applied to women to begin with.

The need to write herstory is one of the fundamental claims of the Women's Movement. This researcher was familiar with sociological attempts to tell the other half of history.

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The possibility than an alternate version of Western philosophy might be required still came as a surprise.

This discussion will first try to convey the relationship to nature which Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot have expressed, so that it can be compared with the men's positions. This subsection has purposely been entitled "The Self and Nature" rather than "The Self and the World" because it seems to be relationship to nature which is at issue. "World" has ambiguous meanings, for it is often a human artifact--as William Bronk has painstakingly explored. "Nature" implies something greater than any human world--"the world beyond our world which holds our world," to use Bronk's phrasing.[25] It has two common meanings. In a general sense, nature means all matter and energy, everything that the mind perceives whether it be tree or skyscraper. This discussion will focus upon a second more specific meaning--the cycles and processes of matter and energy which precede human intervention, which are better represented by a tree than a skyscraper. "Mother Nature" is the familiar term. Other good examples are the seasons, or the human body. Skyscrapers may narrow down observation of nature in this sense, but they do not screen it out. Therefore it is only natural that whether these poets are urban or rural, when they have described their philosophy of relationship to the world, they have focused upon this substratum.

Philosophies themselves are worlds in the more limited, artifactual sense. Therefore this subsection will explore how

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these poets' worlds, in the small sense, relate themselves to this greater world which transcends them.

In some respects, the concerns which Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot have voiced in their writing and interviews parallel Romantic concerns. Like Wordsworth, they stress continuity with childhood memory. Like Wordsworth, they also stress continuity with nature. They have used different terms than the Romantics to state these claims, however.

In a letter to Wordsworth in 1815, Coleridge reminded him of their common understanding that his primary mission was to create a philosophy which could replace the dualism of Locke and the "Mechanic Dogmatists," to effect a "Reconciliation from this Enmity with Nature."[26] The method which Wordsworth used to achieve this reconciliation was based upon a two-term scheme of mind and nature. As M.H. Abrams has characterized both English and German Romanticism, "The tendency of Romantic thought, in general, was to diminish (sometimes to the point of eliminating) God, and leave as prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, spirit and the other, or subject and object."[27] This tendency can still be traced in the work of Bronk and Weinfield and the early work of Ignatow. Stated in these generalities, Romanticism sounds little different than the mechanistic dualism which it opposed. The great distinction is that, where dualism established an irreconcilable division between mind and nature, the Romantics established a "vital and productive" dialectic, a living interchange between the mind and nature.[28]

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The Romantics sought to reconnect and reintegrate the self and nature through a philosophical system of antithesis, or opposition, which impels synthesis, or reconciliation. Although Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot would also like to see enmity between the self and nature assuaged, they have begun by presuming an essential unity which obviates such a system of antithesis and reconciliation. Correspondingly, when they have expressed the basis of their connection to nature, they have not used these agonistic terms taken from a mental system, but terms taken directly from nature as process itself.

Because Marie Ponsot and Audre Lorde were the last poets interviewed, it had already become apparent that they expressed a different orientation to nature than the men, by the time that meeting with them was scheduled. It was possible to bring up this observation at the end of the interviews and to ask them for their own reflections.

Marie Ponsot identified the difference as that men's poetry usually expresses "a way of identifying nature as something outside oneself."[29] She continued, "How can you separate from nature, from the rest of nature? I am not very good at holding distinctions, making distinctions that would hold. I don't think I have a mind and a body for instance."

"As two separate things?"

"Not really."

Immediately afterwards, however, she observed that Saint Francis, who referred to his body with plaintive affection as "Brother Ass," had made this separation. Certainly Catholicism

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teaches it. The distinction which she seems to hold, in this case, is that theory should not be separated from practice, and that, for her at least, correspondence of mind and body is the rule.

Ignatow has found exactly this identification of mind, body, and nature occasion for despair. She finds it occasion for resilience. She has proposed her own version of nature in a poem "Skambha, Guess-Worker, Both Within and Beyond." It was written in frustration against feminist attempts to resurrect historical matriarchal religion. She objects that these attempts either show bad scholarship, or, as far as careful scholarship can show, matriarchal religions projected upon nature a violence and fear that women would rather associate with "patriarchal" war. They invested initiates with knives, sacrificed babies, and sliced the breasts off virgins. So, "If you're going to make up matriarchy, let's just make it up--out of what we know, and that is that mothers have daughters, and daughters have daughters, and daughters have daughters; and that is really a mind boggling experience."[30] The poem combines this human experience with the myth that, in the fall of every great cycle of time, the goddess who is Worldtree and Lifemaker (nature in its all-encompassing sense) is reborn as herself, as her daughter.

> Nothing perishes forever:
> in her fall the mother frees the daughter
> who is herself again when the dream is over.
> After her disaster the Sibyl speaks to us:
>
> See, these are the Same and the Different.

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> Same and Different meet to keep
> light streaming through the mothercord,
> its unrelenting energy
> comes here. . . .[31]
>
> "Skambha, Guess-Worker, Both Within
> and Beyond," lines 18-26

Audre Lorde would characterize the difference between men and women's sense of nature- which she strongly believes exists as a general rule--precisely in such terms of renewal. "It has to do with renewal, with a belief in renewal. . . . The earth renews itself over and over again. None of us lives three hundred years is another way of saying it. You can't have one without the other. A renewal requires a going into dust, to rise again."[32] The loss that goes with this reality is a universal human experience, but, through children, women find themselves linked to renewal more than loss. She believes this rule holds, although she doesn't know why, irrespective of whether or not women actually give birth. "I often want to move it beyond the question of maleness to speak of that principle which is in all of us, that is on the line more for men than it is for women. I think women are capable of that alienation too. Although I think the thing we have built in that guards against it has very essentially to do with the giving of birth, the giving of life." This sense of fruitfulness, in turn, she connects with women's sense of the earth. "The fact that it was women who first developed agriculture, who first learned the relationship to make the earth bear, historically--I don't think it was accidental."

As a result, like Marie Ponsot she finds despair something

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essentially out of tune with nature, rather than a logical consequence of it. Trying to convey William Bronk's sense of nature, this researcher used the beginning line of one of his poems: "Sometimes, I could go in anywhere, not / to see the stars."[33] Audre Lorde's response was, "When you said that line, my spine shook. But I suspect that we came to that line from different places. I thought, yes, sometimes we do give in to despair. We do retreat from power. That line represented to me a retreat from power."[34] Power signifies an affirmation of connection.

In place of futility, she derives from nature a lesson of indispensable continuity. "I get this sense more and more and more the older I get--that I am part of a chain, I am part of a continuum. It did not start with me and it will not end with me, but that my piece is vital. I feel this so strongly now."[35]

Corresponding to this different sense of nature, Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot have each described being taken by the hand by their mothers, when they were young children, and introduced to nature as something essentially constructive and benign. For example, when Audre Lorde's mother catalogued Carriacou plants, she gave her daughters instruction in their use in healing.

In his last phase of writing, David Ignatow has also come to an acceptance of nature as metamorphosis and renewal, after battling against its changes during most of his career. In his last published notebook entry he has written, "The

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division between ego and reality is a false one because the ego manifests exactly the principle which makes reality, and that is change, renewal, reassertion, reaffirmation of itself in constantly emerging new forms."[36] In contrast to Stevens (and, one might add, Bronk), he questions that this reality of nature is chaotic. ". . . Since we live and breathe and function beyond and with and by and against and towards and away from pain, we cannot honestly declare all this chaos, ourselves chaos who live to know, to see, to change which too is within the principle of being."[37] Instead of annihilating the ego, this reality both provides for individual creativity and assimilates it. "You're living significantly if you recognize that the whole world is in process and you recognize that somehow you're contributing, there is something new that is contributing to this process."[38] As a result of these contemplations, Ignatow has come to be able to say, like Audre Lorde standing in the river at dawn, "Nothing can kill me. I am always alive."[39] As this study has shown, Ignatow's coming to accept natural cycles has coincided with his coming to accept his own childhood memory.

Nevertheless, a position which is a point of laborious arrival still has a distinction from a position with which one somehow begins. One of the most telling evidences of the men and women's different attitudes to nature is a different attitude to death. Despite his moments of affirmation, death has become Ignatow's primary theme. It is the construct that underlies all of his nature poetry. That trees and birds

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never answer his attention and addresses, that earth and grass always lie silent but accommodative, that the identity that he must feel his way into is what it must be like to be stones and dirt--these perspectives upon nature have come to dominate his work. Consciousness of death unifies Bronk's sense of nature also. Death is the subject of many of his poems, in which he has also moved from defiance to imaginative participation. Death itself is not a subject in Weinfield's poetry; but his work is regularly punctuated by the observation that his spirit "Shall not forbear to be itself destroyed / Because it is upborne against the void."[40]

Death is a critical subject in the writing of Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot as well. Yet the work of neither includes a single poem on the subject of her own death. In Marie Ponsot's work, death means the pain of losing family and friends, or a dynamic which drives poets to use their talent urgently and faithfully. Audre Lorde's Cancer Journals is a record of fear in the face of surgery, the difficulty of coping with physical pain, rage against the insensitivity of medical staff and the duplicity of a society that tolerates carcinogens, the different stages of recovery, and gratitude for other women's healing support. Nowhere does she stop to consider death as such--except, like Marie Ponsot, to observe that it illuminates priorities. In her poetry, death enters as murder, as an unjust unnatural opposition to life. In both women's work, nature enters as an essentially life-giving force.

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There is a background aspect to this discussion which the women have not stressed, but which may be critical. Both women draw upon older philosophies which antedate Romanticism itself, which bind all things in the world, as well as world and word, and which allow death no final stopping place. African religion and Catholicism may have their differences, but they also have these similarities.

Marie Ponsot's poetry leaves open the possibility which is essential to Catholic faith.

> Some suppose that this post-natal life
> where all we have is time, is fetal life,
> is where as we bounce and flex in time
> our years of moons change us
> into beings viable not here
> but somewhere attentive. . . .[41]
>
> "The Great Dead, Why Not,
> May Know," lines 7-12

That she entertains the possibility of "those outlands" must strengthen Marie Ponsot's sympathy with Wordsworth's sense of memory. In an 1814 letter to a friend explaining the Intimations Ode, Wordsworth stated that, "This poem rests entirely upon two recollections of childhood." One is "splendour in the objects of sense," and the other is "an indisposition to bend to the law of death, as applying to our own particular case." "A reader who has not a vivid recollection of these feelings having existed in his mind in childhood can not understand that poem."[42]

The African religion which Audre Lorde said resounded, which hit something deep inside of her, makes room for attentive outlands with a very different topography than Christian

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or Platonic territories. In keepting with the African emphasis upon ancestry and tribal connection, there is a conception that, as long as the dead are remembered and spoken of by the living, they form a class of "living dead" who watch over and guide their descendents. When all traces of the dead are lost to living memory, they pass into the elements of the earth itself. Since everything on earth is filled with spirit, it is still a form of life.[43]

In their African context, these beliefs appear ancient and primitive according to modern perspectives. Separated from this context, they show many points of resemblance with the very contemporary position which Ignatow's latest writing expresses. In an interview, he has said that, "It is enough for me to leave behind a child, some books, memories of myself with some friends."[44] Through children, books, and memories, the dead remain a present force, a "living dead." In his poems which draw upon a modern consciousness of ecological cycles, he addresses dirt and stones with something close to a primitive sense of union: "I walk upon and study you as my next brothers and sisters."[45]

The difference between either Audre Lorde's or Marie Ponsot's world view and David Ignatow's appears in the succeeding lines from the same address:

> I am resigned, if I must say it that way.
> Try as I might, I cannot think myself exactly that.
> I see us each in separate worlds.[46]
>
> "Invocation," lines 8-10

From a modern perspective, dirt and stones are only that.

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From older perspectives, dirt, stones, people, and everything else are animated by a common spirit. Wordsworth too, reaching back in time to his own Christian Platonic roots, gave spirit all credit for setting alight the "splendour in the objects of sense."

In the middle of writing this discussion, these musings regarding connections among people's sense of nature, death, and memory were shared with Marie Ponsot, since her knowledge of both feminist and traditional literature far exceeds this researcher's. She concurred regarding the connections that have been traced up to this point, and with one further reflection. Although both she herself and Audre Lorde leave open the possibilities of older philosophies--that there is something called soul and that it does not die--they do not phrase their sense of nature, death, and memory by these terms any more than they have stated their sympathy with Romantic goals according to Romantic terms. They have left these beliefs unelaborated not only because something which is a possibility and not certain knowledge should not be elaborated, but because, as women living in a certain present world, there are enough certain, present reasons for the sense of connection and renewal which they share. The faith that the dead continue to guide and protect the living, which is inherent in the African concept of the "living dead," is pivotal to her own sense of the perpetuity of the "great dead"; and "you can take that metaphorically in any way you want."[47] Ancient religion elaborated the metaphor of a

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surviving spirit in mythological terms. As contemporary women, it is enough for herself and Audre Lorde to elaborate their sense of connection in familiar earth-bound terms: connection to their parents and grandparents, back through the past; to their children and grandchildren, ahead into the future; to all of the great dead and living whom they converse with through writing itself; and to the earth itself whose ordinary, everyday miracles they trust.

After all of these reflections, if the words of Edith Cobb which instigated this research are reread, two heritages can now be heard in them. As her liberal quotations from Wordsworth elsewhere in her writing reveal, she is accepting his Romantic conception of memory without questioning it. In her stress upon the words "continuity" and "renewal of relationship with nature as process," she can now also be heard speaking in her own words, the words of a woman.

The significance which each poet has given to autobiographical memory accords with each person's philosophy of nature. Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot, who find nature an essentially meaningful sum of parts which rest upon a common denominator which is renewal, find meaning "natural" to their memory. David Ignatow, who concluded that no human meaning can be derived from nature's swirling forces, determined, in opposition, to give life a purely human meaning. "Life has to be lived, no matter how meaningless it is. . . . Life still has to be affirmed and expressed in all its ways" (see page 280). Whatever meaning his life has then, depends upon

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autobiographical analysis. William Bronk, in the face of nature, has concluded that such an attempt to ascribe meaning can never succeed; and he has never tried it. Henry Weinfield defines the nature of nature as fullness, not chaos. It is, however, a fullness within the world of time, which is ephemeral and inevitably a world of loss. Therefore he seeks meaning by transcending loss through art's enduring forms. Since language, or any other artistic medium, cannot reproduce the world of time, it means transcendence through a world apart from this world, where he himself, as an individual with an individual history, is "dead."

After writing this subsection primarily as an account of sexual differences, at a time when such differences make popular reading matter, it is necessary to reaffirm that men and women are not different species, but only variants of the same. The words "man" and "woman" are common nouns which mask uncommon individualities. Not only are they generalities populated by distinctions and exceptions, but they have developed from a common base. "Man" and "woman" have developed from one root, and that is the Sanskrit man, which means "to think." The necessary predecessor to this accomplishment comes from our evolutionary stock, which is "animal." From our animal roots comes anima, which means the spirit, breath, source of movement, or soul which makes thinking possible. Any familiarity at all with animals reveals that it provides one more basic foundation for thinking, and that is feeling. In entitling itself "Philosophy and Metaphysics," this

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subsection might appear to be about thinking; but no reader can have traversed all the pages up to this point without noticing that when these five poets have written about thinking, it is saturated with feeling, and when they have written about feeling, it is saturated with thinking.

The logic of hermeneutics itself affirms similarity more than difference. If any reader has been able to read the presentations of all five poets or the preceding discussion with any degree of understanding, it is a sign of the hermeneutic principle of re-cognition: a sign that one has understood the different sides of the arguments because, on an essential human level, one already knows each side.

One last reflection is in order regarding the issues which this section has covered. In establishing connections between philosophy and use of memory, it is possible to speak of different conceptions of memory associated with different dominant philosophical positions in the course of history. Contemporary dominant currents of thought make childhood environmental memory problematic.

As Ignatow has observed, with faith in a unifying principle undergirding the universe in disrepute, we have been left with the self as the denominator of the world's meaning (see page 279). As the weight of determining life's meaning has fallen upon the individual self, personal memory has assumed greater significance. Psychoanalysis is one evidence of this trend. Autobiography as a genre is another. This same modern world view which magnifies the importance of

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personal memory conflicts head on with a childhood world view. A child's sense of an animated, dynamically interactive universe in which magic can routinely happen conforms to the adult world views of earlier centuries; but our contemporary scientific world view denies it validity. The same trend of thought which teaches continuity with memory teaches discontinuity with this aspect of it. In all but some of his latest work, Ignatow's own writing illustrates this conflict.

Audre Lorde, Marie Ponsot, and David Ignatow in his later work have given an emphasis to generativity which may point a direction out of this double-bind. They reconnect the self to the world through a faith that each individual self can make a contribution to a constructive collective effort which is in step with nature's processes. Speaking in human generational terms, they do not require that our culture re-adopt faith in the magical elements of older cultures which it has discarded. They only require that we have faith in each other. They have created a contemporary basis for finding value in the self, not as a solitary self isolated from nature, but as a self embedded in nature. Through this reconnection they have made room for acceptance of childhood environmental memory. Otherwise, the modern scientific disjunction of human ends from nature's infinite endlessness leads us directly where it has led Bronk, to "the void of whole despair." How many people have a grip as strong as his to hang "enraptured" there?[48]

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Language and the World

One of the issues which these five poets dispute is the relation between language and the physical world. Their views on this subject have implications for their use of environmental memory. As this issue is elaborated, it should be kept in mind that all five are poets, which already says something about their involvement with language. Being already committed to language, they may be expected to chafe at its constraints, or celebrate its merits.

Experience is essentially wordless; but whether or not the world itself is is the issue of dispute. At the beginning, then, is a silence which can be variously interpreted. For most of Western history, the beginning of things has been interpreted as a pregnant silence, a fertile ground which grows grammar and vocabulary, as well as everything the eye beholds. "In the beginning was the Word. . . . all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1,3). Much ink has been spilled in an effort to define this Word; but both Christian and Jewish esoteric traditions took it quite literally and believed that the seed that gives birth to a thing is its true name. The secular application was magic: technical manipulation through charms.

One of the great modern changes has been to separate language and world. The world is the world, and language is an artificial human creation. As for the relationship of world and language, there are two basic modern possibilities.

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One is that, given any experience of the world, language is something added on, in afterthought. The relationship between words and language is then essentially arbitrary. More unitively, experience of the world may be experience of the world through language. Language may not be integral to the world, but it may still be entirely integral to experience of the world. In place of the older ideal of finding words which are true to the world's own truth, there may still be an ideal of finding words which are true to experience.

Views on memory go along with views on world and word. The positions of these five poets can be set in a sequence from greater to lesser faith in the connection of these two domains.

Both the African traditions of Audre Lorde and the Catholicism of Marie Ponsot set language and the world in orderly correspondence, as the very nature of things. When they measure language, they find it more full than wanting. The great discovery which Audre Lorde made on the hill in Mexico, which continues to inspire her writing, was that, "I didn't have to create the world I wrote about. I realized that words could tell. . . . that words can match that, re-create it" (see page 307). In response to theories which suggest that words are limited, Marie Ponsot has retorted, "Of course they have their limits. So do we."

The great power which Marie Ponsot attributes to words is that, by naming things in the outer world, they enable us to name ourselves. "Objects, all kinds of objects from the

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natural world, are the only way that we really can talk about what's going on inside. Language really isn't designed to describe the inner life. There aren't many good words for it, and they're not very well defined."[49] Instead of finding this insufficiency a lack, she finds that it makes language a sort of go-between (which means a sort of angel) which relates the history of our inner life through our relationship to the outer world.

For both Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot, memory becomes a storehouse for truths which reward inventory. Through memory, it is possible to recover the truth of the world, the truth of experience, and the right words to relate them.

David Ignatow and Henry Weinfield position themselves midway between this faith in the unity of language and the world and disavowal of it. They do not seek to discover the relationship between language and the world through accurate memory; they impose it through artistry. It is possible for art to form an analogue to experience, because they believe that experience itself has form.

David Ignatow has not written directly about the subject of language as such, but he has fervently debated the subject of style. One of his central concerns has been to evolve a style which recreates the rhythms and qualities of his surroundings. He has explained developments in his style according to changed understandings, in the process of trying to wrest meaning from his experience. Giving order to his words and giving meaning to his life are simultaneous actions.

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Since he defines meaning through his relations with society and with surrounding things, analysis of present and past experience is the focus of his writing.

Henry Weinfield also describes experience as something which is already full of meaning; but a central tenet of his work is that language cannot preserve actual experience. It can, however, have a meaning of its own. Whenever actual experience is imperfect or incomplete, art can transcend it and restore a sense of fullness. Since his art creates an alternate world to the physical world, everyday experience and personal memory never form its explicit subject.

For William Bronk, experience is essentially chaos, and language is an inaccurate attempt to express what is unsayable. Whatever the world is, it cannot be known through language. The self is equally chaotic, and equally dependent upon tricks of language for any semblance of order. Just as there is no real world which can be revealed through language, there is no real self. Moved by emotion in direct response to the world, his thought and feelings have their say anyway; but analysis of memory, which requires a conscious exercise of a sense of self, is not possible.

Bronk makes the exception that there is one form of memory which can endure, at least as long as human existence endures. It is art itself. There may be no language and no self which can anchor individual memory; nevertheless, language--or any other artistic medium--through the instrumentality of the artist's "selfless" self, can create objects of

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cultural memory which have firm stability.

Relationship to Childhood

Adult relationship to remembered environmental experience may be best expressed in terms of distance, in the sense that time is measured by movement across distance. There seem to be three critical dynamics:

- o Length of distance
- o Direction of movement
- o Routes for return

Each factor has two opposing poles which encourage or discourage memory: distance can be shorter or longer; routes for return can be accessible or rare; movement can be backward or forward, or there can be no movement at all.

The relationship to childhood memory shown by these five poets can be interpreted according to these three dynamics.

Length of distance. Used metaphorically, distance refers to the relationship between adult and childhood identities. The distance is long when adulthood follows the model that, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (I Corinthians 13:11). The distance is short when adulthood follows either of two alternate models: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3); or "Suffer the children to come unto me" (Matthew 19:14).

These models have been phrased in Biblical terms to

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make two points. The first point is that these models reach back to the roots of our civilization and they coexist within the same tradition.

The second point is that these models are themselves metaphors which refer to spiritual states of being through the vehicle of secular modes of behavior. Secularly, they simply say, "Be grown up," "Be childlike," or "Be nurturing." The adult life-span research which this study has reviewed (see page 428) has shown that these adult roles relate to the use of memory even if the secular dimension alone is considered.

Given the embeddedness of present culture in past history, it is questionable whether our secular roles can ever be excised from our religious traditions. To be grown up, childlike, or nurturing may seem like universals--givens of human nature. Exactly how these roles are defined and valued, however, depends upon the interaction of social and economic conditions with cultural traditions. Perhaps, at most, people can act in ignorance of the traditions they draw upon. In the case of these five people, their use of memory has the added dimension that they work with explicit consciousness of tradition.

In mid-life, both David Ignatow and Henry Weinfield have justified their dissociation from childhood through the Jewish ideal that manhood means something radically distinct from childhood. Although William Bronk has not discussed this issue directly, his writing suggests a similar position. He

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omits both children and himself as a child from all but a few rare poems. In the few poems in which children figure, they are objects of adult reasoning rather than sympathetic identification.

The adult models of Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot remain close to childhood. Both Audre Lorde's African beliefs and Marie Ponsot's Catholic faith reinforce a childlike way of perceiving the world. Both traditions declare the world to be permeated by spirit and purposeful: orientations which parallel childhood animism and artificialism. Both leave open that life continues, despite death, which parallels a child's sense of futurity and persistent optimism.

In Audre Lorde's and Marie Ponsot's writing, the third model--nurturance--also functions. Through involvement with children, they remain in touch with children's way of perceiving.

Regarding the metaphor of distance, a clause must be added with regard to the subject of memory in poetry. If childhood ways of feeling are remote from adult ways, early memory becomes insignificant. If childhood experience and adult experience remain close, there may be either of two results. Memory may become significant; or it may, once again, become insignificant. An adult who feels continuity with childhood may remember it often; or else, remaining in the same state, memory may be superfluous. The tension of a short irretrievable distance between childhood and adulthood, such as Wordsworth expressed, seems best calculated to make memory

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a preoccupation.

Other than by the metaphor of identity, there is one more way in which distance can be measured. It is geographical. To speak in quantifiable, empirical terms, for once, a second way of staying close to childhood environmental experience is exemplified by William Bronk. It is to never move at all. Distance, as a geographic actuality, functions in the operation of the second dynamic which influences memory, routes for return.

Routes for return. There are different ways to reach a place. One can set out with purposeful intention, or discover oneself there by surprise. As this discussion has already noted, the critical force which determines how one travels, and what one does once there, is desire.

David Ignatow, Audre Lorde, and Marie Ponsot have each described conscious processes of memory. For different reasons, each of these poets has sometimes deliberately desired to recover some aspect of childhood and submit it to analysis in poetry or prose. As Marie Ponsot has noted, once writing is under way it may set off a chain of memory that one follows as well as controls; but the initial desire to begin is conscious.

The most common route of return which this group of poets has described, however, is involuntary memory. The basis of involuntary memory is the physical environment.

> Without the steady presence of a nature which sustains its permanent forms, we should merely drift on the stream of time, unable to recover more than the thinnest ghosts of time.[50]

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Proust has made involuntary memory noteworthy by giving it name and form. This last quotation, however, is taken from commentary upon Wordsworth. The significance of this form of memory is that it is a familiar experience.

Since he remains where he has always been, William Bronk finds this form of memory recurrent. It is the only way in which childhood enters his poetry. Many of David Ignatow's notebook entries and poems which reflect upon childhood were also touched off by it. Audre Lorde and Marie Ponsot have also referred to it in writing and in interviews.

Once arrived somewhere, what one does there remains governed by desire. To stay somewhere, there must be something precious one wants to retrieve there, something one wants to enjoy, something one wants to set straight, something one wants to combat, or something one wants to retreat to.

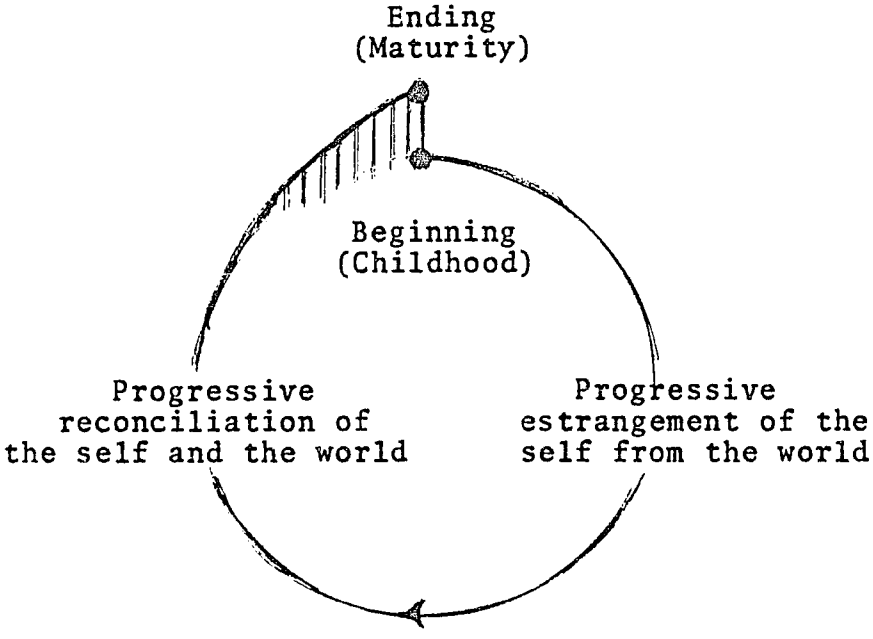
Evidence of the critical force of desire is that Proust constructed a seven-volume work upon the theme of involuntary memory; but Bronk, who is constantly exposed to it, has not given it one word . . . or at least, not more than the few words already quoted from the poem which compares memory and a remembered melody (see page 258). Proust set out to rescue an enduring self from the oblivion of time by regaining the past through these privileged moments and fixing them within the relative eternity of words. He said regarding the madeleine, "this essence was not in me; it was me."[51] Given such an ephemeral essence, he was driven by the desire to preserve himself through memory. Both Bronk and Weinfield, who accept

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the inevitability that this essence is ephemeral, have declined to pursue any such desire. David Ignatow, Marie Ponsot, and Audre Lorde, who have other, conscious routes for return open to them, have not needed to exhaustively pursue this one.

Direction of movement. At this point in this research, it is time to simplify all of these complexities through a diagram. Since this research is hermeneutic, it must be a circle. According to the logic of hermeneutics, it must be the same circle with which we are already familiar.

Distance, route, and direction are all contained in the Romantic model of development with which this study began (page 48).



The original impetus of this study was to explore whether Wordsworth's Romantic model of memory remains valid

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among contemporary American poets. When all five poets in this study are reconsidered, only David Ignatow's account of memory fits this Romantic pattern. The irony is that Ignatow has not come to Romantic conclusions. Although eventual reconciliation with his childhood sense of the world has brought him personal peace, the unity of self and world which he has come to accept has a somber earthy cast totally at odds with the clouds of glory which Wordsworth positioned at the beginning and end of the circle.

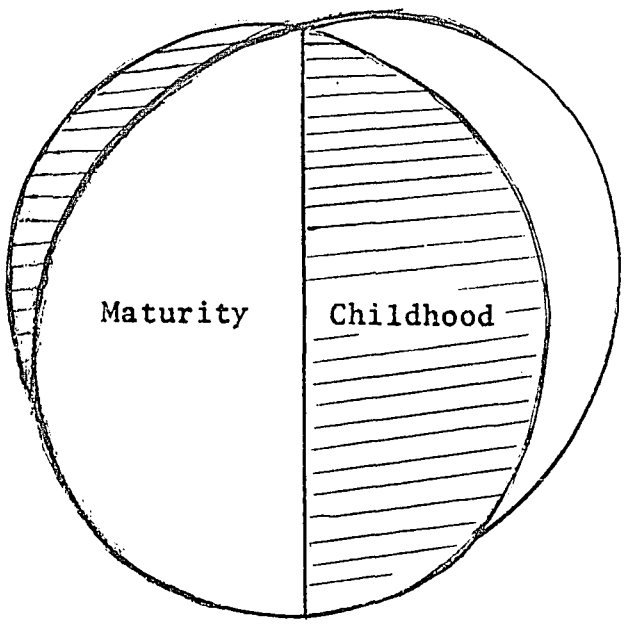
Henry Weinfield, at half David Ignatow's age, has noted the distinctions which separate adulthood from childhood. He has emphasized that the circle is a spiral, and that the ending fails to touch the beginning by a wide margin of gain and loss.

William Bronk has excused himself from any such attempt to net the infinite. He would surely point out that circles have holes in them. Only now can be real, so that childhood can only return, by chance, in individual instants of now. Whether one thinks of the now as an infinitely recurring dot of time, or as an infinitely extending line, there is no way to circle back. There is no way to move from here to there.

What path of movement have Marie Ponsot and Audre Lorde described? The diagram only partially applies. They do assume a world, so that a circle fits. They also assume maturity and change, so that childhood and adulthood never precisely overlap. In contrast, however, they do not speak in terms of estrangement and reconciliation. The relationship

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between childhood and maturity which they describe may be better represented by two intersecting planes.



Their present self and their remembered self meet at the center, and they reflect each other at all other points on the plane. The diagram also begins to suggest a three dimensional sphere. The worlds they assume are solid, with no hole at the center.

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Notes

[1]See page 226 for a list of the supplemental materials available for the different poets.

[2]William Bronk, personal interview, July 1983.

[3]Marie Ponsot, personal interview, November 3, 1983.

[4]Henry Weinfield, revised version of Sonnet VIII of Sonnets Elegiac and Satirical (Cincinnati: House of Keys, 1982). The revision was given by personal communication, March 1984.

[5]Marie Ponsot, Admit Impediment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), pp. 70-73.

[6]Audre Lorde, personal interview, January 1984.

[7]David Ignatow, personal interview, April 11, 1983.

[8]Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power (Brooklyn: Out & Out Books, 1978).

[9]Marie Ponsot, "From the Fountain at Vaucluse," "On the Country Sleep of Susanne K. Langer," "Discovery," Admit Impediment, pp. 46-53, 89-90, 99-100.

[10]Friedrich von Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, cited and discussed in M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), pp. 214-5.

[11]Henry Weinfield, "'Of Being Numerous' by George Oppen," George Oppen: Man and Poet, ed. Burton Hatlen (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation-University of Maine at Orono, 1981), p. 375.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Plato, "Ion," The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1954), p. 128.

[14]William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, ed. T. Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 590.

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[15]William Bronk, Life Supports (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 167.

[16]William Bronk, "A Conversation with William Bronk," Credences 1(3) (May 1976):31-32.

[17]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 119.

[18]David Ignatow, Open Between Us (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 108.

[19]David Ignatow, The Notebooks of David Ignatow, ed. R. J. Mills, Jr. (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973) (1964 entry), p. 258.

[20]Pierre Proudhon, Système des Contradictions Economiques, cited in Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 66.

[21]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 268.

[22]Harvey Peskin and Norman Livson, "Uses of the Past in Adult Psychological Health," Present and Past in Middle Life, ed. Dorothy H. Eichorn et al. (New York: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 153-181.

[23]Ibid. The theory of Erikson which this work refers to is developed in his book Life History and the Historical Moment (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

[24]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism; Ernst Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, trans. J. P. Pettegrove (New York: Gordian Press, 1970); W. H. Coates, H. V. White and J. S. Schapiro, The Emergence of Liberal Humanism: An Intellectual History of Western Europe (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Joseph Kockelmans, Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Psychology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967); Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (New York: Harper & Row, 1936); Stephen Prickett, ed., The Romantics (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981); Marjorie H. Nicholson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

[25]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 33.

[26]Coleridge to Wordsworth, May 1815, cited in Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 145.

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[27]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 75.

[28]Ibid., pp. 268-9.

[29]All remarks in this paragraph were made by Marie Ponsot in a personal interview on November 3, 1983.

[30]Marie Ponsot, personal interview, November 28, 1983.

[31]Marie Ponsot, "Skambha, Guess-Worker, Both Within and Beyond," Thirteenth Moon 6, nos. 1 and 2 (1983):107. The myth the poem incorporates is adapted from Hamlet's Mill by Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (Boston: Gambit, 1969). The interpretation of the poem is Marie Ponsot's own, from a personal interview on November 28, 1983.

[32]All quotations in this paragraph are from a personal interview with Audre Lorde in January 1984.

[33]Bronk, Life Supports, p. 53.

[34]Lorde, personal interview, January 1984.

[35]Ibid.

[36]David Ignatow, "From the Notebooks (1972-1974)," Ironwood 21 (1983), p. 98.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ignatow, personal interview, April 11, 1983.

[39]Ignatow, Ironwood, p. 101.

[40]Henry Weinfield, In the Sweetness of the New Time (Atlanta: House of Keys, 1980), p. 49.

[41]Ponsot, Admit Impediment, p. 141.

[42]William Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson, December 1814, Letters: The Middle Years, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 2:619.

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[43]John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (New York: Praeger, 1975).

[44]Ignatow, personal interview, April 11, 1983.

[45]David Ignatow, Facing the Tree (Boston: Little Brown, 1975), p. 17.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Marie Ponsot, personal telephone conversation, April 1984.

[48]The phrases are taken from William Bronk's "Virgin and Child with Music and Numbers," Life Supports, p. 53.

[49]Ponsot, personal interview, November 28, 1983.

[50]Geoffrey Durrant, Wordsworth and the Great System (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 77.

[51]For a discussion of Proust's sense of time and memory which this quotation embodies, see Georges Poulet, Studies in Human Time (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Initial Resolutions and Retrospective Results

As for this research itself, its aspiration has been to follow the pattern of the Romantic model of development, to practice hermeneutic phenomenology by circling around its subject, until the beginning comes back into view with a new richness not seen before. Now that this paper has reached the point where it is picking up pieces from its beginning, it is drawing to a close.

Hopefully the circle has been elevating. If it has been, it will have left the area open. The most helpful guide for this research has been Gadamer, who has argued that when the hermeneutic circle is translated into human terms, the most productive example is conversation. Like good conversation then, this study will have served its purpose if it comes to the end with many questions opened, but none closed. In research, as in conversation, a closed question must represent some terrible impasse.

The beginning theme of this study was "Memory and Method." Up until now, this discussion has dealt extensively with memory. What can it say now, compactly, about method?

The initial resolutions in beginning this study were simply two: 1) To turn to poetry to explore meanings which

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childhood environmental memory may have, since psychology itself has had little to say on this subject, and that little has done quite a bit of borrowing from poetry; and 2) To engage in a conversation with poets through a combination of speech and reading, to follow the subject through whatever turnings the conversation might take.

Potentially, the philosophy of "research as a conversation" can be used to take any question from any discipline and submit it to discussion with relevant, willing people. It can be applied to interdisciplinary research, as has been done here. It can also be used to broaden the conception of a question among members of a single discipline. It can be used with any subjects of social science research, to guide and to enrich standard methods of collecting data. For example, if one wanted to better understand the housing constraints faced by urban women with young children, one would open conversation with a few initial questions, and then carry an evolving perception of the situation from woman to woman, gaining insight by seeing the issues from more and more perspectives. Because this method has so many potential applications, a few observations will be made regarding its practice here.

As the pursuit of this method now appears, in memory, keeping up with an interdisciplinary question turned out to be more difficult than had ever been anticipated. As a psychologist, I came to the field of poetry after having evaded any undergraduate, much less graduate, course in literature

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but one, and that one was on Faulkner. Trying to divest oneself of presuppositions before undertaking research is one thing. Not having any to divest oneself of is something else. This second course of entry into research may have the advantage of openness, but it also has its hazards. It does not go recommended, unless a researcher is prepared to work strenuously yet never escape one quickly learned presupposition, that one is always probably missing as much as one is discovering.

Parts I and II of this study represent an attempt to acquire background fast. Even after two years of involvement in this research, although I know immeasurably more than to begin with, there are still great gaps in my awareness of poetic tradition. Surely I might have been able to hear more, and to read more into my reading, if I had known more.

Given these shortcomings, it is all the more to the credit of the concept of research as a conversation that, nevertheless, this method essentially worked. For one thing, phenomenology requires description rather than omniscience. The researcher's task is to listen and record. One intent in preparing Part IV, the presentation of the poets, was to provide enough information for someone better informed to make independent observations.

Another benefit of this method is that, as soon as a minimal background had been acquired and interviewing began, each poet proceeded to fill in remaining areas of ignorance. I found that each interview served not only to pick up the

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subject of environmental memory and carry it along; but also that each poet inevitably reflected upon the history of English language poetry, by reference to his or her place in it. Exactly as hermeneutic phenomenology would predict, understanding of both the specific question under examination and of the larger tradition in which it is embedded continuously developed side by side.

This particular attempt at research as a conversation may have been complicated by the fact that these conversants are not your ordinary man and woman on the street (whoever that is). Being able to open conversation with them required gathering a wealth of background regarding cultural traditions which is not necessary to pursue most social science topics. Most conversations which social scientists are likely to undertake involve less unusual subjects and less complex traditions. Or so it would seem.

The great privilege of this particular study, with these particular participants, is that it suggests that the above generalization is only seemingly true. Following through conversation with these five poets has led to the conclusion that they are distinct only in being better informed and more self-conscious than usual regarding their traditions. The traditions and presuppositions which they have openly discussed are not theirs alone.

If phenomenology is right in one more claim, when it comes to self-awareness of the traditions which run through our perceptions, our choices, our customs, our language, and

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our trends of thought, most scientists have remained out on the street with your ordinary man and woman. Certainly it is where I found myself. A shock upon immersing myself in this research was to find that, in the name of starting out fresh, filled with nineteenth century fervor for "unbiased" empirical observation, psychology (and myself as a psychologist) had forgotten so much. Reduction, as a methodological principle, may simplify experimental design; but too often it has been accompanied by reduction of ourselves--ourselves as individuals with a personal history, and ourselves as carriers of a cultural history. This loss applies to scientist as well as subject. The conduct of science has often reduced us to less than we are.

Armed with phenomenological principles, this study has made positivist science's distancing of subject and object a frequent target of critique. As an unexamined presupposition in the practice of research, positivism still flourishes. As a tenable principle within the literature of the philosophy of science, positivist dualism has already begun to appear a straw man. It is getting battered from so many sides. Phemenology forms only one angle of attack. Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle is a blow from within the inner sanctum of physical science itself. Its implications continue to be developed. Biology, psychology, and anthropology have created positions for assault from other sides, each revealing in its own way that mind and world form one ecology.[1]

The subject of this study suggests that a profitable

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area of work in the future will be to build an alliance between hermeneutic phenomenology and developmental psychology. Hermeneutic phenomenology offers a philosophical grounding for "the conversation that we are"--a conversation in which we engage with physical things as well as with each other and with history. As Heidegger and Gadamer have laid it out, however, hermeneutic phenomenology is not at all developmental. Developmental psychology, on its side, has begun to look into the effects of different forms of conversation, as we engage in them from infancy up.[2] If philosophical understanding were combined with developmental understanding, the outcome should be exactly the interdiscipline which this researcher would like to see form: a hermeneutic social environmental developmental psychology. This study has been an attempt to already practice it, in more simple words.

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Final Resolutions

The best way to close this study may be to take a tip from Heidegger, and look for clues to its resolution, or future direction, in the actual words with which it all began. As disciplines stand now, this study originated in the concerns of "environmental psychology."

"Environmental"

The first source of clues for future work is the word "environmental." Looked at once, "environmental" is the adjectival form for "all the physical, social, and cultural factors and conditions influencing the existence or development of an organism or assemblage of organisms; . . . that which surrounds, surroundings" (Webster's Dictionary). (It can be observed that this definition already reads like a call for a hermeneutic social environmental developmental psychology.)

Looked at twice, "environmental" contains a puzzle. Environ | mental: does it refer to the environs around the mind, or environs assembled in the mind, or both at once? Is it the case that the mind looks out and takes in the world outside it, or that, in the world outside it, the mind looks out and takes in itself?

Looked at three times, the word is familiar. Environ | mental: it is the same self | world, or world | self, with which this study began. No wonder that, in undertaking this research, it has proved difficult to keep environmental psychology distinct from the philosophy of science. The

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basic quandaries of epistemology are contained within its name. When the mind sees, does it see through a one-way mirror, or in a reflecting one . . . or can the mirror be taken away?

If Heidegger is correct in insisting that language has a wisdom of its own, then we can turn to the word one more time and find that it contains an answer as well as a puzzle. "Environmental": as it is, the word has no partitions. World and mind combine in it indivisibly. This resolution, however, still contains a challenge. The question which remains is, "How?"

"Psychology"

The question "How?" brings us to our last word, "psychology." What light can psychology throw on the conversation that we have just conducted? Or, in this world of flashing mirrors, what light can the conversation throw on it?

If we go back to beginnings, the first subject of this conversation was "Memory and Method." The first method illustrated was myth. This point of beginning makes the point at which to stop. Psychology, by the one slight respectful act of capitalizing the "P," reveals whom it is discourse about: that mythical maiden, Psyche.

The story is well known. A mortal renowned for her beauty, she incurred the jealousy of Aphrodite, who dispatched her son Eros to inflict punishment. Instead, he married her, on the condition that he would come only in the dark and she

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must never look upon his form, since "I would rather you would love me as an equal than adore me as a god." Tempted by her sisters, who suggested that he was a monstrous dragon who was fattening her for the kill, she held a lamp above him as he slept, only to discover that it was Eros at the same moment that he awoke and flew away. To find him again, she had to suffer hard trials: to sort a mountain of peas, beans, wheat, millet, and barley into separate piles (the ants helped); to gather golden fleece from violent rams (a river and the trees and bushes helped); and to run an errand down to dread Persephone, the queen of Hades (Eros had to directly intervene). With the benefit of this aid from nonhuman friends, she triumphed over adversity. She was rewarded both by the return of her husband and by a cup of ambrosia which conferred immortality.[3]

In coming to this myth, we have made progress. Mnemosyne, with whom this study began, is a most ancient Titaness. Psyche is latest born of the Olympians. In keeping with up-to-date modern methods and modes, she is, in fact, a self-conscious literary fabrication. The Platonist Apuleius, in the second century A.D., borrowed from old folk themes and legends to compose this allegory.[4]

Contemporary psychology may be embarrassed to claim such a Neoplatonic patroness. It cannot expunge her from its name, however, without losing its own identity. To avoid giving her unwonted honor, it may try keeping the "p" to lower case and--if we are still willing to trust Heidegger's method--

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see how "psychology" fares then.

Granted, "psyche" is an ancient word. Back in their own stage of primal unity, the early Greeks did not distinguish psyche and soma. Psychology has tried this tack before and will surely continue to try it. If historical progress is followed past this point of innocent nondifferentiation, however, the issue becomes delicate again. At first "psyche" meant "breath," from the verb "to breathe, to blow." From there it came to mean the breath of life, the animating principle in all things. (In this etymology, it exactly parallels the Latin cognate "inspiration"--the precise problem with which this whole study began.) The Platonists quickly took the word over, and extended it to mean anima mundi, the animating principle of the universe as a whole, which sustains the universe just as the individual soul sustains the organism.

Given such inherent complications, psychologists may prefer to define themselves via entomology, and choose the second early meaning of the word "psyche": a butterfly. It is still to no avail. Later Greeks found the butterfly the perfect symbol for the soul, and artists attached butterfly wings to Psyche's shoulder to represent her. As usual, we arrive back at the beginning.[5]

Considered objectively, Psyche is not such an inappropriate patron goddess. She was well acquainted with problems of the body and personal vicissitude. Sometimes she had to perform absurd tasks. She even engaged in some heavy

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quantification. It was all excusable in her case, however, since she did it in the name of love. From environmental psychologists' own special point of view, the nonhuman environment brought her sustenance.

In one essential, Psyche's character remains problematic. Exactly who she is must somehow relate to the identity of her husband, since he is ever the object of her devoted attention. If there is anything at all that this study should have made clear, it is that his identity is murky. He has kept flying in and out of this study, under various guises. He could be any one of the following characters, or some complex character who harbors diverse potentials.

1. According to Audre Lorde, he is Eros
   who came first in the world after Chaos,
   to impose upon the void of Chaos creative
   power and harmony.
2. According to Plato, he is the begging,
   scheming offspring of Poverty and Plenty,
   a great daimon who serves as intermediary
   between gods and mortals.
3. According to the Renaissance Neoplatonists,
   whom the Metaphysical poets and Wordsworth
   read and took to heart, he is the "tye of
   bodyes" which sustains creation by descending
   down through all ranks of all things and by
   drawing all things back up to him.
4. According to Freud, he is mischievous Eros,

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child of Aphrodite and Ares, who shows characteristics of both parents and who hides himself under many fickle forms.

5. According to William Bronk, he is a name for the nameless god, the one of whom he can only say, "Always, in all the calling, I had thought to call you."
6. According to persistent rumor, he is a dragon.

Psychology, like Psyche, is faced with a dilemma. If it is to hold up a lamp, which figure will it light? Psyche herself confronted this question in uncertainty. Her first impulse, which led to difficulties, was empirical examination. When she thought to remove all doubts by this method alone, the answer proved fugitive.

The final resolution to this study's question hangs upon this problem of identity. As this research has concluded, the course of memory itself follows upon the promptings of desire.

Psychology, struggling to evolve new methods, cannot content itself with the answers of old myths. It must work out for itself just whom it is that Psyche has wedded. It is a hard problem which puts everyone to the test; but there is no escape from it. For better or for worse, she <u>is</u> wedded. On one side, there lurks the possibility of the dragon. Many people claim to have sighted it; and psychology may be pressed into their service. If it is to form a better union, who will

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it choose? How must it conduct itself? Before these unsettled questions, this study must stop. It can go no further.

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Notes

[1]A review of different positions which oppose dualism is given in Morris Berman, The Reenchantment of the World (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981).

[2]For a review of different interactionist language development models, see Norman K. Denzin, "Interaction and Language Acquisition in Early Childhood," special issue on Child Language-1975, Words 27, nos. 1, 2, 3 (1971):445-459.

[3]Thomas Bulfinch, "Cupid and Psyche," The Age of Fable (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Dolphin Books, n.d.), pp. 95-106.

[4]Pierre Grimal, "Greece: Myth and Logic," Larousse World Mythology, ed. Pierre Grimal (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), pp. 173-5.

[5]James A. Murray, ed., A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, 10 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 7:1549-50.

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POSTSCRIPT

The clause chosen for this study's title, "in the first country of places," owes its origin to the poet Howard Nemerov's five-year-old son. It comes from one of the out-of-the-blue pronouncements, delivered with oracular solemnity, that children of this age sometimes make. His father took it to heart and preserved it. The title discloses only the first half of the child's pronouncement. Now that this study is finished, after following both books and people through hundreds of questions and answers, the second part can be confessed. It serves as a reminder that the first country of places itself exists within the inviolability of spontaneity. It is a domain which precedes reflection and interpretation. It may be a domain which precedes unsettled desires. The child's full wisdom was,"In the first country of places, there are no requests."

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