

**THE POETICS OF IMMANENCE AND EXPERIENCE:
ROBERT LOWELL, JAMES WRIGHT, RICHARD HUGO, JORIE GRAHAM**

Lidija Davidovska, M.A.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis defines the poetics of a strand within contemporary American poetry, generally described as “mainstream” by literary critics that I define as “the poetics of immanence and experience”. I delineate the genealogy of this poetics from the late 1950s to the end of the 1990s, focusing on four poets who, I contend, best represent “the situation of poetry” in each of the decades during this period. Each of these poets will be shown to sustain and extend this vibrant, and according to literary scholarship, still dominant tradition in American poetry. Robert Lowell, James Wright, Richard Hugo and Jorie Graham are analyzed in the literary context of a particular decade as the most representative poet of this strand of poetry. Defining and tracing a stable poetic model within the vast poetic, aesthetic and cultural input and output in America during the second half of the twentieth century, contributes to a better understanding of American culture as susceptible to generating experiential types of poetry. Drawing from Altieri’s concept of immanence, I define the poem as immanent when it reveals a presence/immanence of a human consciousness as an individuated and particularized agent/protagonist who narrates his/her personal story in a primarily causal, narrative language generated by the structures of the depicted story. The result is the realistic illusion that the poem captures the experience as “it happened”, which is then only transferred to the poem-world from the Object-world. Altieri’s idea about the general turn in American poetry towards the Wordsworthian Order of Nature and my argument about experience as value-generating principles for the poets, are manifested in Lowell’s photographically “objective” surface descriptions and narrations, Wright’s transcendental moments inspired by numinous nature, Hugo’s projections of the human self upon the Object-towns and Graham’s experiential frames of reference filled with the meditations and speculations of her discursive voice.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to define the poetics of a strand of American contemporary poetry which literary criticism has often described as “mainstream”. Although I agree with this description generally, I view this type of poetry only as a tributary stream (one of many) of the general American mainstream in the second half of the century. I follow the evolution of this poetics from the late 1950s to the 1990s, focusing on four poets (Lowell, Wright, Hugo and Graham) who, I believe, best represent “the situation of [this strand] of poetry”¹ in each of these decades, sustaining and extending this vibrant, and according to literary scholarship, still dominant tradition in American poetry. As I hope to show, their poetry exhibits a specific quality in each decade, whilst still retaining (the structure of) a shared poetic model. Each poet, Lowell, Wright, Hugo and Graham is analyzed in a literary context of a particular decade as the most representative poet of this strand of poetry in that decade. Although some of these poets are often placed by literary criticism in different literary schools or movements (e.g. Lowell, Confessional poetry in the late 1950s; Wright, Deep Image, in the 1960s), my intent is to identify the key, shared, general characteristics in their poetry which produce a poetic model discernible as such in a larger body of poetry in America written in the second half of the century.

Although this thesis is interested in a type of poetry strongly aligned with the mainstream, as the literature review will show, I do not attempt to provide definitions of American mainstream poetry, since it would require a very different, broader, and much more comprehensive study of the whole poetic culture in the given period. Basically, this project focuses on a compendium of shared characteristics among the selected poets and argues that they are indicative of a distinctive poetics which in the course of the thesis is defined as “the poetics of immanence and experience”.

I believe this broad definition (“poetics of immanence and experience”) can be applied as an umbrella term to a large body of poetry which, after gaining its momentum in the late 1950s

¹ Reference to the title of Robert Pinsky’s book, *The Situation of Poetry*.

and 1960s, has marked American contemporary poetry as a dominant presence. My assumption is that, notwithstanding the vastness of poetic, aesthetic, cultural input and output in this period—the second half of the twentieth century—one can still trace a poetic model emerging and reemerging throughout the decades and evolving as a result of interrelations with cultural discourses in these decades.

My interest in charting a common, general aesthetics that is “visible” behind this particular mainstream strand of American contemporary poetry was triggered by some initial assumptions about, and observations of, a dominant mode of American poetry which typifies it and makes it different. This thesis demonstrates how, and why, a poetics of “immanence and experience” can be seen as one of *the* dominant modes of American poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century, and its focus upon these four poets is an attempt to argue for their status as “exemplary” poets of this strand of American poetry. This becomes clear not just in the close readings of these poets in subsequent chapters, but in the ways in which this thesis situates itself within various critical traditions that have sought to define an American mainstream poetry and poetics.

Another equally generative reason for the particular focus of the thesis is the great shift of direction American poetry took after Modernism. Just looking at tables of contents of critical and historical surveys of poetry after the 1950s, one finds many chapter titles that even use terms for physical movement to indicate such a shift: “A Step Away from Them: Poetry 1956” (Perloff, *Poetry on & off the Page*); “We Have Come This Far” (Charles Molesworth, *The Fierce Embrace*). Any great change in aesthetics such as indicated here inevitably triggers some interesting questions: What kind of poetry came after? Is there a general dominant poetic model after this shift? Was the change primarily triggered by cultural and socio-political developments? Was it simply a result of recurrent changes in literary modes? Although my research opens these “big” questions implicitly, I do not attempt to answer them all, since this would unavoidably “push” the project into the domain of culture studies and discourse analyses. The thesis mainly provides extensive analyses of various forms of immanence these poets adopt and develop accordingly to suit their poetic idioms.

Critics of American poetry have certainly acknowledged this typical and dominant mode of poetry in America but mostly in negative terms, particularly critiquing the poetic output of

MFA (in creative writing) programs after the 1970s. However, an important point to be noted is that a good number of these critics view this (as they call it “MFA poetry”, “workshop poetry”, “university poetry” or “creative writing poetry”) as a continuation of the confessional style that emerged in the late 1950s with poets like Robert Lowell, W. D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton and John Berryman. I draw on this point of the debate to develop my argument about a dominant poetic mode in the late twentieth century, emerging from confessional poetry. However, my general standpoint is not a critique, as I offer a definition and analysis of best practices of this aesthetics.

One of the major critics of twentieth-century American poetry, especially of modernist, avant-garde and experimental poetry, Perloff, acknowledges the dominance of this sort of poetics which this thesis seeks to examine. She sees it, however, in critical terms, as can be seen in her book *21st-Century Modernism* (2002):

Indeed, surprising as it may seem, given the enormous political, demographic, and cultural changes of the post-World War II era, in the mainstream poetry press the lyric paradigm has remained remarkably constant. (155)

According to her, this “lyric paradigm” is a “remarkably constant poetics”, spanning from the 1930s to the near-present and “exhibiting a move towards a greater informality and everyday language” (157-8). She defines this poetic model as:

A generic “sensitive” lyric speaker contemplates a facet of his or her world and makes observations about it, compares present to past, divulges some hidden emotion, or comes to a new understanding of the situation. The language is usually concrete and colloquial, the ironies and metaphors multiple, the syntax straightforward, the rhythms muted and low-key. (161-2)

Another authority on American contemporary poetry, especially of the second half of the twentieth century, Altieri, in his study on a prevalent poetics in the 1970s (*Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry*), also acknowledges the existence of a dominant aesthetics which the majority of younger poets adopt, and warns against the institution of the “poetry workshop” which fosters it (205). He refers to this model as the “scenic style” and draws a

connection with the confessional style (“as in heirs of confessional styles”). It is interesting to note that his description of the model is similar to Perloff’s:

The work places a reticent, plain-speaking, and self-reflective speaker within a narratively presented scene evoking a sense of loss. Then the poet tries to resolve the loss in a moment of emotional poignance or wry acceptance that renders the entire lyric event an evocative metaphor for some general sense of mystery about the human condition. The two most popular varieties consist of making the scene a more intense moment of psychological conflict (as in heirs of confessional styles) and extending the evocative metaphor by a more discursive and tonally complex reflective summary. . . . (10)

However, the most open assertions about a predominant poetic mode of the last fifty years in American poetry, come from a critical debate between poets and critics who belong to entirely different poetic camps, namely “Language poetry” and “Expansive poetry” (New Formalists and New Narratives), comprehensively summarized in Christopher Beach’s *Poetic Culture* (1999). The fact that two major and opposed poetics, the very avant-garde, experimental one, and the very conservative, retrograde one, seem to unite in a critique of this poetry describing it as “mainstream” and “dominant”, and using the same descriptive terms: “confessional/postconfessional”, “academic”, “workshop poetry”, “workshop lyric”, is another point which I draw on in order to develop my argument about several general and typical characteristics which best describe the model. In summary, the experimental Language poetry camp (Christopher Beach, Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Jed Rasula, Perloff and others) criticize the strand of poetry and poetics in which this thesis is interested for an absence of experimentation and lack of density in its poetic expression, as well as for its “straightforward syntax” (Perloff, *21st-Century* 162). On the other hand, the conservative New Formalist and New Narrative critics (David Dooley, Robert McDowell, Kevin Walzer, Dana Gioia) demand a return of various poetic forms (epic poetry, villanelle, sonnet, ballad, etc.), rhythm, rhyme and narrative flow (a beginning, a middle and an end) in poetry, and criticize this strand for its lack of metrical schemes, its stringent adherence to free-verse orthodoxy and its “domesticated confessional” mode (Dooley 260). In summary, this poetry has been “accused” of being (1) confessional, (2) narrative, (3) colloquial and concrete. Thus, I read this critical debate (i) as a broad scholarly

consensus on a predominant poetic mode in the second half of the century which (ii) has identified several typical and shared characteristics in the poetic mode, which I analyze further.

I define this poetry as the “poetics of immanence and experience”, arguing that poems reveal the presence of a concrete human consciousness, often aesthetically “incarnated” in the first person(s) “I” or “we” and the second person “you”. This human consciousness presenting the poetic experience, “narrates” itself as part and agent of the experience. It (the poetic voice) does not approach the experience as a knowing subject from “outside”, but as a participating agent from “inside”. The experience in the poem does not leave an impression of being premeditated, but is a process of discovering its structure through the active poetic subject. The structure is often narrated as a story, a “slice of life” or a meditation, employing linear, causal exposition. This contrasts with a modernist approach where the speaker who presents the experience is basically impersonal and his/her presence in the poem is not felt as an active, concrete human consciousness in a process of discovering the reality through experience. In most modernist poetry the speaker appears as a symbol, a conceptualized agent (or agents, as in T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*), in a symbolically premeditated experience.

The critic who defines the idea of *immanence* in reference to the poetry which emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s is Altieri in his *Enlarging the Temple* (1979). I draw mostly on his idea of immanence of human consciousness in the poem and adopt his explanation of the shift in poetic stance towards the world and the poetic experience after Modernism. Principally, Altieri sees such a shift as an effect of a more general disenchantment in culture and in a man-made civilization after World War II in the McCarthy years, during the Cold war and the Vietnam era, although he does not analyze this shift any further. He draws a correlation between a Wordsworthian poetic stance where the poetic consciousness puts its trust in “the order of nature” to discover “the otherness”, i.e. the objective world outside of it and its active part in it, and the poetry emerging with the confessionals (Robert Lowell), New York poets (Frank O’Hara), the Projectivists (Charles Olson and Robert Duncan), Deep Image (Robert Bly), Gary Snyder and W.S. Merwin, who found various immanent forms to exceed Modernism. The opposed modernist stance which he finds originating in Coleridge’s symbolist poetics, places its trust in culture and in man-made civilization, and so is opposed to nature. Thus, according to Altieri, the first model with its trust in the orders of the natural world presents the experience in

the poem “as it appears” in nature, that is, outside the poem, while the second model, with its trust in human culture and imagination, restructures and conceptualizes the experience symbolically. Hence, the immanentist mode of poetic thought emerging after the symbolist mode of poetic thought.

I argue, however, that the concept of personal experience as a discovery of new values sweeping the culture in the 1960s, forced the poet to change his/her position towards such conceptions as the object-reality-nature. His/her position towards the world outside the Self, towards the object, reality, nature, becomes exploratory and—what is more—the poem tries to capture it. The poem, that is, creates an illusion that the experience “is happening” at the moment when we read the poem or the poem presents a story of “how it happened”. Altieri in the already mentioned significant analysis of the shift of the poetry in the 1960s, *Enlarging the Temple*, says: “In the aesthetic of presence, on the other hand, poems do not present direct experience but the aesthetic illusion of direct experience that depends on style and form as means of seeing the world freshly” (24). He is one of the critics who best capture the position of the poet in the new poetics by the single phrase *poet’s immanence*. Since this phrase best explains the concept of *experience* (through the concept of immanence) applied to the 1960s period, I concentrate more on his well developed dual model of poetics: *the symbolist* and *the immanentist modes* which he traces, as implied previously, back in Romanticism, that is, in the theoretical writings of Coleridge and Wordsworth, respectively. This is how he explains his model:

I call the alternative logical model represented by early Wordsworth an essentially *immanentist* vision of the role of poetry. Here poetic creation is conceived more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms. Hence its basic commitment is to recovering familiar realities in such a way that they appear dynamically present and invigorate the mind with a sense of powers and objective values available to it. Where the symbolist poet seeks to transform nature into satisfying human structures, the immanentist poet stresses the ways an imagination attentive to common and casual experience can transform the mind and provide satisfying resting traces in an otherwise endless dialectical pursuit by the mind of its own essences and of the Transcendental realities. (17)

Other critics of American contemporary poetry have reiterated the same claim but nobody has shown in such interlocking detail the main nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical ideas at play in creating the philosophical background of these poetic models. Altieri draws from Wordsworth's and Coleridge's well-known essays on poetry, *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* and *Biographia Literaria* respectively, to define two philosophical positions, two stances of the poet towards the world or nature. Coleridge's more ontologically inclined stance of creating/ recreating reality/nature through the imagination is the "locus and even source of the values and images we live by" (37) and Wordsworth's more epistemological position is one which sees the poet discovering nature or "one's capacity to look steadily at his object and to recover the qualities inherent in it or in the act of perception" (36). Although both poets, as Altieri argues, are preoccupied by their attempts to define the lines of the subject-object relationship, or the dualism of human-nature relations, they part company in the ways they imagined it should happen. Wordsworth believed in the subject's participation in objective laws, Coleridge tried to recreate the objective by the creative acts of consciousness. Coleridge's poetics, his trust in the creative powers of the mind, was embraced and survived in twentieth-century modernist poetry. Wordsworth's sense of Nature as enlightening poetic ground did not interest Victorians and modernists, because both placed their trust in human constructs of the Self; the first in the ethical values, the second in cultural values, as ways of creating order in the fragmented world. Thus, Altieri concludes, modernist poetics developed relying on symbols and metaphors as tokens of Coleridge's artistic re-creation of reality. The poetry after Modernism which he calls "immanentist or presence poetry", basically redeems Wordsworth's belief in poetic experience recollected through memory, not imagination. Although he maps how the poetics of immanence develops further in the poetry of several major poets of the sixties, the immanent Self participating in the experience remains the central point in his analysis.

Thus, we have the poetry of *presence* in which the poet's or the speaker's immanent Self is in pursuit of discovering the complex natural orders and energies governing the "outside" world. However, the Self in the poem, discovering the ineffable energies and orders of the natural world, discovers that he/she is part of them. If the poet/the speaker is immanent in the poem then we inevitably hear a personal account of *his* experience. In the poetry after the fifties

we witness a grand return of the “I” in the poem. Actually, the “I” becomes almost inevitable, if the poem wishes to sustain its illusion that it catches an experience in process.

The language of poetry of immanence, depicting the participating Self in the experience, tends to adopt the “syntax” and the “diction” of a particularized, concrete, experience. Thus, the language is concrete and deals with the universals which are particularized; it tries to explore “the universal – be it Being or energy or the collective unconscious – [which] manifests itself in the concrete moment” (Altieri 43). In other words, the concrete expression of poetry after Modernism stems precisely from this trust in experience, from the poetic “honesty” and the artistic simulacrum that the experience is just depicted in the poem without exercise of the re-creative powers of poetic imagination. As Altieri puts it:

Like concepts of the ego, ideas about language depend in large part on more general attitudes toward the relationship between the mind and nature. In immanentist thinking, symbolist theories of language as the creation of forms or experience give way to doctrines stressing the way authentic language grows out of the world’s vitality and gives expression to it. (44)

I adopt this exegesis of the aesthetics of immanence, but argue that there is another important, value-generating, concept in American culture, relevant to understanding the poetics of immanence: the concept of “experience” in the sense of “action” or “praxis”. I understand this concept culturally and view it as part of the aesthetics of immanence that is deeply embedded in American value systems and a key epistemological principle in American philosophical thought (namely, in Pragmatism). Demonstrating the linkage between the time-enforced pragmatism of Puritan culture and the latter school of philosophy, William Dean in *The American Spiritual Culture* (2002), notes:

Cast on the shores or into inner cities of America, tested for their capacity to survive in what was or felt like a wilderness, American immigrants learned to prize practicality above all. Of course, they wanted their religious beliefs to resonate to establish truths, but they knew their beliefs must be able to keep them alive or enhance their lives in adverse circumstances. Americans were not just practical; they were systematically practical, so it should have surprised no one

when they became the world architects of the formal philosophy of pragmatism.
(62)

This thesis shows that the poetry of immanence and experience reflects this culturally engraved trust in experience as praxis, more than any other strand of poetry in the last half of the century. I see this concept at play: (i) in the personalized, concrete poetic voice presenting a concrete and personal experience as a testing ground for discovering and comprehending reality; (ii) in the rendition of the poetic experience which creates a simulacrum that it “really happened”, or is happening now, and (iii) in the linear structures of experience expressed in causal language with conjunctive links provided by metonyms, rather than metaphors. These are the three key, recurrent rhetorical modes within which this thesis sees the strand of poetry with which it is concerned, operating.

Thus, I use Altieri’s idea derivatively, identifying and developing an additional informative concept of this poetics (“experience”). A point of departure from Altieri’s concept of the poetics of immanence is his application of the concept to content-related issues, while I am primarily interested in the rhetorical effects. Thus, I examine the characteristics: (1) confessional, (2) concrete, colloquial, (3) narrative and (4) metonymic as rhetorical devices of the poetics in question. Also, Altieri applies his idea of immanence only to the poetry of the sixties, while I will try to demonstrate that it has been alive in the poetry of each decade after the 1950s.

The argument about the legacy of Confessional poetry in the dominant poetic strand is most explicitly made by poet and critic Gregory Orr, apart from the aforementioned general critical debate. In his essay “Postconfessional Lyric” (*The Columbia History of American Poetry*), he identifies three generational groupings of “postconfessionals” in the sixties and seventies. Although he approaches the confessional mode related to autobiographical subject matters, and my thesis deals with the confessional as a rhetorical mode, it is important for my research that he acknowledges the continuity of this poetic mode throughout the decades, and views it as a poetic tradition. Talking about Frank Bidart, Louise Glück, Sharon Olds (the younger “postconfessionals”), he says:

Using a variety of literary and psychological strategies, the youngest generation has assimilated the autobiographical encounter into the mainstream of American

poetry to such an extent that, thirty years after the confessionals, it is one of the dominant modes of writing. (653-4)

Other similar references to the confessional poetry also come from the previously discussed critical debate between the Language and Expansive poetry. The first of the ten theses against “the workshop poetry” drawn up by David Dooley (a critic of New Formalist affiliation) reads:

Workshop lyrics generally fall into three modes: the domesticated confessional, the quasi-surreal, and the regional-pastoral. The domesticated confessional poem descends from the work of such poets as Lowell, Berryman, Sexton and Plath with the important difference that more recent writers have not been institutionalized, but the confessional manner has been. The quasi-surreal mode includes such sub-genres as the “deep image” poem, the chthonic manner of W.S. Merwin, and the surrealist cute school of poets like James Tate. . . . The domesticated confessional and quasi-surreal modes may be regarded as the personal and impersonal poles of the workshop lyric. The regional-pastoral poem can often be assimilated to one mode or the other. Some poems have worked in all three genres; others, like Richard Hugo, have sometimes mingled the modes in the same poem. (260)

Bob Perelman, a poet and a critic of the Language poetry group, in his introduction to *The Marginalization of Poetry* (1996), referring to the poetry after Modernism, says:

Confessional poets were the model: Lowell, Plath, Sexton, Berryman. Poems were short, narrative, focused on small or large moments of crisis or optimism. Whether the form was free-verse or rhymed iambic stanzas, the tone was conversational. (12)

Thus, I define the “confessional” as a rhetorical mode, a model in which the voice of the poem renders the experience of the poem. I do not use the traditional meaning of “confessional” referring to the poetry of the informal group of poets in the late fifties and sixties who explicitly, or so some of them claimed, used their personal lives (their biographies) as subject matters (Lowell, Sexton, Snodgrass, Plath, Berryman). That is, I am not interested in biography as subject matter, nor do I examine the “confessional” as content-related (confessing “the self”), as the largest number of the authors in Jo Gill’s collection of essays, *Modern Confessional Writing*,

do. My definition and understanding of “the confessional” in this thesis stems from the already defined presence (immanence) of a concrete, personalized, particularized subject (a human consciousness). Thus, I argue that the rendition of any experience by a concretized and fully defined human presence in the poem (the personal voice) unavoidably becomes, or takes the form of a confession, that is, it becomes “my story” or “my meditation”. Thus, I am interested in the confessional model as a way of imparting, telling, and narrating. What matters more than if the story is true or not, is *how* it is told, that is, its truth is in its form.

Since I am interested in the predominantly rhetorical qualities of this poetry, my research examines and enters into a meaningful debate with some seminal studies which deal with rhetoric-related issues and discursiveness in American poetry after Modernism. One such key author is critic and poet Robert Pinsky. Pinsky’s seminal study *The Situation of Poetry* (1976) is examined in the chapter on Hugo’s poetry in the 1970s when this poetry takes a noticeable shift towards discursiveness and a greater reliance on prose elements, and even more extensively in the chapter on Graham’s poetry, which takes up this discursive trend far into the 1980s and 1990s.

I also define the other mentioned characteristics: (2) concrete and colloquial and (3) narrative as key rhetorical elements of the poetics of immanence and experience. If human consciousness puts its trust in the natural order of the universe, and the poem is a means to discover this order and one’s place in it, then, consequently, the voice only disentangles the existent structures of experience and transfers them in the poem without re-creating them through symbols or metaphors. This philosophical stance of the subject in relation to the object (the world outside of human consciousness), inevitably chooses concrete, detailed, narrative and colloquial language “as found” in nature, that is, in the world-object outside the subject. The poem is an artistic simulacrum of that transfer. In this sense, it is metonymic rather than metaphorical in its engagement with the world. In other words, the poem is just a part of the big whole (the world), rather than its symbolic replacement.

Often, the (2) *concrete, colloquial* and detailed language refers directly to real times and places (Wright’s “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota”; Lowell’s “Memories of West Street and Lepke”; many of Hugo’s poems about Missoula, Montana). Such poetic renderings of “real” events are looked at through the prism of Bakhtinian

chronotopes (time-space matrices) as techniques of a narrative mode which often reflect different worldviews and ideologies deeply imbedded in the poetic discourse.

In analyzing some of the (3) *narrative* characteristics of this poetry—long lines, a linear, causal, expository mode, and straightforward syntax, I examine how much this poetry borrows from prose, and still produces poetic effects. I also examine one of the key aesthetic principles of realist poetry—selection, and the interplay between the inherent (sometimes archetypal) symbolism of selected material (e.g. “apple-picking” as “knowledge gaining”) and the symbolism acquired within the structure of the poem. I also engage in some discourse analysis applying Bakhtin’s idea of “dialogue”/“dialogism” and “heteroglossia”, especially in the chapter on Wright’s poetry. Although Bakhtin developed and applied these ideas primarily in relation to the novel, his ideas of language as inherently dialogic (entering into dialogues with past and future discourses) and the idea of heretoglossia as a multitude of different, often conflicting sociolects, jargons and discourses, are well suited to analyses of narrative poetry, because the concrete, causal, logical language of the individualized, concrete voice in the immanentist poetry, reveals diverse cultural discourses.

(4) One of the key aims of this thesis is to define the *metonymic* character of this poetry also springing from the poetics of immanence and experience, and I analyze it as a typical feature of a narrative and concrete poetic language. Metonymy is a figure of speech which replaces the whole with one of its parts or qualities (“a hand” for “a worker”; “the deep” for “sea”). When frequently employed in literary texts, metonymy reflects a particular approach towards the artistic rendition of experience. Again, it suggests that poetic experience is only transferred from the world (outside of the poem) without symbolic re-creation (which would be typical for metaphor). In other words, the poet employs the human linguistic faculty of combination of “ready-made” elements found “outside” of the poem, on the basis of their closeness, adjacency, or contiguity. For example, when Hugo implicitly talks about a drowned woman in the first stanza of “The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir” (*Selected Poems* 201), in the second stanza he talks about the close, contiguous elements, surrounding the spot where apparently she drowned: “the spillways”, “the lakes”, “the mountain range”, which are different parts and features of the whole – the Kicking Horse reservoir:

Lie there lily still. The spillway’s closed.

Two feet down most lakes are common gray.
 This lake is dark from the black blue Mission range
 Climbing sky like music dying Indians once wailed. (98)

I draw here from Roman Jakobson's theory about development and organization of discourse in his "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" (*Fundamentals of Language*):

The development of the discourse may take place along two semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (165)

Also, this thesis aims to demonstrate how this poetics (of immanence and experience) is conducive to producing poems which develop metonymic structures inside which metaphors breed. I draw on David Lodge's argument in *The Modes of Modern Writing*, that poetry which relies on the verbal feature of "combination" of poetic material on the principle of contiguity produces linear, narrative poems with logical conversational discourse. At the opposite pole, is poetry which mostly employs the verbal feature of "selection" of poetic materials which belong to different realms of language, and substitutes one thing for another. Thus, in the phrase "she was flying with happiness", the human faculty of moving, walking happily, is first compared to, then substituted with the bird's entirely different but still similar, in terms of speed and vigor, faculty of "flying". According to the theory (which I apply), this is an artistic re-creation of reality conducive to a more symbolic, dense and metaphoric type of poetry. Elaborating Jakobson's principle of the metonymic and the metaphoric linguistic structures further, David Lodge draws up a typology of poetry (and of prose), which generally oscillates between metonymic and metaphoric poles. This is what he says about T.S. Eliot's modernist poetry (which is much closer to the metaphoric pole):

Like most modernist verse, Eliot pushes Jakobson's poetic principle to an extreme: substitution not merely projects into, but radically disrupts, combination and the similarities on which substitution is based are often strained or recondite –

hence the obscurity of such writing, its (in some cases, to some readers) willful unintelligibility. (117)

I engage with analyses of the poetry of the selected poets in individual chapters dealing with the successive decades from the 1950s to the 1990s (I-IV). I opt for the deductive method, from the general (the Introduction) to the specific (chapters I to IV), because I believe it best serves my goal to define the general model first which, although able to accommodate specificities and differences of a range of poets in a span of several decades, still remains a model, a poetic mode. I have chosen a historical, that is, chronological, approach, as it should support my claim that the poetic model under examination is still alive and vibrant, reinforced by various cultural infusions in the decades. My close reading of the poetry of the selected poets primarily utilizes the basic critical and analytical tools of theory of *stylistics*, defined by Peter Barry as “a practical critical approach or a theory interpreting literary works based on linguistic evidence” or “a modern version of ancient discipline known as ‘rhetoric’” (*Beginning Theory* 196, 213). I have chosen this particular critical theory, because it best supports my approach to the analysis of the poetic rhetoric of immanent and experiential poetry. My analysis focuses variably on: point of view, deixis (words which indicate spatial and temporal distances in relation to the speaker, for example, this, that, yesterday, that day, over there); context and contextualization; metaphor, metonymy; foregrounding, defamiliarization, dialogization, heteroglossia, chronotope. Although most of these critical terms and concepts originate from Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle, they are adopted and used in stylistics basically in their original meanings.

The first chapter examines the model of immanence and experience in Lowell’s poetry of the late 1950s, more precisely in his volume *Life Studies* which marks American poetry’s shift away from Modernism and its prevalent metaphoric and symbolic patterns. Defining immanence as a structure-generating principle which presupposes the presence of a human consciousness as an individuated and immanent “I” in the poem, the chapter delves into some of the most common forms of realist poetry, such as confession, description and narration. Lowell’s newly acquired artistic urge in the late 1950s to capture the flux of experience, as implied in his interviews (*Collected Prose*), explains his confessions as rhetorical forms, that is, as “true stories” the immanent agent tells and shares. In his interviews, he openly reveals that he played with facts

imaginatively and creatively, so that the artistic output is just a feeling that “the reader is getting the *real* Robert Lowell” (*Collected Prose* 247). In his descriptions and narrations, Lowell’s immanent narrator and agent, adheres to this principle of the depiction of “bare facts” by describing experiences and the other agents with objective photographic precision, that is, indirectly by the description of the objects they use or possess, their habits and looks, without making any direct evaluative statements. Actually, the narrator’s comments and attitudes towards the experience and the other agents depicted in it are displaced in the details of his precise, objective and surface descriptions. This displacement technique becomes the generator of metonymic but also of symbolic and metaphoric inputs, such as, for example, “the house” in the poem “For Sale” (76) which describes the owners (the narrator’s parents) or the “blue room” in the poem “Father’s Bedroom” (75), which reveals the personality of the narrator’s father. In the narrations, the poem uses the technique of associative memory links and cinematic technique of montage of scenes, so that the poem develops into a metonymic, realistic structure, restating the main themes through metaphors engendered in the structure.

The culturally coded lexis of Lowell’s *Life Studies* is another authentic and documented presentation of the “lived experiences” of the immanent narrator. The chapter analyzes the connotations and the denotations of the specific lexis of Lowell’s poetry, such as real historical names, brand names of the material culture of the first half of the century, idiomatic phrases and expressions. These verbal “ready-mades”, as stylistics generally refers to them, usually enter the poem with a set of “external” denotations which reflect different ideologies and cultural codes. Within the new context of the poem, they undergo a “verbal osmosis” acquiring new meanings, new connotations. Thus Lowell’s lexis in this volume, which is greatly saturated in the culture of the first half of the century, contributes further to the authenticity of the immanent narrator and the experience depicted.

Wright’s poetry continues the experiential and immanentist strand into the 1960s (*The Branch Will Not Break* [1963]) and *Shall We Gather at the River* [1968]). This was the era of the counter-culture in America which placed value on the authentic language of *personal experience* above any societal and common values and, consequently, their rhetoric. The second chapter focuses on the concrete/colloquial, narrative, metonymic and confessional characteristics of Wright’s poetry which, as we can see in the chapter on Lowell and in the subsequent chapters on

Hugo and Graham, all the poets considered in the thesis generally share in evolved and altered forms that serve their poetic designs and idioms. The chapter argues that all these characteristics of Wright's poetry are already present in his poetry of the 1950s (*The Green Wall* (1957) and *Saint Judas* (1959), despite some critics' insistence that Wright's poetry undergoes radical change in the sixties. Thus, the analysis of Wright's poetry of the 1950s and 1960s corroborates my argument about continuous presence of the model of immanence and experience in these subsequent decades. Through Wright's poetry of the 1950s, I argue that the model is present even in the decade when the conceptual dictum of New Criticism was an ambivalent, ironic and primarily ambiguous poem whose main design is an elaborated idea or a concept, rather than a *presence* of a concrete and specified human consciousness as the protagonist of the poetic experience. The analysis of one of Robert Penn Warren's New Critical poems, illustrates precisely this crucial difference.

Wright's constant references to the concrete time and place of "poetic action", in this case the Midwest of the working classes in the 1950s and 1960s, constitute what the Russian formalist critic and theoretician Michael Bakhtin defines as an interdependent category of time and space, the "chronotope". The linear, causational and logical expositions make up the narrative quality of his poetry which exposes the "dialogism" and "heteroglossia", or what Bakhtin defined as "multiplicity of social voices" (Bakhtin 260-3), that is central to Wright's poetics. A metonymic characteristic is identified as the general structural condition of Wright's poems; this contains and produces metaphors, usually of the Frostian, "natural" kind.

The chapter also explores the links between Wright's existential themes and the main principles of the informal school of poetry, mainly centered around the poet Robert Bly, known as the Deep Image school, which Wright shares allegiances with, to a certain extent. The characteristic "leaps" of deep image poems into the unconscious are interpreted here as leaps into moments of enlightened perceptions from which are produced the existential statements of the immanent agent in the poems. By analyzing an example of both Bly's and Federico Garcia Lorca's poetry, the chapter demonstrates that Deep Image poetry is not surrealist in the sense of Spanish and French poetry, but rather fits into the immanent and experiential tradition of American poetry that this thesis is delineating. Then, the chapter dwells on Wright's transcendental poetic moments and links them with an Emersonian philosophical tradition, in

which the Subject-Object relationship is seen as a different manifestation of the transcendent idea of One-ness (with God, Over-Soul, or Spirit). I argue that this approach is more in line with what has been called a Panentheistic belief in God and the world as inter-related, and in which God is felt to be both everywhere *and* beyond the world (everywhere, thus “pan”; and in the world, thus “en”, at the same time).

The third chapter approaches the presence/immanence of human consciousness and consequently the model of immanence and experience through the specific tone and atmosphere of Hugo’s poetry, which is mainly generated by statements of existential resignation, prevailing sadness, melancholy and stoic acceptance of the agent of the poetic experience. Analyzing *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* (1973), *What Thou Lovest Well Remains American* (1975) and *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* (1977), the chapter charts the changeable states of consciousness of the immanent agent in the phenomenological quest to know the Object, the endless chain of forlorn, small Northwestern towns in the 1970s. The stages of the Subject’s consciousness and his equally changing perceptions of the Object-towns, are examined in relation to some of Sartre’s and Heidegger’s general phenomenological concepts which define universal states of the human mind in constant pursuit of its true self and in constant interaction with the perceived world (mainly through concepts such as *being-for-itself*, *being-in-itself*, and *bad faith*).

The range of phenomenological themes is also examined from the perspective of the grammatical and stylistic structures that “support” them. The descriptions, judgments and comments of Hugo’s poetic voice, generate discursive-descriptive linguistic structures. The discursive, abstract and evaluative statements, comments and judgments reflect the Subject, while the descriptions and the concrete images reflect the Object, thus producing patterns which I call “succinct expressions in wordy poems”. Often, the second-person pronoun is the other protagonist in the discursive, hypothetical situations and the rhetorical means for the speaker of the poem to avoid personal tone of testimony.

Another linguistic and stylistic support which enacts the primary Subject-Object relationship in this poetry is the trope of personification. The Subject’s projection of human faculties and characteristics upon the Object reflects the awareness that it is only the Speaker’s immanent consciousness that we see in the Other. Therefore, Hugo’s attitude towards Nature as

the Object is not Wright's numinous One; for Hugo nature does not speak, rather, we make nature "say" the things we want to hear.

The fourth chapter traces the forms of immanence in Graham's five volumes of poetry written in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s (*Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*, *Erosion*, *The End of Beauty*, *Region of Unlikeness*, and *Materialism*). Her poetry demonstrates the continuation of the poetic model of immanence and experience in the subsequent decades of the second half of the twentieth century. Graham's immanence is, for the most part, located in this chapter in her "deeply" reflective voice of meditation and speculation. This displays a discursive quality which she takes up from the previous decade, and which is marked by the discursive trends defined and exhibited in the critical writings and the poetry of Pinsky (*The Situation of Poetry*), John Ashbery, and A.R. Ammons amongst others. These reflective occasions generate different poetic discourses that resemble scientific, philosophical and spiritual discourses, as the consecutive phases in the discovery of answers about matter, God, time, beauty, physical laws and spirituality. The voice resorts to scientific-like observations and descriptions/narrations of sensory data and, consequently, to philosophical-like speculations and meditations on the same issues. I argue that her Keatsian faith in sensory experience and data generates the scientific-like discourse, combined with the specialized registers of the scientific disciplines, such as physics, dynamics, botany, etc. The knowledge gathered is then processed further through a philosophical deduction of more general principles according to their applicability to different planes of human existence. After the scientific and the philosophical discourses are finally exhausted, the spiritual and numinous alternatives emerge, mapping the boundary between the known and the unknown.

Yet, the presence of the human consciousness trying to reveal the visible and the invisible layers of matter and phenomena is not some general poetic voice, but a concrete protagonist in a concrete experience. In Graham's poetry, then, this concrete experience is identified and referred to as an *experiential frame of reference* or an *occasion*. Even the most speculative poems rarely appear outside of the empirical frames of reference or the experiential scenes which, by their details, construct the protagonist's concrete "identity". The result is thus an immanentist and experiential poetry.

Finally, the important questions captured as processes lived through that constitute Graham's poetics, generate metonymic linguistic structures. I argue that her descriptions,

narrations and gradual process-like discoveries, are intrinsically susceptible to metonymic structures, since the same process of combining the congruent, contiguous concepts in what Jakobson calls “syntagmatic chains”, is at work in her poetry. However, the metaphoric structures generated by comparing similar concepts from dissimilar and remote contexts, are also present but remain embedded parts in the predominantly metonymic poetic structures of Graham’s poetry.

In the main, this thesis ventures to identify some of the most comprehensive and defining categories, such as *immanence* and *experience*, which can describe the markedly dominant group of stylistic features found in the postwar decades of American poetry. Furthermore, the identified *poetics of immanence and experience* is seen in this thesis reflecting one of the most essential values of American poetic culture—the trust in personal experience whose immanence the poem captures.

CHAPTER I

ROBERT LOWELL: CONFESSING THE SHIFT

The poetic model defined in the previous chapter can best be seen operating in Robert Lowell's seminal *Life Studies* (1959) and the subsequent collection, *For the Union Dead* (1964). Although some characteristics of this poetics of immanence and experience can be identified in American poetry since the nineteenth century, namely in Whitman's first-person and demotic language and subject matter and Frost's linear, causal language and narrative structure, this specific model gained full recognition in the late 1950s when Lowell began publishing what became known as confessional poetry. As indicated in the previous chapter, there are other influential collections of poetry that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s which contributed to the inception of the poetics of immanence and experience during a period of cultural and political tumult. These include, but are in no way limited to, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, with its all-inclusive rhetoric of jargon and slang depicting both personal and social evils; Frank O'Hara's experiential poetry and his language of popular culture; W.D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle* (1957) that consists of personal, intimate subject-matter. However, Lowell's poetry of the late 1950s and the early 1960s best demonstrates the inception of this poetic model, as it combines all the key characteristics witnessed in these collections in addition to others to become the "incarnation" of the poetics of immanence and experience. A further reason for choosing Lowell to illustrate this poetics of immanence and experience is the significant influence his poetry exerted during this and subsequent periods as a result of its aesthetic values.

Although it is not the main aim of this chapter to trace the genealogy of reciprocal influences between Lowell and his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, it is important to identify the key features that motivated Lowell's adoption of a poetic mode during the 1950s that was subsequently labeled "Confessional poetry" by the critic L.M. Rosenthal in 1959. There is hardly any critical survey of the period that fails to mention the same sociopolitical events and literary movements that led to this general shift of aesthetics: the disbelief in the old values of American culture and society as a result of the Cold War and its "culture of containment", reinforced later by the Vietnam war, the assassinations of president J.F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the "counter-culture" of the 1960s, to mention a few. Here is Lowell's own

“confession” about the influence that West Coast, Beat, writing had upon his poetry, as it led him to revise and “simplify” poems even while reading them in front of an audience. This is included in the often quoted interview with Frank Seidel following the publication of *Life Studies* (1959):

I’d been doing a lot of reading aloud. I went on a trip to the West Coast and read at least once a day and sometimes twice for fourteen days, and more and more I found that I was simplifying my poems. If I had a Latin quotation, I’d translate it into English. If adding a couple of syllables in a line made it clearer I’d add them, and I’d make little changes just impromptu as I read. That seemed to improve the reading. (*Collected Prose* 242-3)

In the same interview, he also mentions his encounter with Snodgrass and the influence the younger poet exerted: “He did these things before I did, though he’s younger than I am and had been my student. He may have influenced me, though people have suggested the opposite” (*CP* 245). A decade later, in 1971, he talks about the influence of the Beat scene in another well-known interview with Ian Hamilton:

At that time, poetry reading was sublimated by the practice of Allen Ginsberg. I was still reading my old New Criticism religious, symbolic poems, many published during the war. I found—it’s no criticism—that audiences just didn’t understand, and I didn’t always understand myself while reading. . . . I did not want to be Ginsberg; I hoped to write poems as pliant as conversation, so clear a listener might get every word. . . . *Life Studies* is heightened conversation, not a concert. (*CP* 284)

Critics have argued that besides the high poetic quality and craftsmanship of *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead*, Lowell’s owes his influence during this period to his established public position of a poet-professor. His status was almost impeachable on account of his numerous prestigious poetry prizes he had won, including the Pulitzer and the Harriet Monroe, his role as a conscientious religious objector during WWII, his public battle with manic depression and his inheritance of a family name present at the very beginning of New England’s history.

Yet, if we momentarily discard this intricate network of influences, I would argue that it is primarily his craftsmanship that earned *Life Studies* the status of a groundbreaking, influential

and much imitated collection. Unlike other poets who might have been involved in various degrees in the inception of the immanentist and experiential model, Lowell continued to produce collections that sustained this model's influence. Snodgrass, for instance, started exploring this vein of experiential poetry before Lowell, as his mentor acknowledged, but never managed to produce other influential poetry books after the success of his Pulitzer Prize winning *Heart's Needle*. Lowell suggests his continued interest in this model of immanence and experience when he talks about his incessant revising and returning to old subjects in the previously mentioned interview with Ian Hamilton (1971):

In *The Union Dead*, I modified the style of *Life Studies*—free-verse stanzas, each poem on its own and more ornately organized. Then came metrical poems, more plated, far from conversations, metaphysical. My subjects were still mostly realism about my life. (*CP* 269)

Some critics, such as Marjorie Perloff, also acknowledge that Lowell's strength lies mostly in the poems that deal with family and private matters, the recurrent themes throughout his works. I would argue that it is in these poems that the model of immanence and experience is most clearly visible and sustained throughout his writing career. In her review of Frank Bidart's *Robert Lowell: Collected Poems*, Perloff re-evaluates Lowell's poetic opus by arguing that of all the poems written in the last decade of his life (the 1970s), only *Notebook* and the last collection, *Day After Day* (1977), have "an air of candor and self-assessment that recalls *Life Studies*" (21). She finds his formal and public poetry, mostly the sonnets and their numerous revisions, such as *History* (1973), ideologically biased and full of weaknesses and bathos:

In the sonnets of his last decade, in any case, Lowell kept revising and revising, desperately hoping to turn straw into gold. But for a brief moment, in the newly devised free-verse of his last book, *Day by Day*, it all came back: the searing, matter-of-fact, startlingly candid images of the daily—(and especially nightly)—life of the man without a future, a man whose only solace is in routine. . . .
.(Perloff, "The Return of Robert Lowell" 26)

It is this "matter-of-fact" and "candid" poetry of *Life Studies* that this chapter will concentrate on. Firstly, I want to discern the model supporting these seemingly frank, "confessional" and

factual poems and examine how the concepts of immanence and experience generate the basic structures of the poems. I will then focus on the forms and conventions that the immanent agent as the voice of the poem assumes in order to present its experiences. The form most often used in Lowell's poetry is "confession". The poetic voice-agent presents recollections of past experiences and descriptions of the present actions of the other agents, including himself, as the confessant, the "I" of the poem. The agents are presented to the reader through indirect description of their external features or through the objects they possess and use. Therefore, the most utilized rhetorical figure in these poems is metonymy, the strategy of using objects and external characteristics, or parts, to stand for entire characters, that is, the whole.

In addition to considering confession as the primary form, I will also analyze narration and description as other forms that build the structure and texture of this realistic poetry. By discussing the general structure of this poetry, my analysis will additionally consider the minute details of the carefully selected poetic material, the material objects, external features of agents, spatiotemporal elements, idioms and idiomatic phrases, and how these reveal the specific ideological, social, and cultural "patina" and create a polyphony of voices, a heteroglossia in the language of the poem.

The Poetics of Immanence and Experience

The first concept to be examined is immanence, a structure-generating principle which also determines the stance of the poet toward both the artistic depiction of reality and experience, that is, the world "outside" the poem. The poem is structured on the basis of immanence when the poet chooses to present the experience through a poetic voice which is fully present. This voice is immanent in the poem but only as a particularized and concretized agent, for example a speaker, narrator or confessant. The essential forms of immanence which I find in Lowell's poetry are: (i) the immanence of a lived experience, which occurs when the poet presents the full structure of an experience with precise and concrete descriptions through the voice of the poem, (ii) the narrator's immanence, which occurs when the narrator narrates himself through the selections of material and becomes the agent of the experience. Since my critical methodology is

primarily stylistic, I analyze the poetic language as a speech act and the terms voice, speaker, narrator, and confessant are accordingly interchangeable. The use of confession does not imply the poet confessing his autobiography in the poems. Confession, as I will explain later, is approached here as a convention, a form the voice uses to talk about his experience. When mapping out the most frequent forms of American poetry in the postmodern period, Jonathan Holden says that “poets have increasingly turned to nonliterary analogues such as conversation, confession, dream, and other kinds of discourse as substitutes for the ousted “fixed forms”, which he categorizes under one general term “convention” (*Style and Authenticity* 11). Since the voice in these poems is explicitly gender-determined as male, I will refer to it with the masculine pronoun and possessive adjective.

The immanence of a lived experience and the narrator’s immanence in the poem cannot be examined and explicated as separate forms of immanence, since one cannot exist without the other. The presence/immanence of a lived experience in a poem is impossible without a narrator, a human consciousness that narrates the experience. Similarly the presence/immanence of a concrete, particularized narrator in the poem is impossible if he does not narrate a “lived” experience. In other words, if the poem does not create the illusion that what is presented “really” happened and the narrator is a “real” individual, the poem will not be immanentist and experiential but a different kind of poem, symbolic and aesthetically conceptual. I would argue that the primary aim of the symbolic poem is to depict and present a concept, or concepts, such as death, fear, courage, being, nothingness or fragmentation of culture. The story, the images and the structure of the symbolic poem, is put in service of this goal. This type of poem may even use a realistically presented story but only as a symbol of the concepts or ideas it depicts. The symbolic poem artistically re-creates the experience in order to present it. It does not create a simulation of an experience transferred to the poem as it happened in real life. Any poem of high Modernism might be seen to contrast with Lowell’s experiential and immanentist aesthetics. For example, W. B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” consists of images that are each subordinated to Yeats’ notion of the cyclical movements of civilizations and the crumbling of the present one, in this case Christian civilization and its culture. The poem begins:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born. (158-9)

The image of the “falcon and falconer” and the vision of the half-lion, half-man figure, serve only a symbolic function to further explicate Yeats’ main idea and concept. The second line of the poem, “The falcon cannot hear the falconer”, is a symbolic representation of the idea expressed in the first line: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre”, that is, the notion of the circular progression of civilizations as one is created, reaches its peak and destroys itself for a new one to be born. The vision of “a shape with lion body and the head of a man” symbolizes Yeats’ grim vision and skepticism of any future redemption of the present, Christian civilization. The poem is an act that artistically and symbolically re-creates reality in order to depict and present a particular concept or notion of reality.

In Lowell’s experiential poetry, the whole poem is subordinated to the presentation of a complete, realistically structured experience. Symbols, ideas, or concepts are presented only as intrinsic parts of the experiential structure rather than being the final goal. Consider the first stanza of “Commander Lowell”:

There were no undesirables or girls in my set,
 when I was a boy at Mattapoissett—
 only Mother, still her Father's daughter.
 Her voice was still electric
 with a hysterical, unmarried panic,
 when she read to me from the Napoleon book.
 Long-nosed Marie Louise
 Habsburg in the frontispiece
 had a downright Boston bashfulness,
 where she grovelled to Bonaparte, who scratched his navel,
 and bolted his food—just my seven years tall!
 And I, bristling and manic,
 skulked in the attic,
 and got two hundred French generals by name,
 from A to V—from Augereau to Vandamme.
 I used to dope myself asleep,
 naming those unpronounceables like sheep. (*LS 70*)

The voice here is an agent/participant of a past experience and a confessant/narrator at the same time. Playing this “multitasking” role, he is inevitably present in the experience of the poem. However, what makes the voice immanent in the context of the poetics of immanence and experience is how he, the voice, presents the experience and himself as part of it. We find in this poem the whole structure of an experience, the portrait of an insecure Father overpowered by an overbearing Mother drawn by carefully selected “scenes from life”. The second and the third stanzas continue:

Having a naval officer
 for my Father was nothing to shout
 about to the summer colony at “Matt.”
 He wasn't at all “serious,”
 when he showed up on the golf course,
 wearing a blue serge jacket and numbly cut
 white ducks he'd bought
 at a Pearl Harbor commissariat. . . .
 and took four shots with his putter to sink his putt.
 “Bob,” they said, “golf's a game you really ought to know how to play,
 if you play at all.”

They wrote him off as “naval,”
 naturally supposed his sport was sailing.
 Poor Father, his training was engineering!
 Cheerful and cowed
 among the seadogs at the Sunday yacht club,
 he was never one of the crowd.

“Anchors aweigh,” Daddy boomed in his bathtub,
 “Anchors aweigh,
 when Lever Brothers offered to pay
 him double what the Navy paid.
 I nagged for his dress sword with gold braid,
 and cringed because Mother, new
 caps on all her teeth, was born anew
 at forty. With seamanlike celerity,
 Father left the Navy,
 and deeded Mother his property. (*LS 70-1*)

This full structure of experience built by scenes which are concrete and precisely documented creates the effect of the immanence of a lived experience: it is summer in the vacationing town “Matt” (Mattapoisett) on the Atlantic Ocean, where Father plays golf with the upper class, starts working for the “Lever Brothers” company, but still “booming” ship commands “in his bathtub”. At the same time, we have a picture of the narrator’s character by his selection of the episodes with his father. Selecting the scene of him shunning his mother’s disquieting voice speaks of the narrator’s attitude towards her too. The golf scene speaks of his embarrassment with his father’s ineptitude at fitting into the society, while the comic “bath tub scene” speaks of the narrator’s contempt for his Father yielding to the pressures of his ambitious Mother. His immanence as a character is even more visible in his descriptions. The Mother’s voice, “electric with a hysterical, unmarried panic”, is not just a description, as it reflects his implied criticism and judgment. The Father’s “numbly cut white ducks”, which he bought in a navy shop, suggest the narrator’s criticism and deep “numbing” sense of his lack of self-confidence and self-assertiveness, while his resignation from the Navy is described using sailing and navigation connotations to convey the narrator’s description with irony. His Mother’s aggressive ambition and pushiness echo in “new caps on all her teeth, was born anew at forty”, and the statement: “Father left the Navy /

and deeded Mother his property” further suggests the narrator’s contempt toward his Father’s emasculated personality. The voice becomes immanent in the poem through his narration and his descriptions in addition to being a participant in the experience. The artistic effect created is of a voice that is immanent in the poem as (i) an agent and a particular person with a point of view and an attitude towards the narrated experience, and (ii) as a narrator of the immanent experience who also narrates himself.

If, on the other hand, the voice resorted to speculations about the Father, entered into interior, fragmented monologues or used symbolic forms to talk about the character of the Father and the attendant Father-Mother relationship, the poem would lose the effect of immanent experience, since it would interrupt the fully realistic story of the experience. In the case of a symbolic poetic structure, the poem loses its effect of immanence, because the original experience goes through artistic and symbolic re-creation, that is, it is not presented “as it really happened”. In addition the whole structure of the symbolically presented experience would essentially rule out the immanence of a particular, concretized narrator, since it is solely aimed at presenting a concept or idea.

The poetic voice is immanent in a poem even when it is not an agent in a past or present experience, but is instead only a narrator or observer. In the first two stanzas of the four-stanza poem “Terminal Days at Beverly Farms”, the narrator narrates himself by describing his parents’ garden, the location of their house, his father’s daily rituals, objects, heart attacks (“coronaries”), and finally, his “unprotesting death”. The narrator is immanent in the poem through the selections made in his descriptions and the manner in which they are made. His emotive stance and general disposition toward what he describes is “heard” and “felt” in the poem and can be decoded as deeply ingrained in his descriptions.

At Beverly Farms, a portly, uncomfortable boulder
 bulked in the garden’s center—
 an irregular Japanese touch.
 After his Bourbon “old fashioned”, Father,
 bronzed, breezy, a shade too ruddy,
 swayed as if on deck-duty
 under his six pointed star-lantern—
 last July’s birthday present.

He smiled his oval Lowell smile,
 he wore his cream gabardine dinner-jacket,
 and indigo cummerbund.
 His head was efficient and hairless,
 his newly dieted figure was vitally trim.

Father and Mother moved to Beverly Farms
 to be a two minute walk from the station,
 half an hour by train from the Boston doctors.
 They had no sea-view,
 but sky-blue tracks of the commuters' railroad shone
 like a double-barrelled shotgun
 through the scarlet late August sumac,
 multiplying like cancer
 at their garden's border. (*LS 73*)

If we consider the narrator's descriptions in the first stanza, we immediately find they contain more than just descriptions. If we decode them, his emotive stance towards his parents' relationship and the effects it has had upon him can be identified. It is at the very beginning that his vision is blocked by a "portly uncomfortable boulder" at the center of their garden; "bulked" there forever it resembles their "heavy" relationship, estranged forever. The "boulder" is described with the adjective "uncomfortable" which usually is collocated with "uncomfortable chair", "uncomfortable feeling", etc. This lexical deviation emphasizes the modifier "uncomfortable". Similarly, "the irregular Japanese touch" does not escape his perception and suggests the awkwardness whenever his parents' relationship is portrayed in the poems. The rest is a description of the Father's daily rituals, his clothes and facial features. The last two lines of this stanza summarize the narrator's attitude towards his father that constantly lurks behind the descriptions: "his head was efficient and hairless / his newly dieted figure was vitally trim". The description of Father's head as "efficient" but "hairless" implies the opposite of what is said, bearing in mind that he is an unsuccessful navy commander who sways after a drink as if on a ship deck. Again, the lexical deviation in collocating "head" with "efficient" instead of "efficient" with "mind", further reveals the narrator's ironic and emotive stance. The Father's figure is not "vital" and "trim", but "vitally trim". The use of the adjectival phrase "vitally trim" implies the sense of "vitally important" rather than "healthy" or "animated". It seems as if the

narrator is saying that it is vitally important for Father to think he is “vital”, even though he evidently is not. The narrator’s irony becomes audible as his complicated feelings towards his parents can hardly “stand still” behind the matter-of-fact, realistic and seemingly neutral descriptions.

In the second stanza, the voice describes the location of the parent’s house and its surroundings with carefully selected material, whose detail becomes indicative of his attitudes towards them. His matter-of-fact language and the spatial references are combined with the colors of the surroundings which bear significance upon the whole experience. Knowing from the last three stanzas of this poem, and from the cycle of poems about his parents, that Father loses his identity and “grip” on life (“inattentive and beaming” [74]) and was constantly fired from a series of jobs, we hear an echo of the narrator’s judgment passed on him in the lines: “They had no sea-view / but sky-blue tracks of the commuter’s railroad shone / like a double-barrelled shotgun”. The blue color implied in “sea-view” and “sky-blue tracks” brings back associations with the Navy and connotations of his failure. It also brings to mind associations of health with the “sea-view” which his parents do not have any more. They can only see the blue shiny reflection of the cold, metal railroad tracks, which, when compared with a loaded weapon, become fatal. The narrator’s description becomes a projection of his own feelings of contempt toward, and judgment upon, his parents’ plight and their seemingly “pragmatic” decision “to be a two minute walk from the station”.

The last five lines of the description provide an image that is heavily saturated with the narrator’s emotions. The red, berry-like fruit of the “sumac” bush which turns “scarlet” in late August resonates with the previous descriptions of his Father’s face as “a shade too ruddy”, commonly the color of rotting fruit in autumn. The sumac bushes, which “multiply like cancer / at their garden’s border”, are like the plight of his parents’ terminal days. However, under the rhetorical “pretense” of a deictic device, this last line actually circumscribes and closes the life circle of this household by indicating the exact location where the “sumac multiplies”. Outside this garden there is constant movement and life evoked by “the commuters’ railroad”. Even though the narrator is not a direct agent of the experience here, he becomes immanent in the poem through his generally ironic and emotional disposition toward the other agents in the experience, reified by his seemingly matter-of-fact descriptions. Although he does not pass direct

judgments, or express his feelings openly towards the other agents, his descriptions summarize his points of view and his emotional stance and attitude.

The confessant narrates himself through the “action” of the poem by powerful descriptions of the main characters via the objects that surround them. His point of view and attitudes toward the experience are immanent in his descriptions. The result of these forms of immanence, as we shall see next, is an artistic illusion of what is presented/confessed is what has been experienced as such, and the poem becomes a testimony of that experience without any artistic manipulations of fact.

Confessional Poetry

Since the term “confessional poetry” was specially coined to categorize Lowell’s formally and thematically radical poetry, and expanded later to include Snodgrass, Sexton, Berryman and Plath, it is necessary to distinguish between the use of the confessional mode in the context of the poetics of immanence and experience and the more general context of literary criticism. In the first context, the “confessional mode” is approached as a rhetorical model, a form the voice adopts in the poem to tell its story, give its narration and ultimately present the poetic experience. Since the voice in the poem uses the first-person pronoun, its story, narration and presentation inevitably becomes a confession, a personal, individual story. However, this confession does not imply that the story, the experience, is autobiographically accurate in reference to the poet’s actual experiences. The confessional mode is a convention here, a rhetorical form that the speaker of the poem resorts to when dealing with his experience. When the immanent and personalized voice in the poem takes up this rhetorical model, it creates an artistic simulacrum, an artistic illusion of a “true confession” which does not correspond and coincide with the poet’s life. As literary scholarship has established, the confessions in *Life Studies* often coincide with Lowell’s real life, but my interest here only rests with “confession” as a rhetorical model.

No members of the informal group of poets were comfortable with the principles associated with the term “confessional”. They often publicly stated that they did not work exclusively with the facts of their own lives, or of other people’s lives, but rather “tinkered with

facts” a great deal. In his *Paris Review* interview, Lowell explains this relation between autobiography and artistry:

They’re [the poems of *Life Studies*] not always factually true. There’s a good deal of tinkering with fact. You leave out a lot, and emphasize this and not that. Your actual experience is a complete flux. I’ve invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented. So there’s lot of artistry, I hope in the poems. Yet there’s this thing: if a poem is autobiographical—and this is true of any kind of autobiographical writing and of historical writing—you want the reader to say, This is true. . . . [T]he reader was to believe he was getting the real Robert Lowell. (*CP* 246-7)

That feeling “of getting the real” story, the real experience in the poem, is the main effect produced by the confessional mode. This artistic effect supports the principle of immanence of a lived experience previously discussed. In Lowell’s poetry, as in much of what is called confessional poetry, the use of “I” rhetorically pledges to disclose the “truthfulness” of the story. Thus, the narrator can take the role of an observer who only describes/narrates the experience without directly participating in it. Throughout *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead* we hear the same voice behind the first- and third-person pronouns in the narrations and descriptions. Has Lowell created a poetic persona which he wants us to believe is the real Lowell? If so, it is not the poetic persona in the sense that we find in “A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich” and “The Banker’s Daughter”, which are the only examples in *Life Studies* where experience is presented through the distinct subjective perspectives of two personae who the poet endows with particular idioms of expression, ideology and diction. The poetic voice in the rest of the collection takes a seemingly objective position, mostly narrating and describing the experience without *directly* pronouncing his point of view or feelings. Yet, it is not the poet giving us his factual autobiography in verse, but rather the illusion of autobiography, as he admits in his interviews.

Based on the confession as a convention, I would argue that this rhetorical model results from Lowell’s newly assumed aesthetic and thematic perspective and principles when he composed *Life Studies*, synchronous with the general shift away from the poetics of Modernism as discussed in the previous chapter. As Lowell stated in his interviews, poetry should be as close to life and culture as is achieved by the masters of realist prose:

Poets of my generation and particularly younger ones have gotten terribly proficient at these forms. They write a very musical, difficult poem with tremendous skill, perhaps there's never been such a skill. Yet the writing seems divorced from the culture. It's become too much something specialized that can't handle much experience. It's become a craft, purely a craft and there must be some breakthrough back into life. (CP 244)

And in the same interview:

The ideal modern form seems to be the novel and certain short stories. Maybe Tolstoy would be the perfect example—his work is imagistic, it deals with all experience, and there seems to be no conflict of the form and content. So, one thing is to get into poetry that kind of human richness in simple descriptive language. (CP 241)

As we have seen, Lowell's confessional model reflects his belief that poetry should be more life-like than craft-driven and should consequently create life-like images. This vein of the realist tradition, when combined with the confessional model in which the "I" seemingly presents an autobiographical experience, led some critics to define Lowell's poetry in *Life Studies* as a combination of romanticism and realism. Perloff's conclusion to *Poetic Art of Robert Lowell* demonstrates this general perception:

In *Life Studies*, one concludes, Lowell is trying to fuse the romantic mode, which projects the poet's "I" in the act of self-discovery, and the Tolstoyan or Chekhovian mode, usually called realism. (86)

I fully agree with this contention and the rest of the chapter will actually test the claim about Lowell's poetic language following the vein of a realist mode by examining some of its most frequent forms and techniques. The second part of Perloff's argument, the romantic projection of Lowell's poetic "I", has already been covered in the previous discussion on Lowell's seemingly autobiographical "I" and his confession as a form and convention.

Narrative Poetry

Having discussed the use of the first-person pronoun in conjunction with the confessional model as a rhetorical convention, I now want to examine the structure and texture of these confessions as essential realist forms. Narration is examined as a form which structures the poetic experience, primarily employing associative memory links and techniques of montage and editing. Description is approached as a form which textures the poetic experience by applying metonymic displacement as a technique which uses objects, physical characteristics and surroundings to depict the emotions and ideational position of the agents in the poetic experience.

In the majority of descriptions and narrations, the poetic “I” does not describe the inner state of the mind of the other agents or of his own as a narrator. As we have seen earlier, his narrations and descriptions appear as precise, matter-of-fact accounts of facts, whether external features, actions or objects that surround the characters. In addition, this poetry does not resort to internal or fragmented monologues, speculations or meditations. That is not to say that the narrations and descriptions are always chronologically structured or appear as cause-and-effect sequences. As can be easily seen in “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow”, the scenes are juxtaposed in such a way to produce symbolic, metaphoric meanings. The structure of some of the poems is reminiscent of realistic documentaries, in which the actual sequencing or juxtaposing of scenes involved in the process of poetic montage produces the symbolism and metaphors.

The narrative structure of “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow” rests on the associative links which the main protagonist’s memory provides. It is a childhood memory that is fully recollected following the utterance of the protagonist as a child. It gradually develops into a narration of several scenes, an afternoon at the grandfather’s farm. No prominent events occur in the poem except the description of the characters and their environment, as well as a growing sense of imminent death in the family which the narrator as a small boy tries to comprehend. The first scene of the first section (1) begins:

“I won’t go with you. I want to stay with Grandpa!”
That’s how I threw cold water

on my Mother and Father's
 watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner.
 . . . Fontainebleau, Mattapoissett, Puget Sound. . . .
 Nowhere was anywhere after a summer
 at my Grandfather's farm. (*LS* 59)

In the second scene, the boy is sitting on the porch of the farm house before this scene changes to a little “construction site” on the farm. One wonders about the transition between them, since there is only a tentative link which the sounds of the ticking clock provide:

One afternoon in 1922,
 I sat on the stone porch, looking through
 screens as black-grained as drifting coal.
Tockytock, tockytock
 clumped our Alpine, Edwardian cuckoo clock,
 slung with strangled, wooden game.
 Our farmer was cementing a root-house under the hill.
 One of my hands was cool on a pile
 of black earth, the other warm
 on a pile of lime. All about me
 were the works of my Grandfather's hands: (*LS* 59-60)

Focusing on the minute details described by the matter-of-fact, objective language of the narrator, reveals that the associative leap of the memory seems to be the 3rd line, “screens as black-grained as drifting coal”. Thus, the visual perspective of the narrator's memory focuses on the screen door of the porch, blackened with residue like “drifting coal”. This black dust then transports him to the memory and the sensation of the “black earth” and the “lime” in the scene of the farmer “cementing a root-house”. The next associative link in this structure leads from the boys' *hands* on the piles of “earth” and “lime” to the details and objects that surround him—the reminders that his grandfather produced everything with his own *hands*: “All about me / were the works of my Grandfather's hands”.

Another succinct example of an associative memory link is the scene at the beginning of section IV. The memory of the narrator focuses on another minute detail, “the anchor” on his “sailor blouse” as a boy, which provides the link to the next scene, the boy's fantasy of “floating” and “sailing” in the air over the lakes where his dying uncle had a hunting cabin:

I picked with a clean finger nail at the blue anchor
 on my sailor blouse washed white as a spinnaker.
 What in the world was I wishing?
 . . . A sail-colored horse in the bulrushes . . .
 A fluff of the west wind puffing
 my blouse, kiting me over our even chimneys,
 troubling the waters. . . .
 As small as sapphires were the ponds: *Quittacus*, *Snippituit*,
 and *Assawompset*, halved by “the Island,”
 where my Uncle’s duck blind
 floated in a barrage of smoke-clouds. (*LS* 62)

The scenes, therefore, move forward through verbal and visual associations provided by the memory of the narrator. We have seen how the memory of “black-grained screens” brings us to the piles of “cold black earth” and “white warm lime”. These scenes become metaphorically important at the end of the poem, when they are repeated and juxtaposed to the scene of his dying uncle. The concrete piles become the boy’s medium for materialization and reification of the abstract concept of death as the only way for him to understand it:

While I sat on the tiles,
 and dug at the anchor on my sailor blouse,
 Uncle Devereux stood behind me.
 He was brushed as Bayard, our riding horse.
 His face was putty.

.....

He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin’s disease. . . .
 My hands were warm, then cool, on the piles
 of earth and lime,
 a black pile and a white pile. . . . (*LS* 64)

The cold black “pile of earth” becomes the metaphor for death and the warm white “pile of lime” the metaphor for death-in-life, that is, for disease, since the face of the dying uncle is “putty”, the color of earth and lime mixed together. Thus, the poet uses the inherent symbolism of “cold

earth” as “death”, and juxtaposes the scenes, to generate this symbolism. This poetic montage restates the main theme of the child’s first perception and attempt to comprehend death.

Another similar restatement of the poem’s theme by means of its structural organization, or more precisely, by sequencing of its scenes, is the following juxtaposition:

Double-barreled shotguns
stuck out like bundles of baby crow-bars.
A single sculler in a camouflaged kayak
was quacking to the decoys. . . . (LS 62)

.....

Daylight from the doorway riddled his student posters,
tacked helter-skelter on walls as raw as a board-walk.
Mr. Punch, a water melon in hockey tights,
was tossing off a decanter of Scotch.
La Belle France in a red, white and blue toga
was accepting the arm of her “protector,”
the ingenu and porcine Edward VII.
The pre-war music hall belles
had goose necks, glorious signatures, beauty-moles,
and coils of hair like rooster tails. (LS 63)

Here, the grotesque scene (“quacking to the decoys”) of gun-smoke, shotguns and the whole game of hunting, surviving, killing and dying, is juxtaposed to the description of the interior of the dying uncle’s cabin, which speaks of his hopes, passions, culture, taste in women, his whole personal ideology. Also, this description of the hunter’s cabin and his student posters on the walls, are interspersed by understatements about his imminent death: “Uncle Devereux was *closing* camp for the winter” and “Daylight from his doorway *riddled* his student posters” (my emphasis). In combination, these understatements and the juxtaposition of the cabin scene to the hunting scene, reinforce the irony of the situation: the hunter is being hunted by death.

Selection of details in narrative poetry is another way of stating the main theme. In the previously quoted passage from his Paris interview, Lowell clearly states that the artistry of the

poem is in careful selection from the “flux of life”. All the physical details in the scene with Great Aunt Sarah (in the same poem) bear the same symbolism of the idea of death-in-life:

Up in the air
by the lakeview window in the billiards-room,
lurid by the doldrums of the sunset hour
my Great Aunt Sarah
was learning *Samson and Delilah*. (LS 61)

She is “up in the air”, both physically, being in an upstairs room, and mentally, having withdrawn to a life that is a replica of her real life. She is playing a dummy piano after failing to establish a career as a pianist in her youth:

Each morning she practiced
on the great piano at Symphony Hall,
deathlike in the off-season summer—
its naked Greek statues draped with purple
like the saints in Holy Week. . . .
On the recital day, she failed to appear. (LS 62)

The condensed expressiveness of the line “lurid by the doldrums of the sunset hour”, summarize her present life: still lured to what once meant life for her—her music—and withdrawn from an active career, she is forever “in the doldrums of the sunset hour”, that is, her old age.

As a childhood memory, the narration is naturally presented from the point of view of the narrator as both a young boy and as a grown-up man. Although these perspectives are sometimes intertwined, they remain distinctly discernible through the grammatical and stylistic features of the poetic language. It is obvious that the lines which follow the direct speech of the first line of the poem are the words of the narrator as an adult:

That’s how I threw cold water
on my Mother and Father’s
watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner. (LS 59)

The signs of the adult language are visible in the use of idioms and complex grammatical structures, as in the phrase “watery martini pipe dreams”. The more common construction would be “pipe dreams and/over/caused by watery martini”, or similar. Instead, the noun phrase “watery martini” is in an adjectival position, modifying another, idiomatic phrase, “pipe dreams”. This skillful rhetorical maneuver produces a masterfully condensed description and more than that. It is, at the same time, an evaluative statement of the adult narrator about his parents.

Although the whole memory is primarily narrated from the adult’s perspective it is interesting to see how it merges with that of the boy. One such example is the final statement at the end of the section I:

The farm, entitled *Char-de-sa*
in the Social Register,
was named for my Grandfather’s children:
Charlotte, Devereux, and Sarah.
No one had died there in my lifetime . . . (LS 60)

Although the complex grammatical structure of the line, the past perfect tense, implies that it is the voice of the adult narrator, its abruptness speaks of an innocent, child-like spontaneity, as it interrupts the seemingly unrelated exposition of the farm’s legal name. This line is typical of what G. Genette’s theory of narratology defines as “focalization”, basically “the one who perceives is not necessarily the one who tells, and vice versa” (Guillemette, online source). The one who perceives here is the boy, while the one who tells is the adult narrator. Another similar example of focalization is the description of the scene when the boy dips his face in the basin and compares his distorted image to a bird: “I was a stuffed toucan / with a bibulous, multicolored beak”. In addition to meaning “highly absorbent”, “bibulous” also means “fond of alcoholic beverages” (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*), a language definitely pertaining to an adult. The focalization reveals a two-way process: the boy trying to understand the world of adults and the adult narrator trying to understand his childhood. The humorous irony of the narrator’s description of himself as a self-conscious boy in an imitative search for self-identity reveals the same process:

My perfection was the Olympian
 poise of my models in the imperishable autumn
 display windows
 of Rogers Peet's boys' store below the State House (*LS* 61)

The overlapping perspective of the child and the adult narrator also appears in the hunting scene:

where my Uncle's duck blind
 floated in a barrage of smoke-clouds.
 Double-barrelled shotguns
 stuck out like bundles of baby crow-bars. (*LS* 62)

The image results from both perspectives intersecting. The register used is adult-like in its precision and specificity—"shotguns", "barrage", "crow-bar", while the resultant visual effects are somewhat childlike—"the bundles of baby crow-bars" resemble thin birds' legs, sticking out from white "smoke-clouds" as baby diapers. The image is not seen by the one who describes it—the adult narrator—but instead by the small boy.

Whenever we have the child's focalization, the language is more figurative. The following lines tell how the boy perceives the physical appearance of his dying uncle:

His blue coat and white trousers
 grew sharper and straighter.
 His coat was a blue jay's tail,
 his trousers were solid cream from the top of the bottle.
 He was animated, hierarchical,
 like a ginger snap man in a clothes-press. (*LS* 64)

In the boy's world, abstract thought is replaced by concrete, physical images. The use of figurative language comes naturally, since tropes, after all, are concrete and physical words used for abstract concepts and ideas. There is a weak metaphor in "His coat was a blue jay's tail", as the sharp figure of the sick uncle in cream trousers appears like a "bottle of cream" to the boy; he is flat and pressed like a "ginger snap man". In other words, the boy's perceptions of the phenomena of life, disease and death are through concrete, material elements such as "earth", "lime" and "putty", and their respective colors and sensations—black and cold for death, white

and warm for life, and putty for disease. At the end of the poem, the boy merges them all in one explanation: “Come winter, / Uncle Devereux would blend to the one color”.

Descriptive Poetry

Description is another relevant form in Lowell’s poetry, at least in the volume discussed here. It constructs the texture and, in some instances, the structure of the poems. At the same time, it reflects Lowell’s aesthetic principle that the poem must create life-like images that are expressive enough to indirectly state the main themes and ideas of the poem. In a later interview with Ian Hamilton in 1971, Lowell compares *Life Studies* to a photography: “I hoped in *Life Studies*—it was a limitation—that each poem might seem as open and single-surfaced as a photograph” (*CP* 272). By depicting the external, outward characteristics of the agents involved in the poetic experience using matter-of-fact and objective language, Lowell’s descriptions create the photographic effect of a “single-surfaced” replication of reality. As we shall see in the following analyses, this “surface” description technique, when combined with expressive diction and effective rhetorical maneuvers, produces the indirect statements and understatements of the narrator, ventriloquising the poetic voice. However, in addition to producing the texture of the poems, description is often the structure in numerous poems, such as “Father’s Bedroom” and “For Sale”. It is worth considering how rhetoricians define objective and subjective descriptions before proceeding to analyze description itself as both a texture and structure generating form:

In *objective description* the writer sets aside those aspects of the perception unique to himself and concentrates on describing the percept (that is, what is perceived) in itself. In *subjective* (also called *impressionistic*) *description* a writer projects his or her feelings into the percept. Objective description says, “This is how the thing is”; subjective, “This is how the thing seems to one particular consciousness”. . . .

The truth of objective description lies in its relationship to fact; that of subjective in relationship to feeling or evaluation. . . . Subjective description . . . is “true” because it presents a valuable response, not because it makes an accurate report. (Kane 351-2)

I would argue that Lowell constantly plays with the notion of objective portrayal of characters by primarily describing the objects they use, their daily rituals, interests, tones of voice, surroundings and other domestic details. He projects the artistic illusion that the narrator is concentrating solely on the percepts, that is, on the things in-themselves rather than on the narrator's actual perspective. The characters are objectively portrayed through their external, surface characteristics as seen in photographic representations. The narrator generally refrains from "entering into" and describing the characters' inner psychological states as an omniscient narrator would do. Similarly, he refrains from describing his own feelings, thoughts and judgments regarding the observed and described agents or events in the poems. In spite of this, however, the narrator's emotive and evaluative responses are still discernible, as they are embodied and embedded in the described details and in the angle of perspective of some scenes. The narrator's points of view, indirect statements and numerous understatements are "read into" his actual selection and description of the details.

Description in "Father's Bedroom" generates both the structure and the texture of the poem. The poem describes neither actions or events nor the traits of the Father's personality and character. Instead, there is only description of the selected objects in his bedroom. The narrator lets the percepts represent the Father's character. It becomes clear that the narrator's feelings and his attitude towards his Father determine the organization and selection of the details in this description. The described objects become the only means of analyzing and evaluating the poetic experience. For example, by concentrating on the "blue" in Father's bedroom, the narrator sets the general emotional tone of the scene and indirectly expresses his attitude towards Father:

In my Father's bedroom:
 blue threads as thin
 as pen-writing on the bedspread,
 blue dots on the curtains,
 a blue kimono,
 Chinese sandals with blue plush straps.
 The broad-planked floor
 had a sandpapered neatness.
 The clear glass bed-lamp
 with a white doily shade

was still raised a few
 inches by resting on volume two
 of Lafcadio Hearn's
Glimpses of unfamiliar Japan.
 Its warped olive cover
 was punished like a rhinoceros hide.
 In the flyleaf:
 "Robbie from Mother."
 Years later in the same hand:
 "This book has had hard usage
 on the Yangtze River, China.
 It was left under an open
 porthole in a storm." (LS 75)

The poem does not "hide" the fact that it is a "catalogue" or "inventory" of objects. Instead, it emphasizes this by the colon in the first line of the poem. By combining rhetorical and psychoanalytic reading of *Life Studies*, Lawrence Kramer describes Lowell's "inventories" as intended to reveal a general disconnectedness and estrangement in the human relationships between the agents in the poems:

Clipped, short-breathed, discontinuous, [the inventories] isolate the objects they supposedly conjoin, expose the gaps between individual perceptions, feelings, memories. The catalogues of *Life Studies* are haunted by pathos or futility, as delineated by objects that ironically betray those who possess them: Uncle Devereux's spruce clothing, Commander Lowell's chinoiserie, Charlotte Lowell's "proper *putti*." (94)

To illustrate the value of this acute observation, I want to begin by considering how the objects in this room depict the character and life of their owner as inscribed upon them. This statement comes in the form of the simile-based image in the second and the third lines:

blue threads as thin
 as pen-writing on the bedspread, (LS 75)

The owner's life is inscribed upon the objects as a permanent "signature" visible as "pen-writing" upon the "the bed spread". As mentioned earlier, it is worth noting that the narrator

emphasizes the minute blue details and describes the planked floor as a ship's deck. His eye also catches the details connected to the Far East and sailing. We are made to assume that these details were vitally important to the Father as they color his entire life. We know from the other poems which depict the Father that he was often fired and consequently changed many jobs after he left the Navy, as in "Commander Lowell". Every time this happened, he would buy a "smarter car" and grow "inattentive" by indulging in useless ship calculations, as in "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms". Is the narrator's insistence on the blue details a message that some things were disproportionate in his Father's life? Do the selected detailed descriptions reveal the narrator's point of view and his judgmental attitude towards his Father? It is as if he is saying that the Father remained a defiant and careless child all his life. The catalogue of blue objects from his father's room displays the son's ironic stance and indirect disapproval, as well as his alienation from him, or in Kramer's words, "the gaps between individual perceptions, feelings, memories".

"For Sale" is also structured as a description, and it similarly arouses poignant feelings as the narrator ascribes human characteristics, feelings and thoughts to the house and its objects. The house itself is a "Poor sheepish plaything", a dollhouse in which the people played a simulacrum of life.

Poor sheepish plaything,
 organized with prodigal animosity,
 lived in just a year—
 my Father's cottage at Beverly Farms
 was on the market the month he died.
 Empty, open, intimate
 its town-house furniture
 had an on tiptoe air
 of waiting for the mover
 on the heels of the undertaker.
 Ready, afraid
 of living alone till eighty,
 Mother mooned in the window,
 as if she had stayed on a train
 one stop past her destination. (*LS* 76)

It is the “furniture” that is impatient here, as it waits for the “mover” to come right after “the undertaker”. It is noticeable how references to the human characters are entirely absent, since the house is “organized with prodigal animosity” rather than by the people who organized it. The mother is like “town-house furniture” in a farmhouse; she does not belong there and is impatient to move out and move on: “As if she had stayed on a train / one stop past her destination”. All the inanimate objects become animated by the descriptions and are made “restless”. Stylistically this displacement of human feelings on the objects is a metonymic process, since the whole is represented by the parts. That is, the people are represented by their personal belongings. This results in poignant feelings being produced by the metonymic suppression of direct feelings. In this description, the truth lies in the feelings and evaluations which the narrator produces, rather than in the facts he describes.

The well-known and oft-quoted “Waking in the Blue” is structured by “external” descriptions too. There is some action of course, but nothing of significance happens in the day at the mental hospital. The poem simply describes the daily rituals of the characters, their social backgrounds, past affiliations, clubs, clothes, and physical appearance. Lowell sets up the scene of the poetic experience on his usual condensed descriptions:

The night attendant, a B.U. sophomore,
rouses from the mare’s-nest of his drowsy head
propped on *The Meaning of Meaning*.
He catwalks down our corridor.
Azure day
makes my agonized blue window bleaker.
Crows maunder on the petrified fairway.
Absence! My heart grow tense
as though a harpoon were sparring for the kill.
(This is the house for the “mentally ill.”) (LS 81)

The use of the expressive, metaphorical noun phrase “mare’s nest” denotes complicated, tricky and delusive situations from which the “night attendant” is waking up. The lines invoke the idea of the human psyche remaining incomprehensible, tricky and deceptive as a “mare’s nest”. It also introduces the setting, the place where the “mare’s nests” of human beings are dealt with. The book on which the attendant’s head is propped, C.K. Ogden’s and I. A. Richards’ *The*

Meaning of Meaning is hardly a randomly chosen detail since the stanza continues searching for meaning, or anything that might make sense in “the[se] bleak” surroundings. However, the narrator does not say that his state of mind is bleak and agonized. Instead, it is his window that is bleak and agonized: “makes my agonized window bleaker”. Similarly, it is the “fairway” outside that “is petrified”. The displacement technique evokes the bleakness, agony and fear the narrator projects on his surroundings. By analyzing this dominant realistic technique of *Life Studies* and tracing it back to the masters of realist prose, Perloff also sees it as a stylistic restatement of one of Lowell’s overarching themes in *Life Studies*:

By presenting his parents in terms of a metonymic series of objects, Robert Lowell creates a devastating image of a tradition gone sour. Father’s “rhino” chair and Mothers’ monogrammed hot water bottle stand metonymically for the materialistic debasement of the American dream, the dream of the Mayflower Lowells and Winslows. (*The Poetic Art* 98)

This critical observation acknowledges the idea that Lowell’s poetry almost exclusively captures its ideas and the state of mind of his characters through objects, places and temporal references, or as Lawrence Kramer says, by “Lowell’s deadly accurate representation of the props and detritus of three intertwined life histories” (85).

Similarly, the characters of the other inmates are portrayed by descriptions of their external appearances. Stanley, once a famous footballer, a “Harvard all-American fullback”, now “hoards” his body like a treasure. To complete the portrait of an individual manically obsessed with his body, the narrator “places” him in a bath tub where he looks like a “ramrod” while his muscles appear like “seals”:

still hording the build of a boy in the twenties,
as he soaks, a ramrod
with the muscle of seal
in his long tub,
vaguely urinous from the Victorian plumbing.
A kingly granite profile in a crimson golf-cap,
worn all day, all night,
he thinks only of his figure,

of slimming on sherbet and ginger ale—
more cut off from words than a seal. (*LS* 81)

With the explicit connotations of killing, tension and physical force invoked by “ramrod” and “seal-like” muscles, Stanley speaks and articulates himself only through the physical aspect of his being. He is literally “more cut off from words than a seal”. The portrayal of the other inmate employs the same technique of “surface” description to reveal the aberrations of the character:

the hooded night lights bring out “Bobbie,”
Porcellian ’29,
a replica of Louis XVI
without the wig—
redolent and roly-poly as a sperm whale,
as he swashbuckles about in his birthday suit
and horses at chairs. (*LS* 82)

The vocabulary of this comical description plays an important role in the portrayal of the character. The narrator resorts to a comic comparison of the character’s porcine looks with the similar appearance of Louis XVI. Socially, he is referred to as “Bobbie”, with a figure like a “sperm whale” and as a “Porcellian”, since he belongs to the traditional, epicurean student club at Harvard whose emblem and symbol was a “pig”. The tragicomic irony is produced by the use of the uncommon word “swashbuckle” in the sense of a “reckless adventurer” to describe a person who is “redolent” of massive and rounded animals such as whales and pigs. The bitter irony with which the narrator imbues both portraits in the psychiatric ward is summed up in the line: “These victorious figures of bravado ossified young”. Even in this concluding line, their mental condition is described with the word “ossified”, which denotes hardening and fossilization of substance as in bones or minerals. Here, however, it implies mental retardation, the rigidity and incapacity of these people evolve or grow. At the end of the poem, we have the narrator’s self-portrait:

After a hearty New England breakfast,
I weigh two hundred pounds
this morning. Cock of the walk,

I strut in my turtle-necked French sailor's jersey
 before the metal shaving mirrors,
 and see the shaky future grow familiar
 in the pinched, indigenous faces
 of those thoroughbred mental cases,
 twice my age and half my weight.
 We are all old-timers,
 each of us holds a locked razor. (*LS* 82)

Just like the two previous portraits, this self-portrait is presented through the physical characteristics and objects surrounding the character—the heaviness of his body induced by the medications, his walk, clothes, and finally, the “metal mirrors” and “locked razors”. These objects are carefully selected in the description and loom as symbols of the sick, abnormal and edgy atmosphere of both the mental hospital and the narrator’s mind. The narrator does not tell us he is terrified and afraid for his future; his feelings are projected and fixed on the faces of the other patients and the objects around him. He can see his “shaky future” on the concrete faces of the other inmates reflected in the metal mirrors. Here Lowell conveys an abstract concept, the former, through a physical object, the latter. This constant verbal suppression and postponement of direct emotional expression reinforces and intensifies the emotional effect to the degree of almost haunting poignancy.

Despite the numerous instances of metonymic displacement, this poem does provide one direct description of the narrator’s state of mind in an expertly condensed simile-based image in the first stanza: “My heart grows tense / as though a harpoon were sparring for the kill”. In both, his personal accounts and in the poems about his bouts of manic depression, he talks about a steadily growing tension and nonsensical, verbal aggression: “its hackneyed speech, its homicidal eye” (“Man and Wife” 87). The metaphoric image of his “heart” as tense as a “sparring harpoon” captures this state succinctly through the use of the verb “spar”, which suggests a physical fight or a verbal dispute.

The mastery of Lowell’s descriptive techniques is also evident in “The Memories of West Street and Lepke” (*LS* 87). In this poem, the memorable portraits belong to another institution, the prison. Since this poem’s content and ideas have been analyzed extensively by numerous critics, I will concentrate instead on how the descriptions bring to life the characters. Talking

about his life and personal circumstances at forty, the narrator describes his nine-month old daughter: “Like the sun she rises in her flame-flamingo infants’ wear”. The alliterative compound adjective “flame-flamingo” to describe the baby’s clothes reinforces the sensory perception of brightness and fire, and by extension light, warmth and life, all consistent with the attributes of the sun. His daughter is therefore indirectly compared to the sun. She looks like the rising sun in her clothes. There is a metonymic displacement in the comparison: it is more the baby’s clothes that look like the sun than his daughter. One way of interpreting this shift is that it enables the poem to preserve a thin realistic veneer. Lowell avoids the explicit metaphor “daughter—sun—life”, which presupposes an artistic change of reality, a substitution of one concept for another.

Another relevant characteristic of this poem is the ideational and societal contribution of the diction or the lexis of the condensed, descriptive lines. The period during which *Life Studies* was written is often referred to using Lowell’s phrase “the tranquilized Fifties”. The line, “These are the tranquilized Fifties”, achieves a generalization of the mentality of the decade that is synonymous with the “culture of containment”, a policy not only aimed at controlling the spread of communism, but preserving and containing the old values and the status quo of American culture too. The single descriptive word “tranquilized” is a socially encoded word and becomes the key signifier of the decade. The short, precise description of the African-American boy’s hair in the prison, where the narrator is serving a sentence as a Catholic conscientious objector, is another highly condensed signifier for broader social and cultural strata of American society, one that includes drugs, youth, class and race:

sat waiting sentence in the bull pen
beside a Negro boy with curlicues
of marijuana in his hair. (*LS* 85)

The descriptions of the other inmates are equally expressive, as their respective ideologies and cultures become discernible through their speech patterns, clothing, rituals, interests and social affiliations:

Strolling, I yammered metaphysics with Abramowitz,
A jaundice-yellow (“it’s really a tan”)
and fly-weight pacifist,

so vegetarian,
 he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit.
 He tried to convert Bioff and Brown,
 the Hollywood pimps, to his diet.
 Hairy, muscular, suburban,
 wearing chocolate double-breasted suits,
 they blew their tops and beat him black and blue. (LS 86)

Two extremely opposed ideologies of the society are embodied in the descriptions of the physical characteristics of the characters. On the one hand, there is the non-violent, intellectual group represented by the pacifist and vegan Abramowitz, whose “jaundice-yellow” face and “fly-weight” stature suggest physical weakness. On the other hand, the aggressive cultural group which is at the bottom of the social scale of values, the pimps. They are represented by color. Their “double-breasted suits” are “chocolate”, a strong, earthy color, which might refer to Italian mobsters, and they are portrayed as physically proficient, “hairy, muscular and suburban”. The condensation of description is achieved by the use of highly specific registers and professional jargon: “fly-weight” associated with boxing and “chocolate double-breasted” to stylish clothing.

However, the external, surface descriptions of the characters as a means of exposing their mental state and ideology is even more expertly applied in the frequently quoted stanza about the real-life criminal, Czar Lepke:

He taught me the “hospital tuck,”
 and pointed out the T-shirted back
 of *Murder Incorporated’s Czar Lepke*,
 there piling towels on a rack,
 or dawdling off to his little segregated cell full
 of things forbidden the common man:
 a portable radio, a dresser, two toy American
 flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm.
 Flabby, bald, lobotomized,
 he drifted in a sheepish calm,
 where no agonizing reappraisal
 jarred his concentration of the electric chair—
 hanging like an oasis in his air
 of lost connections. . . . (LS 86)

As in previous descriptions, the selection of particular details and the choice of words are even more important. The reference to Lepke as “Murder Incorporated’s Czar Lepke” invokes the world of trade unions, Mafia and the business of contract killings. The pre-modifier “T-shirted” is an uncommon derivation, or deviation, of the noun “T-shirt”. It foregrounds the meaning that Lepke is wearing and bearing, his life on his back. Interestingly enough, T-shirts were becoming popular as a garment during the time when Lowell was writing this poem. In the period depicted in the poem, the forties, t-shirts were worn mainly as under-garments for work and recreation by soldiers, farmers, and probably prison inmates. This detail in Lepke’s description speaks about Lowell’s well-known “grace of accuracy” (Bidart 838), while the stylistic derivation of the adjective “T-shirted” from the noun “t-shirt”, indicates his acute sense of the language of popular culture. At the same time, the description of the objects in his cell speaks about absurdity of human nature to cling to objects even when death is so imminent. Another detail in the cell further reinforces this absurdity, “two toy American flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm” that stand on his dresser. The Judeo-Christian symbol of triumph and victory over death, the “ribbon of Easter palm”, is placed in the environment of the prison cell that contains a notorious Jewish criminal who has been sentenced to death. The irony and paradox of “victory and triumph” in Lepke’s life are self-evident. However, the Christian symbolism of “palm” as a triumph of the immortal spirit over the mortal body and the reference to Christ’s entry into Jerusalem a week before his crucifixion on Palm Sunday reinforces the absurdity of Lepke’s spiritual growth.

The choice of the specialized psychiatric word “lobotomized” in the description of Lepke’s physical appearance, is another culturally loaded word, a frequent expressive means in Lowell’s condensed descriptions. The word acquired negative connotations by the mid 1950s because of the devastating side-effects of lobotomy as practiced by psychiatrists. In the forties, it was not such a negative term. Lowell’s use of a word which connotes such huge cultural controversy expands the ideational strata of his poetic discourse. This lexis reflects the popular culture of the mid 1950s and informs the authentic language of the narrator. Keeping in mind the connotations of the word “lobotomized”, it is easy to understand the summary in the final expressive lines that depict Lepke’s state of mind. We do not know if he was actually

lobotomized in the 1940s but regardless, he awaits his death penalty “in a sheepish calm”, incapable of undertaking an “agonizing reappraisal” of his life and actions. His “concentration on the electric chair” is like a spot in time hanging as an “oasis in the air” which he cannot connect as a consequence to his previous actions.

Culturally Coded Lexis

I now want to address how a vital element of Lowell’s descriptive and narrative structures, the lexis, promises to unfold the “layers” of the culture that served as a context for *Life Studies*. This will involve exploring both the denotations and connotations of his culturally encoded lexis, that is, the external meanings of certain words and phrases before they “enter” the poem and the internal meanings they acquire after entering the poem. This process of “verbal osmosis” when words absorb meaning from different contexts, is, I believe, what critic and linguist Winifred Nowottny describes in general terms:

[W]hen a word or phrase enters into the patterns set up in a poem its effectiveness will depend much on the give and take between those patterns and itself. We cannot, however, avoid the question, ‘What does the word or phrase bring with it that is constant enough to make it a contributor to as well as a recipient of the poetic power of the structure it enters?’ (Nowottny 26)

This process of the words contributing to and/or receiving from the “environment” of the poem is the central methodological aspect of this part of the chapter. My analysis focuses on the sociolinguistic patina that has accrued on certain units of the poetic lexis, such as the names of historical people, events and concepts of American and European spiritual culture, as well as brand names from the popular material culture of the first half of the twentieth century. The analysis will also dwell on the use of idioms, catch phrases and other verbal clichés which reflect the culture that generated them and function as verbal “ready-mades” in addition to reinforcing Lowell’s well-known anecdotal, colloquial and informal poetic language. The choice of these particular lexical items is significant to my analysis as they reflect the categorization of the world

and experience performed by the poetic voice or “language user” in a broader linguistic context. At the same time, categorization of experience reflects the ideational position, the worldview, of the language user. As the linguist and critic Roger Fowler explains, commenting on M.A.K. Halliday’s theory:

Through the ideational function, says Halliday, ‘the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world’—through it he represents his view of the real world’ (his system of categorization) to himself and to others. The speaker’s view of the world, of how it is structured and divided into systems of separate ‘things’ and ‘processes’, is obviously carried largely by vocabulary: the way ‘things’ are named and classified. . . . (Fowler 31)

At the same time, if the main aim of this poetry is to catch the “flux of experience”, as Lowell declared in his interviews, it becomes important to examine the culture which constitutes this flux of experience. Consequently, *Life Studies* is a poetry collection that cannot be read without consulting encyclopedias or other reference books, regardless of the general knowledge of American culture of the period that the reader possesses. This is the case because some of Lowell’s references to popular and material culture are either short-lived or belong to very specialized registers. Perloff’s personal account of the impact Lowell’s poetic voice had on her speaks about how his poetry is saturated by references to American culture of the 1950s:

Who can forget the shock waves generated by these lines, appearing in a slim book called *Life Studies* in 1959? For me, the memory is very much alive: 1959 was the year my second daughter was born and I was having a hard time of it. Two children under the age of three, very little help, a physician husband who was rarely home, endless Gerber meals to serve, piles of baby clothes to take down to the building’s laundry room, and—perhaps worst of all—the conversations with Other Mothers in the playground that revolved around things like the parsley sale at the Giant supermarket. I never seemed to get enough sleep and on rare occasions I even took one of the then-new tranquillizers like Equanil, whose trade name was Miltown. Thus, in the rare moments snatched for “serious” reading, it seemed amazing to come across a poem so “authentically” depicting the poet and his wife, not as lovers but as a sedated pair, lying, not even on their own bed but, incongruously, on “mother’s”—a bed where the only Dionysian “abandon” is that of the gilded bedposts. What a fitting emblem of what the

neighboring poem, “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” called “the tranquillized Fifties”! (“The Return of Robert Lowell” 1-2)

The documentary-like diction of Lowell’s poems can also be read as the language of the immanent poetic voice, documenting and thereby providing the authenticity of a “lived experience” in the context of the poetics of immanence and experience. Therefore, this concrete and culturally-encoded lexis is tightly interwoven with, and consequently supports, the structure of the poetic model of immanence and experience. The analysis of this specific diction does not require as much in-depth scrutiny as it requires a broad grasp of the widening cultural gyres of the indicated period. One can get an idea of this culturally coded vocabulary by reading Lowell’s prose and his interviews in which, for example, he refers to Snodgrass’ daughter: “I mean, the poems are about his child, his divorce, and Iowa City, and his child is a Dr. Spock child” (*Collected Prose* 245). Dr. Spock is a rather obscure reference to a specific era that requires particular knowledge to understand. The chances are the majority of twenty-first century readers will need a reference book to find out about this public figure in order to understand the connotations of his name (which accidentally coincides with “Mr. Spock”, the popular hero of the 1960s-1970s TV series and film “Star Trek”). The connotations refer to a child who has been brought up as an individual from a very early age and has been shown love and affection freely and openly. Dr. Spock’s popular and radical ideas about child-bearing fitted well into the liberal decade of the 1960s.

This referential quality of the concrete, descriptive and narrative language of *Life Studies* is interpreted by critics as a result of Lowell’s and other poets’ mid-century quest for an authentic voice or manner of speech. Perloff comments on this general trend in *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*:

[Louis] Simpson’s view of the poet as sensitive other, giving voice to the “primacy of feeling”, carries on what I have called the holding operation of the fifties and sixties, the poetic demand, if no longer for common speech, at least for authentic speech. To be a poet, at midcentury, was to “find one’s own voice,” to “bring to speech,” as Denise Levertov put it, one’s own experience. “Almost the whole problem of writing poetry,” said Robert Lowell in 1961, “is to bring it back to what you really find.” (41)

Perloff contends that the impact of media on language from the 1950s onwards made “demands on the authentic self . . . extremely difficult to sustain even for a poet like Lowell” (42). Therefore, she maintains, American poetry had to take a turn towards the “radical artifice” which led to Language poetry and other more radical strands after the mid-century.

This culturally encoded quality of Lowell’s poetic language is often analyzed by critics as being in service to the content-related issues of his poetry, which include his manic depression, his psychiatric treatment in hospitals, stories about his family members and the American history connected to his family history. However, I believe that the culturally informed discourse of *Life Studies* calls for a stylistic and socio-cultural approach, since, as Fowler again argues, “discourse has a definite context of culture, which may—I would say “ought to”—be studied as an influence on the linguistic structure of literary texts, and as a guide to their interpretation” (114).

The third section of the long poem “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow” which depicts Great Aunt Sarah playing her dummy piano, also, includes the image: “Aunt Sarah, risen like the phoenix / from her bed of troublesome snacks and *Tauchnitz classics*” (my emphasis). These lines reveal more of her general portrait, foregrounding the objects of her personal use: the bed, the snacks and the type of books, called “Tauchnitz”. I have already identified Lowell’s technique of metonymic displacement which reveals and marks the personality, lifestyle and ideology of the agents in a poetic experience, which Lawrence Kramer refers to as a “rhetorical commitment to the figure of metonymy, a trope that is equivalent to displacement in psychoanalytic discourse” (Kramer 85). Through the objects so described we can construct the psychological profile of a withdrawn and, perhaps, depressed woman, who spends most of her time in bed. When she is not in bed, she is described as “risen like the phoenix”, that is, somebody restored back to life after death. She takes her solace in “snacks” which are “troublesome” and in German books, “Tauchnitz classics”. It therefore becomes obvious that the “troublesome snacks” and “the books” become metonymic displacements of Aunt Sarah’s personality and lifestyle. It consequently becomes necessary to ask what kind of books “Tauchnitz classics” were and signified in the culture of the time. Are they a socio-cultural semiotic sign which speaks for a certain class and attendant set of values and mentalities? In other words, one needs to determine the external connotations which the proper name “Tauchnitz” brings to the semantic and semiotic patterns of the poem. In the language of

semiotics, these external connotations can be categorized as the “third order of signification” of the denotative sign which reflects the concepts and ideology of the particular culture:

In the third (mythological or ideological) order of signification the sign reflects major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview—such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, Englishness and so on. (Chandler 95)

These new meanings and connotations are ascribed to the sign as signifiers in the coded system of the particular language and culture. *Encyclopedia Britannica*’s records give the name of a famous German family of printers and publishers, “Tauchnitz”, which began to publish British and American classics for the tastes and requirements of Anglophone travelers in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. These editions, considered precursors to the popular paperbacks of the twentieth century, were often smuggled to the UK and US as forbidden imports. But what does all this say about Great Aunt Sarah? We can conclude that she lives in the past more than the present, since she is surrounded by objects that function as markers of the previous century, probably the century of her youth. However, besides generating this brief socio-cultural sketch of her character, the single phrase “Tauchnitz classics” also adds authenticity to the scene in terms of unity of time, place and culture. The name “Tauchnitz” semantically grows into a larger concept which imports its connotations into the language of the poem. Its connotations enrich the poetic language with cultural expansiveness and are combined with the lyrical condensation of a single phrase. The signifieds of the concept illustrate Bakhtin’s idea that there are no socio-culturally neutral words in language. Even a personal name such as “Baron Christian Bernhard von Tauchnitz (1816-95)”, who founded the publishing house in Leipzig in 1837 that began to issue a series of English-language titles in 1841 that eventually became known as the ‘Collection of British and American Authors’”, becomes a socio-cultural concept and a signifier of particular temporal and spatial meanings. At the same time, the objects in the scene of Aunt Sarah adhere to the typical, mid-century demand for cultural authenticity, as well as providing the socio-cultural categories which are attributable to her as a person. Perloff attributes this feature to Lowell, as well as his contemporaries John Berryman and Louis Simpson, amongst few others.

The same era that Aunt Sarah's "books" evoke is also referred to by the historical term "Ancien Régime" in lines (7) and (8) of the second stanza of the same poem: "Even at noon here the formidable / *Ancien Régime* still keeps nature at a distance". Historically, "Ancien Régime" is a French phrase which means an "old order" and an "old regime". It refers to the socio-political system and aristocratic culture of France from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century prior to the French Revolution. This generic phrase covers a huge time span and "carries" a huge semantic weight of French and European history, the ideology of the aristocratic classes, and the names of historians such as Alexis De Tocqueville, who researched and wrote about this period. In other words, it functions as a full semiotic sign encoded with the numerous connotations which the phrase brings "inside" the narrow context of the poem. This complex sign that enters the poem with its signifieds also gains new meanings through the implied verbal osmosis. "Ancient Regime" therefore stands for the aristocratic culture of the pre-WWII Bostonian ways of life and powerful, financial status. By choosing such culturally encoded items in the lexis, Lowell empowers *Life Studies* with the quality of the cultural "epos" of the pre-war period. This diction, which belongs to the domain of American material and popular culture from the 1950s, also makes *Life Studies* a culturally colorful text. An example of this kind of reference appears in the poem "Grandparents" with the name "Pierce-Arrow", an expensive, luxurious car manufacturer and self-titled model of the 1930s:

They're altogether otherworldly now,
 those adults champing for their ritual Friday spin
 to pharmacist and five-and-ten in Brockton.
 Back in my throw-away and shaggy span
 of adolescence, Grandpa still waves his stick
 like a policeman;
 Grandmother, like a Mohammedan, still wears her thick
 lavender mourning and touring veil;
 the Pierce Arrow clears its throat in a horse-stall.
 Then the day road dust rises to whiten
 the fatigued elm leaves
 the nineteenth century, tired of its children, is gone.
 They're all gone into a world of light; the farm's my own. (*LS* 68)

In an initial reading, this descriptive and even metaphorical name suggests the name of a horse, since “a horse-stall” is mentioned in the same line. It becomes clear later, however, that the reference is to a car in the context created by the first few lines of the poem: “those adults champing for their ritual Friday spin”. The informal use of “spin”, meaning “a short drive”, and the grandparents “champing for” it, another informal use of the verb “to champ”, reiterates the informal idiom “to champ at the bit” (*Merriam Webster*), meaning to be impatient to start working or taking a journey. The use of this concrete name which belongs to the register of the American automobile industry can be interpreted as a further example of Lowell’s concrete and documentary diction, generating his well-known “authentic speech”. However, if we consider the last two lines of the stanza, it becomes evident that it is more than that. The grandparents are dead and gone and with them the pre-war values and culture. Similarly, the “Pierce-Arrow” company, active between 1901 and 1938, the year Lowell’s grandfather died, is also gone. The name of the car in the context of the poem becomes a sign, another marker of the pre-World War II era and culture, as “Pierce Arrow” is ascribed a new signifier in the poem—the personal history of the family. In other words, this expensive and luxurious car becomes the symbol of the bygone, comfortable ways of life of an aristocratic family.

Lowell’s “culture studies” do not end here, however. The poem “Sailing Home from Rapallo” (*LS* 77) reflects the narrator’s changing emotions toward his deceased mother. We hear his grief in the third line, “and tears ran down my cheeks”, before his irony and sarcasm towards Mother’s snobbery and exaggerated class consciousness become evident in the following line: “mother traveled first-class in the hold / her Risorgimento black and gold casket / was like Napoleon’s at the Invalides”. However, his emotional descent reaches the furthest limit when he informs us of the tragicomic misspelling of her last name:

In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother’s coffin,
Lowell had been misspelled *LOVEL*.
 The corpse
 was wrapped like *panetone* in Italian tinfoil. (*LS* 78)

These most bitter feelings regarding the sheer absurdity of human fate and his most cynical and grotesque lines come at the very end. The reference is to the traditional Italian sweet bread-loaf

shaped like a cupola that is enjoyed at Christmas—*panetone*. The dehumanizing description of Mother's body with a word from the food register is a tragicomic treatment of her pretentious taste and exaggerated adoration of Italian culture; she even dies in Rapallo. This sentiment is echoed throughout *Life Studies*.

Similarly, the next poem in the collection, "During Fever", depicts his Mother's tendency to aspire to the "right" circles and adopt the "right", that is, high class ideologies and tastes:

You had a window-seat,
an electric blanket,
a silver hot water bottle
monogrammed like a hip-flask,
Italian china fruity
with bunches and berries
and proper *putti*. (LS 80)

Through the lexis of the popular material culture in the above stanza and in the last lines of the previous poem, we can discern his Mother's socio-cultural position and attitudes. Part of her ideology is to trust Italian culture unconditionally as a sign of sophistication and social status. This is clearly explicated in the prose memoir "91 Revere Street", which is part of *Life Studies*. In this stanza, the Italian word "*putti*" denotes the figure of a Cupid-like baby from Renaissance and Baroque paintings found as patterns of common china and objects for practical use. However, the narrator's ironic overtone is caught in the pre-modifying adjective "proper" ("proper *putti*") in which we hear the echo of his Mother's voice. By using this word, the narrator enters into a kind of dialogue with his dead mother, which reiterates at the same time Bakhtin's idea of the dialogic and polyphonic character of language.

The analysis of the "external" connotations is simultaneously an analysis of the multi-layered discourse of Lowell's poetry. The text turns into a palimpsest. This multi-layered discourse is also produced by the use of the lexical "ready-mades", or what stylistics refers to as "generics". According to Fowler, they "are generalized propositions which claim universal truth, and are usually cast in syntax reminiscent of proverbs or scientific laws" (167). The "generics" in Lowell's *Life Studies* most often appear as idioms or component parts of larger idioms, clichés and catchphrases.

Ideologically, they are a highly encoded lexis shared by many people, and consequently, they reflect the ideology and culture of a large population. These are just some examples of idiomatic phrases: “Reading how even the Swiss had thrown the sponge” from “Beyond the Alps”; “they blew their tops and beat him black and blue” from “Memories of West Street and Lepke”; “heart in mouth” from “Man and Wife”. These are each examples of idioms being used in their original meaning but in the contexts of the poems they operate more as contributors than recipients of these contexts. In other words, they retain their external meanings codified by the system of American English language and culture. Besides adding authenticity and anecdotal quality to Lowell’s language, they release a sociolinguistic polyphony of voices from the culture that generated them. The lines are primarily only allusive and reminiscent of well-known idioms which appear paraphrased or deeply embedded and almost blended into the syntax of the poem. It is equally important, as the stylistic critic Paul Simpson says, that idioms are essentially metaphoric expressions:

[M]any metaphors have become embedded over time into fixed expressions like idioms. Idioms are conventionally defined as clusters of words whose meaning cannot be read off their constituent parts, although it is important not to lose sight of the often metaphorical origin of a particular idiom. (93)

They carry their “external”, “ready-made” metaphoric meanings into the structure of the poem which are then altered, paraphrased and blended into the context of the poem. Consider this example of a paraphrased idiom from “Beyond the Alps:”

The lights of science couldn’t hold a candle
to Mary risen – at one miraculous stroke (*LS* 3)

It is evident that the idiom “could not hold a candle” is highly incorporated into the syntax of the poem as the predicate to the grammatical subject “the lights of science”, which is another metaphorical expression. As a weak metaphor for knowledge and intellectual enlightenment, “the lights of science” suggests the failure of science to provide answers to the spiritual and existential requirements of the people of the twentieth century. That is why science “could not hold a candle” up to “Mary risen—at one miraculous stroke”, or measure up to Christianity. The

“candle”, considered an inferior means of “illumination” in regards of technological progress, becomes superior to “the lights of science” and a metaphor for religious enlightenment that attracts “the crowds at San Pietro [who] screamed Papa” (*LS* 4). The idiom and metaphorical expression of this line gain additional symbolic meanings through their verbal interactions. However, their externally contributed meanings are still relatively stable in the patterns of the poem. As such, they add to the idiomatic quality and authenticity of Lowell’s language, which remains sensitive to the culture that serves as the context of the poem.

Another case of two idioms incorporated into the linguistic structure of a poem to the extent that they produce new metaphors which stand for weakness, unrealistic expectations and emotional alienation, are the well-known lines of “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow” (*my italics*):

That’s how I *threw cold water*
on my Mother and Father’s
watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner. (*LS* 59)

The syncretism and general sensation of weakening or “diluting” the power, authority and love towards the parents are captured by the first idiomatic phrase “cold water” which is “thrown” at the second idiomatic phrase, “pipe dreams”, which denotes something weak and unrealistic as wishful thinking. These lines are a rare example of grammatical, stylistic and metaphorical “games” the child-adult narrator plays. The generics, that is, the idioms and idiomatic phrases in these lines, are thoroughly absorbed into the texture of the poem as one phrase serves as an adjective to the other phrase. Paul Simpson gives an interesting example of this idiom blending, similar to the processes operating in Lowell’s idiomatic language:

(1) He’s burning the midnight oil at both ends.

(from Simpson 1992b)

In this example, two expressions embodying one conceptual metaphor have been unwittingly merged. The metaphor which is evoked is ENERGY IS A BURNING FUEL and it is commonly transmitted through idioms like ‘burn the midnight oil’ and ‘burning the candle at both ends’. The popular term for this sort of slip, a ‘mixed metaphor’, is something of a misnomer because, as observed, this is really a blend of two idioms which draw on the same metaphor. (Simpson 93)

The first stanza of the poem “The Banker’s Daughter” is a further example of the assimilation of popular idioms into the language of the poem. On this occasion, the idiom “to lay an egg”, is only implied and echoed in the poem:

Once this poor country egg from Florence lay
at her accouchement, such a virtuous ton
of woman only women thought her one.
King Henry pirouetted on his heel
and jested, “Look, my cow’s producing veal.” (*LS* 5)

The stanza resonates with several meanings of the idiom “to lay an egg”—to do something badly and to give birth—in the context of the historical story of Marie de Medici as a second wife to Henry IV of France that was unsuccessful as a Queen consort and a Queen regent to her son Louis XIII, who subsequently banished her from France. Thus, through the informal use of “egg” meaning “a human being”, this “poor country egg” is someone who did poorly in her life, and someone who gave birth. The idiom is echoed by the verbal interplay between the past tense of the verb “lie” as in “lay at her accouchement”, and the homophonous present tense of “lay”, as in “lay an egg”. She “lay on her accouchement” in labor to “lay an egg”—give birth to a son who will be an executioner of her fate. The image of Marie de Medici in labor and her husband “jesting” about her weight is rendered in realistic and straightforward lines. Thus, the symbolic and metaphoric meanings are produced within this realistically rendered scene by the external idiomatic connotations of the word “egg” and the idiom “to lay an egg”.

“Home after Three Months Away” is one of many poems in *Life Studies* which use catchy pop-phrases and quotes. The well-known phrase in this poem, “spin and toil”, is from the Gospel of Luke: “Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not (*The Official King James Bible Online* 12:27). This slightly paraphrased quote appears in the first line of the second stanza (my italics):

Recuperating, I neither *spin nor toil*.
Three stories down below,
a choreman tends our coffin’s length of soil,

and seven horizontal tulips blow.
 Just twelve months ago,
 these flowers were pedigreed
 imported Dutchmen; now no one need
 distinguish them from weed.
 Blushed by the late spring snow,
 they cannot meet
 another year's snowballing enervation.

I keep no rank nor station.
 Cured, I am *frizzled*, stale and small. (LS 84)

This is an example of a quote whose full ideational connotation, that is, its full external meaning does not “enter” the poem with its full connotations. There is only an echo of the recommendation from the original context that men should not worry about material things but remain concerned with spiritual matters. This is “heard” in its reference to plants, “the tulips”, and the narrator’s self-perception as “Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small”. The physical resemblance of “frizzled” and withered in dying plants causes an association with the “lilies” which also “do not labor or spin” like him. The reference to plants is incorporated in his self-image as a dying annual plant, like the Dutch tulips in his “coffin’s length” front garden. The dehumanizing state caused by his illness is like the “snowballing enervation” which the “tulips” cannot survive. Thus, the independent “generic” phrase, “spin and toil”, exceeds the original Biblical connotation and “lives” in the culture as a free signifier, a catchy phrase solely reminiscent of its original idea, its original signified. As such, when removed from its original context, it can enter into other spheres and contexts freely and acquire new signifieds, as it does in this poem. Its external meanings are only implied and absorbed in the language. In Nowotny’s terms, this phrase is not stable in the patterns of the poem and is more a recipient than a contributor (26). However, as in the other examples, it reflects the immanent narrator’s ideational position and his manner of categorizing his experience as a language user.

My main intention in this chapter has been to show the inception of a poetic model I have defined as the poetics of immanence and experience in Lowell’s poetry written during the late 1950s. I have tried to demonstrate how the concept of immanence materializes and produces an artistic effect, a simulacrum of a lived experience and a concrete, personalized immanent

narrator. This experiential poetry adopts confession as a convention and a form, transforming it into a rhetorical model which reinforces the notion of life-like poetry and reifies the principle of immanence. I have also tried to point out that the “I” is not strictly autobiographical, although the intention to present itself as such is constantly immanent in his narrations and descriptions.

The analyses of the poems have shown how the narrative structure produces metaphoric messages through associative memory links and poetic montage which restate the main themes of the poem. Identifying the different perspectives of the narrative voice, the focalizations, has highlighted the structural patterns and nuances in the depicted experience.

I have analyzed the equally important realist form of description as a structuring and texturing tool which reveals Lowell’s poetic credo in life-like images. I have examined the interplay between the objective photographic descriptions of surfaces and the subjective attitudes embodied in the selection and organization of the details. The technique of metonymic displacement which indirectly represents the personalities and mental states of the agents through objects and external characteristics has been examined as a reiteration of the same interplay between objective and subjective categories. The emphasis has been put on Lowell’s masterfully condensed, descriptive lines whose lexis has the potential to convey rich connotations to revealing a broad cultural spectrum and ideology.

The lexis has been further analyzed to show how the external connotations, the names of historical people, objects of material culture and idiomatic expressions as verbal “ready-mades”, expand the grasp of culture in the poems and contribute to the authenticity of the immanent narrator. Equally, the assimilative processes of the poetic language toward the external connotations have been shown to produce new, and primarily, metaphoric meanings. In the context of the poetics of immanence and experience, Lowell’s culturally coded poetic diction has been analyzed as another authentic and documented presentation of the “lived experience” of the immanent narrator.

CHAPTER II

JAMES WRIGHT: DEEP PRESENCE IN THE IMAGE

One of the significant contributors to American immanent and experiential poetry, James Wright, published his most important work between the fifties and seventies. His poetry charts the development of the immanent and experiential poetic model seen operating within mainstream American poetry during the second half of the twentieth century. Analyzing his poetry involves analyzing some of the main characteristics that this strand exhibits throughout these decades. This chapter, however, is limited to considering two of his collections from the 1950s, *The Green Wall* (1957) and *Saint Judas* (1959), and two of his collections from the 1960s, *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963) and *Shall We Gather at the River* (1968), each of which equally demonstrate his poetics of immanence and experience. As this chapter will demonstrate, Wright's poetry exhibits some of the most common and striking characteristics of this strand, such as: the concrete/colloquial, the narrative, the metonymic and the confessional which, as we have seen in the previous chapter on Lowell and will see in the subsequent chapters on Hugo and Graham, these poets generally share in evolved and altered forms that serve their poetic designs and idioms. Thus, Lowell's narrations and descriptions, Hugo's semi-discursive and semi-descriptive expressions and Graham's experiential frames of reference, fall into one or another of the categories as constitutive elements of the poetics of immanence and experience.

This chapter will explore the concrete/colloquial characteristic in Wright's poetry that finds expression in his often colloquial diction. In addition, his references to the concrete time and place of the poetic "action" will be shown to constitute the interdependent category of *space-time*, defined M.M. Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope.² The chapter will also consider his narrative characteristic, traced through the stories and events that the poems depict in linear, causational and logical expositions, as well as the dialogism and heteroglossia present in his poetic language. This is defined in Bakhtin's theory as concrete "social speech diversity" and a "multiplicity of social voices", respectively (Bakhtin 260-3). The metonymic characteristic will

² Bakhtin's definition of chronotope: "We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" ("Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* 84).

be examined as the general structure of the poems which contain and produce metaphors, usually of the “natural” kind we might encounter in Robert Frost. I will argue that these characteristics are present and typify Wright’s poetry of the 1950s and 1960s and corroborate the model’s continuum and subsistence through the decades. Particularly during the 1950s, the conceptual dictum is an ambivalent, ironic and primarily ambiguous poem whose main design is an elaborated idea or concept, rather than a presence of concrete and specified human consciousness as the protagonist of the poetic experience.

Interestingly enough, critics and literary historians unanimously speak of the great and radical shift Wright’s poetry undergoes after the 1960s, especially with his third volume, *The Branch will not Break*. Critics characterize his first two volumes published in the 1950s, *The Green Wall* and *Saint Judas*, as mainly adhering to the strict tenets of the formalist poetics associated with New Criticism. Certain critics, such as Kevin Stein in *James Wright: The Poetry of a Grown Man*, even discusses Wright’s poetic diction and formal characteristics during this period as a continuation of the tradition of seventeenth-century English Metaphysical poetry:

Although Wright shares Frost’s sense of the ironic and Robinson’s notion of human limitation, the voice that speaks his early poems clearly owes less to them than to the seventeenth century, for a carefully chosen poetic diction contributes to the air of preciousness that surrounds these early poems. Though Wright was raised in the mill and factory environment of Martins Ferry, Ohio, he mostly rejects the language he heard (and probably used) at home in favor of a learned, acquired manner of speaking more akin to seventeenth-century England than to twentieth-century Ohio. (19)

This observation clearly identifies his elevated diction, one of the recurrent remarks by critics on Wright’s poetry during the fifties. However, I will argue that besides these formal qualities of regular meter and rhyme, and the presence of intellectualized diction, Wright’s poetry of this period significantly employs logical expositions depicting concrete “stories” and “events” in the poems, a trait possibly learned from Frost and further developed through the theories of New Criticism. The poems “tell” their stories using colloquialisms and usually set the poetic “action” in spatio-temporal terms. I agree with Henry Taylor when he says that Wright does not deny “the new subtlety of perception, the new sensitivity in [his] later work, but [he] is suspicious of claims that the shift was a cataclysmic transformation of the whole man” (*The Pure Clear Word*, 49-50).

He further adds that “[a]t its most extreme, Wright’s early-mastered ability to combine traditional form and colloquial diction sounds increasingly like his later [1960s] poems” (61). Furthermore, in an interview with Dave Smith, Wright comments extensively on this “change”, elaborated by many literary critics including Bly, as an empty statement mainly initiated by his comment to the publisher of his second book *Saint Judas* in the 1950s. As I have indicated, Wright states that the change was not that radical but was mostly in the *growing frequency* of everyday, colloquial, conversational English and almost complete abandonment of strict poetic forms and metrics. Consequently, the colloquial, everyday and conversational English produced more poems with concrete expressions and spatiotemporal markings that tell his specific “story”, or in Wright’s own words:

It is true that I wrote to my publisher after *Saint Judas* and said I don’t know what I am going to do after this but it will be completely different. This comment, and Robert Bly’s essay on my work, has given rise to some sort of assumption that I calculated that I was going to be born again or something, that I would become a completely different person. I think that this is nonsense. There was a good essay by Mark Strand in *Field* magazine, regarding changes in poetry. He used my work as an example and he said the only difference, really, was that I don’t rhyme so often now. I don’t think that a person can change very quickly or easily. . . . Let me say that to change one’s kind of poetry would be, in effect, to change one’s life. I do not think that one can change one’s life simply as an act of will. And I never wanted to. (Smith 18)

The first part of this chapter will analyze Wright’s collections of the 1950s, tracing the four characteristics (concrete/colloquial, narrative, confessional and metonymic) and their concrete manifestations in the poetic idiom specific for the decade, while the second part of the chapter will elaborate on the same traits in his poetry from the 1960s. It will also explore the links between his existential themes and the main principles of Deep Image poetry. Thus, the leaps of the deep image poems into the subconscious are interpreted as leaps into moments of enlightened perception which produce existential statements which the “I” in the poem spontaneously utters. By analyzing an example of both Bly’s and Federico Garcia Lorca’s poems, I will demonstrate that Deep Image poetry, and Wright’s poetry is often categorized as

such by critics, is not surrealist in the sense of Spanish and French poetry, but rather a part of the same immanent and experiential tradition of American poetry this thesis is delineating.

The second section of the chapter will also explore Wright's transcendental poetic moments and link them with the Emersonian philosophical tradition, according to which *Nature*, as universal consciousness, and *nature*, as that encountered daily by man which establishes a Subject-Object relation, are seen as different manifestations of the One (God/Over-Soul/Spirit). I argue that this approach is more Panentheistic in that God and the world are seen as "inter-related, the world being in God and God being in the world", as *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines it.³

The chapter will conclude that Wright's poetry of the 1950s and 1960s reflects an uninterrupted evolution of the experiential and immanentist poetic model that originates in Whitman's and Frost's concrete, narrative and metonymic idioms. As Altieri elaborates in *Enlarging the Temple*, the presence of a concrete human consciousness identified in the concrete experience narrated in the poem reflects Wordsworthian poetic thinking and his belief in the general Order of Nature.⁴ Accordingly, poetry only "transfers" an experience from Nature into the domain of the poem with its natural language. The predominant poetic modes of thinking and the rhetoric of these decades, already influenced by the Beat poets of the mid 1950s, reflect the general disbelief and disappointment in American culture and in man-made civilization and its achievements, which consequently leads toward an oppositional turn in relation to the modernist principle of re-creating poetic experience or imaginatively recycling the achievements of human civilization and its spiritual and material culture. The poetry of these decades shifts its interests towards the experience as it *is* in nature and the praxis, thus reconnecting with the old Pragmatist and Emersonian philosophies.

³ "'Panentheism' is a constructed word composed of the English equivalents of the Greek terms 'pan', meaning all, 'en', meaning in, and 'theism', meaning God. Panentheism understands God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world. It offers an increasingly popular alternative to traditional theism and pantheism. Panentheism seeks to avoid both isolating God from the world as traditional theism often does and identifying God with the world as pantheism does. Traditional theistic systems emphasize the difference between God and the world while panentheism stresses God's active presence in the world" (John Culp, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

⁴ See especially the Introduction and Chapter 1, "Modern and Postmodern: Symbolist and Immanentist Modes of Poetic Thought" in Altieri's *Enlarging the Temple*.

James Wright's Poetry in the 1950s

The elegy "The Accusation" from *Saint Judas*, provides an illustration of the concrete expression and colloquial diction of Wright's poetry during the 1950s. Although it tells the sad story of losing a woman he loved in a regular metrical pattern with rhymes, which creates a solemn, distant and ethereal quality, the language operates as a logical exposition of this nightly affair of making love to a girl who is constantly hiding her scarred face in the darkness and with her scarf. The poem begins:

I kissed you in the dead of dark,
 And no one knew, or wished to know,
 You bore, across your face, a mark
 From birth, those shattered years ago.
 Now I can never keep in mind
 The memory of your ugliness
 At a clear moment. Now my blind
 fingers alone can read your face.

Often enough I had seen that slash
 Of fire you quickly hid in shame;
 You flung your scarf across the flesh,
 And turned away, and said my name.
 Thus I remember daylight and
 The scar that made me pity you.
 God damn them both, you understand.
 Pity can scar love's face, I know. (*Collected Poems* 71)

As we can see, the language of the poem continues to reveal the details of this secretive and hidden love-affair, a moment complicated by pity, shame and rage. What is more important, however, is that it never loses the firm ground of the daily logic and never slips into a dream-like language of illusion and apparitions caused by the suffering over her death. The poem apostrophizes the dead lover and confesses simply and openly his feelings then and "now". The poem keeps the expository manner even in the stanza which "takes off" into an imaginary situation of the speaker having "a blind god's power."

If I were given a blind god's power
 To turn your daylight on again,
 I would not raise you smooth and pure:
 I would bare to heaven your uncommon pain,
 Your scar I had right to hold,
 To look on, for the pain was yours.
 Now you are dead, and I grow old,
 And the doves cackle out of doors, (CP 72)

If the language of this poem is not overly colloquial and the diction is mostly emotional and ethereal, the mode through which the affair and the emotions are presented does not produce the typical ambiguity and semantic polyvalence witnessed in a New Critical poem. It is a straightforward, logical and causational exposition that depicts a concrete experience.

Although an intellectualized poetic diction was prevalent during this decade, a colloquial diction and the traditionally “non-poetic” and “prosaic” objects of mass consumption often appear in Wright’s poetry, “tossed” among the rhyming lines and the regular rhythms of the traditional poetic forms. Beat poetry was also enjoying exposure during this decade and its influence can be identified in the rhetoric here. The colloquial lines often work particularly well when the poem reaches an emotional climax of rage, despair or painful resignation. They also build up the speaker’s credibility, which is sometimes lost among the associative links between the surroundings and his reflections upon them. In “The Fisherman” from *The Green Wall*, he sees a concrete place along the Ohio River, littered with “beer cans”, and tells us the rest of his experience:

We tossed our beer cans down among the rocks,
 And walked away.
 We turned along the beach to wonder
 How many girls were out to swim and burn.
 We found old men:

The driftwood faces
 Sprawled in the air
 And patterned hands half hidden in smoke like ferns;
 The old men, fishing, letting the sea fall out,
 Their twine gone slack. (CP 10-11)

Another example of colloquial diction combined with elevated one is provided in “All the Beautiful are Blameless”, where “harly-charlies” are followed by “sylphs:”

Two stupid harly-charlies got her drunk
 And took her swimming naked on the lake.
 The waters rippled lute-like round the boat,
 And far beyond them, dipping up and down,
 Unmythological sylphs, their names unknown,
 Beckoned to sandbars where the evening falls. (*CP* 63)

The inevitable “beer cans” pop up again after the “orplidean shoulders” in the fourth stanza of this longer poem:

Slight but orplidean shoulders weave in dusk
 Before my eyes when I walk lonely forward
 To kick beer-cans from tracked declivities.
 If I, being lightly sane, may cave a mouth
 Out of the air to kiss, the drowned girl surely
 Listened to lute-song where the sylphs are gone.
 The living and the dead glide hand in hand
 Under cool waters where the days are gone.
 Out of the dark into a dark I stand. (*CP* 63-64)

We can see here how even the register considered to be most traditionally poetic, that of “sylphs”, “lute-song”, “orplidean” and “swans”, is interspersed with “non-poetic” words and lines. The rough, sarcastic lines and the colloquial diction, “The girl flopped in the water like a pig / and drowned dead drunk”, break the speaker’s delicate, gentle surge of thoughts and feelings for the drowned girl. It is as if two different worlds are colliding with one another in the ambivalent and twofold diction of the speaker – the beautiful world of his sympathy and love for the drowned girl, and the feeling that they are both victims of the other world—the world of “the ugly” (“The ugly curse the world and pin my arms / Down by their grinning teeth, sneering a blame”). At the same time, this ambivalent diction in Wright’s writing also answers the New

Critical demands for ambiguity, irony and tension in the poetic language as the Modernist barriers against romanticism and “spiritualization of nature”.⁵

It is also worth noting how some of the poems published in the decade when symbolic and metaphoric language were a dominant norm manage to create their poetic experiences, or tell their “stories”, by using logical patterns of events. The selected material in the majority of the poems is organized on the basis of the metonymic function of language, which substitutes one concept or entity with one of its compositional features or parts to create a substituted entity. An example of this can be found in Wright’s recounting of a story about a criminal in *The Green Wall*, one of the many “heroes” who frequent his poems alongside bums, prostitutes and hobos. As the title indicates, “A Poem about George Doty in the Death House”, it is about a real-life serial killer waiting for his death sentence (*The Green Wall*, 1957):

Lured by the wall, and drawn
To stare below the roof,
Where pigeons nest aloof
From prowling cats and men,
I count the sash and bar
Secured to granite stone,
And note the daylight gone,
Supper and silence near. (*CP* 25)

The first stanza gives certain details about the exterior of a building in a straightforward, metonymic mode by substituting the main entity—the prison. It also introduces the speaker’s musings over a particular theme, in this case the inmate George Doty. The selection of details here is extremely important. The elements depicted are realistic and common, without any gothic symbols or subconscious embodiments just “windows”, “bars” and “pigeons”. Why are the “pigeons” selected among many other elements which could have comprised this image? The poet does not have to include them, or the speaker’s eye might not perceive them since they are not the primary interest. This image is reminiscent of, and easily comparable with, popular film

⁵ See Robert Pen Warren, “Pure and Impure Poetry” (*Kenyon Review*, Vol.5, no. 2, Spring, 1943).

techniques: the camera's eye goes over the wall, then up to the "sash-windows" and the metal bars, zooming onto the pigeons nests, then abruptly down to the street where "men and cats are prowling". One realizes, however, that the pigeons, as creatures of freedom and flight and, in some Slavic cultures, symbols of peace, are as fragile and delicate as peace and freedom are for the inmates. Being perched on the top of the prison, they are symbolically and physically juxtaposed to their opposite, the prison as the epitome of confinement and lack of freedom. It is as if nature, "the pigeons", and culture, "the prison building", are cooperating to create symbols and metaphors which the poet only selects as ready-mades.

This method of poetic selection reflects a worldview based on a strong belief in reality as the source of symbols. This perspective insists that the intrinsic symbolism of animate beings and inanimate elements and objects is derived from the essence of their being. In innumerable cultures, birds symbolize absolute freedom because of their capacity to access what men naturally cannot and their natural inclination to build nests on tall buildings far away from "prowling cats and men". These natural symbols are always there even when the poetic eye does not perceive them. Therefore the poet does not create the symbolism that associates bird with freedom since it is already present as part of the realistic scene. He simply follows the metonymic principle of combining the elements of reality on the basis of their contiguity and closeness as parts of the whole. The existent natural juxtaposition of the "pigeons" and the "prison roof" produces their symbolism; they become a "natural" metaphor. It is realist literature's principle to rely on the selection of symbols already "provided" by reality without the necessity of the poet recreating reality by means of his/her creative imagination when producing them.

It seems that structuralism reflects this particular link between *language* and *reality* by its basic reliance on binary oppositional pairs. Without the concept of imprisonment and restraint, we cannot understand the concept of freedom, or vice versa. They go together as birds and tall buildings, such as prisons go, seen in the typical and clichéd scenes in many films, novels, or paintings, where prisoners are depicted watching birds flying or freeing them from their cages. This principle of symbols or metaphors "clustering" or "nesting" like the pigeons on the metonymic structure of the poem, is a common characteristic of Wright's poetry and indicative of the experiential and immanent poem.

Besides its logical exposition, linear presentation and metonymic structure, the narrative quality of Wright's poetry is also characterized by a story or an event depicted in his poems. Such poems reflect one of the aesthetic principles within immanentist poetry—an artistic illusion that an experience from reality is only transferred into the realm of poetry instead of being created through the poet's act of imagination. There are many poems in Wright's collections from the 1950s that tell stories narrated in linear and causal language but in which surreal, subliminal and dream-like elements are embedded. These poems are like dreams because they feel so real and convincing to the dreamer even though their content is completely absurd. "Father" from *The Green Wall* is a good example of such a poem, forcing the reader to wonder whether it is only a story about a strange dream or if the speaker is still in the dream. It begins in a Dantesque atmosphere: a boy wakes up in Paradise wondering why he has been blessed and describing the details around him in causal and matter of fact language:

In paradise I poised my foot above the boat and said:
Who prayed for me?

But only the dip of an oar
In water sounded; slowly fog from some old shore
Circled in wreaths around my head.

But who is waiting? (CP 15)

In the next stanza it becomes clear that the speaker is a grown-up man describing a dream: he is a child and his face is restored out of "nothingness". "Nothingness" invokes associations to religious and philosophical beliefs in the full circle of life, the journey from nothingness to nothingness witnessed in Zen Buddhism and Existentialism, although the setting here is a scene from the Christian afterlife:

And the wind began,
Transfiguring my face from nothingness
To tiny weeping eyes. And when my voice
Grew real, there was a place
Far, far below on earth. There was a tiny man— (CP 16)

No matter how metaphysical the poem gets, we still pursue uncanny physical and spiritual transformations in a causal logical language reinforced with the conjunctions “and” and “and when”. In the third stanza, the language becomes even more matter-of-fact: the boy looks down from the now concrete place, “Paradise”, and sees his father searching for him like an obscure “oarsmen in the mist enshawled” (*CP* 16). The allusion to Dante’s use of what was originally Greek mythology where the souls of the dead are carried across the river Styx, is striking. However on this occasion, the dreamer’s soul is carried back to the living by the blessing of fatherly love. The poem ends and leaves us wondering what kind of sleep it was when the narrator could still see what his father was doing while he was sleeping:

He drew me from the boat. I was asleep.
And we went home together. (*CP* 6)

The poem is one of many in Wright’s collections from the 1950s that do not abandon the realistic exposition and narration of the concrete event or story, even when the scenes constructed deal with metaphysical issues. This narrative quality is already noticeably present in the 1950s and will be built into Wright’s poetics of the 1960s and 1970s.

These poems often reflect Bakhtinian “dialogues” between the speaker and his own Self or the speaker and his absent addressee. It is a poetry in which the speaker constantly searches and manages to discover and re-discover his emotional and physical place, especially when he is immersed in “deep images” that nature provides, which, we may say, are moments of the poet’s existential utterances are “heard”. These poetic monologues-as-dialogues influence and are influenced by the tradition of American narrative poetry. It is evident in Frost’s poetry and in the experiential and immanent strand after the 1950s. “At the Executed Murderer’s Grave”, a recurrent motif in this poetry, begins with the poet/speaker’s detailed introduction of himself:

(1)

My name is James A. Wright, and I was born
Twenty-five miles from this infected grave,
In Martins Ferry, Ohio, where one slave
To Hazel-Atlas Glass became my father.
He tried to teach me kindness. I return
Only in memory now, aloof, unhurried,

To dead Ohio, where I might lie buried,
 Had I not run away before my time.
 Ohio caught George Doty. Clean as lime,
 His skull rots empty here. Dying's the best
 Of all the arts men learn in a dead place.
 I walked here once. I made my loud display,
 Leaning for language on a dead man's voice.
 Now sick of lies, I turn to face the past.
 I add my easy grievance to the rest: (CP 82)

It is as if this neutral, matter-of-fact and autobiographical language of personal details and facts tries to contest Bakhtin's theory that there is no neutral language. However, line three immediately proves the opposite; it supports and gives credence to Bakhtin's sociologically oriented theory of language, as the poet introduces his father as a "slave to the Hazel-Atlas Glass" factory. He uses the word "slave" which is tinted with the ideology of a particular group, most probably the community of workers who felt like slaves or their families who felt the consequences of their socio-economic conditions and status. Also, "dead Ohio" and "in a dead place" is a language colored by the context, the particular place and social group. The speaker openly confesses that it is not his own language but somebody else's in the last three lines, "Leaning for language on a dead man's voice", which further corroborates Bakhtin's argument that:

[T]here are no "neutral" words and forms—words and forms that can belong to "no one"; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 293)

It seems as if the author is referring to the constant dialogue he is having with the dead man, the serial killer George Doty and his grief for Doty's victims. However, "a dead man's voice" can

also be a reference to, and a dialogue with, “the dead voices” of the poets whom Wright translated and who might have influenced him (Smith xvi). The second stanza is even more explicit about the speaker’s agonized dialogues with the criminal and with his own Self, that is, his own consciousness:

(2)

Doty, if I confess I do not love you,
 Will you let me alone? I burn for my own lies.
 The nights electrocute my fugitive,
 My mind. I run like the bewildered mad
 At St. Clair Sanitarium, who lurk,
 Arch and cunning, under the maple trees,
 Pleased to be playing guilty after dark.
 Staring to bed, they croon self-lullabies.
 Doty, you make me sick. I am not dead.
 I croon my tears at fifty cents per line. (*CP* 82-83)

There is a small chorus of voices, a Bakhtinian heteroglossia, joined by the language of the commercial “PoBiz”, “I croon my tears at fifty cents per line”. This heteroglossia is even more audible in the well-known poem “A Note Left in Jimmy Leonard’s Shack” from *Saint Judas*. It begins:

Near the dry river’s water-mark we found
 Your brother Minnegan,
 Flopped like a fish against the muddy ground.
 Beany, the kid whose yellow hair turns green,
 Told me to find you, even in the rain,
 And tell you he was drowned.

I hid behind the chassis on the bank,
 The wreck of someone’s Ford:
 I was afraid to come and wake you drunk:
 You told me once the waking up was hard,
 The daylight beating at you like a board.
 Blood in my stomach sank. (*CP* 53)

As the title of the poem suggests, the speaker is reading “aloud” a note to us that he apparently wrote, which, similarly to the poem itself, is actually a speech act in a written form. The “reading” of the note turns into a dialogue with the absent addressee, the implied interlocutor “Jimmy Leonard”, “Minnegan’s brother”. Leaving the note conveys a fear to communicate directly with the interlocutor because of the anticipated reaction: “You told me once the waking up was hard, / The daylight beating at you like a board”. The third stanza lists more of the anticipated reactions which cause this fear and confusion:

Beside, you told him never to go out
 Along the river-side
 Drinking and singing, clattering about.
 You might have thrown a rock at me and cried
 I was to blame, I let him fall in the road
 And pitch down on his side. (*CP* 53)

We can see here how the speaker is involved in an agonizing internal dialogue with the absent addressee which completely inhibits him through fear. Yet this monologue-as-dialogue turns into an open quarrel in the last stanza:

Beany went home, and I got sick and ran,
 You old son of a bitch.
 You better hurry down to Minnegan;
 He’s drunk or dying now, I don’t know which,
 Rolled in the roots and garbage like a fish,
 The poor old man. (*CP* 54)

It seems that the speaker has finally conquered the fear and shouts out in desperation. Is this what he wrote or wanted to write? It opens up another avenue of psychological analysis of the speaker as a boy caught experiencing the terror of death, perhaps for the first time. There is also fear of his parents punishing him for being there, as the fourth stanza says: “Well, I’ll get hell enough when I get home / for coming up this far”. It is interesting that besides the dialogue, we can also overhear other voices and languages in his speech, further reiterating the presence of cultural heteroglossia. The line “Beany, the kid whose yellow hair turns green” suggests the context of a boy gang and the bizarre names they tease each other with. The swearing and shouting to which

the boy succumbs at the end, trying to gather some courage or in exasperation, reflect the voices and the language of the “grown-ups” from this particular cultural milieu. The poor men from the shacks on the banks of the Ohio river often experience the “daylight like a board beating at them”, a metaphor that sums up their lives. The presence of their voices is also marked by the reported speech in the second stanza: “You told me once the waking up was hard”. The typical language of the child is visible in his use of tropes in the description of the dead man’s body, such as the simile in “Flopped like a fish against the muddy ground”. Also, the boy as the speaker might be the only one who can see “Beany’s yellow hair turn green”. This childhood drama of fear, shock, confusion, swearing and death among the children and the drunks of the Ohio banks is also a chorus of voices which can be heard directly or indirectly in the language of these four stanzas.

If the presence of a story in the experiential and immanentist poetry serves the purpose of creating a poem which is more or less a reflection of the Order of Nature as one of Wordsworth’s dicta (Altieri, *Enlarging* 37-39), that is, a creative illusion of the experience only transferred from reality to the poem without imaginative poetic recreation, then what is the purpose of a story or an event also present in some of New Critical poems? There are narrative elements, logical expositions and concrete expressions in this poetry too, but why is not the result an experiential and immanent poem? It is interesting to note where the narrative threads lead in these poems, as can be seen from the analysis of a New Critical poem. The narrative construction and linear sequencing of the experience when present in these poems serve to illustrate, explore or poetically “research” a thesis, idea or concept, or maybe even suggest a question which the speaker voices in the poem. The speaker does not impart why or how he feels or how he is affected by his experiences. The voice does not seem to be immersed or to participate in the experience fully, except as an intellect or a questioning mind. This is evident in one of the frequently anthologized poems by Robert Penn Warren, “Mortal Limit”, which begins:

I saw the hawk ride updraft in the sunset over Wyoming.
It rose from coniferous darkness, past gray jags
Of mercilessness, past whiteness, into the gloaming
Of dream-spectral light above the last purity of snow-snags.

There—west—were the Tetons. Snow-peaks would soon be
 In dark profile to break constellations. Beyond what height
 Hangs now the black speck? Beyond what range will gold eyes see
 New ranges rise to mark a last scrawl of light. (Warren 530-531)

Upon first reading, we realize that there is a concrete event/experience that begins with the speaker watching a hawk in a concrete spatio-temporal setting: a sunset in Wyoming. Then the poem moves into a greater space, capturing the Tetons mountain range in the west where the hawk hangs in great heights like a “black speck”. But before we embark into the density of light and air thus captured in the poem, we wonder at the definite article “the”, precisely defining the noun “hawk” in the first line. Why is it not “a hawk”? Does the speaker refer to a particular hawk he watches every day? If so, the poem does not provide this context. The voice of the poem does not address a particular addressee, so the definite article can hardly be interpreted as a deictic or denotative device that indicates the distance between the speaker, addressee and the denoted object. This linguistic gesture might also be interpreted as the speaker’s attempt to involve the implied addressee (the reader) into the story immediately in order to create the illusion that they share the same familiar, contextual knowledge. However, as we can see from an analysis of the rest of the poem, it is the beginning of a different, symbolic “story” that the poem uses to illustrate a particular point, a thesis or a concept. As we are reading the poem, a sonnet with three quatrains and a rhyming couplet, we follow the development and defense of a poetic thesis which begins with its initial symbol—“the hawk”. We realize that it symbolizes the human spirit and the living beings which can uplift themselves into great heights. However, once confronted with the “thin air”, the “mortal limit” of their living bodies, they swing “into great circular downwardness”. The tug of the earth (the “rot”, the “rock” and the “darkness”), which is the force of the inevitable natural law of mortality, are all pulling downwards:

Or, having tasted that atmosphere's thinness, does it
 Hang motionless in dying vision before
 It knows it will accept the mortal limit,
 And swing into the great circular downwardness that will restore

The breath of earth? Of rock? Of rot? Of other such
 Items, and the darkness of whatever dream we clutch? (531)

The poem only seems like a matter-of-fact description of a concrete event or an experience: watching a hawk disappear into great heights from a particular, concrete place and time. However, Wyoming at sunset is only the background, the “scaffolding”, for the real design of the poem to be erected – conceptualization of the described story or the event as a symbol or a metaphor of a philosophical idea. Also, it is not a free meditation on an idea initiated by something concrete in the surroundings of the speaker. The poem starts with a predefined and premeditated symbol, “the hawk”, which then becomes any “hawk”, a generic concept. Thus, “the hawk” and the event of observing and meditating on its symbolic significance are not given as a concrete experience of a concrete immanent speaker and a protagonist. As the poem develops, the whole story of watching “the hawk” becomes only a development of the idea, the poetic argument about man’s spiritual and physical efforts to break through the sad mortal limit.

I have discussed some of the characteristics of Wright’s poetry written in the 1950s, which sustain the overarching thesis that the narrative, concrete/colloquial and metonymic strand within mainstream American poetry has been present and evolving even in the decade when the dominant literary tastes were different and inclined towards a polysemy of highly symbolic language, ambiguity, dramatic tension, tight organic unity, strict poetic forms and regular metrics. It was still the decade of New Critical poetry, although different voices were already being heard by the mid 1950s, such as the Beat poets. Undoubtedly, this new “howling” that had begun to disturb the consensus of the “containment culture” during the mid 1950s, had become more audible, shifting the poetic language towards the metonymic pole. This poetry was loosening itself through lists, parataxis and parallelisms, thus replacing the tight organic unity and the formalism of the earlier poetry.

James Wright’s Poetry in the 1960s

Wright’s poetry continued to develop along the previously discussed lines. His poetry of the 1960s is also situated in a concrete time and place, and the spatial and temporal references, its chronotope, further contributes to the general aura of concreteness this poetry conveys. Consider the title of the poem from *The Branch Will Not Break* “As I Step Over a Puddle at the End of

Winter, I Think of an Ancient Chinese Governor”. The title itself is a miniature narrative that defines the action or an event before the poem begins. It also provides a temporal reference for the poetic action, “the end of winter”. The title functions as a concrete overture to the main theme or idea delineated in the poem. It begins:

Po Chu-i, balding old politician,
 What’s the use?
 I think of you,
 Uneasily entering the gorges of the Yang-Tze,
 When you were being towed up the rapids
 Toward some political job or other
 In the city of Chungshou.
 You made it, I guess,
 By dark. (*CP* 111)

The poem continues to tell us about an actual Chinese governor (Po Chu-i) who made extraordinarily difficult trips to distant regions that verged on the absurd in order to perform his job, frequently having to be towed up rapids to cross the gorges of the Yang-Tze river. However, the chronotope changes in the second stanza:

But it is 1960, it is almost spring again,
 And the tall rocks of Minneapolis
 Build me my own black twilight
 Of bamboo ropes and waters.
 Where is Yuan Chen, the friend you loved?
 Where is the sea, that once solved the whole loneliness
 Of the Midwest? Where is Minneapolis? I can see nothing
 But the great terrible oak tree darkening with winter.
 Did you find the city of isolated men beyond mountains?
 Or have you been holding the end of a frayed rope
 For a thousand years? (*CP* 111)

The poem gives a specific point of time, almost spring in 1960, when the speaker crosses “a puddle”, an act which provides the associative link with the Chinese governor. The poem also gives place names which preoccupy the mind and the eye of the speaker. Minneapolis, the American Midwest, is obviously the *topos* of the theme of the poem. However, despite these

precise spatio-temporal indicators, the poem “decides” to remain only vaguely suggestive and indicative about the revelations and wisdom gained from this act of associating the two crossings – one in the present over “a puddle” and the other over a gorge in China in the distant past. It seems as if the poem has lured us into the action, introduced by the long title, only to find ourselves like the speaker, facing yet another kind of “gorge”, “a black twilight” of ethereal comprehension and understanding of things: “And the tall rocks of Minneapolis / Build me my own *black twilight* / Of bamboo ropes and waters” (CP 111). Are we to gather from the questions which the speaker throws seemingly at random at the addressee, “the governor”, and at himself, that he is confronted with an existential abyss of loneliness and the impossibility of bridging it? Addressing the governor, he poses his first existential question in the second line: “Po Chu-i, balding old politician / What’s the use?” (CP 111). However, it seems as though he addresses the question to any man about the Sisyphus-like, repetitive efforts of one’s life. In other words: why put so much effort into and repeat the same thing all over again when the outcome will always be marred by human temporality, as the epigraph of the poem suggests, “And how can I, born in evil days / and fresh from failure, ask a kindness / of Fate?—Written A.D. 819” (CP 111).

The questions continue in the second stanza, which consists of almost nothing else, yet the primary one that confronts the speaker remains unanswered: whether there is any use in trying to reach people/human kind, symbolized here by urban Minneapolis and Minnesota, another set of concrete place names. The poem suggests that this vast and eternal loneliness could be “solved” or dissolved if the sea still existed there, “Where is the sea, that once solved the whole loneliness / Of the Midwest?” (CP 111) It appears that he is left with ceaseless attempts to try to cross over and reach humankind, even though his rope is “frayed” like the “absurd” Chinese governor’s, the real Camusean hero, who succeeds by trying and rejoices in the acceptance of the absurd human situation and its transient nature and mortality.

In addition to this concrete quality, Wright’s poetry in the 1960s retains and further explores the other characteristics discussed previously, the metonymic, narrative, and confessional mode of referring to real people and real places that were part of the poet’s life (Mary Bly, William Duffy’s farm, George Dotty, Fargo North Dakota, Central Ohio, Martins Ferry, Ohio). Analyzing specific poems will demonstrate how these characteristics sustain the immanent and the experiential mode of Wright’s poetry in the 1960s.

The metonymic structure becomes increasingly prominent in Wright's poetry during the period. The very short poem, "In the Cold House", demonstrates the co-existence of two structures: the visible metonymic and the often hidden metaphoric one. The poem also captures those moments of deep realization when the mind or the soul speaks to the human being about matters deeply buried in the consciousness:

I slept a few minutes ago,
Even though the stove has been out for hours.
I am growing old.
A bird cries in bare elder trees. (*CP* 130)

The third line is an utterance released from the depths of the human soul. As psychology tells us, these moments of deep realization usually happen upon waking or falling asleep, on the thresholds between two different modes of consciousness, that is, in the liminal space of "either-or". The speaker is waking up but not aware of how long he has slept. Upon being awake he is struck by the dreadful realization of his temporality, of growing old and eventual death. Is this existential dread triggered by the cold room and the bare trees outside? The utterance is framed within the image of "the cold house" and the "bare elder trees" outside, as the human being, the speaker, is framed or caught within his transient human nature. "The cold house" in the title becomes the total metaphor for this human condition—man thrown into the facticity of the world and facing its limits. It is a succinct illustration of David Lodge's argument, based on Jakobson's theory about metaphoric and metonymic structures, that every poem is inevitably and finally a metaphor, since it is always about something else and stands for something else – either an idea, feeling, mental discovery or an event (Lodge 109-111). This short poem is definitely about something else. It is a metaphorical vehicle for its tenor—the existential fear and deep realization of man's "mortal limit". But the interior of the "cold house", the inside of the metaphor, is a metonymic structure. Its layout is based on metonymy and motivated by the principle of contiguity. There is a room, a stove, a man sleeping inside and birds on trees outside, nothing unusual or unexpected as everything conforms to the logic of realism. The "stove" is neither equated nor made to stand for something else. The poem does not employ the metaphoric principle of substitution, that is, of equation of different concepts on the basis of their similarity, in this instance, "Stove-world". It does not *select* concepts from the two different spheres that are

available to the creative mind, the world of concrete objects, “the stove”, and that of abstract concepts, “the world”. It only combines the elements on the basis of their congruity, that is, what is in the room: physical coldness and the human emotional and mental coldness at waking-up and being struck with an existential thought. In the end we recognize “the cold house” as the metaphor for “the world” by the literary convention of intentional artifice or “deceit” that the poem uses.

In an attempt to demonstrate the basic characteristics of the typical immanent poem, defined in the introductory chapter of the thesis and identified in the first section of this chapter, I want to consider “Undermining of the Defense Economy” as an example to serve this purpose:

- (1) Stairway, face, window,
- (2) Mottled animals
- (3) Running over the public buildings,
- (4) Maple and elm.
- (5) In the autumn
- (6) Of early evening,
- (7) A pumpkin
- (8) Lies on its side,
- (9) Turning yellow as the face
- (10) Of a discharged general.
- (11) It's no use complaining, the economy
- (12) Is going to hell with all these radical
- (13) Changes,
- (14) Girls the color of butterflies
- (15) That can't be sold.
- (16) Only after nightfall,
- (17) Little boys lie still, awake,
- (18) Wondering, wondering,
- (19) Delicate little boxes of dust. (CP 123)

The poem begins with its *locus* of action, which according to the title, is most probably the Pentagon in the 1960s, one of the most conspicuous government administration buildings during the Vietnam War. It is easy to assume this but more difficult to understand the “mottled animals” in the second line. Are they a reminder of the other world – the world of nature—coexistent with the man-made world of culture tainted by the Vietnam War? The animals are mentioned in line

two after the context of the “public buildings” is established in line one and three. We can infer that the faces of the people inside the buildings might look like “mottled animals” to an affected and critical viewer, standing outside the public building both physically and ideologically, or because of the decorations, hats, uniforms and the other military paraphernalia. A temporal reference follows the image, an early autumn evening, as something lying near the building is still visible. The discarded pumpkin provides a comparison for the face of “a discharged general” in line seventeen. The simile is a decisive point when the poet opts to remain on the path of the metonymic presentation of experience by selecting and reporting what is logically possible to be present in that scene, thus creating an illusion that this realistic scene is only transferred or reported as it was to the poem. It is not unusual to find a rotten pumpkin in the street in front of a public building where rallies have taken place. The artifice is in the poetic selection. The poet has an eye for spotting an element, a detail in the surroundings that, when reported in the poem, assumes symbolic meaning. The poem does not hide the act of conferring symbolic meaning upon these details. The concepts are conjoined on the basis of their similar features; the round face-like pumpkin turning yellow, thus old and bad, is like the human face of the general, maybe also turning yellow, old and bad, discharged from service. But the poem, as we have said, maintains the evidence of this equation: one thing is like something else. The poet could have tried a metaphor, but instead he opted for a metonymic recollection of reality. On the path of this recollection or report of the event, the voice stops and notices the potential symbolism in the details of the selected elements and foregrounds them in similes. The public building grows into a Bakhtinian chronotope, representing “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that is artistically expressed”, that is, “the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (*Dialogic* 84). In this spatio-temporal scene, somebody’s voice is heard commenting on the time in despondency, “It’s no use complaining, the economy / Is going to hell with all these radical / Changes” (line 11). Is it the discharged general’s voice overheard nearby, or some concerned social or professional group, perhaps the discharged military officers, speaking indirectly through the poetic voice? It is possible that it is all of them, since there is no escape from the heteroglossia of the socially constructed medium of language. However, there is something which does not depend on the economy, the “girls” which appear in the scene, “the color of butterflies that cannot be sold” (14-15). In other words, the problem

cannot be solved with the beauty of the girls or the butterflies, which the “little boys” often dream about: “Only after nightfall, the little boys lie still, awake / Wondering, wondering / Delicate little boxes of dust” (lines 16-19). If we add the context of the 1960s, the war in Vietnam, the fear of drafting and dying, and TV reports on casualties and funerals of young men, “the delicate little boxes of dust”, which keep these young boys awake, are not difficult to interpret as the general psychosis caused by the fear of being drafted and getting killed at the time.

As we have seen, the poem relies on a concrete scene set in front of a government building which is narrated through the details seen by and reflected upon by the viewer/speaker’s eye and mind located within it. His selection of details, their description and the comparisons through simile construct a metonymic rather than a metaphoric structure of the whole poem in which things are selected on the basis of their contiguity and the logic of a particular, realistic context, instead of metaphoric equations or substitutions.

As argued before, the much discussed change of Wright’s poetics after the 1950s was more of a formal and particularly of a prosodic character. His interest in the downtrodden characters, the existential place of the human being thrown into the givenness of the world and its efforts to comprehend it all, continue to be present in his poetry. Wright’s most anthologized poem, “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota” from *The Branch*, is well-known primarily for its last abrupt line: “I have wasted my life”. This line draws attention as a loud cry coming from the suppressed sense of existential nothingness. Here, we find ourselves drawn to a realistic picture clearly explicated by the specific title. The speaker is in a hammock at a particular farm which belongs to a particular man in a specific location—Pine Island, Minnesota. Like the other long titles, it reads like a caption of a photo or a postcard, that is, of a verbal image. This image-poem, one of many in Wright’s poetry, is an answer to the call in the 1960s to “show not tell”, a dictum similar to the Imagists that the poet Bly and his informal circle of Mid-Western poets, the Deep Image poets, voiced again. The poem begins:

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow. (CP 114)

The speaker is lying down and reporting certain minute and not so minute details in the natural surroundings. The butterfly on the trunk above his head is the first thing he reports on, but the butterfly is neither pretty, nor interesting, nor exotic, but instead the color of “bronze”. It seems that it is selected by the speaker simply because it is there. It is not intentionally looked for, but rather just observed as it is in reality. The poem continues to present the oneness of the “sleeping butterfly”, “the wind” and a “green shadow” (“Blowing like a leaf in a green shadow”). It is a perfect verbal picture which catches the minute motions and movements:

Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of a last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones. (*CP* 114)

The report continues in a calm and matter-of-fact voice about an empty house with cows passing, which his senses receive only as monotonous sounds, “the cowbells”, coming one after the other. There is no foregrounding of a particular detail, instead everything is presented evenly and flatly as if the voice has no interest in, or passion for, any one thing in particular. Then for a moment the speaker entertains himself with a very unusual comparison, something so trivial and worthless as last year's “horse droppings” and “golden stones”. The voice still does not change its dispassionate tone. The line breaks in the middle of this comparison, slowing the rhythm even further before stopping completely with a full stop.

It is interesting to note here how the voice sends several messages with this comparison. It intimates that I am indifferent to the values of things and therefore I can compare the most base and insignificant things like “last year's horse droppings” with precious metals. It indicates how many things there are in the world which I have not noticed before, and it suggests that everything has its beauty, or that beauty is relative and depends on the perspective from which it is looked upon. As indicated before, however, the voice is not excited. After these instances it comes completely to a pause, “I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on”. We wait until the voice resumes again and reports on the final thing the eye perceives, “A chicken hawk floats

over, looking for home”. This is the last thing which goes through his mind, a quest or search for something, a home. The poem comes to a stop, after the situation constructed in the poem affects the speaker into a state that makes him utter “I have wasted my life”, in the last line of the poem. Judging from what we have seen and heard in this verbal picture, the poet/speaker/human being has found itself in one of the situations that existential philosophy, more precisely, Heideggerian philosophy, explains as brief, infrequent moments, triggered by profound boredom that amounts to indifference towards what-is in reality. We can genuinely hear the indifferent tone of the reporting voice in the poem. However, this is not boredom which we experience when bored with something in particular, such as a person, a book or a movie. It is an affective state in which the key-mood is dread or angst. It is not fear or anxiety of something, says Heidegger, because in fear or anxiety, one “loses his bearings” (“What is Metaphysics?” 248). This is a state when the mind is pervaded with a strange sense of calm that strikes one dumb:

In dread, as we say, “one feels something uncanny.” What is this “something” (*es*) and this “one”? We are unable to say what gives “one” that uncanny feeling. “One” just feels it generally (*im Ganzen*). All things, and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread, this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, in this “nothing.” (“What is Metaphysics?” 249)

Caught in this ineffable state of dread, “we often try to break the empty silence by words spoken at random”, Heidegger says (249), and that is precisely what happens to our speaker in the poem. On the one hand, what we witness is a description of a revelatory state of mind when the human being, thrown into the givenness of the world, experiences a rare moment of comprehending its true Being. For a few brief moments the mind can look upon itself as somebody else and consequently judge itself, come to a conclusion or revelation as occurs in the poem. As Heidegger explains, confronting its Being for a second, the human consciousness can perceive itself in the midst of “what-is-in-totality”, that is, it is confronted with its transient nature, its mortality and “Nothing” (242-249).

On the other hand, this poem can be analyzed as a perfect example of a “deep image” poem, on whose maxims Bly insisted during the 1960s and afterwards, although he never defined them clearly and even rejected the phrase “deep image”, as Kevin Bushell states. Bly rejected the name “deep image” because, as he says, it “suggests a geographical location in the psyche”, while he prefers “a notion of the poetic image which involves psychic energy and movement” (Bushell, web-site source). In other words, this poetic image is not just a perfect verbal picture, but it reveals an “associational leap from the conscious to the unconscious . . . a leap from the known part of the mind to the unknown part and back to the known” (Bly, *Leaping* 1). “The real joy of poetry is to experience this leaping inside a poem. A poet who is “leaping” makes a jump from an object soaked in unconscious substance to an object or idea soaked in conscious psychic substance” (Bly, *Leaping* 4). The result, as we have seen, is a revelatory experience similar to the human encounter with its ineffable Being in totality. Therefore in Wright’s poetry, the “deep image” which triggers and depicts the leap from the unconscious to the conscious is actually a leap into an existential state of mind which produces the ensuing existential statements. The “deep image” poetry of the 1960s, as Wright’s poetry aptly demonstrates, is merely one component that fits into the same model of the immanent and experiential poem that exhibits concrete, narrative, metonymic and confessional characteristics. I would argue that literary criticism sometimes applies the descriptive term “surreal” to Deep Image poetry very loosely, for as we have seen in Wright’s poetry, these images are often metaphorical constructs imbedded in metonymic structures. They originate in and emerge from the structural, metonymic unity of the poem. The term “surreal” brings to mind automatic writing, random language emitting from the depths of the unconscious, which numerous French poets experimented with at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bly decidedly defines this surrealist quality in *Leaping Poetry* as rooted in the Spanish (not French) surrealism and their modernist poets, especially Federico Garcia Lorca:

French surrealism and Spanish surrealism both contain wonderful leaps, but whereas French surrealism often longs for the leaps *without* any specific emotion—many believe that the unconscious does not *have* emotions—the Spanish poets believe that it *does*. The poet enters the poem excited, with the emotions alive; he is angry or ecstatic, or disgusted. There are a lot of exclamation marks, visible or invisible. Almost all the poems in Lorca’s *Poet in New York* are written with the poet profoundly moved, flying. (28)

If we take Bly's poem "Waking from Sleep" from *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, where the "deep image" aesthetics is rather pronounced, and compare it to a poem by Lorca from the early 1930s, "Casida of the Dark Doves", we can see that Bly's poem retains the narrative flow of the "outside", external worldly logic as he leaves some "signposts" to guide the reader through the images when they become rather surreal. The first stanza begins:

Inside the veins there are navies setting forth,
 Tiny explosions at the water lines,
 And seagulls weaving in the wind of the salty blood. (*Silence* 13)

After the title establishes the background of the poetic experience—a waking up—whatever happens in the "veins", in the "blood", be it "navies", "explosions" or "seagulls", is acceptable and understandable to us; we know it only "feels like" to have them in your blood stream at waking up. In the second stanza the phrase, "It is the morning", explains further that it is one of the mornings when it feels like "the country has slept the whole winter":

It is the morning. The country has slept the whole winter.
 Window seats were covered with fur skins, the yard was full
 Of stiff dogs, and hands that clumsily held heavy books. (*Silence* 13)

Again in the third stanza, it becomes "natural" to hear "shouts rising" from "the harbor of blood", "masts" and a "wooden tackle", since we are in the open sea of the "salty blood" where "ships" are part of the expected environment. This is how the poem celebrates waking up in a joyful morning which we know "our master has left us":

Now we wake, and rise from bed, and eat breakfast!
 Shouts rise from the harbor of the blood,
 Mist, and masts rising, the knock of wooden tackle in the sunlight.

Now we sing, and do tiny dances on the kitchen floor.
 Our whole body is like a harbor at dawn;
 We know that our master has left us for the day. (*Silence* 13)

Compare those strategies with those found in Lorca's "Casida of the Dark Doves:"

I saw two dark doves
 through the branches of laurel.
 The one was the sun,
 and the other the moon.
 ‘Little neighbors,’ I said to them,
 ‘where is my tomb?’
 ‘In my tail,’ said the sun.
 ‘In my throat,’ said the moon.
 And I who was walking
 with the globe at my belt
 saw two snowy eagles
 and a girl, who was naked.
 The one was the other,
 and the girl was no one.
 ‘Little eagles,’ I said to them,
 ‘where is my tomb?’
 ‘In my tail,’ said the sun.
 ‘In my throat,’ said the moon.
 I saw two dark doves
 through the branches of laurel.
 The one was the other
 and the two were no one. (*Selected Poems* 183)

It is obvious how the somnambulistic or “cinematographic” transformations and reincarnations of the objects and the birds into one another happen in each new line of the poem, without the poet leaving any visible sign that this is a dream or any other psychic experience explicable in logical terms. The poet not only uses metaphors, but also explains them to us. Regarding the “two dark doves”, we are told that “The one was the sun / and the other the moon”. The poet distorts the metaphor at the end of the poem when he finally informs us that “The one was the other / and the two were no one”. This is one of the striking examples of modernist European poetry that moves beyond metaphorical language, deconstructing the metaphor itself. Thus, the “surrealism” of Deep Image poetry which Bly claims as its indispensable quality, is very different from both Spanish and French versions of surrealism. The surrealist aura of the images in Bly’s poem is “explained” as part of the general, realistically defined experience of the poem—waking up.

Another poem which lets out a striking utterance or a spontaneous “cry” at its end is “Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry Ohio”. Here we witness a real “leap” into the unconscious and back to the conscious, from the unknown to the known, that brings a statement that is shocking because unexpected from—“Their sons grow suicidally beautiful”:

In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home.
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other’s bodies. (*CP* 113)

Before we start analyzing where that statement or the utterance comes from, it is worth considering what precedes it, what kind of other voices and utterances “can be heard”. Actually, it is a clamor of images and their accompanying voices, such as “Polacks” and “Negroes”, the workers and watchmen employed in big industrial plants in small town America. Who they are is thus foregrounded in the picture with exact names of mills and other locations, Tiltonsville, Bentwood, Wheeling Steel. Are they all dreaming of heroes like the “ruptured night watchman” in line four? We are led to assume so by the linguistic structure of the stanza. Lines three and four are noun clauses of the same subject and verb in the phrase “I think of” from the second line. The effect of conjoining, their togetherness, is reinforced by the repetition of the conjunction “and”. This parallelism reinforces the sense that all these men are in the same boat. Consequently, they are all “ruptured” spiritually like the “night watchman”. Is this because of the incongruity of their small lives and their big dreams? They are in a state of Sartre’s “bad faith”, a

state of self-deception and illusion when one does not act and exercise one's freedom and free-will regardless of the circumstances.⁶

The second and third stanzas, with their innuendo of powerlessness and impotence, offer some explanations. If we add the causal conjunction "therefore" after the first stanza, an argument proceeds that if the fathers are torn between their desires and dreams and their powerlessness to fulfill these as industrial workers, then they are tired and impotent both spiritually and physically. They are ashamed to go home to their neglected wives, hungry for love. "Therefore" in the third stanza continues the previous argument. Their young sons seem to them even more powerful, stronger and "suicidally beautiful", every autumn when the high-school football matches begin in front of the mainly parental spectators. The phrase "Suicidally beautiful" is a deviation from the expected arrangement of adjectives one would expect with "the young". The phrase is composed of a pair of opposite concepts: "suicide", on the one hand as death and destruction, and "beauty" on the other, as health and life. What is more, the structure of the poem reveals other oppositional pairs, such as fathers-sons, old-young, ruptured-beautiful, dreamers-players. The phrase "suicidally beautiful" creates tension and a sense of forcefulness, because the adverb "suicidally" has been assigned an unusual function to modify a semantically opposite adjective, "beautiful", instead of a verb. It is the same forcefulness which we find in the last line, "And gallop terribly against each other's bodies". It is this "certain ferocity of emotion [that] sets him apart from other poets of his generation", as Bly comments on Wright's poetry ("The Work of James Wright" 83). The striking phrase, "suicidally beautiful", makes the reader pause, but more significantly it continues the innuendo of impotence, powerlessness and shame, the "perfect" reasons for suicide. The fathers are growing helpless and old, while the wives are starved for love, yet both are reminded and confronted with what they lack by watching their young and beautiful in the stadiums every year. These lines reveal the "painful thoughts" which Bly refers to when analyzing Wright's poetry, "In poems the deepest thoughts are often the most painful thoughts and they come to consciousness only despite the rationalist road-blocks, by

⁶ "[I]t is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Self-deception on the contrary implies in essence the unity of *a single* consciousness". See Sartre's essay "Self-Deception" in Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: A Meridian Book. New American Library, 1975) 302.

slipping past the defenses of the ego” (“The Work of James Wright” 91). By beginning with a very communal scene of high-school football in a small town, the poem attempts to delve deeper into the suppressed, collective unconscious of the community. In an interview with Dave Smith, Wright talks about his experience as a semi-professional football player growing up in Ohio. He refers to American football as an important communal event with ritualized forms of confrontation and violence (Smith 3).

There is a clamor of voices speaking through the voice of the Ohioan poet, that is, through the poetic “I”. The sociolect of the male chorus is most audible, I would argue, in the unflattering trope describing the wives as chickens in the second stanza, “Their women cluck like starved pullets”. Although the speaker uses “their”, the line can be read as free indirect speech.⁷ If we add the element of indirect speech, the line reads, “They say that their women cluck like starved pullets / dying for love”. One recognizes in the simile the lexis, or typical vocabulary, of the working-class men who “nurse long beers” in small-town bars after working hard in the mills. In this macho and sexist language, women are often referred to, amongst other things, as “chicks” who annoy men talking about feelings, an example of another cultural stereotype. It is even more resonant with the “Polacks” mentioned in the poem. At an inter-textual level, one cannot but recall another Polack whose machismo is prominent in American literature, Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams’ *A Street Car Named Desire*.

The poem therefore reveals an implied cultural dialogue between the speaker of the poem and the men mentioned in the poem through an intertextual, cultural conversation joined by other similar voices from literature. These lines reflect a sense of frustration and yearning reinforced by the consonance of the sound “k” in “cluck” and “like”, the onomatopoeic sound of a beak opening and shutting, which also introduces associations with the open human mouth and hunger, “dying for love”.

This poem is one in a series of Wright’s poems that employ a confessional tone regardless of any references to his personal life. The confessional tone is created by the facts which comprise the chronotope in the poem—autumn in Martins Ferry, Ohio. It is left to the

⁷ “What is especial interest to stylistics is the impression this mode gives of both a character and narrator speaking simultaneously, through a kind of ‘dual voice’. . . . [T]his mode displays all the features of indirectness but, crucially, it lacks a reporting clause, and inverted commas” (Simpson 82).

reader to contextualize these loose biographical references to the poet's place of birth and growing up. However, the poem is confessional mostly because it tells a story. The speaker is situated in a concrete place, "Shreve High football stadium", and thinking about concrete people that surround him, he even provides the names of the actual towns these people come from. Through this strategy, he creates the *illusion* that the poem "confesses" a concrete, real-life event.

Many of Wright's poems end by leaving the speaker or the voice of the poem literally in the dark. Sometimes it is a beneficial dark, a place of acceptance of the human limitation, a chance to "ponder it all", to find answers for the important questions such as the self's place and mission in one's life, the phenomena, etc. The poems "By a Lake in Minnesota" and "Beginning" both end in this dark place. First, we look at "By a Lake in Minnesota":

Upshore from the cloud—
 The slow whale of country twilight—
 The spume of light falls into valleys
 Full of roses.

And below,
 Out of the placid waters,
 Two beavers, mother and child,
 Wave out long ripples
 To the dust of dead leaves
 On the shore.

And the moon walks,
 Hunting for hidden dolphins
 Behind the darkening combers
 Of the ground.

And downshore from the cloud,
 I stand, waiting
 For dark. (CP 126-27)

This is a poem that provides an effective depiction of movements in space. Through the wonderfully puzzling word "upshore", the first line modifies a particular space. It seems as if the

speaker is looking at the sky and noticing a lake-shaped formation of clouds and its shore. Thus it is “upshore” from the “lake-cloud”. Using this deictic or pointing device to denote terrestrial phenomena “shore” and “lake” in the sky, the poem provides a kind of “metaphoric directions”. This metaphor “lake - cloud” is half-hidden in the adverbial phrase, “Upshore from the cloud”. In the second line, the speaker is still pointing to the sky at the approach of twilight, “The slow whale of country twilight—”. This is a dense image packed with broad spatio-temporal references such as “country twilight” which is compared to a “whale”, another spatial reference to oceans or seas. Yet this line is a typical example of the much criticized “of phrase” in American poetry. Bly criticizes the frequent use of “of phrases” in Wright’s poetry, but he also gives precise descriptions of their various effects:

In *The Branch* there are too many *of* phrases: inhuman fire of jewels, hallways of a diamond, pillows of the sea, happiness of small winds, oak trees of heaven, waters of air, shores of melting snow, etc. . . . Some of the *of* phrases are more interesting than the others. There are actually two types: the first, purely descriptive: “Graves of Chippewas and Norwegians,” which could be rephrased as “graves *belonging* to Chippewas, etc.” The second sort is quite different. When a man says “ruins of the sun” he is imagining a substance that is neither ruins nor sun, but some third substance, which has never existed before, created by the words. Other examples are “daylight of the body,” “black waters of the suburbs,” “heaven of my skull”. . . . They are a kind of vision, rather than a description. Nevertheless, the reader has the feeling there are too many *of*’s. (“The Work of James Wright” 96-7)

I would argue that even though there are too many “of phrases” in the first stanza, they produce interesting stylistic and rhetorical qualities:

The slow whale of country twilight—
the spume of light falls into valleys
full of roses. (*CP* 126)

In the first line, the adjectival phrase, “the slow whale”, is linked to the prepositional phrase, “of country twilight” by the possessive function of the “of phrase”, that is, the “slow whale” belongs to, or is part of the “country twilight”. However, stylistically and rhetorically, the “slow whale”

which can be white, gray, or black, and huge, as well as overwhelming like a natural phenomenon, actually modifies the “country twilight”. This rhetorical structure “explains” its own metaphor constructed by the linking function of the “of phrase”, revealing a relationship of metaphoric comparison between the two on the basis of likeness. The next two lines of the stanza create a metonymic connectedness of the whole image, especially since “the spume” is part of, or belongs to, the same context of “the slow whale”. Despite this metonymic contiguity, we are aware of the metaphoric lay-out of the stanza. The “twilight” in the sky approaching is the “slow whale” which at some point spumes red light like “roses”, that is, the sun which turns red before setting and ends the twilight. The poem continues to move further in space:

And below,
out of the placid waters,
two beavers, mother and child,
weave out long ripples
to the dust of dead leaves
on the shore.

And the moon walks,
hunting for hidden dolphins
behind the darkening combers
of the ground.

And downshore from the cloud,
I stand, waiting
For dark. (*CP* 126-127)

It is now turned towards the earth, where the “beavers” go on with their daily lives in a place where the boundaries between water and ground disappear. Outside the lake, the beavers still “weave out long ripples” on the ground covered with dead leaves since the water and the ground, as their habitat, are one and the same for them. The poem then points up to the sky again, it is night and “the moon” hunts “dolphins”. Remembering the “whale-twilight” metaphor of the first stanza, we are not surprised now by the “dolphins” in the “sea-sky”, hiding behind “darkening combers / of the ground”, which again refers to both the sea and the earth. The poem draws an incredible circular line between sky-earth-sky and captures the sense of circular movement in

space. In the last stanza, the “I” of the poem explains its location, it is “downshore from the cloud”, which is again as ambiguous as “the upshore” in the first stanza. Besides this circular movement, which reminds one of the circular movements of water in the atmosphere, there is also a strong sense of unity between the sky, earth and water.

At the same time, everything is in its habitat or in its place in this poem. The beavers are in the water and on the ground, the human being is on the ground by the lake watching, except for the “dolphins” and the “whales” which are in the sky. It appears that they are either “misplaced” or that their real place is in the language and the metaphors the human being constructs. After its intensive observation of the place and movements in this place, the human being stands waiting for the dark in the end. It seems that all the protagonists mentioned in the poem are waiting for the dark. It is as if the poem is saying that humans can create metaphors, that is, they can re-create the world and this space in their own ways, but that their place is still “downshore”, standing in the darkness, in the limited knowledge about everything around them and beyond them. There is a similar message in the poem “Beginning”:

The moon drops one or two feathers into the field.
 The dark wheat listens.
 Be still.
 Now.
 There they are, the moon’s young, trying
 Their wings.
 Between trees, a slender woman lifts up the lovely shadow
 Of her face, and now she steps into the air, now she is gone
 Wholly, into the air.
 I stand alone by an elder tree, I do not dare breathe
 Or move.
 I listen.
 The wheat leans back toward its own darkness,
 And I lean toward mine. (*CP* 127)

After the metaphorical re-creation of the world in the first and second lines and the “slender woman” who can disappear back and forth in the air, we find the observer of these semi-shadowy metaphorical images also in the dark like “the wheat” in the final two lines. The

speaker appears reconciled with the existential necessity of continuing to live in a semi-shadow of knowledge and to accept the impossibility of fully comprehending existence and reality; he remains to “lean” on his darkness.

There are poems such as “Today I was so happy, so I made this poem”, in which the speaker experiences an existential joy of living when every minute of his life is as important and big as a “mountain”:

As the plump squirrel scampers
 Across the roof of the corncrib,
 The moon suddenly stands up in the darkness,
 And I see that it is impossible to die.
 Each moment of time is a mountain.
 An eagle rejoices in the oak trees of heaven,
 Crying
This is what I wanted. (CP 133)

Nothing particularly important happens that would trigger the voice to declare: “And I see it is impossible to die / Each moment of time is a mountain”, except maybe the happy image of the “plumb squirrel” almost dancing on its food (the “corncrib”). In this image of sheer simplicity, everything is in its place and reconciled. “*This is what I wanted*” cries “the eagle”, or it is what the speaker wants to hear, thus projecting his own happiness upon nature. All the existential worries are postponed and living in each moment becomes paramount.

If the happiness in the above poem is not triggered by anything in particular except the realization that life is a gift and each moment counts, the happiness in the poem “Mary Bly” is triggered by something more specific, the baby with the “full, soft, red hair”. The awe the poet feels towards this new life and its beauty after feeling “worn out by [a] long winter”, finds expression in the beautiful image at the end of the poem:

I sit here, doing nothing, alone, worn out by long winter.
 I feel the light breath of the newborn child.
 Her face is smooth as the side of an apricot,
 Eyes quick as her blond mother’s hands.
 She has full, soft, red hair, and as she lies quiet

In her tall mother's arms, her delicate hands
 Weave back and forth.
 I feel the seasons changing beneath me,
 Under the floor.
 She is braiding the waters of air into plaited manes
 Of happy colts.
 They canter, without making a sound, along the slopes
 Of melting snow. (*CP* 133-4)

It is as if the movements of the baby's hands, which "weave back and forth", create a beauty which touches him deeply and moves him to create. He sees her movements, this new energy which is powerful and beautiful, "braiding" all the elements into a beautiful whole; waters, air, sand and animals. This is a verbal "color picture"; the translucency of the waters, the reds and the browns of the colts' manes and the whiteness of the melting snow are all the colors of the red-haired, delicate baby. But this is a silent picture, since the poet insists that "they canter without making a sound, along the shore / of melting snow". This quality of a silent movie scene with a lack of auditory sensations reinforces the visual ones, the colors and the movements thus become more vivid. This poem begins with a matter-of-fact, logical and confessional language with the precise reference to Mary Bly, his friend's, Bly's, baby-daughter and his tall, blonde wife, the baby's mother. However, at the end, the poem is transformed into a metaphorical image, that is, into an allegory, as the graceful energy and beauty of the red-haired baby-girl is compared to the equally beautiful and graceful energy of the colts, galloping against the white, snowy background. This is a dynamic syncretism. At the same time, there is a sense of transformation or a transcendence of the speaker, from a "worn out" observer to a creative human being, a poet who attempts to recreate the beauty he sees. The poem reflects and follows this same process stylistically and rhetorically, beginning with the narrative, matter-of-fact lines in the first part of the poem before turning into the metaphorical ones.

American mainstream poetry after the 1950s has often been categorized as neo-Romantic, since the general poetic stance resides basically on a dualism between the Subject (the human consciousness) and the Object (nature). However, with poets like Wright constantly preoccupied with self-acceptance, which comes from a deeper understanding of and immersion into nature, this dualism becomes more than simply a relationship. It is a complete belonging to and feeling one with what Emerson calls "Nature". Emerson speaks of "Nature" as the universe, as distinct

from “nature” in the common-sense as the natural world surrounding us and the man-made world of culture:

Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked this name, Nature. In enumerating the values of nature and casting up their sum, I shall use the word in both senses;—in its common and in its philosophical import. (1111)

In other words, the material world which man can relate to through his senses, including his body, is “nature”, which together with man-made culture, or art, are the two component parts of the universe, of “Nature”. However, the human soul rather than the body is part of the universal Soul. Thus, “Nature” and the human soul are all the creations of the “Over Soul”, “Father”, “God” or “Spirit”. Emerson uses these various terms to express the idea of a universal spiritual creator being part of its own larger creation, and conversely, the creation being part of its creator. This is the main point in his philosophy where, I would argue, he diverges from the idea of dualism and instead emphasizes the *Panentheistic* idea of the god (creator/over-soul) being absolutely omnipresent and standing beyond its creation (“pan”) and at the same time being inside its creation (“en”). This ontology is at the core of Emerson’s philosophy of art, experience and knowledge:

Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour, and is not reminded of the flux of all things? Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence. Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life, wherein, as in a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine. This universal soul, he calls Reason: it is not mine, or thine or his, but we are its; we are its property and men. And the blue sky in which the private earth is buried, the sky with its eternal calm, and full of everlasting orbs, is the type of Reason. That which, intellectually considered, we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries, embodies it in his language, as the FATHER. (1118-9)

In Wright's poetry, nature in the common sense is an often frequented place where the poetic voice stops to "confide" its gloom and its sense of failure or confusion. It often becomes the meeting place of the human being and the other inhabitants of nature, all of which are the creations of one and the same creator. In his later poetry, Wright's poetic "I" frequents and considers nature not as the Object or that which is not ME, but as the other part of ME. In this poetry, the soul of the human being communicates with the spirits of the other living beings in nature. Consequently, trying to communicate with his own Self, he tries to communicate with "Nature" and its Creator, since they all are part of the One. Nature finds a home in "me" and "me" reciprocally finds a home in Nature.

The last stanza of "Two Horses Playing in the Orchard" plainly declares this panentheistic principle of unity. After watching a pair of horses "steal" apples from somebody's land, the voice says:

Too soon, a man will scatter them,
 Although I do not know his name,
 His age, or how he came to own
 A horse, an apple tree, a stone.
 I let those horses in to steal
 On principle, because I feel
 Like half a horse myself, although
 Too soon, too soon, already. Now. (*CP* 126)

This stanza seems like a morality play addressing Everyman that has forgotten that in principle you cannot own a stone, a land or a horse. Instead you can just be one with them. The voice lets the "horses" eat the apples. The idea of knowledge that nature provides is thus strongly emphasized in the symbolism of "apples", which seem to dominate and bring the whole picture together. They even appear in the "horses" dreams". Here as in many of Wright's poems, the Frostian way of only "taking" symbols and metaphors as "ready-mades" from reality, becomes evident. What is more, the poem rhymes and has a regular iambic tetrameter meter, similar to the majority of Frost's poems. The intertextual reference to "After Apple Picking" and "Mending Wall" is therefore not coincidental.

The short lyric poem “Milkweed” has a succinct beginning, middle and an end, adhering to the demands of the New Narrative poetry of the 1980s:

While I stood here, in the open, lost in myself,
 I must have looked a long time
 Down the corn rows, beyond grass,
 The small house,
 White walls, animals lumbering toward the barn.
 I look down now. It is all changed.
 Whatever it was I lost, whatever I wept for
 Was a wild, gentle thing, the small dark eyes
 Loving me in secret.
 It is here. At a touch of my hand,
 The air fills with delicate creatures
 From the other world. (135-6)

The poem begins with the speaker gazing at a distant location, removed from where he stands and therefore not noticing anything close to him. Although he is “in the open”, that is, exposed to life, he is in himself, lost and oblivious to the life around him. He is nostalgic for something he has lost, giving us a pastoral, idyllic picture of a “small house” with “white walls” and animals. Is it a tranquil domesticity he has lost? The voice is not sure, except that the feeling of loss pervades him. It is interesting how he tries to make this feeling of loss materialize as something “wild”, “gentle” and with “small dark eyes”. It is as if he is describing an animal, a living creature. However, his eyes are lowered as he looks at the grass in front of him and he finds it, the same thing that was “loving him in secret”. The last three lines depict powerful images of the gentleness and spirituality found in nature, which only the mind’s eye can see:

It is here. At a touch of my hand,
 The air fills with delicate creatures
 From the other world. (*CP* 136)

The magic touch the voice needs in order to communicate with “Nature”, and with his own soul for that matter, is the acknowledgement of a minute, simple detail in nature such as “the milkweed”. The lost “loving” is regained as the “milkweed” becomes a wild and delicate “globe” to be explored. One gentle and loving touch and its shape and material nature disappear, thus

offering the metaphor of transcendence towards spirituality. Many interpretations and speculations are possible. To a believer in the immortality of the soul and in the spiritual world, these lines generate the perfect metaphor for the spiritual world and the speaker's transcendence towards it. This is what Emerson says about the relationship between man and the natural world which this poem explores:

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right. (1112-3)

Another poem that addresses the same sense of Emersonian unity with nature and its attendant power to “open up” the human soul toward feelings and the urge for transcendence to a higher plane of spiritual existence, is the often anthologized, “A Blessing”. It is concerned with those rare moments of enlightenment when the human being is in touch with its own deep feelings and finds a way to articulate them in language regardless of their evanescence. The poem begins with a precisely documented first line that reads like the beginning a wildlife adventure story based in the Midwest in dramatic present simple tense. It begins:

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness. (*CP* 135)

From the opening, the poem maintains the tone of a story being narrated, while at the same time creating a verbal amalgam of softness and darkness. It is as if the approaching darkness, “the twilight” at the end of the day, gradually touches the whole scenery depicted in the poem, demarcating the boundaries of other invisible realms, ones of softness and mystery. In other words, there is a sense of darkness softening the “edges” of daylight and creating an obtuse quality of gentleness and kindness in the world. This effect is partly produced by the grammatical deviation in the second line, where the transitive verb “to bound” is used intransitively, that is, without the action passing on the object, “the grass”. The proactive aspect of the phrase “twilight bounds” therefore comes to the fore. Similar to other creative linguistic

deviations, it makes the reader stop and “look” closer at the grass. This sense of immanent and all-pervasive oneness in the encroaching darkness is further reinforced by the three adverbs placed one after the other: “softly” (manner), “forth” (place) and the adverbial phrase “on the grass” (place). There is also a lexical tension between the matter-of-fact language of the first and third lines and the poetic diction of the second and fourth lines. The poem provides a precise spatio-temporal contextualization that draws the reader directly into the scene, Rochester, Minnesota, at twilight. There is another interpersonal contextualization when the speaker shares what he sees, his view, with the reader. That is, the speaker easily points out to “*those two* Indian ponies” (my emphasis) as if the reader is present in the scene. These deictic devices construct the rest of this “wildlife story”:

They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl’s wrist. (*CP* 135)

We are given an accurate and precise picture of where the “the ponies” came from, how long they have been grazing there, how the speaker and his friend approached them and so on. The happiness of the ponies is deftly rendered visually by the rippling of their skin, thus their bodies, the means by which the non-human world expresses its emotions. It is a welcoming happiness that the “ponies” show when their eyes “darken” with kindness upon seeing the approaching men. The speaker does not choose words from the human register to express the grace of the

animals, but instead compares their body language to the language of other inhabitants of the animal kingdom, “they bow shyly like wet swans”. He concludes that in order to have a similar amount of love for strangers, the ponies must love each other and must be content with their loneliness, which is unlike the human’s. The aura created by the ponies bonding with the human beings as the other living creatures, and the affection of the humans triggered by this spontaneous affection, creates a small center of the animal, human and vegetal world. The emotions of the human voice grow stronger in the description of one of the ponies. The speaker realizes it is a “she”, and his description resembles the description of a girl, “her mane falls wild on her forehead”, the skin of her ear feels like “the skin of girl’s wrist”. This raises the questions of whether the pony finally awakens the speaker’s dead feelings toward his other fellow human beings and whether he compares the ponies’ beautiful existence with the human’s, as they are, finally, one. Wright’s poetry also treats the baseness and self-destructiveness of human beings that cannot equal the one of the animal world. Consider these lines from “In Shame and Humiliation”:

What can a man do that a beast cannot,
A bird, a reptile, any fiercer thing?
He can amaze the ground
With anger never hissed in a snake’s throat
Or past a bitch’s fang,
Though, suffocate, he cannot make a sound. (*CP* 69)

It is significant that the epigraph of this poem is from one of Dostoyevsky’s most existential novels, *Notes from Underground*, which addresses the utter destructiveness and baseness of human existence. The self-proclaimed “sick man”, the main character of the novel, considers the “curse on the world”, human hatred as the way for human beings to confirm their different existence from the rest of the natural world. “A Blessing” develops in quite the opposite direction, towards universal love:

Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom. (*CP* 135)

The emotion building throughout the poem reaches its climax at the end, as the speaker expresses the deep uplift associated with spiritual transcendence. The blessing which he feels coming from a sense of universal love and the acceptance of the order of the universe has found expression in his strong urge to step out of his physical body and be transcended into another natural form, a “blossom”. However, regardless of how ethereal the ground becomes, he is still in touch with matter-of-fact reality, because the urges for spiritual transcendence are expressed in the grammatical structure of the subjunctive mood or the imaginary past, that is, only as a desired or imaginary situation. No matter how intangible and metaphysical the realm becomes, the poem retains its deep realism framed as a conditional sentence. The sense of tension between the matter-of-fact, logical, causational, narrative language and the metaphysical semantic content of the poem is resolved with the tremendous power of the last four lines. The poem stops and dwells in the liminal space between two the two realms, the physical and the metaphysical one, that is, between a wish and the thought about the wish. It is one of the places where “poetically man dwells”, as Heidegger concludes analyzing Hölderlin’s poetry.⁸

As we have seen, Wright’s poetry published during the 1950s and 1960s outlines the development of a poetic model referred to throughout this thesis as immanent and experiential. This strain in mainstream American poetry found its inceptions in the late fifties, being reinforced by the librating forces of Beat poetry, before gradually evolving and incorporating Confessional and Deep Image poetry in the 1960s. I have demonstrated how some of its primary characteristics, the concrete/colloquial, narrative, metonymic and confessional, were already present in Wright’s poetry in the 1950s, the decade of New Criticism’s prevalent demands for poetry with different characteristics. As we have seen in the analysis of Warren’s poem, its priorities are vastly different. The New Critical poem seeks to analyze ideas or concepts and neglects the agent, the human consciousness, discovering the experience itself and being affected by that process. The typical New Critical poem appears as a premeditated and intellectually structured unity, while the immanent and the experiential poem appears as a process that might or might not lead toward any resolutions. We have seen how the immanent agent of this poetry

⁸ See Heidegger’s essay “. . . Poetically man dwells . . .” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Perennial and Classics, 1971) 225-8.

narrates its story, producing concrete and often colloquial language and a Bakhtinian-like chronotope, in this case, the Midwest. This narrative and often linear, experiential language inevitably exposes an array of voices, the inevitable heteroglossia with which the poetic agent enters into dialogue, thus sometimes revealing the “dialogization” of language as the main theme of the poem. As the poetry and the culture of the late 1950s and 1960s begin to place their trust in the individual and its concrete experience, the poem adopts a more metonymic mode which does not rely so heavily on the metaphoric re-creation of reality as a verbal construct of the Self, but rather on a combination of givens found in reality while exploring their intrinsic symbolism. Wright’s poetry is abundant with “natural”, Frostian, metaphors that cluster and “nest” on the dominant metonymic structure, thus creating the illusion of reality transferred to the poem without artistic recreation. The presence of the human consciousness as a discovering agent that finally discovers its place in the larger Order of Nature, becomes the only way to create values in poetry. Therefore, it is “Nature” rather than culture that becomes the primary place of dwelling for poetry. As is evident in Wright’s poetry, it was going back to the familiar creative grounds of Emerson’s philosophy that resolves the Romantic Subject-Object dualism for mainstream American poets with transcendence in “Nature”, and a Panentheistic belief in Oneness.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD HUGO: THE TRIGGERING CHRONOTOPE

Now that we have seen how a particular human consciousness makes its presence felt in Lowell's poetry in the guise of an immanent agent experiencing a fully structured immanent experience, and how the same presence is captured in Wright's heteroglossic and metonymically structured transcendental moments, I want to show how Richard Hugo conveys this presence in the specific *tone and atmosphere* which dominates his poetic oeuvre. Although this chapter only focuses on his 1970s collections, *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* (1973), *What Thou Lovest Well Remains American* (1975), and *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* (1977), this tendency can be witnessed throughout his work. The idiosyncratic, ubiquitous tone and atmosphere consequently reflect the presence/immanence of a highly particularized and individuated agent in his poems. They reveal a low key, emotionally "hurting" agent in a quest of self-discovery and self-acceptance in the world encountered on his journeying through the spiritual and physical geography of Montana and the American Northwest. And, as Hugo states in his book of essays: a "Quest for a self is fundamental to poetry" (*Triggering Town* 33). Defining the dominant poetic mode of the 1970s, Altieri classifies Hugo's style as a variant of the popular and dominant mode which he calls "the scenic style", listing several of its paradigmatic features:

The work places a reticent, plain-speaking, and self-reflexive speaker within a narratively presented scene evoking a sense of loss. Then the poet tries to resolve the loss in a moment of emotional poignancy or wry acceptance that renders the entire lyric event an evocative metaphor for some general sense of mystery about the human condition. The two most popular variants consist of making the scene a more intense moment of psychological conflict (as in heirs of confessional styles) and extending the evocative metaphor by a more discursive and tonally complex reflective summary (as in Richard Hugo, David Wagoner, and the heirs of Elizabeth Bishop). (*Self and Sensibility* 10)

Altieri's condensed description of Hugo's style as "discursive and tonally complex" provides a good starting point for the analyses in this chapter, as it brings to the fore these two recurrent categories of this poetry which significantly contribute to the general makeup of the

tone and atmosphere. Although the short length of verse makes the presence and retention of the same tone and atmosphere more intensive than in prose, it is still difficult and intriguing to penetrate them, as they can linger like an all-enveloping “cumulus” which conceals the linguistic and thematic charges of the poetry that generated them.

As the main indicators of immanence in Hugo’s poetry, his specific tone and atmosphere will be analyzed in this chapter through more concrete and tangible linguistic and stylistic categories, such as his recurrent themes, and the equally recurrent semi-discursive and semi-descriptive linguistic structures. However, before beginning this analysis, it is important to note that the other feature singled out by Altieri as “the complex tonality”, can be approached through the regular metric patterns Hugo’s poetry exhibits. Although not the focus of this chapter, it suffices to say that there is a certain reciprocal oppositionality between Hugo’s measured, formal rhythm (primarily tetrameters and pentameters) and the informal and free conversational and colloquial language. In other words, the sustained and predictable rhythm of the measured language makes the emotional honesty and the candor of his poetry sound more decisive, inevitable and important. This is how Michael Dobberstein comes to a definition of Hugo’s poetic idiom, analyzing some of his stylistic techniques, rhythm and colloquialisms in the poem “December 24 and George McBride is Dead” (*CP* 87):

Hugo uses to wonderful effect the poetic strategies he had been honing for years: startling enjambments combine with caesuras to form clusters of anticipation, pausing the rhythm and catapulting it forward (““One gulp. The whole quart, Mac’ That town / you died in”); then at the end the generally four beat iambic pattern gives way to five strong trochees in the last line, declaring the poem’s finale in loud fricatives and plosives: “fat and writing, drinking beer and shaking.” Hugo’s trademark use of colloquial speech (“Some crap / never stops”) seamlessly blends with the sophisticated deployment of these strategies to produce a poetic idiom that sounds as honest, and as accurate, as a hammer pounding a nail cleanly into wood. (422)

The contrast between the metric formality and the linguistic informality are complementary or they “seamlessly blend” as Dobberstein observes. As recurrent features, they produce the ubiquitous tonal and emotional key of Hugo’s poetry. These recurrent categories in Altieri’s formulation—“discursive” and “tonally complex”, can be approached through what Kenneth

Burke defines as “repetitive form”, which he argues is an intrinsic principle of any poetic or prose structure:

Repetitive form is the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises. It is restatement of the same thing in different ways...A succession of images, each of them re-giving the same lyric mood; a character repeating his identity, his number under changing situations; the sustaining of an attitude as in satire; the rhythmic regularity of blank verse; the rhyme scheme of *terza rima*—these are all aspects of repetitive form. (*Counter-Statement* 125)

Hugo’s repetitive rhythm and trademark colloquialisms maintain the same “principle under new guises”, his general tone and atmosphere. The other important “repetitive form” in Hugo’s poetry, the main feature of the analysis in this chapter, is the recurrent *phenomenological themes* which “work out” various ramifications of the essential Subject-Object relation. They can be traced most expressly in the recurrent, and predominantly negative, emotional statements about love, self-acceptance, self-respect, as well as in the series of recurrent, similar images and depicted situations. In “Iowa Déjà Vu” (253-4), the speaker pronounces: “Girls don’t like me in the town”, “West of here love is opportune”. While in “The Swimmer at Lake Edward” (252), the speaker says: “His tongue / drove girls away and he sat in taverns hours / and the fat piled up”, “He lost jobs fast. In interviews he blushed”. Another strikingly repetitive form is the succession of images depicting “the kind town drunk” or “bars”, as in the poem, “To Die in Milltown” (173): “Even the famed drunk has begun to fail”, while in “Late Summer, Drummond” (241): “The town drunk knows / the world blurs, drunk or sober . . .” and “The town drunk waves goodbye to cars and flash east”, and in “The Hilltop”: “I like bars close to home and home rundown” and “I take pride drinking alone and being kind”. These thematically similar statements and series of images are the repetitive forms which evoke the same lyrical mood and atmosphere emanating from a lonely, self-deprecating human being in the spiritually stagnant atmosphere of the bars and small towns of the Northwest.

However, Hugo’s tone and atmosphere can still “linger” undefined and unexplained after many re-readings if one does not “scoop” even deeper into “current” of many other recurrent poetic themes, including but not limited to the dilapidated and almost deserted towns and their inhabitants, the remnants of the Indian and European immigrant culture, the poignant scenery of

the Pacific Ocean and the lakes, rivers, prairies and mountains of Montana and the Northwest. They are the Objects which trigger certain emotional responses in the Subject (the voice or the narrator), stemming from unresolved past issues. Michael Dobberstein identifies in Hugo's themes a general process of fusion and rejection between self and place:

The poetry finds its material in two separate but connected locations: in the derelict, broken-down place—house, bar, street, town, etc.—and in the damaged self that is a product, inhabitant, and observer of that place. A powerful tension occurs in the best of the later poems as place and self converge, separate, and re-converge, the wounded self straining against the ruined place that would claim it as one of its own. The struggle allows the poet to raise the constant possibility that self and place will become a single poetic entity, fusing the inner life of shame and degradation with the outer life of the [?] run-down, the abandoned, the broken. The poems offer a record of intense ambivalence as the narrator sometimes accepts this fusion, and sometimes rejects it. (417-18)

From a phenomenological perspective, it is by delving into the Subject's constantly changing states of consciousness that the equally malleable perceptions and *projections* upon the Object-town are produced. When Wallace Stevens talks about poets' imagination becoming part of the real, reflected object, he also talks about human projection upon reality "as looking at the world of their own [human] thoughts and the world of their own feelings (*The Necessary Angel* 65-6).

As indicated already, these thematic preoccupations are linguistically mediated in several rhetorical and stylistic categories, which will be identified in Hugo's poetry in the second part of the chapter as semi-discursive and semi-descriptive lines, "succinct expressions in wordy poems" and value-bearing judgments and comments on his "verbal postcards" from the Northwest. These produce Hugo's reflective and searching tone, accompanied by a smooth and uninterrupted flow of emotions expressed as comments and statements. The effect of reading a Hugo poem is often like listening to a voice which has abandoned hiding and controlling his emotions a long time ago, and is instead resigned to becoming "broken", vulnerable, quiet, empathetic and accepting. It is also a voice deeply aware that the main existential "themes" of failure, incorrect choices, emotional deprivation, pain, elusive human perception and self-perception, are recurrent in any human life. The first stanza of "The Hilltop" from *Making Certain It Goes On: the Collected Poems of Richard Hugo*, is a succinct illustration of this specific tone and atmosphere:

I like bars close to home and home run down,
 a signal to the world, I'm weak. I like a bar
 to be home. Take this one. Same men every night.
 Same jokes. Traffic going by
 fifteen feet away and punchboards never paying off.
 Churn of memory and ulcer. Most of all
 the stale anticipation of the girl
 sure to walk in someday fresh from '39,
 not one day older, holding out her arms. (CP 249)

The tone and atmosphere of this stanza emanate from the particularized immanent consciousness of the speaker, or the narrator, of the poem engaged in an experience which stylistically can be framed as a poetic “report” on a trip to a concrete place, in this case the “Hilltop”. The immanence of the thinking and reporting voice is most directly “visible” and “heard” in a number of rhetorical means in addition to the descriptions, for example, in statements, value judgments and comments. The voice thus reveals its feelings in informal and straightforward statements, such as: “I like bars . . .”, “I am weak”, etc. Also, the speaker frequently comments upon the poetic experience depicted: “Churn of memory and ulcer” or “the stale anticipation of the girl”. Another stylistic characteristic which determines the general stance of the narrator towards the poetic experience are his hypothetical propositions addressed to the reader as “you”. From a linguistic perspective, they are performative utterances,⁹ for example: “Take this one”. As we shall see, these characteristics support the more general intellectual endeavor of Hugo’s poetry to phenomenologically process the complex Subject-Object relation.

The first part of this chapter will trace the dual aspects of the Subject-Object relation. This includes (i) the speaker projecting its emotions upon the encountered locations and their inhabitants; (ii) the encountered locations and their inhabitants reciprocally triggering emotions in the speaker which make his perceptions subjective. The analysis will also focus on the important processes of self-discovery and self-perception which the speaker undergoes as the active Subject in this relationship.

⁹ According to J.L. Austin’s theory, statements such as: “‘I do’, spoken as part of the marriage service; ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*,’ spoken when breaking a bottle against the hull of the ship in question; ‘I give and bequeath my watch to my brother’, occurring in a will; ‘I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow’ . . . The utterance is not setting out to *describe* a situation, an event or an action: it *is* an event or an action” (Loxley 8).

The second part of the chapter will analyze the stylistic and linguistic features of Hugo's poetic language which reiterate the same themes and contribute to his distinctive tone and atmosphere. The semi-discursive and semi-descriptive language of Hugo's poetry will be shown to be a combination of statement and image i.e. evaluative judgment or comment and description. The result is often what I term a "succinct expression in a wordy poem". The wordiness of the poem, that is, its lengthy and detailed exposition and description of the surroundings, are interspersed with highly condensed and expressive single-line statements which summarize the whole experience in a limited number of words. An additional recurrent stylistic feature is the use of the second-person pronoun "you" and the hypothetical propositions it introduces, which consequently turn the experience of the poem into a subject "for discussion" between the speaker and the reader: "You'd bet your throat against / the way a mind goes bad", ("Montgomery Hollow" 191).

The third and final part of the chapter, will analyze personification as the dominant trope in this poetry which stylistically restates the Subject–Object relationship. By ascribing human characteristics to the Object, the Subject is projecting his Self upon and perceiving Nature according to his own human terms.

The stylistic analyses lead to the conclusion that the particular consciousness and its changeable states in the phenomenological quest to know the Object and itself through its surroundings are another variant of the same poetic model this thesis has been following, that is, the poetic model of immanence *and* experience. In Hugo's poetry, this model is traced through his specific tone and atmosphere. The analysis of this pronounced and individualized tone and atmosphere is, at the same time, the analysis of the presence of a particularized and individualized human consciousness struggling to comprehend the triggering Other, the Object-town. This analysis of Hugo's "stance", develops from the work of critics, such as Michael Allan, who identifies it "as the mind creat[ing] a new self, a stance, an altering of consciousness so that a poem might be written. This process is related fundamentally to the question "how do you feel about yourself" (33).

Phenomenological Themes

Trying to trace the poetics of immanence and experience in Hugo's specific tone and atmosphere, leads us to question how they are captured in language. This in turn causes the reader to address Hugo's typical "towns", the real locations in the American Northwest, which he "populates" with imaginary human stories and situations. These towns become Hugo's main chronotope that trigger emotions in the poetic voice or the narrator, which can be often translated into a general sense of failure or a resignation toward unresolved past and present issues. These emotions influence the narrator's perceptions of the towns, and we are inclined to see his presentations of the towns as projections of his own Self and his attendant suppressed feelings. At the same time, these subjective perceptions and stories reflect the phenomenological states which the Subject's consciousness undergoes as it encounters the Object, the towns. As Dobberstein states, it is "a poetry whose relentless focus on the tension between place and self compels attention to a peculiarly American way of being, a phenomenology of failure, degradation, and loss" (425). The narrator's projections of his feelings about past and present losses, loneliness, unfulfilled emotional needs and melancholy are stoically accepted as existential "facts" of any life. I would argue that it is this quiet acceptance, and the consequent "dull" pain produced by it, that creates the general tone and atmosphere of Hugo's poetry.

The stages of the Subject's consciousness and his equally changing perceptions will be examined here in relation to some of Sartre's and Heidegger's primary phenomenological concepts. Despite the profound differences in their thinking and definitions, these two philosophers refer to the states of human perception and self-perception as: (i) *being-for-itself*—a state where the Subject is conscious and aware of itself as such; (ii) *being-in-itself*—a state where the Subject is not conscious or not aware of itself; (iii) Sartre's "bad faith"—a state in which a person is in self-deception and escapes the responsible freedom of Being-for-itself; (iv) Sartre's *being-for-others*—a state when the person experiences himself as seen by Others, or when a person sees himself/herself as an Object of the perception of Others, and Heidegger's *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others*, as ontological and existential givens which one cannot choose or escape. These general phenomenological concepts define some of the universal states of

the human mind in constant pursuit of its true self and in constant interaction with the perceived world. They will be examined and explicated further in the context of Hugo's poems.

In the majority of the poems examined here, one can trace the same, "winding" line of human consciousness, constantly affected by the triggering towns. It is visible in the subjective descriptions and the spiritual "chronicles" of the towns which are heavily interspersed by personal, evaluative judgments and comments. These are the basic, general contours of Hugo's poetic structure, visible behind the numerous variations. Certain poems are self-conscious and candid about this poetic model, especially the epistolary ones as more conducive to personal confession. In one of these poem, "Letter to Levertov from Butte" (*31 Letters and 13 Dreams*), Hugo confesses his *ars poetica* as situating imagined stories and human situations in real towns, which channel his past and present emotions about important personal and social issues. He speaks to his addressee, the fellow poet, Denise Levertov, about the "poverty of wallet and spirit" in a small town, Butte, Montana, and the disastrous consequences of hatred, family violence, racism, sexism and alcoholism. By foregrounding these recurrent issues in his poetic depictions of small-town America, he makes his statement about his poetic themes and self-perceptions both as a poet and a human being:

I have ambiguous feelings coming from a place like this
and having clawed my way away, thanks to a few weak gifts
and psychiatry and the luck of living in a country
where enough money floats to the top for the shipwrecked
to hang on. On one hand, no matter what my salary is
or title, I remain a common laborer, stained by the perpetual
dust from loading flour or coal. I stay humble, inadequate
inside. And my way of knowing how people get hurt, make
my (damn this next word) heart go out through the stinking air
into the shacks of Walkerville, . . . (CP 308)

This is the voice of a human being who "has suffered" from the place and is aware of the suffering of others in the same place. It is a voice which expresses the poet's ambivalence about himself as a common laborer, an intellectual and a poet all at the same time. This is also a human being ambivalent about expressing emotions, damning the word "heart" before pronouncing it. On the one hand, he is the hyper-masculine model of the American West, while on the other

hand, he is a sincere human being and poet who can state: “. . . [that] my way of knowing how people get hurt, make / my (damn this next word) heart go out through the stinking air / into the shacks of Walkerville,. . . “. It is this recurrent ambivalence of the poetic voice that produces the controlled, and somewhat suppressed emotional quality of the tone. However, the central *modus operandi* of Hugo’s poetry comes in the following statement of this letter-poem:

. . . And I want my life
inside to go on long as I do, though I only populate bare
landscape with surrogate suffering, with lame men
crippled by more than disease, and create finally
a simple grief I can deal with, a pain the indigent can find
acceptable . . . (308)

If we take the phrase “my life inside” as a reference to his ability for writing poetry, then the verb “populate” and the adjective “surrogate” can be seen as referring to his poetic principle to make up stories about imagined people in real towns, which he has to first make “bare” of the actual facts (“though I only populate bare / landscape with surrogate suffering”). In his collection of essays about teaching and writing poetry, Hugo explains why it is important for him to invent stories and events in real places, and why “loyalty” to facts can be unnecessary and hindering:

The poem is always in your hometown, but you have a better chance of finding it in another. The reason for that, I believe, is that the stable set of knowns that the poem needs to anchor on is less stable at home than in the town you’ve just seen for the first time. At home, not only do you know that the movie house wasn’t always there, or that the grocer is a newcomer who took over after the former grocer committed suicide, you have complicated emotional responses that defy sorting out. With the strange town you can assume all knowns are stable, and you owe the details nothing emotionally. . . . It is easy to turn the gas station attendant into a drunk. Back home it would have been difficult because he had a drinking problem.

Once these knowns sit outside the poem, the imagination can take off from them and if necessary can return. You are operating from a base. (*Triggering Town* 12)

This is why the “sufferings” he “plants” in the “bare” towns are only “surrogate[s]” of his own personal feelings of deprivation and loss in his past and their consequences in the present. And it

is emotional, spiritual and existential suffering with which he “populates [his] bare landscapes”, rather than merely corporeal suffering caused by economic and material needs, as the next line indicates: “with lame men / crippled by more than disease”. Finally, this surrogate suffering is “quantified” with the adjective “simple” in the next line: “and create finally / a simple grief I can deal with, a pain the indigent can find / acceptable”. This measured and artistically controlled grief (“the small pain”) is like a verbal “vaccine” that poetry provides for Hugo and consequently, for the speaker in his poems. It strengthens his emotional “immunological system” so as to be able to bear “big pains”. This “simple grief” is the prevailing sadness and melancholy triggered by the places the voice chooses to describe and occupy. They are the channels through which his deeply buried childhood feelings are gradually released and eventually cured. Feelings of deprived love and self-denigration were caused by the neglect he received from his parents and guardians. Critics have acknowledged this resultant “poetics of need”, especially Michael Allen in his book *We are Called Human: the Poetry of Richard Hugo*:

Beneath lack of money—the dispossession from society and the things of this world—lay another dispossession: Richard Hugo was born Richard Hogan, the son of a father who deserted his teenaged wife, Hugo’s mother; she, in turn, left her infant son to be brought up by her parents. When she later married a man named Hugo, young Richard decided that that would be his surname. Thus a double dispossession lies behind Hugo’s early poems. In some ways his first two books, *A Run of Jacks* and *Death of the Kapowsin Tavern* (1965), are haunted by the intertwining of those two emotional scars: his personal tragedy is seen in economic terms, and economic degradation is seen as intensely personal. (45)

Hugo’s *modus operandi* speaks about a poet who contextualizes his poetry in real towns with real place names but who remains disloyal to empirical facts, because of their innate instability and malleability. He infuses the towns with imaginary personal stories and human situations in which the voice and the inhabitants are the protagonists. Thus, the realistic contexts are just “bases”, as he says, to “erect” the lyric and spiritual architecture of the American Northwest.

In the context of Jakobson’s linguistic theories, the “referential function” which centers on the context of the communicated message, prevails in Hugo’s poetry of place. However, the towns and the places are only the apparent context and setting of the poetic message. Throughout the poem, they are transformed into the primary poetic message as the language centers on the

“poetic function”.¹⁰ Another equally dominant function in Hugo’s poetry is the “emotive function”,¹¹ which the voice (the addresser) exercises repeatedly when articulating the poetic messages. It is generally “heard” in low key, sincere, emotional statements made by the voice when “discussing” the towns, as these examples indicate: “My pride in a few poems, my shame / of a wasted life, no wife, no children” (“The House on 15th S.W.” [225]); “What denies me love today helps me hold a job” (“Last Day Three” [233]); “When I’m traveling, I’m hurt” (“Places and Ways to Live” [234]); “Once more you’ve degraded yourself on the road” (“Goodbye, Iowa” [237]), etc. One might argue here that the emotive function of language is another recurrent generator of the specific emotional tone and atmosphere in Hugo’s poetry.

Another interesting point related to the phenomenological themes in Hugo’s work is how the Subject (the poetic voice) positions itself in relation to the Object, the towns and the places he visits and narrates. More often than not this is an interplay in which the Subject, searching for his true sense of self, relives the imaginary lives and situations of these towns. They become his other Self, a true reflection of his emotional states. The analysis primarily dwells on the elusive self-perceptions of the speaker as a conscious *being-for-itself* and his perceptions of the Object as a non-conscious *being-in-itself*. Since Sartre develops and explicates these concepts only in the context of other phenomenological ideas developed in *Being and Nothingness*, there are hardly any straightforward definitions of the human pre-reflective *being-in-itself* and the reflective *being-for-itself*, except for statements which describe their characteristics and ramifications:

[I]f being is in itself, this means that it does not refer to itself as self-consciousness does. It is this self. . . . In fact being is opaque to itself precisely because it is filled with itself. This can be better expressed by saying that *being is what it is*. (21)

The for-itself is the in-itself loosing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness. Thus consciousness holds within itself its own being-as-

¹⁰“The set (Einstellung) toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language” (Jakobson, *Language in Literature* 69).

¹¹ “The so-called EMOTIVE or “expressive” function, focused on the addressor, aims a direct expression of the speaker’s attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion, whether true or feigned . . .” (Jakobson, *Language in Literature* 66).

consciousness, and since it is its own nihilation, it can refer only to itself. . . . It is not only that the for-itself as a nihilated in-itself is itself given a foundation, but with it foundation appears for the first time. (106)

The poem “The Only Bar in Dixon” captures some of the Subject’s constant reflective and fathomless vortexes when he starts to observe himself as an “in-itself”, that is, becomes an object to his own conscious and perceiving Subject, and the resulting attitudes and perceptions of the town-Object. The poem is a straightforward poetic “exposition” of how the atmosphere of a setting transports the poetic voice back home to its place of origin which is, as the poem indicates, another rundown town similar to Dixon, Montana. Dixon provides an example of a triggering town which stirs the suppressed emotions of the viewer. However, the phenomenological question still remains: does the selective perception of the viewer make him see only details which are likely to trigger these particular emotions? If so, is he not projecting these feelings upon the town and not seeing anything else but “green cheap plaster” and “failed stores”, and hearing only people complaining about having no choice but to live in other similar towns?

Home. Home. I knew it entering.
 Green cheap plaster and the stores
 across the street toward the river
 failed. One Indian depressed
 on Thunderbird. Another buying
 Thunderbird to go. This air
 is fat with gangsters I imagine
 on the run. If they ran here
 they would be running from
 imaginary cars. No one cares
 about the wanted posters
 in the brand new concrete block P.O. (*CP* 212)

The result of the viewer’s description is an authentic atmosphere of a desolate, small, American town with only one bar and the 1970s culture of crime movies (“This air / is fat with gangsters”, “the wanted posters”). The voice is happy, in a certain way, to be able to define the atmosphere, repeating the word “Home” twice in the first line. Yet, this feeling is restrained, as it is captured

in two elliptical, one-word statements: “Home. Home”. The voice then continues to describe the scenes in the town, which appear so familiar to him that they become stereotypes, as suggested by the image of the Indians drinking and buying more alcohol, “One Indian depressed / on Thunderbird. Another buying / Thunderbird to go”. Yet, there is an ironic twist given in the name of the wine, “Thunderbird”¹² which is a mythological bird in some American Indian tribal cultures. This signifier of an almost destroyed culture is thus “preserved” as a brand-name for alcohol, the destroyer of this ethnic group and a sociological sign of their centuries-old cultural and economic oppression of the American society. As the Subject, the voice or the *being-for-itself* is aware and “confesses” his projections and the free play of his imagination upon the town, stating: “This air / is fat with gangsters I *imagine* / on the run. / If they ran here / they would be running from / imaginary cars”. We can see that these lines and the variations of the phrase, “This is home because”, expose his “phenomenological fallacy”, seeing more or less his own thoughts in, and the workings of his own imagination on, this place. The relation is that an “objective” perception and reception of the Object-town becomes elusive and almost impossible. In other words, the poem demonstrates how Hugo’s poetic voice decides upon the “destiny” of a place. In this poem, the speaker creates the atmosphere of an utterly forlorn and forgotten town, before comically reinforcing it by the proposition that even hypothetical “gangsters” need not fear being chased by the *imaginary* cars, since the inhabitants do not care much about them or anything else. However, the final stage of the inhabitants’ inertia which reflects Sartre’s state of “bad faith” is evident in the lines which conclude that the only choice of a good life the people have is drinking away their life savings in another equally forlorn town. Sartre’s notion basically implies that through bad faith a person seeks to escape the responsible freedom of Being-for-itself:

¹² “thunderbird, in North American Indian mythology, a powerful spirit in the form of a bird. By its work, the earth was watered and vegetation grew. Lightning was believed to flash from its beak, and the beating of its wings was thought to represent the rolling of thunder. It was often portrayed with an extra head on its abdomen (*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*).

Bad faith flees being by taking refuge in "not-believing-what-one-believes". It has disarmed all beliefs in advance—those which it would like to take hold of and, by the same stroke, the others, those which it wishes to flee. (93)

[One's] consciousness affects itself with bad faith. There must be an original intention and a project of bad faith; . . . It follows first that the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully. . . . (72)

The next extract from the same poem illustrates how the inhabitants and the speaking voice fit into Sartre's description:

This is home because some people
go to Perma and come back
from Perma saying Perma
is no fun. To revive, you take 382
to Hot Springs, your life savings
ready for a choice of bars, your hotel
glamorous with neon up the hill.
Is home because the Jocko
dies into the Flathead. Home because
the Flathead goes home north northwest. (*CP* 212)

The self-deception of the locals reflect this state of bad faith, since they believe that they have no choice or that the choice and the meaningful content of their lives do not lie in their own hands, but in an unidentified Other, which is fleeing their own freedom. However, it is just like "home" for the speaker, who recognizes this state in himself too. The third stanza continues:

I want home full of grim permission.
You can go as out of business here
as rivers or the railroad station.
I knew it entering.
Five bourbons
and I'm in some other home. (*Collected Poems* 212)

After the line, “I want home full of grim permission”, we realize that the visit and the experiencing of Dixon, has helped the voice accept and “permit” his hometown to “dwell” more peacefully in him. Although it is still a painful and “grim permission”, it is step toward reconciliation and acceptance of some childhood facts that will eventually lead to his self-acceptance. Exposing the general bad faith of the town becomes a way of exposing and surpassing his state of bad faith. This path is long but the next lines, “You can go as out of business here / as rivers or the railroad station”, suggest some degree of sympathy for the town as a victim of unfortunate historical and economic events. Consequently, he grows more sympathetic towards and forgiving of his own humble place of origin which, as he tells us, is connected to Dixon geographically by the rivers (Jocko and Flathead), as well as spiritually. The last line of the poem is another confession of the speaker’s imagination and projection at work, although in a somewhat humorous self-deprecating manner. His highly subjective and automatically “biased” perception of the town is induced by alcohol this time: “Five bourbons / and I’m in some other home”.

The poetic voice often assumes the role of a lyric chronicler, recording and re-evaluating the “emotional history” of a specific location and presenting the experience as a hypothetical situation. One such meditation in which the voice tries to define the place and the sentiment that “lingers” above it, while at the same time resolving his personal issues, is the frequently anthologized poem, “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg”. The meditation starts with Hugo’s typical hypothetical construction:

You might come here Sunday on a whim.
Say your life broke down. The last good kiss
you had was years ago. You walk these streets
laid out by the insane, past hotels
that didn’t last, bars that did, the tortured try
of local drivers to accelerate their lives.
Only churches are kept up. The jail
turned 70 this year. The only prisoner
is always in, not knowing what he’s done. (*CP* 216)

This poem most directly demonstrates Hugo’s essential poetic model as the descriptions of and the comments about the specific location, Philipsburg, reflect the speaker’s struggle to

understand both his old and new emotions. It becomes obvious that the main aim of the poem is not to produce a mental and physical postcard of the town, but rather to show the internal struggle of the voice as he tries to leap out of his own state of “bad faith”, which the town clearly exhibits. The first line immediately establishes the entire situation: a person comes to a place like this to escape from the life which “has broken down”; instead, he finds his personal and unfulfilled needs for emotional connection mirrored and intensified by the town itself. The second-person pronoun adds a more universal and impersonal feel to the situation; the speaker’s pretense is that it is a hypothetical situation that he wishes to discuss, not his personal confession, or Jonathan Holden says, Hugo “mythologizes” the land and the human situation:

Recoiling from the demands of testimony, yet still committed to poetry that treats of the self, a poet may now find himself resorting to forms that resemble extended hypotheses instead of testimony, poems that invite the reader to “suppose” and that then proceed to spin a mythology. As Hugo’s “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg” says, “You might come here Sunday on a whim. / Say your life broke down. . . .” Clearly the Hugo poem retains a strong testimonial flavor; but the grammar of hypothesis allows him to mythologize the landscape and the situation far more readily and extremely than if the poem had begun, “It’s Sunday. I came here on a whim. My life broke down.” (Holden 136)

When transferred to a phenomenological ground, the same situation reveals the Object, the in-itself, affecting the Subject, the for-itself. We are never sure if the Subject, as conscious being-for-itself, is not psychologically transferring his own intensified feelings onto the town. Accordingly, “the streets [might just seem to be] laid out by the insane” when observed from the perspective of an unhappy person. However, there are few historical references which make the negative perception of this town more objective: “hotels that did not last, bars that did”, “only church kept up”. This sequence of negative descriptions, evaluations and comments, continues in the second stanza:

The principal supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
the Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte. One good

restaurant and bars can't wipe the boredom out.
 The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
 a dance floor built on springs—
 all memory resolves itself in gaze,
 in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
 or two stacks high above the town,
 two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
 for fifty years that won't fall finally down. (*CP* 216)

The voice “explains” in a metaphysical manner the origin of the emotions of “hatred” and “rage” that rule the town: “Hatred of the various grays / the mountain sends . . .” As an Object-in-itself, the mountain is perceived as a consciousness, a being-for-itself, which can generate and transmit emotions. The language trope, personification, turns the non-conscious Object, “the mountain”, from its original state of being-in-itself to the state of being-for-itself.

If the first stanza begins as a meditation structured hypothetically (“say your life broke down”) and upon modality¹³ (“you *might*”) that signals the speaker’s *own* attitude and degrees of commitment to truth and validity, then the second stanza begins by announcing an economic, and consequently more objective, perspective upon the depressing surroundings with the phrase: “The principal supporting business”. The effective and direct evaluative judgments and comments of the voice complete the representation of the town with succinct paratactic statements: “The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls / who leave . . .” (Note the consonance of “l” and the masculine mid rhyme “bill-repeal”), “The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines”; “two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse”. This failed economic base affects the superstructure of the town and the quality of life, “One good / restaurant and bars can’t wipe the boredom out” or “a dance floor built on springs—”. The last phrase, in addition to being suggestive of the old western entertainment (the culture) during the silver boom, also evokes the transient nature of human endeavor and man-made things versus prevailing nature. The “dance floor”, which is either built over water (“springs”) or by man-made devices (“springs”), supports a very temporary stage of human existence.

¹³ “Textual elements such as modal auxiliaries (e.g. *may*, *could*, *would*) and **sentence adverbs** (e.g. *perhaps*, *certainly*) signaling attitude and enabling speakers to express degrees of commitment to the truth or validity of what they are talking about, and to mitigate the effect of their words on the people they are talking to” (Verdonk 119).

Another interesting device which brings out the direct expressiveness of the second stanza is the free indirect speech which the speaker uses to “quote” or speak “on behalf” of the local characters. As the detached narrator of this scene, he captures them complaining about “the best liked girls / who leave each year for Butte”. Girls are the focal point of the fantasies and illusions of a good and fulfilled life, as well as symbols of warmth, communication and energy for the male voices and inhabitants of the Western bars and towns. Their departures are seen as a serious sociological and psychological problem, as they become part of the failed emotional superstructure of the various towns.

In the third stanza, the voice resumes a more meditative stance and comes to the point of comparing his life with the town-Object: “Isn’t this your life?” and “Isn’t this defeat so accurate...” Finally, the voice understands more clearly why he came to this town and his perception of it, or in Husserl’s terms, he better understands the *intentionality* of his “consciousness of”¹⁴ the town. He realizes that this is a triggering town and a point where Subject and Object can merge:

Isn’t this your life? That ancient kiss
still burning out your eyes? Isn’t this defeat
so accurate, the church bell simply seems
a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?
Don’t empty houses ring? Are magnesium
and scorn sufficient to support a town,
not just Philipsburg, but towns
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the town you came from dies inside? (CP 217)

The experience of visiting the town and the speaker’s perceptions of it are only the “outer”, visible motives of the poem. The “ulterior” motive appears to be instigating a discussion of one’s personal feelings of failure, chiefly unfulfilled emotional needs and inaccurate self-perception, in addition to other recurrent issues that follow the visitor from town to town. Michael Allen

¹⁴ “Every act is consciousness of something, but there is also consciousness of every act”. See Husserl’s *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time-Consciousness (1893-1917)* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991) 130.

defines this as Hugo's "poetics of need" (14), "geography of feeling" (55) and a "license for defeat" (72). These needs ring like "the church bell" of the "defeated" town with the "empty houses". Yet the most captivating lines in this stanza express the speaker's realization that if he does not change his inaccurate self-perceptions (as "I stay humble, inadequate inside" [308]), and if he does not reconcile the issues of his lower class, childhood traumas, he can never expect the world to perceive and accept him differently. The speaker comes to a realization that he perceives himself as he thinks others perceive him, thus as an object or an in-itself to Others. This is Sartre's eternal circle of consciousness, trying to be constantly for-itself in the encounter with others who always try to make him/her an in-itself, or just an object of their perception:

By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. . . . I recognize that I *am* as the other sees me. . . . I am unable to bring about any relation between what I am in the intimacy of the For-Itself, without distance, without recoil, without perspective, and this unjustifiable being-in-itself which I am for the Other. (246)

This state of consciousness translated into the vocabulary of the towns would read: "the world will never let you have the towering blondes", an augmented symbol of a fulfilled and happy life, "until the town you came from dies inside", that is, until you change your negative self-perception. Acknowledgment is not enough, however, action is required; to say "no" is to get out of there, change yourself and your state of mind:

Say no to yourself. The old man, twenty
when the jail was built, still laughs
although his lips collapse. Someday soon,
he says, I'll go to sleep and not wake up.
You tell him no. You're talking to yourself.
The car that brought you here still runs.
The money you buy lunch with,
no matter where it's mined, is silver
and the girl who serves your food
is slender and her red hair lights the wall. (CP 216)

At the end of the poem and at the end of the visit, the voice finally seems to be able to change his state of mind, and consequently, his perceptions of the town. He acknowledges happier details of his surroundings, such as the laughing old man, “although his lips collapse” like the buildings. The last lines of the stanza express a new resolution to “leap out” of the present state of “bad faith”. It is as if the poem is saying that it is all a question of perception and what you notice or do not notice. That is to say, it is a matter of choice.

Among those of Hugo’s poems which best capture the aura of utter desertion, finality, and cessation of life, is the poem based in a very small place, “Silver Star”. The images of deserted trains always invoke the sense of life come to a stop, since they epitomize life and movement in the historical context of the American West. The images of the discarded steam engines in the first stanza capture an even “larger than life” stoppage, a desertion and the terminus of a whole era of Western culture, including movies, songs, dress code, etc. It also invokes the era of pushing the frontier further and human destinies becoming intertwined with westbound trains and the consequent, short-lived economic booms of small towns. From the beginning of the poem, the speaker’s immanence is reified by his definitive and self-assured statements and assumptions about the place and the people:

This is the final resting place for engines,
farm equipment and that rare, never more
than occasional man. Population:
17. Altitude: unknown. For no
good reason you can guess, the woman
in the local store is kind. Old steam trains
have been rusting here so long, you feel
the urge to oil them, to lay new track, to start
the west again. The Jefferson
drifts by in no great hurry on its way
to wed the Madison, to be a tributary
to the ultimately dirty brown Missouri.
This town supports your need to run alone. (CP 177)

What reinforces the tone of definiteness, in addition to the images of the discarded trains, is the use of expository statements which usually explain or state facts based on evidence: “This is the *final* resting place for engines” or “. . . that rare, *never more than* / occasional man. . . .” (my

emphasis). At the same time, the voice is aware that his perception might be slightly “tinted”: “For no / good reason you can guess, the woman / in the local store is kind”. Why must the woman in the local store be kind? The voice continues to “record” his own reactions to the place, his desire to “oil the engines” and “start the west again”. This is also nostalgia for the romantic West of simple values, as mythologized in western movies and novels. Also, we follow the immanent consciousness, projecting the human desire for solitude upon the town: “This town *supports* your need to run alone” (my emphasis). Once again, this is the Subject personifying and humanizing the Object.

The next stanza posits a hypothetical situation which the speaker argues about, namely, what would have happened if he had been born in a place like this? It is worth noting here that he operates with those familiar and almost stereotypical scenes seen in multiple American films about absconding adolescents. Is the speaker’s consciousness playing with the stereotypes retained from films, or is the town of Silver Star itself triggering his childhood memories of cruel teachers, guardians, lack of parental presence and love in a town different from, yet still similar to, the town of his birth?

What if you’d lived here young, gone full of fear
to that stark brick school, the cruel teacher
supported by your guardian? Think well
of the day you ran away to Whitehall.
Think evil of the cop who found you starving
and returned you, siren open, to the house
you cannot find today. You question
everyone you see. The answer comes back wrong.
There was no house. They never heard your name. (CP 177)

The situation remains contained within the hypothetical frame, as the poem tells us that no one knows his name or his house. In other words, the poem does not want to lose “touch” with reality, implying that it is not his town of birth, but is rather a town which causes certain memories to return. In the last stanza, the immanence of the voice is most directly channeled through performative structure in the imperative mood:

When you leave here, leave in a flashy car

and wave goodbye. You are a stranger
 every day. Let the engines and the farm
 equipment die, and know that rivers
 end and never end, lose and never lose
 their famous names. What if your first girl
 ended certain she was animal, barking
 at the aides, and licking floors? You know
 you have no answers. The empty school
 burns red in heavy snow. (*CP* 178)

The performative structure here does not describe the action but rather performs it, that is to say, the speaker gives advice: “. . . leave in a flashy car”, “Let the engines . . .” etc. It therefore captures the intensity of the speaker’s urge to leave behind the hindrance of his childhood memories that consist of cruelty and neglect, as well as the “busted” myth of the idyllic West. The speaker continues his argument by implying that like the rivers, human consciousness and everything which passes through it are changeable and relative: “and know that rivers end and never end, lose and never lose their famous names”. Equally, there are no answers to the madness, that is, why “your first girl ended” believing she was a dog. Regardless of the urge to move on, change and forget, the poem ends with more memories still burning in the speaker’s conscience: “The empty school / burns red in heavy snow”. Yet, it can be the fire purging bad memories which lets you move on. This poem is a further example of a small town being “populated” by the poet with desolation, cruelty and narrow mindedness, his “surrogate suffering”, in order to “let” the speaker of his poem escape hurtful childhood memories.

“Helena, Where Homes Go Mad” is another poem in which the voice assumes the role of a lyric chronicler of the capital of Montana. In this poem, the voice/Subject “struggles” emotionally with his Object, or more precisely, with the history of the place of gold rushes, greed, violence, economic failure and prostitution. The voice comes to the point of negative identification with the place: “Not my country” in the fourth stanza. This lyrical chronicle captures the main points in the spiritual history of the place in a few sketchy lines, combining historical facts, descriptions and the speaker’s evaluative comments. To a certain extent, the poem reads like a Western documentary in which the “cries of gold” and the “fatal groans” coming from the gallows and the “roaring bars”, can still be heard.

The poem does not use many details or deictic devices of place and time; instead it operates with generic and universal categories which produce almost stereotypical scenes, for example, “the ground”, “the gulch”, “the brewery”, etc. I would argue that this strategy works because these categories create the immediacy of the essential scene, Hugo’s “bare landscape”, while also leaving a lot to the imagination and intertextuality. At the same time, this generic style adds an aura of the great American Western epic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century:

Cries of gold or men about to hang
trail off where the brewery failed
on West Main. Greedy fingernails
ripped the ground up inch by inch
down the gulch until the hope of gold
ran out and men began to pimp.
Gold is where you find it in the groin. (*CP* 176)

The dramatic or historic present simple tense in the first two lines of the poem captures the immediate atmosphere of great expectations and prosperity paired with cries of desolation and failure. The powerful synecdoche “greedy fingers” and the “violent” verb “ripped”, add to the violent story of the gold rushes which are replaced by another, but equally, violent story of prostitution: “the hope of gold ran out and men began to pimp”. After this powerful and succinct transition in the lyric chronicle, the typical Hugo comment follows: “Gold is where you find it in the groin”. Here the poet plays with the double meaning of “groin” as a part of human anatomy with reference to sex, and as a hollow between two vaults with connotations of mining.

The second stanza continues with even more violent imagery in which “the vicious” always find ways to relieve their urge to kill and destroy. The stanza does not discuss the urge; it reveals it through action. Instead of hanging or killing men for various reasons, they, “the vicious”, either suppress their wild urge or suffer a bad conscience: “The vicious rode the long plain north / for antelope, or bit their lips in church”. This substitution of one act for another is metonymically structured, since hunting antelope or biting one’s lips in church are not metaphors of violence or bad conscience. Rather they are just different, contiguous aspects or parts of the same general concept of violence, thus metonyms.

That hill is full of unknown bones.
 What was their sin? Rape? A stolen claim?
 Not being liked? When the preacher,
 sick of fatal groans, cut the gallows down
 the vicious rode the long plain north
 for antelope, or bit their lips in church. (*CP* 176)

The third stanza constructs the spiritual architecture of the town: when gold is no longer accessible there is only the love game pursuit, prostitution and babies. Gold, the central concept and the prerequisite for the establishment of Helena, is also the cause for all material loss and spiritual grief, as well as the consequences which befell the town after the gold rush subsided:

Years of hawks and nutty architects
 and now the lines of some diluted rage
 dice the sky for gawkers on the tour.
 Also shacks. Also Catholic spires,
 the Shriner mosque in answer,
 Reeder's Alley selling earthenware.
 Nowhere gold. Nowhere men strung up.
 Another child delivered, peace,
 the roaring bars and what was love
 is cut away year after year
 or played out vulgar like a game
 the bored make up when laws are firm. (*CP* 176)

The “panorama” of the town is followed by a stanza of comments and judgments upon the town. “Not my country”, states the voice, as it subsequently gives the reasons why, yet in the indirect manner of narrative description, that is, through images depicting the harshness of the weather and natural elements. What follows is a stereotypical cinematic scene verbally depicted, the generic good guy leaving the town now dominated by violence as the lone rider: “Someday a man / might walk away alone from violence / and gold, shrinking every step”.

Not my country. The sun is too direct,
 the air too thin, the dirt road packed
 too hard. Someday a man
 might walk away from violence

and gold, shrinking every step. (*CP* 177)

The last stanza continues the style of the great western, the strong and silent hero hiding his soft side (“his early tears”) from a small girl who appears on the scene, “doomed perhaps to be a whore” or a symbol of innocence destroyed. However, as the last four lines indicate, the future of the town will remain violent all the same. The future of the town is read in “the hawks”, which function as a metaphor for the violent and restless men who leave their women and babies in insane Helena:

A small girl, doomed perhaps
to be a whore might read his early tears.
Let’s read the hawks. She’ll marry, he
go dry-eyed to the hot plain north
and strong, behind him—Helena
insane with babies and the lines of homes. (*CP* 177)

The speaker of this lyric chronicle manages to convey the atmosphere of both past and present Helena. When Hugo wrote this poem in the 1970s the traces of the “golden” past, the economic and spiritual consequences of the gold fever that shook the town at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, were still visible. Although it is a subjective story, some of the historical references “support” the speaker’s predominantly negative comments and descriptions that produce a well-structured chronicle. He does not fully subject the chronicle to his emotive projections, but instead states his distance from it: “not my country”. Phenomenologically speaking, the Subject denies the status of a triggering town to the Object. Helena is not his projected Self identified in the town. He decides to leave like a lone western hero or a poet observer who can walk away from the scene he describes.

The categories of tone and atmosphere have been examined through the poetic themes and motives of spiritually and economically failed real towns and places, made vivid by imagined, most often failed, lives of imaginary people. They are his proclaimed “stable set of knowns that the poem needs to anchor on” (*The Triggering Town* 12), unimpeded by any commitment to the emotional undertones associated with the unstable and changeable facts of people’s real lives. The ensuing relationship between the Subject and the towns and places as the Object has been approached as a phenomenological interplay that reveals the various states of human consciousness in the act of perceiving these towns. I have demonstrated that the speaker

frequently registers, and subsequently depicts, the details of the towns which are most likely to trigger melancholy and the sense of failure to which he has succumbed. The triggering towns, therefore, become a projection of his own Self in its struggle to understand and relieve his suppressed emotions and desires that are articulated through the imaginary stories of the failed towns.

The state of the various inhabitants' "bad faith" most often coincides with a similar state being experienced by the speaker. He recognizes it and tries to address these issues, thus confront his repressed emotions by positioning himself and/or "you" in the consequent hypothetical situations. The immanence of the human consciousness is arrested in this specific tone and atmosphere produced by the speaker's personal resignation and reconciliation to melancholy and vulnerable sincerity.

Language in Support of Phenomenological Themes

As we have seen, when poetry chooses specific locations as its poetic medium in order to articulate the corresponding worldviews and emotional responses to them, such poetry inherently addresses issues relating to phenomenology. Hugo's is a poetics of place which claims that "The poem is located in a specific place. You don't know where, but you know the poet knows where" (*The Triggering Town* 7). According to these aesthetics, "place" becomes synonymous with poetic experience, which presupposes the human being and its emotional and intellectual reactions and interactions with the world and the others in that world. The poetic experience happening in the world with others is similar to Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the-world-with-Others*, an existential and ontological *given* that cannot be opted out of:

. . . [B]eing-in is not a "property" which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, *without* which it could *be* just as well as it could with it. It is not the case that human being "is," and then on top of that has a relation of being to the "world" which it sometimes takes upon itself. Dasein is never "initially" a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up a "relation" to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only *because*, as being-in-the-world, Dasein is as it is. This constitution

of being is not first derived from the fact that besides the being which has the character of Dasein there are other beings which are objectively present and meet up with it. These other beings can only “meet up” “with” Dasein because they are able to show themselves of their own accord within a *world*. (*Being and Time* 57-58)

The range of phenomenological themes identified in the first part of the chapter will now be examined from the perspective of the grammatical and the stylistic structures that “support” them. The descriptions, judgments and comments of Hugo’s poetic voice generate semi-discursive and semi-descriptive linguistic structures, the primary feature of his poetic idiom. This combined language structure reiterates the already analyzed Subject-Object relation, as the *discursive* element expresses the Subject’s (speaker’s) attitudes and views of the town-Object, while the more “neutral” *descriptive* elements construct the images of the town-Object. The discursive quality of Hugo’s poetry also reflects the general discursive trends in American poetry during the 1970s, which Altieri analyzes in his *Sense and Sensibility in American Poetry*:

In a critical age we cannot do without discursiveness. Indeed, the contemporary poetry most aware of the issues we are discussing tends to meet demands for lucidity by incorporating a good deal of discursiveness within the poetic experience. Such poetry recognizes a need to deal with qualities inherent in our practices as explaining and interpreting animals. (26)

The statements and counter-statements which constitute Hugo’s discursive poetic language reflect the demands of the decade for prose elements in poetic discourse. This is most clearly pronounced by the poet and critic Pinsky in *The Situation of Poetry*: “The poem is a statement, made in the tone of a human being speaking of and to human beings, with all the excitement of poetry” (162). Although this chapter is not concerned with further explicating the “situation of poetry”, it is vital to note that critics generally view this trend as a counter-reaction to the modernist principle of “show do not tell”, which was maintained in Confessional and “Deep-Image” poetry. Like their modernist predecessors, these two movements gave precedence to coherent images over argument in poetry.

“Driving Montana” provides an example of a poetry that refrains from depicting large, intensive emotional “events”. Instead, the experiencing of objective time and space is conveyed as a human activity which we all participate in but are not always aware of. As the title of the

poem suggests, the speaker is experiencing time and space in wide-open Montana. At the start of the poem, the beginning of the day feels like “a woman who loves you”. While structurally simple, this metaphor reveals the speaker’s current state of mind with an erotic anticipation of the day ahead. As I will demonstrate, the poem captures a human being “lost” in a harmonious relationship with Nature, the Object and the absolute Other, as well as in his own internalized experience of subjective time. Towns begin to “arrive so late” or are “ahead” of his “imagined schedule”, as the poem begins:

The day is a woman who loves you. Open.
Deer drink close to the road and magpies
spray from your car. Miles from any town
your radio comes in strong, unlikely
Mozart from Belgrade, rock and roll
from Butte. Whatever the next number,
you want to hear it. Never has your Buick

found this forward a gear. Even
the tuna salad in Reedpoint is good. (CP 204)

This is another poem of place in which travelling through a certain location captures the individual’s interactive experience with the world. It is generally presented in descriptive lines that are interspersed with the speaker’s straightforward, evaluative comments on what is being experienced. In the statement, “*unlikely* Mozart from Belgrade, rock and roll from Butte” (my italics), the word “unlikely” bears the evaluative edge of the voice’s personal comment on the state of arts and the desire for culture in Belgrade, Montana, a small and remote place in the Rocky mountains. There is a similar evaluative stress on “even” in the statement: “Even the tuna salad in Reedpoint is good”, that is, surprisingly good considering the place. It is in these statements that we can observe the subjectivity and personal perceptions of the speaker, in addition to his personal projections upon the places. The second stanza continues:

Towns arrive ahead of imagined schedule.
Absorakee at one. Or arrive so late—
Silesia at nine—you recreate the day.
Where did you stop along the road
and have fun? Was there a runaway horse?

Did you park at that house, the one
 alone in a void of grain, white with green
 trim and red fence, where you know you lived
 once? You remembered the ringing creek,
 the soft brown forms of far off bison.
 You must have stayed hours, then drove on.
 In the motel you know you'd never seen it before. (*CP* 204)

Besides the internalized experience of time, the poem depicts the acts of a human consciousness assessing what has, might or seemed to have happened to him: "Where did you stop along the road . . . ?" "Was there a runaway horse? / Did you park at that house . . . ?" These lines reveal the internalized experiencing of time and space of which the speaker is aware. He tells us in the last line that "the house" only feels like he has lived in it ("In the motel you know you'd never seen it before"). Similarly to the opening metaphor, the familiar "feel" of the house can be a symbol of a desire for love, warmth and family protection when interpreted psychologically. Hugo's resultant "poetics of need", is accordingly defined by Michael S. Allen, who says:

Emotional need is the foundation of Hugo's concept of poetry. We can see his early writing as impelled by a need to write not just *of* but *out of* and *away from* a deep emotional impoverishment. His attention to that need has led him to insights that mark the furthest advance in our understanding of the way that human emotion comes to be poetic expression. In attending to the dynamics of emotional need, Hugo has placed the writing of poetry in a wider social context than it has had for years—wider perhaps than it has ever had. The writing of poetry . . . places the writer in touch with his or her feelings, giving the poet insights into "that body of emotion" behind the words. (40)

This is increasingly evident if we consider the actual description of the house which resembles a child's drawing: "white with green trim and red fence". On the other hand, the same lines might be interpreted as remnants of the general romantic image of the West, a "little house on the prairie". This romantic fancy is immediately "wracked" by a moment of heightened realism in the last lines: "You must have stayed hours, then drove on. / In the motel you know you'd never seen it before". It is as if the voice openly admits its fantasies while driving through the expansive, and almost empty, space of Montana.

Nearly the entire second stanza consists of questions and hypothetical positions which resemble an argument which the voice is having with itself. The use of the impersonal “you” and the modal structure of the line introduces a strong probability that transforms the whole reflective experience into a series of hypothetical situations which the voice “puts up” for discussion: “You must have stayed hours, then drove on”. The voice also *implicitly* invites the addressee (the reader) to imagine that he/she were in this situation. By involving the reader in hypothetical experiences, the poem creates an impression that the speaker has gone through the same experience so many times that he wants to discuss it and reflect upon it with others. In this poem, discursiveness is in service of the phenomenological quest of the voice to understand his evasive perceptions of space and time during the drive through Montana. The last stanza illustrates the components of Hugo’s typical poetic idiom, alternating and combining the semi-discursive and semi-descriptive lines numbered accordingly:

- (1) Tomorrow will open again, the sky wide
- (2) as the mouth of a wild girl, friable
- (3) clouds you lose yourself to. You are lost
- (4) in miles of land without people, without
- (5) one fear of being found, in the dash
- (6) of rabbits, soar of antelope, swirl
- (7) merge and clatter of streams. (CP 204)

This stanza addresses another phenomenological issue—losing oneself in the Object. When one loses oneself in nature, in the “in-itself”, one consequently loses the sense of being for-itself in the space without Others. Consequently, this makes one’s self-perception and self-experience impossible. In other words, you need to be “in-the-world-with-others” in order to acquire a sense of yourself and become a being-for-itself. Once again, Sartre provides explanation of this state:

There is a relation of the for-itself with the in-itself in the presence of the Other.
(BN 383)

. . . I *am* my own detachment from myself, I *am* my own nothingness; simply because I am my own mediator between Me and Me, all objectivity disappears. I cannot *be* this nothingness which separates me from me-as-object, for there must of necessity be a *presentation* to me of the object which I am. Thus I cannot

confer on myself any quality without mediation or an objectifying power which is not my own power and which I can neither pretend nor forge. Of course this has been said before; it was said a long time ago that the Other teaches me who I am. (*BN* 298)

Losing oneself in the vast space of nature and contemplating that state of consciousness is stylistically recaptured by the alternating descriptive lines and discursive statements. The speaker begins with a predictive statement in line 1 of the poem quoted above: “Tomorrow will open again, the sky wide”. The speaker then continues with a description in concrete images in lines 2-3: “as the mouth of a wild girl, friable / clouds you lose yourself to. You are lost”. The descriptive and concrete noun phrase, “friable clouds” is combined here with the abstract verb phrase “lose yourself”. The voice then returns to a discursive statement in lines 4-5: “in miles of land without people, without / one fear of being found, in the dash”, and finishes with description in lines 6-7: “of rabbits, soar of antelope, swirl / merge and clatter of streams”. The language of the poem combines on the one hand the discursive features of language, for example, argument, explanation, questioning, statements and abstract propositions. On the other hand, the descriptive features of language, such as demonstration and description, are expressed in images and concrete words. This combination reflects and linguistically supports the speaker’s subjective perception and the objective description of the experience of time and space. Consequently, the language of the poem reflects and expresses the phenomenological theme of the poem, the various degrees of an individual’s subjective and objective perception of time and space being experienced.

When a poem such as, “St. Ignatius Where the Salish Wail”, begins with the reference, “It’s a bad Good Friday, snow and mud”, to a religious holiday, than we might expect the whole poem to be “exposed” to the speaker’s evaluative comments and statements. Linguistically, “bad Good Friday”, is a phrase which consists of a qualitative modifier, “good”, and a noun, “Friday”, pre-modified by an opposite modifier, “bad”. This construction reflects the essential strategy of Hugo’s poetic idiom, as a given fact or statement is immediately followed or preceded by a personal comment or evaluation of some kind. As the poem develops, the dualism and the constant oppositional pairing are visible in the merging of two cultures: the grim American, Christian culture, and the happier polytheistic and naturalistic culture of the Native Americans.

The title emphasizes the same cultural and religious dichotomy. After watching the ceremony of the Indian wailing and the deposition of Christ from the cross, the voice tentatively concludes with an ambiguous comment that “The mud is deeper”, suggesting an incomprehensibility and incongruence within this cultural mix. The first stanza begins:

It's a bad Good Friday, snow and mud
and mongrels in the road. Today's sky said
He'd weigh a ton tonight. A priest
unhooks the hands while Flatheads chant
ninety pounds of spices on the skin.
Another One, not the one they took down from
the cross, is lugged by six old Indians
around the room, five following with songs. (*CP* 170)

The Salish Indians are observed wailing at a sacred Christian place. From the beginning, there is a profound sense of the incongruity between the different elements, as they are either combined or juxtaposed but not merged together as one. They remain two different cultures, two separated doctrines. The same idea is hinted at in the mixed breed of the dogs, the “mongrels”, which, as part of the scene, provide a further restatement of the principle of merging. Even the weather is a mixture of “snow and rain”, producing the symbolic “mud”. A sense of dualism and ambiguity is also present in the lines: “Today's sky said / He'd weigh a ton tonight”. “The sky” as “He” can be read as one of the personified, volatile male Indian spirits “promising” more snow and rain. Yet the same personified sky is the place which the other, the Christian god, inhabits. If the capitalized “He” is read as a reference to Christ, then it becomes ambiguous why he would weigh a ton since the ceremony, as the poem tells us, must be held indoors because of the bad weather. At a ceremony such as this, performed by a Christian priest before an Indian congregation, it is inevitable that one expects there to be “another one” besides the “one on the Cross”.

The strategy of having statements followed by descriptive lines, captures the hybrid Indo-Christian ceremony occurring on Good Friday and extends the dualism further. The line, “ninety pounds of spices on the skin”, is a comment which is also a hyperbolic and slightly humorous perception of the immanent voice observing. The second stanza continues:

On a real Good Friday, warm and moon,
 they'd pack Him outside where bright
 fires burn. Here or there, the dialect
 burns on their tongues. Elbow joints enflame
 and still they crawl
 nailed hours to the tomb. For men
 who raced young April clouds and won, the place
 of reverence is grim. Their chanting
 bangs the door of any man's first cave. (*CP* 170)

Here the combination of descriptive and discursive linguistic units continues, as the voice describing the details of the ceremony also develops the argument and speculates further about “what a real Good Friday” would have looked like if the Indo-Christian ceremony had been performed in its traditional setting, outside in the moonlight with burning fires. The voice furthers the argument metaphorically, by suggesting that the slow, somber rituals involved in performing a funeral on Good Friday is incongruent to people who can “race clouds” and usually win. The conclusion of the argument comes in the statement “Their chanting / bangs the door of any man's first cave”. Their chant is much older than the Christian ritual and sounds primordial, as if coming from the beginning of mankind. It opens our “first cave” with ease, as we all carry it within the collective, genetic memory. We thus experience it as a “bang” in our consciousness. The third stanza continues:

Mongrels have gone home. We slop
 toward the car. Every year
 a few less live who know the Salish hymns.
 The mud is deeper. Snow has turned to rain.
 We were renegade when God had gills.
 We never change. Still, the raw sound
 of their faces and the wailing unpretentious
 color of their shawls— (*CP* 170)

The voice makes its most significant point in the final remarks: “Every year / a few less live who know the Salish hymns” and “we were renegade when God had gills”. The adjective “renegade” might refer to the Puritans, or to other similar groups, who came to America after rejecting allegiance to authority in the “old world”. It might also refer, although unflatteringly, to the

common outlaws who pushed west and encroached upon the native people who worshipped their own deities closely related to natural elements, “when God had gills”. The descriptive line in the middle of this conclusive part of the poem, “The mud is deeper”, acquires a metaphoric meaning. The mixture of two cultures and spiritual doctrines is like the natural mixture of dust and rain which becomes “mud”, opaque and not easy to comprehend. The poem does not end in an understanding, but rather with a double synesthesia, a linguistic mixture on this occasion of color and sound: “the raw sound of their faces” and “the wailing unpretentious color of their shawls”.

This is a further demonstration of the semi-discursive and semi-descriptive language depicting the principle on which the theme of the poem is based, mixing, merging and combining the American and Indian cultures.

The typical line and stanza of Hugo’s poetry is rather long, although his recommendation is: “Maximum sentence length: seventeen words. Minimum: one” (*Triggering Town* 40). However, there are lines in these rather “wordy” poems which succeed to express complex ideas and concepts in relatively few words. In this chapter, I refer to these lines as “succinct expressions in wordy poems”. In addition to the colloquial and conversational quality of Hugo’s language, these focused lines reflect a merging of the descriptive, concrete elements and the evaluative, abstract alternatives. Here are several succinct and expressive lines which articulate the entire theme of the poem: “the tortured try of local drivers to accelerate their lives” and “the principle supporting business now is rage” from “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg” (216), “the fast train east divides the town, / one half, grocery store and mill, / the other, gin and bitter loss” from “To Die in Milltown” (173) and “until the hope of gold ran out and men began to pimp” from “Helena, Where Homes Go Mad” (176). All these examples manage to express the complex nature of the human situation depicted in their respective poems using limited words. When analyzed from a semantic perspective, these lines can be seen combining concepts from completely different, and often opposed contexts. Concepts from the sphere of material culture and economic values are used to refer to social, spiritual and cultural values. The substitution of these similar concepts from such dissimilar contexts produces metaphoric structures which reinforce the expressive power of the succinct lines. “The tortured try of local drivers to accelerate their lives” is a metaphoric construction which depicts the complex social and cultural life of Philipsburg, a small town with little choice for social mobility. In order to compensate for

their frustration with the emptiness of their lives, the inhabitants or the “local drivers”, drive fast to “accelerate their lives”. The metaphor “to accelerate their lives”, is produced by selecting a verb from the context of the mechanics and dynamics of the physical movement of objects (“accelerate”) to refer to “lives” which belong to an entirely different humanistic context. Similarly, the second example (from the same poem): “the principle supporting business now is rage”, combines the phrase “supporting business” which belongs to the economic sphere, with the concept “rage” which reflects the psychological and sociological spheres. “Supporting business” as “rage” generates the metaphor which stands for the socio-cultural and economic condition of the town. The third example of these succinct lines: “the fast train east divides the town / one half, grocery store and mill / the other gin and bitter loss” (“To Die in Milltown” 173), illustrates the frequent use of binary oppositions which the poems employ to substitute and combine alternative concepts from opposed contexts. On the one hand there is the basic economic base: “the grocery store and mill” and on the other, the spiritual and cultural superstructures: “gin and bitter loss”. However, the expressiveness of these lines does not rely on a metaphor, but on a simple metonymy: “gin”, as a contiguous *part* of the bars, stands for and replaces the *whole*, that is, the numerous social evils that produce the atmosphere of “bitter loss” in the town. As implied before, the structure of these succinct and expressive lines is essentially semi-descriptive and semi-discursive, as they simultaneously describe and judge the towns.

“Time to Remember Sangster”, provides an example of how the expressive and evaluative judgments are used in the narrative and descriptive structure of a childhood memory. They reflect the subject’s attitude toward, or more precisely his *ideological perspective* upon, the object of perception. These are harnessed to situate the object of perception and reflection, the old street vendor with his fruit cart, in a certain socio-cultural milieu. The first stanza begins:

One of us would spot his horse, same white
as his mustache, and word traveled on warm air.
When he solicited orders at doors
we stole pears from his cart, that battered
gray board flatbed held together by luck.
He was obsolete as promise. His apples
felt firm green and his cherries were loaded
with black exploding sun. Those days
seemed ripe as women we expected to meet

under flowering trees when we grew up. (*CP* 229)

The vendor's cart is "that battered gray board flatbed held together by luck" which, when put on the socio-economic poverty scale, translates as mere survival by sheer luck. It is an overtly evaluative comment blended into the descriptive structure. The expressiveness of the poem also rests on the lines constructed through simile and certain linguistic deviations which de-familiarize the language and sharpen the expression. The line "He was obsolete as promise" is another comment within the descriptive context of the poem. It is a simile in which the vendor is post-modified by the adjective "obsolete", which usually modifies abstract concepts or inanimate objects but rarely humans. "Obsolete" is then defined by another abstract concept, "promise". Thus, the vendor is not just being likened to an "obsolete promise", which is a conventionally structured simile. Instead, it is as if the poem is suggesting that he is more than a person, since he has become a childhood "institution", a phenomenon of past times that is impinging upon the speaker's consciousness. By the end of the poem, we realize that the vendor's death is also experienced as an unfulfilled obsolete promise which marks the speaker's entry into adolescence. Based on a slight deviation of the common structure, the simile carries greater expressive weight by mirroring the primary intention behind Shklovsky's concept of de-familiarizing language:

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. . . .

. . . Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war . . . And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. ("Art as Technique" 11, 12)

Another linguistic deviation, albeit on a smaller scale, is the adjective phrase "firm green" in the line: "His apples felt firm green". Here the adjectival modifier "firm", modifies another adjectival modifier "green". Conventionally, a conjunction would be expected, for example: "His apples felt firm and green". In addition to this, "firm" does not usually modify colors. This linguistic deviation intensifies the greenness of the apples by de-habitualizing the language

pattern. We experience an intensity of color and shape in the description of “cherries loaded with black exploding sun” in the second line. This hyperbolic description is a metonymy based on a simile, as the effect, the ripeness of the fruit, is replaced by its cause, “the black exploding sun”. By the globular shape and shiny tautness the “cherries” are *like* “the sun”, except that here it is black and exploded having reached its maximum heat. Therefore, “the cherries” are “loaded” with the sun’s explosion, the cause of their ripeness. This intense sensation captured in the language is how the children felt regarding the “forbidden fruit” of childhood. The sensual quality of the ripeness and sweetness mixes with the sexual fantasies of the boys: “Those days / seemed ripe as women we expected to meet / under flowering trees when we grew up”.

There is another significant line in the second stanza based on simile. The line recreates the common situation when children put strange questions they do not dare ask their parents to a stranger in the street. However, regardless of what their questions were, “He sat mute as orchards abandoned to the heat”. Their interlocutor is hence “mute” like nature, like the Object, the being-in-itself:

Summer and summer he came, he, the horse
and the cart beyond aging, all three
frozen ninety-two. To children
he was old as tears. We asked him what caused weather.
We asked him about future wars. He sat mute
as orchards abandoned to the heat.
Summer on summer our delighted thieving
went on until he died and summer went void. (CP 230)

This Edenic, “delighted thieving” of the forbidden fruit is interrupted by the incomprehensible concept of death, which by extension interrupts the speaker’s childhood. The vendor’s death opens the new stage of adulthood, filled with denials, protests and questions that interrupt the summer of childhood. The comparison “his eyes shut tight as a canyon wall of sand” captures the attempt of the child to comprehend death by objectifying it as an image of dark and barren finality. The “canyon wall of sand” is as prohibitive of comprehension as the closed eyes of the dead man.

They took me to his funeral. Open casket.

I exploded when I saw him, his mustache
 touched up blue not looking like it looked,
 his eyes shut tight as a canyon wall
 of sand. They dragged me into the light. (*CP* 229)

Although thematically straightforward, this poem illustrates Hugo's typical expressive line. It blends comment and narration with the rhythmic regularity of recurrent and repetitive forms, which greatly contributes to the generated tone and atmosphere of this poetry.

Even in Hugo's more discursive poems my concept of "succinct expression in a wordy poem" relies on the same combination of descriptive images and argumentative and expository language of statements and comments. The previously analyzed "Letter to Levertov from Butte", is an example of how a long and "wordy" poem captures the gradual process of material and spiritual impoverishment in a few succinct and expressive lines. Although some of the images betray the cinematic quality of illustrating rather than telling, the succinctness and expressiveness of their verbal qualities lie in their metaphoric structure:

my (damn this next word) heart go out through the stinking air
 into the shacks of Walkerville, to the wife who has turned
 forever to the wall, the husband sobbing at the kitchen
 table and the unwashed children taking it in and in and in
 until they are the wall, the table, even the dog the parents
 kill each month when the money's gone. On the other hand, (*CP* 308)

Here Hugo's "degrees of grey", the degree of complete impoverishment, reaches the point of total indifference when the "children" are treated like the household items. This indifference can turn into cruelty at any moment, as the children can be treated like the "dog" the parents kill when they cannot feed it. The process of degradation and dehumanization has a further, heightened consequence: the children treated with indifference and cruelty become indifferent themselves. Hugo implies both the cause and effect when he "transforms" the children metaphorically into objects, "until they are the wall, the table, even the dog the parents kill".

The frequent use of the second-person pronoun is another characteristic of Hugo's poetics. The use of "you", I would argue, "supports" the semi-argumentative style of this poetry by constructing the poetic experience as a hypothetical situation. Accordingly, the poetic

experience is not presented in the form of a personal testimony or a confession, but as a topic “for discussion” or part of an “argument”. It appears that the voice “opens” these discussions in order to resolve some personal issues or to learn more about his own acts, especially why one comes to a particular town and feels in a particular way. By the use of “you”, the poem tries to transcend the experience to reach a more impersonal and universal level. However, with so many precise details of actual geographical locations, the poems still retain their personal quality. Therefore, despite the frequency with which the speaker invites us to imagine that we are in a certain hypothetical situation, we know he is speaking about his personal experience. The personal nature of the experience is also revealed by the emotive attitude of the speaker when he presents, argues and describes the seemingly hypothetical situations. As Hugo explains:

The good poems say: “This is how I feel.” With luck that’s true, but usually it is not. More often the poem is the way the poet says he feels when he can’t find out what his real feelings are. It makes little difference to the reader, since a good poem sounds meant enough to be believed. (*Triggering Town* 34)

It is significant that this seemingly impersonal “you” even appears in situations when the voice deals with self-perception and the emotions associated with self-abnegation. Although using the second-person pronoun, the voice appears to be addressing itself in order to talk about the irreconcilable issues of low self-esteem, shame, guilt and hurt. This tendency is demonstrated in the poem “Goodbye, Iowa:”

Once more you’ve degraded yourself on the road.
The freeway turned you back in on yourself
and you found nothing, not even a good false name.
The waitress mocked you and you paid your bill
sweating in her glare. You tried to tell her
how many lovers you’ve had. Only a croak came out.
Your hand shook when she put hot coins in it.
Your face was hot and you ran face down to the car. (*CP* 237)

The details selected in this episode convey the emotions the speaker is attempting to address as he subjects himself to a self-questioning ordeal while driving alone, “The freeway turned you back in on yourself”. The scene with the “waitress” mirrors the physical and the bodily

manifestations of his shame and self-hatred, “sweating in her glare” and “only a croak came out”. The second stanza continues:

Miles you hated her. Then you remembered what
the doctor said: really a hatred of self. Where
in flashes of past, the gravestone
you looked for years and never found, was there
a dignified time? Only when alone,
those solitary times with sky gray as a freeway. (*CP* 237)

Going back to the car means returning to self-analysis and an argument about the real origin of his feelings while in communication with others. That is to say, his state of being-in-the-world-with-others and consequent low-self esteem can only be cured by solitude. The “grey” of his solitary moments in the past is now the “freeway gray” of this solitary drive. The third stanza continues:

And now you are alone. The waitress
will never see you again. You often pretend
you don’t remember people you do. You joke back
spasms of shame from a night long ago.
Splintered glass. Bewildering blue swirl
of police. Light in your eyes. Hard questions.
Your car is cruising. You cross with ease
at 80 the state line and the state you are entering
always treated you well. (*CP* 237)

The use of “you” is completely appropriate in this primarily discursive context. When expressed in the language of phenomenology, self-perception appears as an event that often hides the answers to the questions regarding what motivates our actions, and in this context, why he consistently degrades himself. Self-perception is elusive because the object of perception, the “I”, or the consciousness for-itself, is at the same time the in-itself or the object which is analyzed. As Sartre implies: “In word, reflection is in bad faith in so far as it constitutes itself as the revelation of *the object which I make-to-be-me*” (*BN* 184). Thus, being and self-reflection

upon being is almost impossible in this eternal phenomenological circuit in which one is conscious of being conscious of being conscious, *ad infinitum*:

The reflected-on knows itself observed. It may best be compared—to use a concrete example—to a man who is writing, bent over a table, and who while writing knows that he is observed by somebody who stands behind him. The reflected-on has then, in a way, already a consciousness (of) itself as having *an outside* or rather the suggestion of *an outside*; that is, it makes himself an object for —, so that its meaning as reflected-on is inseparable from the reflective and exists over there at a distance from itself in the consciousness which reflects on it. In this sense the reflected-on does not possess *Selbständigkeit* any more than the reflective itself. (BN 175)

At the same time, the use of the second-person pronoun ensures that the poem is not overwhelmed by emotional pathos. This consequently preserves the speaker's analytical approach. The discursive quality of Hugo's poetry lies in the hypothetical, imagined situations in which the speaker speculates about and discusses both possible and probable outcomes. As we have seen, they are almost always constructed with "you" as the main protagonist, which the speaker uses to transcend his immanent and often painful experience.

Personification

Personification is a trope which most directly reflects the Subject–Object relation. It is an act of the Subject, or the human being, ascribing human characteristics and faculties to the Object or the non-human world. From a phenomenological perspective, it is a projecting of human consciousness upon the non-conscious world. It is a restatement of the general phenomenological theme of Hugo's poetry through its stylistic features. The locations of Hugo's poems are mostly Montana and the Northwest where the prairies, lakes, mountains and rivers prevail over the human world. The poems often depict the human protagonist being "thrown" into the vast and overwhelming space of the non-human world and projecting his own perceptions and concerns upon them. The first stanza of "Turtle Lake" demonstrates this tendency:

The wind at Dog Lake whispered ‘stranger’ ‘stranger’
 and we drove away. When we drove down that hill
 and flared out on the empty prairie, home seemed
 less ashamed of us. My Buick hit a note too high
 for dogs at 85 and cattails bowed like subjects
 where we flashed through swamp. The wind died
 back of us in slipstream. The sky kept chanting
 ‘move like you are moved by water.’ When we rolled
 into Polson we were clean as kings. (*CP* 239-40)

In this poem “the wind” whispers “stranger” to the human beings or the human beings “heard” their own feeling whispered in that place. Then, they “hear” all the non-human creatures and the inanimate objects “talking” and “communicating” with them in their own, non-human language. The whole stanza is interwoven with a series of personifications that capture the image and the atmosphere of two human beings totally alone in the overwhelming world of nature, to the point of experiencing nature as another consciousness, a being-for-itself. The relationship between these two consciousnesses develops further then, as the wind at Dog Lake rejects them by calling them strangers. They then approach their home in a manner that makes it their home. Consequently, the “cattails bow” with respect to them, while the “sky” encourages them to keep moving. As the relationship with nature becomes consummated, they come out “clean” and powerful “as kings”. This is an intimate relationship in which the human participants can hear and see nature better as the Other, since they can hear “the beat of trout hearts” which “amplifies” as an echo against the mountains:

Turtle is a lake the odd can own. It spreads
 mercurial around those pastoral knolls.
 The water waits so still, we listen to grim planets
 for advice. The beat of trout hearts amplifies
 against the Mission Range and when that throb returns
 our faces glow the color of the lake. This
 is where we change our names. Five clouds cross
 the sun: the lake has been six colors,
 counting that dejected gray our lives brought in. (*CP* 240)

The human members of this relationship can see themselves as the owners of Turtle Lake. They describe their “property” in terms of another natural element, “mercurial”, and assume that the stillness of the place is deliberate, intended to allow them to communicate with the other parts of the universe: “The water waits so still, we listen to grim planets / for advice”. The circuitous relationship between the humans and nature begins with a sound, the beat of “trout hearts”, and finishes reflected as a “glow” on their faces. The sounds, light and colors, and the hard and the liquid elements, all spill over into one another: “The beat of trout hearts amplifies / against the Mission Range and when that throb returns / our faces glow the color of the lake”. After being in the middle of this natural circle, one’s consciousness is altered and one must change or lose one’s human name and one’s self-perception, as the poem states: “This is where we change our names”.

Despite being deeply immersed in the natural world, the humans in the poem are aware of their input in the whole picture; they are “counting that dejected gray” their “lives brought in” this world. Thus, they confess their inevitable phenomenological “sin” of projecting their Selves upon nature as the Other. The last stanza concludes:

The old man fishing fills his limit and goes home.
 The heron takes his limit: one. All five clouds
 poured east to oblivion and from the west advice
 is pouring in. The mute wind
 deeds the lake to us. Our homes have burned down
 back where wind turned hungry friends away.
 Whatever color water wants, we grant it with a wave.
 We believe this luxury of bondage, the warm way
 mountains call us citizen in debt. (*CP* 240)

This last stanza talks about various “transactions” between the humans and the natural world: the “fishermen” takes his share from the lake; the “wind” leaves the “ownership” of the lake to them, who then use their property to make waves and grant the lake “whatever color water wants”. The poem ends with a lucid awareness of how precious the “luxury of bondage” to nature is, and how we remain indebted to it, “the warm way / mountains call us citizens in debt”.

“Turtle Lake” is a rare example of a poetic structure entirely based on personifications of nature, especially of its inanimate components. It reflects the inevitable Subject-Object

relationship in which only one side is active, the perceiving and the projecting one as a being-for-itself. In this in-itself world of nature, it seems that the human beings projected their dejection and melancholy (“that dejected gray our lives brought in”).

As a means of restating the speaker’s subjective perceptions of reality, personification also sets the tone of “Dixon”. Once again, it is difficult to decide which stage of the phenomenological circle the poem depicts. Is it the depressing place that triggers existential despair and puts the speaker in a constant state of “bad faith”, or is it the speaker who projects such feelings upon the town? As “Dixon” demonstrates, it is one of the *triggering town* poems, while its constant personifications suggest a human perception of, and projection onto, reality influenced by the speaker’s self-perception and emotional state of mind. The first two stanzas begin:

Light crawls timid over fields
 from some vague source behind the hills,
 too gray to be the sun. Any morning
 brings the same, a test of stamina,
 your capacity to live the long day out
 paced by the hesitant river. No chance
 you might discover someone dead.
 Always you curse the limited goods
 in the store and your limited money.
 You learn to ignore the wind leak
 in your shack. On bad days in the bar
 you drink until you are a mayor.

On neutral days you hope the school
 is adequate though you’re no father
 and your wife left decades back
 when the train still ran. You look
 hours down the track. Perhaps a freight.
 Only the arrogant wind. You think
 the browns are running, hitting bait.
 You have waited and waited for mail,
 a wedding invitation, a postcard
 from New York. You reread the book
 about red lovers one more time,

pages torn and the cover gone. (*CP* 213)

The speaker can see “light” in his situation, but it is “crawling” and “timid”, and he cannot be certain where it comes from as it is “too gray to be the sun”. This is the first perception of a depressed man for whom going through the day is a “test of stamina”. On such a day, even the river’s flow seems “hesitant”, while getting drunk and totally losing one’s sense of reality allows one to fantasize about being a mayor, a figure of authority, and about control of one’s life. Through the personifications “timid light”, “hesitant river” and “arrogant wind”, *we* can see how *he* sees the town, and consequently, understand his feelings of depression, lethargy and helplessness. Essentially, he has made a choice by not choosing as a being-for-itself “condemned to freedom”, according to Sartre’s existential philosophy.¹⁵

The days of the depressed man in Dixon are primarily described in the second stanza as either long waits for the future or periods spent living in the past. Accordingly, there is no action or resolution for action. There is a sense of indifference and absence of a firm grip on reality; for example, he worries about the inadequacy of schools in Dixon, although he does not have children or a wife. Michael Dobberstein most succinctly identifies the “depressed man” in Hugo’s poems:

Stranded in an “odd empty town,” parceling out his sense of failure like communion wafers to those as debased as himself, the narrator ritualizes his degradation into a sort of sacrament of despair, and becomes himself emblematic of the doomed American, rootless, antiheroic, his only true home a community of souls as damned as his own. (428)

Once again, it is difficult to determine whether it is the town, the train that stopped long time ago or the “arrogant wind” that is responsible for his existential inertia and feeling of utter desertion.

¹⁵ In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre insists repeatedly that the very being of the for-itself is “condemned to be free. This means that no limit to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free. To the extent that the for-itself wishes to hide its own nothingness from itself and to incorporate the in-itself as its true mode of being, it is trying also to hide its freedom from itself” (462).

On the one hand, the poem briefly suggests that at a certain point in time, the speaker became like the town—poor, failed and depressed without prospect for change. On the other hand, the poem seems to suggest that the town has its own share in his depression. By trying to determine what comes first, we enter into the phenomenological circuit that repeats itself in many of Hugo's poems. Personification is another indication of the human mind projecting its own state of "bad faith" onto the Other, on the town. At the same time, it shows how the language "supports" and reiterates the phenomenological themes of the poem.

As I have shown, the immanent human consciousness in Hugo's poetry is traceable in the specific and all-encompassing tone and atmosphere. These confirm the presence of a fully particularized and individualized agent struggling to "touch" the intangible fibers that connect his consciousness to the world outside, that is, to the Object. Referred to throughout this chapter as the Subject-Object relation, this process involves the immanent agent being immersed in the Object, in Nature, or in the string of small, Northwestern, American towns and places, entering different emotional and other "transactional" relationships with them. These Subject-Object relationships are always depicted as fully structured experiences in which the context—the towns and their imaginary stories—become the main poetic "message", the main poetic experience. The triggering town becomes the other protagonist in addition to the human voice/speaker of these poems. Their relationship, as I have argued here, becomes one of the main thematic and phenomenological preoccupations of Hugo's poetry. The perceptions of the Subject, the human voice, are often affected by the emotions which spring from his past, especially from his childhood. These emotions are triggered by the places he visits and are often projected upon the Object.

I have demonstrated that the typical tone and atmosphere of Hugo's poetry is produced by the perception and the stance of the poetic Subject towards reality, which in turn reveal his existential resignation to prevailing sadness, melancholy and stoic acceptance. The first part of the title of his collected poems helps explain this general stance, *Making Certain It Goes On*. The communicative purpose that Hugo ascribes to poetry explains his epistolary poems and the numerous dedications of these poems to his friends and colleagues. By the use of "you", the speaker posits his life in a hypothetical situation which is "open" for discussion. His poetry speaks about the self-perceptions of the Subject as small, inadequate and humble, which

consequently hinder his proper communication with others. As a result, the gap between himself and others is broadened to the point of experiencing a sense of total isolation and despair. This is perhaps why Hugo's town "supports" our desire "to run alone", as he states in "Silver Star" (177).

The second part of this chapter examined the semi-discursive and semi-descriptive lines utilized in the service of the main phenomenological themes of Hugo's poetry. Together with the lines referred to as "succinct expressions in a wordy poem", both these structures reflect and restate the same general Subject-Object relation. That is to say, the discursive, abstract and evaluative statements, comments and judgments reflect the Subject, while the descriptive and concrete images, reflect the Object. The second-person pronoun has been shown to be the protagonist of the discursive, hypothetical situations, and a rhetorical means for the speaker to avoid the personal tone of a testimony.

Another linguistic and stylistic support for the primary phenomenological "investigations" in this poetry is personification. It essentially enacts an aspect of the Subject-Object relationship—the Subject's projections of human faculties and characteristics upon the Object. By this action, Hugo creates another imaginary consciousness, another being-for-itself which he can hear speaking to him. However, in the never-ending and alterable states of consciousness and perceptions, the poems are always aware that it is only the Speaker's immanent consciousness that we see in the Other. Therefore, Hugo's attitude towards Nature as the Object, is neither the familiar Emersonian notion nor Wright's numinous Other. For Hugo, nature does not speak, rather we "make" nature speak the things to us that we want to hear. This is the attitude of a realist who needs "you" to discuss and share the unstable knowledge of the world and of himself.

CHAPTER IV

JORIE GRAHAM: PRESENT IN THE DISCOURSE

As the next poet in the nexus of immanentist and experiential poets examined in this thesis, Jorie Graham takes up the pronounced *discursive* trend of American poetry in the 1970s. Combined with an additional, experiential quality, she continues this trend into the 1980s and the subsequent decades. The discursive style of the 1970s, often interpreted by critics as a radical formal shift from the poetry of the previous two decades, is best described by Robert Gilbert in his survey of the dominant trends in American poetry during the second half of the twentieth century:

The discursive style of the seventies had as one of its hallmarks a more elaborate syntax, devoted not to the proliferation of factual detail, as in the fifties, but to the complexities of abstract thought. The short declarative sentences favored by poets in the sixties were replaced by longer sentences full of qualifications, parenthesis, semi-colons and subordinate clauses. Lines became longer as well in order to accommodate this more expository, discursive syntax. (Gilbert 562)

The discursive and experiential qualities of Graham's poetry will be approached in this chapter as forms of immanent human consciousness, "heard" as the meditative and speculative voice, and "seen" as the active participant or the *protagonist* of the experience in the poem. This analysis of the discursive quality of Graham's poetry utilises some of Pinsky's descriptive categories applied in his study of the various types of discursive poetry, *The Situation of Poetry* (1976).

From the beginning, some of the most exciting, overwhelming moments in the modernist tradition have come when a poet breaks through into a kind of prose freedom and prose inclusiveness which I have tried to suggest with words like "discourse" and "discursive." The freedom and scope of speech may convey the idea better than those of prose, if by speech we mean not the idiom, but its way of moving, inquiring, expanding. (Pinsky 144)

The categorical phrases “prose freedom”, “prose inclusiveness”, “the freedom and scope of speech” in the above passage, in conjunction with other terms used in Pinsky’s study, primarily “arguing”, “telling” “abstraction”, “transcendence of fact towards statement”, will be used in the analysis of Graham’s discursive poems. Most importantly, Pinsky’s demand that poetry strike a balance between *descriptiveness* and *discursiveness*, or, as he says, “transcending fact towards statement”, will be tested further as a generative principle operating in Graham’s poetry, a poetry that combines experiential “fact” and discursive “statement”. These main “filaments” (“Notes on the Reality of the Self”, *Materialism* 3) of the poetic structure and texture will be examined in her poetry collections written in the 1980s and the early 1990s, including *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*, *Erosion*, *The End of Beauty*, *Region of Unlikeness*, and *Materialism*.

Graham often refers to her poetic voice as the “protagonist” (Gardner, “The Art of Poetry No. 85”, interview), who resorts to reflections, meditations and speculations, internalised arguments with the self and externalised arguments with the reader. The quasi-philosophical, scientific, and spiritual discourses consequently produced are primarily situated in a fully manifested, that is, immanent experience which Graham terms an “occasion”. These occasions or events are usually described or narrated in a more causal, linear, and sequential language which she refers to as the “turn outward” of the poem (Ratzabi, “Noting Mystical About It”, interview). The experiential scenes appear as momentary respites of empirical grounding constantly encroached upon by the meditative and speculative thoughts of the “protagonist. These occasions locate the meditations in spatial and temporal terms, and therefore function to hold the diffuse, meditative parts of the poem together. Accordingly, the poem reveals the place and time of the occasion and the reflections initiated therein, which are then developed further in the meditative process. As even a brief example of one of her more speculative poems will demonstrate, those with more thought than “action”, the thinking is still experientially located in a frame of spatio-temporal references. The last three stanzas of the poem “Strangers” (*Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* 12) emphasize this point:

We have no mind

in a world without objects.
The vigor of our way
is separateness,

the infinite
 finding itself strange
 among the many. *Dusk,*

*when objects lose their way, you
 throw a small
 red ball at me
 and I return it.
 The miracle is this:
 the perfect arc*

*of red we interrupt
 over and over
 until it is too dark
 to see, reaches beyond us
 to complete
 only itself. (12-13, emphasis mine)*

After the well-known lines of this poem, “We have no mind / in a world without objects”, the meditative thoughts continue and, almost at the end the poem, we are given a hint of the experiential “whereabouts” of the occasion: the protagonist is playing some kind of ball game with another person at dusk and speculating about human consciousness as a category which presupposes another category, a consciousness *of/about* something.

After discussing Graham’s general discursiveness, I will first focus on the types of discourses identified as consecutive phases of the reflective process in her poetry. I will argue that her Keatsian faith in sensory experience and data generates what I refer to as a “scientific-like discourse”. Combined with the specialized registers of scientific disciplines, such as physics, dynamics, botany, etc., Graham’s discourse primarily consists of acute observations and descriptions of the smallest components of, and changes within, the interactions between the animate and inanimate worlds. The knowledge gathered is then processed further through a philosophical deduction of more general principles according to their applicability to the different planes of human existence. After the scientific and the philosophical discourses are finally exhausted, the spiritual and numinous alternatives emerge, mapping the boundary between the known and the unknown, reaching what Helen Vendler calls the “edge of the

precipice of perception” (“The Moment of Excess”, *Breaking of Style*). This is a point in Graham’s poetry when an emotion, a plea, humbleness or grace, emerge before the grand unknown.

Consequently, the scientific, philosophical and spiritual discourses between which the protagonist oscillates, construct a unified and personalized discourse of a female subject who trusts science and philosophy as much as she trusts the various forms of spirituality. In other words, she is a poet who trusts the “report” of the senses on *phenomena*, the way things appear to us and we perceive them as such, and a poet who lets her mind speculate and reflect on the Kantian “*noumena*”, the things-in-themselves that we cannot know and cannot perceive as such.¹⁶ I believe Vendler finds a variation of this idea of a “gap” between the human perception of things by our senses and our mental processing, and the things-in-themselves, which we can only intuit exist but never know as such, in Graham’s poem “The Turning” (*Errancy*):

[T]here is either a war between the world and its perceiver, preventing their interpenetration; or else there is an indifference between them, making them remain on parallel tracks without intersection. (Vendler, “The Moment of Excess”)

Secondly, I will trace the other defining characteristic of Graham’s poetry, the *experiential* quality, in a number of characteristics analyzed individually. I will begin with the previously indicated empirical *frames of reference*, which situate meditative and thinking experiences in concrete events or occasions. These experiential frames are the empirical scenes set up either at the beginning of poems or interspersed throughout their meditative experiences. Their descriptive and narrative structures will be analyzed, and subsequently juxtaposed with the discursive structures of the meditative experience. Graham’s grand poetic “project” to capture experience as a process, that is, as a thought and an action captured at the moment of their happening, is another experiential characteristic which will be analyzed. Critics mainly discuss Graham’s “process poems” as enactments of her worldviews, or as her epistemological strategy. For example, Helen Vendler refers to them as a “process of step-by-step investigation of the world” or in terms of “the Muse of eternal process, who has replaced for Graham the meditated,

¹⁶ See *Critique of Pure Reason*, Part I, Book II, Chapter III (257-275).

investigative, and shaped Muse of product” (“The Moment of Excess”, web source), while Jessica Greenbaum speaks about Graham’s poems “as a process, a cross section of the author’s evolving, unstoppable intellect” or “like living cross sections of the braiding process of thought” (“Evolution” web source). I will approach the process poems from a similar perspective, primarily as structural and stylistic restatements of Graham’s general idea of the poem as an ongoing and unending process of discovery and pursuit of knowledge. I will argue that capturing experience as a process opens a range of questions and challenges for the poet which she tries to address, including the (im)possibility of verbally representing the “actual” time of an event or a meditation, and the depiction of constant changes in the material world in a moment of passing time. I will also examine how the artistic illusion of the ongoing process is produced in the poem, identifying the frequent use of stylistic devices such as deictics of place, time and person.¹⁷ This is reinforced by the interactive protagonist, who addresses the reader and invites him/her to participate in the process of the *here* and *now*. The reader is often asked to unravel the plot of the “story” in the making, or choose the direction of its flow.

As a final point of analysis, I will examine Graham’s poetic discourse in the light of the metaphoric and metonymic language processes which generate the corresponding structures. The main theoretical tools in this analysis are Jakobson’s theory of two types of discourse, generated by two principles operative in any language behavior, *selection* and *combination*, and David Lodge’s elaboration and extrapolations from this theory in his analysis of various poetic and prose texts. Jakobson’s first principle, selection, generates a metaphoric discourse which is symbolic and figurative. While his second principle, combination, generates a metonymic discourse which is prose-like, that is, descriptive and narrative. The focus of my argument is that the structure of Graham’s poetic discourse is predominantly metonymic with elements of metaphoric discourse dispersed throughout the metonymic structure itself. I will closely examine the metonymic principle at work in the experiential elements of this poetry, namely, the empirical frames of reference and the “scientific-like discourse”. I will also argue that their

¹⁷ Stylistics defines *place* and *time deictics* as devices which “may serve to ‘point to’, or rather direct, the listener’s or reader’s attention to the speaker’s or narrator’s spatial and temporal situation”. For example, adverbs such as “then” “yesterday” or “here”, “there”, prepositional phrases “in front of”, “to the left”. *Person deictic* is defined as a device which “refer[s] the listener or the reader to the people taking part in the events of the discourse” For example, “I”, “me” “mine” “you” “your” and similar (See Verdonk, *Stylistics* 35).

causal, prose-like, sequential narrative and descriptive structures correspond to the metonymic examples produced by combining contiguous and adjacent linguistic units. Therefore the process of description and narration which combines close details, actions or percepts and narrates or describes the whole, reflects the metonymic principle of the combination of linguistic units which belong to the same context of language as parts and cause and effects. The metonymic verbal principle of combination is also seen operating in Graham's process poems. The artistic illusion of the poem as an unpremeditated and spontaneous reflection which discovers and defines its concepts in the ongoing process does not correspond to the metaphoric principle, presupposing premeditation of concepts before they are compared and substituted. Essentially, my argument will demonstrate that a concept cannot be compared and substituted unless it is known and defined first. I will also consider the relationships between the stanzas and sections of Graham's longer poems and argue that these are primarily relationships with metaphoric force but simile-like structure. This is because the process of substitution of elements (stanzas or sections) is not enacted as in metaphor proper. These simile-like relationships reveal meditative thought expanding into different contexts and realms of discourse while also being conjoined on the basis of similarities between them.

Finally, the immanence of the protagonist is found in the experiential elements, the narration and description of the event, and in the discursive elements, the reflection and mediation upon that event. This immediacy is most visible when the protagonist addresses the reader and invites him/her to participate in the interactive process of analyzing and understanding both the visible and invisible phenomena, and the scientific, philosophical and religious principles that govern them.

Discursiveness

I begin this analysis of Graham's discursiveness with a non-analytical and impressionistic thought that reading her poems feels like travelling through a silent land where your only accompaniment is a voice incessantly reflecting, being caught in involuntary meditative

processes. It is an “unfinished accompaniment”¹⁸ of a human voice in its detailed and complex intellectual analyses, observations and argumentations, whose presence, and consequently the presence of the reader, are felt intensely in the process of reading. This observation is reminiscent of what Pinsky calls “the spooky quiet of the material world” (173) and his observation that “the counterpart to the physical world is the lonely, comic, and tragic phenomenon of speech” (172). This statement is the starting point of his defense of discursive poetry developed in his study *The Situation of Poetry*, which demands that poetry should speak freely, that is, it should reflect, argue, enquire and discuss topics as prose or prose treatises do. As a characteristic of discursiveness, speech leads him to the basic dichotomy of *res-verba*, or object-word, and to the declaration that it is impossible to see “landscape purged from human speech or human concepts, since everything is and can only be seen in human terms, speech or concepts” (74). This echoes the Kantian ideas of phenomena, the way we can perceive and think about things, and noumena, the things-in-themselves which we cannot see as such, since we are hindered by our senses and the limits of human perception.

Pinsky’s attempt to define discursiveness results in several insightful descriptions of its categories, speech being one of them. These descriptive categories prove useful for an analysis of Graham’s discursiveness, which also resembles, I will argue, the argumentative, inquisitive, digressive and interactive qualities of speech and prose. However, one of these tentative definitions seems to sum up the core of his idea of discursiveness in a single sentence: “The idea is to have all the virtues of prose in addition to those qualities and degrees of precision which can be called poetic” (134). It is clear that he defends and advocates statement, complex syntax, and the development of argument and intellectual inquiry in poetry. This statement also sums up one of his major objections to what he calls, “the mannerisms” of Imagism and Modernism, which sought to “give the poem a status of an object or a phenomenon” (4). His main argument in favor of abstract reasoning in poetry is that as the medium of poets, language itself is inherently “abstract, or more or less discursive”, and stands opposite to the silent, material world of objects (5).

Accordingly, he views poetry that relies only on painterly presentations of images and is purged of the argumentative power of language, as a silent, static and partial representation of

¹⁸ The reference is to William Stanley Merwin’s title *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (1973).

the world. More importantly, he points to a group of poets, both Modernist and contemporary, who manage to combine and intertwine the two faculties of language. On the one hand the describing and capturing of silent objects, events and sensual data as painters do, and on the other hand declaring, explaining, commenting, generalizing, analyzing, speaking and arguing about subject matter. He discusses the positive examples provided by A.R. Ammons, W. C. Williams, F. Bidart, and especially W. Stevens, to demonstrate how they manage to strike a balance between the two: “the remarkable blending of sensory and intellectual definition, natural image and abstract term.”

This generosity of movement, in modern poetry, is particularly affecting. I have in mind a range of passages in which the dull plains of description or the exactions of the “image” are not abandoned, but transcended: the poet claims the right to make an interesting remark or to speak of profundities, with all of the liberty given to the newspaper editorial, a conversation, a philosopher, or any speaker whatever. (Pinsky 145)

He is even more precise about the transcendence of fact to statement in the following passage, in which it becomes obvious that he advocates poetry that contemplates and consequently enters into abstractions, but does not hide the process. This is also a poetry that begins with the particular, the concrete, and transcends it to move toward the abstract, the general:

Thus, the element of abstract diction in the writing, like the reliance on definition and statement, has two different effects. On the surface, the effect is an air of dogged sincerity, an almost clinical honesty patterned by the rhythms of a naturalistic voice. In a deeper way, the abstractions do what abstractions always tend to do: they assert the presence or pursuit of an absolute, some value transcending the particulars of experience. (Pinsky 142)

The categories of discursiveness in Pinsky’s study are predominantly formulated and are arranged in oppositional pairs, stemming from the starting dichotomy of “word–thing” (“*res-verba*”). I would argue that the oppositional pairing and the principle described above as “transcending fact to statement” correspond to the two main qualities of Graham’s poetry, the discursiveness and the experiential quality. In other words, Graham’s poetry is perceived in this chapter as a combination of the description and narration of empirical facts, which construct the

experiential element, and the reflection and meditation upon experiential occasions, which construct the discursive element.

Some pairs extrapolated from Pinsky's study, such as "speech-image", "moving-static", "discursive conventions-experience", "statement-description", "tell-present"; "soul-sensations, spirit-sensory details", "abstraction-particulars", etc., according to him, determine whether the poem is discursive or not. A poem is discursive if it retains inclusivity regarding the various discursive conventions, while a poem is not discursive if it presents the world in static images, describing particulars of the material world and sensory details.

How does Graham's poetry feature within this notion of poetry? As I have implied before, hers is a poetry densely populated by human speech and intellectual reflection. Her protagonist possesses what Pinsky calls "all of the liberty given to the newspaper editorial, a conversation, a philosopher, or any speaker whatever" (145), as will be evident in the types of discourses analyzed later. Yet, the presence of many concrete images and descriptions construct concrete, experiential frames of reference, that is, "occasions", which anchor a constantly running and ongoing thinking or talking process in a particular time and place. Graham's discursiveness, as the analysis of her poetry will demonstrate, is constructed of "scientific-like", philosophical and spiritual discourses, which predominantly take the form of meditations and loose speculations. The voice in the poems is less argumentative than *inquisitive*, as the poems often turn into quests for knowledge as an ongoing process captured by the poems. The poem creates the illusion that the voice does not enter the speculative process with premeditated categories and conceptualizations, but reacts spontaneously as it reflects on the questions and hypotheses which are initiated by its active participation in the experience. Thus, some answers, conclusions or temporary resolutions are reached in the ongoing process of questioning and testing the empirically generated assumptions and hypotheses.

The immanence of the human voice is revealed as individuated and particularized in the forms of Graham's discursiveness, and in the protagonist of the concrete experiences or occasions. This is the same human voice that takes meditation and speculation as its most prevalent forms of expression. Since these forms and the main discourses will be examined in more detail later, I want to begin with Graham's general discursive quality.

The poem “Noli Me Tangere” (*The End of Beauty* 40) is a good example of transcendence of fact towards statement which resembles a verbal osmosis of the experiential (descriptive) and the discursive quality of Graham’s poetic language. This poem restates the idea of transcending the concrete in order to move towards the abstract on two distinct levels: the semantic level, by its title and its motif, and on the structural level, by its experiential frame, the meditation on a painting. The title, “Noli Me Tangere” (“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father”, John 20:17 [*The Holy Bible: NIV*]) are the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection and his incomplete ascension. Read from a religious, philosophical and symbolic perspective, this is essentially an embodiment of the same idea of the transcendence of the concrete, tangible and carnal, the fact, towards the abstract, intangible, spiritual (divine), the statement. According to Christian interpretations, the change in Christ’s nature, his transubstantiation from semi-human and semi-divine earthly nature, to his fully divine hypostasis had already begun. Thus, his appearance only resembles his previous likeness, so altered that Mary Magdalene does not recognize him before he speaks (John 20:14). His appearance is “tailored” to the human ability to see, to touch, to hear, as the only ways to understand and to start believing and spreading the “word of God”. Therefore, his divine nature already has transcended and cannot be touched. The theme of the poem also paraphrases the same idea and the basic dichotomy from which it stems. On one side, Mary Magdalene, the carnal, physical, concrete, tangible human being, on the other, Jesus, the non-carnal, intangible, god, concept, word, the *logos*, which transcends, or more precisely, ascends, from fact to statement, word, and finally, the unknown, the divine. On the structural level, the experiential frame of the poem—a meditation on a painting (most probably Fra Bartolomeo’s, 1472-1517)—narrates the same idea once again. The painting, as an iconographic representation or image, is also an object and a piece of sensory data. Through the meditation it is transcended to an abstract medium – language, a verbal statement and, finally, a poem. Thus, the poem epitomizes and paraphrases the same idea of transcendence of fact towards statement three times, completely coinciding with Pinsky’s criteria for the discursive poem.

The first stanza depicts a concrete scene of angels in white robes in front of the sepulchre, but it is not a “physical image purified from statement” (Pinsky 12). The evaluative comments of the voice watching the painting are deeply imbedded in the narrative and the descriptive

structure. Here the verbal technique alloys comment and image in such a way that where a concrete word is normally expected, an abstract one is used, and vice versa. When this kind of stylistic deviation¹⁹ manages to restate the main theme effectively, then the general artistic effect is what the Russian Formalists, mainly Shklovski, call “de-familiarization”. This uplifts the language and the perception from the stupor of linguistic habituation, releasing new and fresh meanings (Fowler 56-57):

You see the angels have come to sit on the delay
 for a while,
 they have come to harrow the fixities, the sharp edges
 of this open
 sepulcher,
 They have brought their swiftness like musics

 down
 to fit them on the listening.
 Their robes, their white openmindedness gliding into the corners,
 slipping this way then that
 over the degrees, over the marble

 flutings.
 The small angelic scripts pressing up through the veils.
 The made shape pressing
 up through the windy cloth. (*The End of Beauty* 40)

Here a sequence of linguistically deviated phrases constitutes the whole image, beginning with the lines: “the angels have come *to sit on the delay*” (first line), “they have come *to harrow the fixities*” (third line) and “their *white openmindedness gliding* into the corners” (ninth line). Although the verb and the preposition in the phrase “to sit on” has abstract meanings such as “to be a member of” or “to participate in”, its more common meaning is the physical action of “sitting”. It constructs a predicate more often with a concrete object, e.g. “to sit on a chair”, “on a

¹⁹ Stylistics defines deviation as a device which “refers to divergence in frequency from a NORM, or the statistical average. Such divergence may depend on: (a) the breaking of normal rules of linguistic structure (whether phonological, grammatical, lexical or semantic) and so be statistically unusual/infrequent; or (b) upon the over-use of normal rules of usage, and so be statistically unusual in the sense of over-frequent” (Wales 103).

table”, “on grass”, “on ice”, etc. However, here the angels “sit on the delay” as if on a concrete object. If the phrase is taken in its abstract meaning there is still an undertone of a deviation, as you cannot “serve” or “participate in” something which is delayed, not happening. Yet, the purpose of the deviation is fulfilled; the line is foregrounded and attracts reader’s critical attention. Now it is possible for the angels to sit on *that* delay, waiting for Jesus in his transient human form to enter his full hypostasis as the Son and to join the other two, which according to Christian Orthodoxy, creates one divine nature of three different personalities. Besides the theme of the poem being introduced in the title phrase, it is the second effective phrase which asserts it more explicitly. At the same time, it reflects a simultaneous (re)presentation of image and comment, or fact and interpretation, in the same line.

The second phrase, “*to harrow the fixities*”, is a similarly deviated construction of the verb “to harrow”, normally combined with equally concrete and material nouns, such as “field”, “soil”, “garden”, etc. Here, it is combined with an intangible and abstract noun, “fixities”. The contrast between the two creates a meaningful tension. The effects of the de-familiarization are felt even more since this strained collocation does what it means: it harrows, breaks fixed beliefs (moves the rocks from the sepulchre) to awaken the mind to a new concept of “life after death” and the other ramifications of the concept of resurrection. The reader’s attention is again arrested by the angels’ position and purpose, although the poem has hardly begun. “The white openmindedness” of the angels is an unusual collocation too, since an attribute of color is added to a conceptual, abstract “openmindedness”; the common combinations of this type would be: “white lies”, “dark thoughts”, etc. Again, the de-familiarized language opens the mind’s eye to see the place of the angels in the divine Christian hierarchy. As “creatures” without carnal bodies, serving God and men, their “white openmindedness” is similar to their common depiction in secular and sacred art as white, light, and airy. At the same time, “white” and “open” in the same syntagm construct the meaning of empty, neutral, and airy, and therefore free from the worries unlike the creatures with carnal bodies and analytic minds. That is, men who wonder about “entering” the “gap” in the air, as Graham’s poems often suggest.

This poem plays with the significance of created forms and shapes in art, primarily painting and poetry, and the created nature in the context of the Christian doctrinal opposition of man and the universe as created matter, and the uncreated eternal and divine nature of God. Here

the line referring to the angels, “The made shape pressing / up through the windy cloth”, describes them while at the same time interpreting them as created forms by God and by the artist as his “co-creator” on earth. The image and the first scene end with this line and a full stop.

The verbal scenery then changes from art to nature with a description of a relatively inconsequential phenomenon, the movement of birds in the garden. Unable to explain it, the poetic voice can only catch its circular line. It resembles the general principle of resurrection from the first scene, that is, the conceptual line of movement: Christ getting out of the sepulchre, that is, out of the ceasing, carnal body which he leaves on the cross, and entering into another state by ascension. This closes up, ceases for us with his deterring sentence *Noli me tangere*—the barrier or the gap, between the two states:

I’ve watched all afternoon how the large
red birds here

cross and recross neither for play nor hunger
the gaps that constitute our chainlink fence,
pressing themselves narrowly against the metal,
feeding their bodies and wings
tightly in.
Out of what ceases into what is ceasing. (40-41)

Here the voice sees in the movements of the birds getting in and outside the gaps of the “chainlink fence”, “neither for play nor hunger” we are told, the same essential principle, that is, the same circular movement behind the previous scene. The use of the verb “feeding” to describe the movement of the birds in the line “feeding their bodies and wings”, resonates strongly with the Eucharistic feeding of men on the “body of Christ”. These descriptive and narrative lines reflect the *experiential* counterpart of the discursive lines, and set the place and time of the whole discursive enterprise: “I’ve watched all afternoon how the large red birds here cross and recross”. After observing the birds and their compulsive, inexplicable in-and-out movements, she concludes: “Out of what ceases into what is ceasing”. This abstract statement, transcending the observed facts in the scene, captures the main idea of division between men, with their carnal and mortal (ceasing) nature, and god’s divine, eternal nature. Thus, Christ gradually leaves what “ceases”, his carnal body, and “is ceasing” from us into somewhere/something which we “cease”

to know or comprehend, being limited by our physical body (created matter) and human perception.

From this moment on, the poem becomes more discursive, questioning all the ramifications which ensue from the above principle. The first interesting consequence of *transubstantiation* is captured in the lines which depict a change of state and movement, but this time on a different plane: from objects to their signs, language:

Out of the light which holds steel and its alloys,

into the words for it like some robe or glory,
 and all of this rising up into the deep unbearable thinness,
the great babyblue exhalation of the one God
 as if in the satisfaction at some right ending
come, (41)

These lines combine the abstract Christian doctrine with the concrete natural act of breathing: happy “exhalation of the God”, after the divine mission is fulfilled. This questions the duality of spiritual-material as merely human explanations or categorizations of the inexplicable. The following lines reveal another successful poetic compression and encoding of numerous pages of interpretations of Christianity and its concept of resurrection:

It is about to be
Spring.
 The secret cannot be

kept.
 It wants to cross over, it wants
to be a lie. (41)

The association between “spring” and “lie” brings to mind historical and philosophical interpretations of Christianity as a story rooted in pagan, cyclical vegetation myths depicting young gods who die in winter to be resurrected in spring in accordance to the seasons of nature. The Christian resurrection does become a “lie” once it “crosses over” into the human world of different religions, beliefs or non-belief, as they ultimately are a global lie to one other. In this

context, they are just mankind's different interpretations of the ultimate unknown, the incomprehensible, and are only "words for it like some robe or glory" which veil and enshrine what we usually refer to as "god". The voice further questions the barrier, or the "gap", between the transcendental god and mortals:

Is that it then? Is that the law of freedom?
 That she must see him yet must not touch?
 Below them the soldiers sleep their pure deep sleep.
 Is he light
 who has turned forbidding and thrust his hand up
 in fury,

is he flesh
 so desperate to escape, to carry his purpose away?
 She wants to put her hands in,
 she wants to touch him.
 He wants her to believe,
 who has just trusted what her eyes have given her,

he wants her to look away.
 I've listened where the words and the minutes would touch,
 I've tried to hear in that slippage what
 beauty is—
 her soil, his sweet tune like footsteps
 over the path of

least resistance. I can see
 the body composed
 of the distance between them. (41-42)

The word "freedom" in the first line of this excerpt hints toward the most common answer that Christian theologies provide to the many whys posited throughout the history of its dogmas: Why does God allow evil?, Why does he not prevent his Son's crucifixion?, If God is love, why does he allow people to suffer? The theological answer with all its variants provided by all Christian doctrines is free will. Their basic interpretation of this "law of freedom" is that God allows Eve the freedom to choose to obey or disobey God's law; God allows humankind to

exercise its freedom and choose good or evil, otherwise the loving relationship with his creations would not be possible, as love presupposes a relationship based on freely exercised choices. Graham's mastery in filling a single phrase with such great ideological weight is abundantly evident in these excerpts. It is discursiveness which argues but does not explain, that is, does not exercise Jakobson's referential function of language to provide context²⁰. Or the context becomes ambiguous by "the supremacy of the poetic function of language over the referential function", as Jakobson says (*Language in Literature* 85). This is a demanding poetry which wants to "sing" the questions of mankind but does not bother explaining while singing. However, this is poetry which communicates emotions to the reader, as we shall see through further analysis.

Another example of a philosophical and theological interpretation worth noting, compressed in a single word, is contained in the question: "Is he light / who has turned forbidding and thrust his hand / up in fury?" This touches upon the same question of the dichotomies and dualities: material-spiritual or physical-mental. The voice wonders if we could practically understand the uncreated nature of the eternal god and his states. Light, air and energy can be as much material as spiritual elements, since they are only human constructs, that is, words and categories given to such "given" phenomena. Therefore, the final philosophical-theological translation of the words, "Noli me tangere", could be: "You cannot understand me, just trust me", or as the voice says: "She wants to put her hands in / she wants to touch him. / He wants her to believe, / who has just trusted what her eyes have given her" (42). However, at the end of the words uttered in time, comes "the beauty". Is it the beauty of human endeavor to understand, that is, to touch god and the godly? Maybe it is the beauty of the created matter ("her soil") and the uncreated nature ("his sweet tune") next to each other in a loving relationship, composing the unavoidable "body of distance between them".

²⁰ Jakobson defines "context" as one of the six factors in any verbal communication which determines the referential function of language. He says: "To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to (the "referent" in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized" (*Language in Literature* 66).

It is clear, says the voice, that that “body” is ours, our limited corporal and cognitive nature, but why must it be so? The voice, then, the irreconcilable soul, enters into the beauty of prayer:

why it is these hillsides she must become,
supporting even now the whole weight of the weightless,
letting the plotlines wander all over her,

crumbling into every digressive beauty,
her longings all stitchwork towards his immaculate rent,
all alphabet on the wind as she rises from prayer. . . . (42)

It is in this part of the meditation that the voice becomes very argumentative, using question-answer lines and the repetitive “why” (“But you see it is not clear to me why . . .”) and the emotional overtones are gathering in sympathy to “her”, Mary Magdalene, or mankind, pushed again into the old questioning, seeking, and aspiring to know and understand its own being and God’s, or as the poem says: “the whole long song / down, like a bad toss / let go in order to start again right”. If we let go, the poem seems to be saying, it can become the only governing force of our lives, which is “wrong”. This is discursiveness, which unlike that of the first section of the poem, does not produce unusual collocations of abstract and concrete concepts, but evolves into its own network of symbols, arrived at mainly through a reduction of concepts based on synecdoche. Thus, the abstract argument about the human desire to understand God, that is, Mary Magdalene’s desire to touch him, is restated in the words: “hands”, “seeing”, “touching”, which are just partial manifestations or different aspects of the process of comprehension. The limitations of the mortal body are referred to by concrete words, some deriving from the scene depicted by the painting: “darkness”, “hillsides”, “soil”, “weight”, “stitchwork”, “plotlines”, “prayer”—again, just parts associated to the carnal life of Mary Magdalene, and by extension to mankind, and her urge to get out of the “full darkness that belongs to her”, or “hillsides she must become”, or “her soil”.

We then witness the voice resorting to the familiar symbolism of “siren” and its enchanting song, reminiscent of myths, or Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” or Homer’s *The Odyssey*:

home. I have seen how the smoke here
 inhabits a space
 in the body of air it must therefore displace,

 and the tree-shaped gap the tree inhabits,
 and the tree-shaped gap the tree
 invents. Siren,
 reader,
 it is here, only here,
 in this gap

 between us, (43)

The urge towards God becomes like the enchanting song of the siren, which itself resonates with the soul's nostalgic desire to return to its spiritual home—God, as the line says: “siren over this open meadow singing always your one song of home”. There is sadness in this longing song which is also felt in the next scene (back to the garden again), echoing Eliot-like melancholic tones: “. . . I have seen how the smoke here” Thus, “siren” in this final scene of the poem becomes the central symbol for man's constant and enchanted yearning to encroach upon the gap between the two worlds, the known and the unknown.

It is worth noting how at this stage of high discursiveness, the voice resorts to a more analytical structure of language in order to explain a very metaphysical “process”, linking its “premises” with the causal connective word “therefore”: “I have seen how the smoke here / inhabits a space / in the body of air it must *therefore* displace” (my emphasis). We can argue here that the voice has reached the point in its meditation when it attempts some definitions and conclusions. Thus, the premise that the “smoke” and the “tree” she is watching in the garden both take their places in the “body of the air” after they have emptied spaces to create their own gaps, lead the voice to draw its “logical” conclusions. The “siren” (the song of yearning) then fills the gap between the visible creation (“the smoke” and “the tree”) and the invisible, the incomprehensible. The “siren”—the song of the phenomena—is also in the gap of place and time which exist between us, the readers, and the voice of the poem. At this stage of the meditation, it seems that the voice plays with its own internal symbols developed throughout the poem. At this point the voice goes as far as to invite us to agree on the meaning of the symbols “siren” and

“gap” in the context of the poem’s philosophical thinking (“Siren / reader / it is here, only here / in this gap / between us”). It is as if the protagonist (the addresser), attempting to communicate with the readers (the addressees) through the channel of the poem wants to check and confirm whether we understand the codes of the language employed in her thinking. This agreement of codes is what Jakobson calls the meta-lingual function of language²¹, and is predominant in these lines in comparison to the other five functions, the referential, emotive, poetic, phatic, and conative functions. This hermetic symbolism of Graham’s language explains her firm belief that one should read the collected works of “difficult” poets to be able to understand their utterly idiosyncratic language, chief among these being Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens.

The poem ends by blending all the scenes and themes already mentioned. Now they become twisted like a “gold thread”:

that the body of who we are
to have been
emerges: imagine:
she lets him go,
she lets him through the day faster than the day,

among the brisk wings
upsetting the flowerpots,
among the birds arranging and rearranging the shape of
the delay,
she lets him
slip free,

letting him posit the sweet appointment,
letting out that gold thread that crazy melody
of stations,
reds, birds, dayfall, screen-door
desire,

until you have to go with him, don’t you,

²¹ Jakobson’s definition of the meta-lingual function: “Whenever the addresser and / or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the code: it performs a MEATALIGUAL (i.e., glossing) function” (*Language in Literature* 69).

until you have to leave her be
 if all you have to touch her with
 is form. (43-44)

Christ's departure, or Mary Magdalene letting him go to "posit the sweet appointment", implies her, and humanity's, realization of the impossibility of taking a further step toward the unknown into divine "stations". The crucial moment here, I believe, is when the protagonist brings back the "birds" in the last scene, implying that the idea of the mortal-immortal, or created-uncreated, nature and the comprehensible-incomprehensible Being embodied in the biblical scene of "Noli Me Tangere", are present around us in every moment of our lives, when we watch how air gathers into smoke, the shape of a tree, or the birds and their incomprehensible movements. Or, as the poem says: "arranging and rearranging the shape of the delay", that is, during the time we inhabit this space and live in the delay between known and unknown stations. "When does it end?", asks the voice, which itself suggests that maybe when you "go with him", that is, when you "cross over" and "enter" the incomprehensible. But in the meantime, you can "touch" her, Mary Magdalene, as a form in a painting or a poem ("if all you have to touch her with is form"), as our eternal symbol of yearning to know and "touch" the intangible.

Types of Discourses

Analyzing Graham's general discursiveness does not do justice to her complex themes and stylistic techniques, if one does not "descend" to the discourses the protagonist generates in her attempts to understand experiences and accept what cannot be understood as phenomena. Although we have seen her philosophical and religious discourses operating in "Noli Me Tangere", in this part of the chapter I will demonstrate how different discourses represent different stages of a searching process. The poems generally begin with a close examination and observation of minute details, and in a language of acuity and accuracy that seeks nuance and quantification of time, space, force and energy, construct a scientific-like discourse. Matter, that is, inanimate objects are initially closely described in a bid to discern from their "conduct" and

their laws of existence some general principles, as a physicist does. Then the poems go further, proposing and testing their general applicability to other planes of human existence as a philosopher, or a philosopher of science, does. This type of poetry demonstrates an urge to deduct the general principles of existence by applying first a poetic method of induction. This type of discourse resembles the discourses of scientist-philosophers, when the division between disciplines was not so clearly defined. In *Science and the Modern World*, A.N. Whitehead defines Bacon's style as evaluative and qualitative, lacking the essential scientific feature of quantification:

The third point to notice about this quotation from Bacon is the purely qualitative character of the statements made in it. In this respect Bacon completely missed the tonality which lay behind the success of the seventeenth-century science. Science was becoming, and has remained primarily quantitative. Search for measurable elements among your phenomena, and then search for relations between these measures of physical quantities. Bacon ignores this rule of science. For example, in the quotation given he speaks of action at a distance; but he is thinking qualitatively and not quantitatively. (56-57)

As a result of a fusion of scientific and humanistic discourses, the language of the natural philosophers', such as Bacon's, possesses certain symbolic and figurative qualities, describing natural laws and "conducts" of objects in the material world in the vocabulary of personal human relations, emotions and mental states. The effect is, on the one hand, a remote sense of the material world personified and observed subjectively, and on the other hand, a sense that the laws which govern the objects and elements of the material world can explain the behavior and personal interactions of the human world, as this excerpt from Bacon's *The New Organon* (Aphorisms, Book Two, XXXVI) demonstrates:

Again, let the nature in question be weight or heaviness. Here the road will branch into two, thus. It must needs be that heavy and weighty bodies either tend of their own nature to the center of the earth, by the reason of their proper configuration; or else that they are attracted by the mass and body of earth itself as by the congregation of kindred substances, and move to it by sympathy. If the latter of these be the cause, it follows that the nearer heavy bodies approach to the earth, the more rapid and violent is their motion to it; and that the further they are from

the earth, the feebler and more tardy is their motion (as is the case with magnetic attraction); and that this action is confined to certain limits. So that if they were removed to such a distance from the earth that the earth's virtue could not act upon them, they would remain suspended like the earth itself, and not fall at all. (196)

The phrases: “kindred substances”, “move to it by sympathy”, “magnetic attraction”, “earth’s virtue”, combine “mental” modifiers with physical objects, consequently blending humanistic and scientific discourses. In her fifth book, *Materialism*, Graham includes her adaptation of a longer excerpt from *Bacon’s Novum Organum*, which speaks about the laws and principles of the material and human world. Explaining why she reads Bacon, among other authors, Graham identifies his style and approach to the physical world as a combination of the artist’s, the philosopher’s and the scientist’s:

Bacon—for his Sophoclean use of dramatic action—as well as his ability to structure sequences – for the many ways he compels the inclusion of the viewer into the image, for the way he slows action in the drama to a place which is not stillness, is blurry with stillness but is not “stopped”— and all his glorious thinking about process. (Gardner, “The Art of Poetry No. 85”, interview, online source)

It is precisely this approach and the corresponding perspective that resemble the blend and the interaction of Graham’s scientific-like, philosophical and spiritual discourses. Once the (poetic) *induction* related to her scientific discourse has finished, the voice of her poetry takes the “results” to a more general philosophical level, governed by the principle of poetic *deduction*. In some poems, the meditations end at this point, but in a majority, the voice unavoidably slips into spiritual and religious realms during the final moments in the attempt to understand phenomena. Often, poems end without any definitive conclusions, except for some insights gained in that process of discovering. However, this change of discourse in a single poem—from “scientific” qualitative and quantitative observation and description to “philosophical” and “spiritual” speculation—reflects the protagonist’s deep realization that sciences can only *describe* the already existent, the created nature or matter. Philosophy and science, or philosophy of science, only discover the existing principles that govern nature, but they do not provide the ultimate answers. This is the point, the edge where human knowledge practically stops, the rational mind

withdraws, and man's spiritual and religious reflections and speculations begin. This order of discovering Nature, explains the presence of an intrinsically numinous quality in the world and life depicted in Graham's poetry, which some critics have referred to as "semi-mystical" (Adam Kirsh, "The End of Beauty", online source). These three types of discourses dominate her poems either interchangeably or concurrently, and are a result of this ontological realization. The poems which deal with interpersonal relations least employ scientific discourse, while the philosophical discourse is almost always present. It is, as we have seen in the previous analysis, the primary discourse of the mediations and speculations.

The beginning of the long poem "Relativity: A Quartet" (*Materialism* 34) introduces the experiential frame or the occasion at the beginning of the poem: the protagonist is in a moving train, watching or observing, the internal and the external scenes. This is how the stopping of the train is described at the beginning of the poem, quoted here without line breaks, which reveals the similarity with scientific description:

During the slowdown we lost power along the northeast corridor—it taking a moment before I realized we were at a crawl, then the slow catch, and we were still. I heard the cars behind me each receive the jolt of stillness. Felt the transfer of inertia slither though, creaking then an aftershock—long the backbone. Nothing shrill. A hiss clenched it. (*Materialism* 34)

Firstly, it is intriguing why the movement of the train stopping is foregrounded at the beginning of the poem in such precise details. The style of the text resembles Bacon's "motion of the bodies", or a report describing consecutive motion effects in a professional jargon of dynamics or engineering: "the slowdown", "the slow catch", "receive a jolt", "the transfer of inertia", "an aftershock", "a hiss clenched in". I will argue that this focus on the actual physical processes of motion and the stillness of objects, and the corresponding register, is what makes this discourse resemble a scientific one. Actually, this is how "discourse" is defined in stylistics and pragmatics: "The process of activation of a text by relating it to a context of use" or "An ideological construct of particular sociopolitical or cultural values" (Verdunk 18, 118).

The protagonist observing her environment shifts her view inside and outside, and we realize that she is trying to discern the same principle of relativity and change governing both places. Although the internal scene, two passengers sleeping opposite her, seems static, it is not;

it is also changeable and relative, as the passing scenes outside. Her previous assumption that the passengers are a father and a daughter gradually crumbles, and she realizes they are a couple of drug addicts (the “stoned couple”). The constantly changing scenes outside of the moving train are caught in the window pane and absorbed as such by the human “wet retina”:

to go by and go by, as if matter itself were going
on and on to its own
destination, bouquet of instances collecting all
the swift and cunning and mercenary
appearances—swish—so that it's *there, there*,
and we can, swaying slightly,
eyes still, eyes absolutely open receptive and still,
let it lay itself down frame by frame onto the wide
resistanceless opening of our wet
retina—more and more— (*Materialism* 35-36)

Here, Graham is yoking together different discourses in the mind of the protagonist. Their “friction” produces the emotions of an overwhelmed and frustrated mind and eye under such a burden and pressure, reflected in the repetitive phrases: “to go by and go by” and “*there, there*”. The scientific discourse, mostly of physics, is generated by the descriptions of all visible movements of the objects, elements and the people, and the changing perspectives of her visual optics. The philosophical discourse is generated by the protagonist’s attention to the principle of change and relativity, applicable to *both* mind and matter, and her changing perceptions and perspective regarding a sequence of passing time. At one point the voice asks: “When does it change—the frame around her scene, the frame around my scene?” referring to the changing scenes caught in her and her neighbor’s window.

However, the scientific discourse is even more present in the second section of the poem examining “green leaves”, which the protagonist attempts to resolve by using Zen Buddhist quotes about the origin of matter by one of Buddha’s first disciples, Ananda, and Shanadasa, the third Indian patriarch of Zen Buddhism. Here is the scene of the green leaves stuck on the window pane, and the reaction of the eye watching their movements in the wind from such a close perspective:

Against my pane,
 flat leaves that would bury themselves
 into the molecules of glass—pressed
 right up to my eye—(so close they blur)—
 the flat cold lingering
 against my skin

 as I pull back.
 A scribble of . . . Lowly . . . Green ribbon. They twitch (no
 wind). They peck a bit (now wind). A stratagem (*Materialism* 36)

It seems that this closely documented scene of leaves on a glass pane is actually an observation of two types of matter together: one not-created by men, the leaves, and one created by man, the windowpane. The scene resonates with old philosophical and religious arguments for the idealistic and spiritual origin of matter: can men create leaves in a laboratory? And as the Zen Buddhist master and his disciple, suggest:

without meaning—leaf, leaf—
 Shanavasa asked Ananda,
 “what is the fundamental uncreated essence of all
 things?”
Come back come back with empty hands, he said,
 and
where can dust collect?
 (time and again wipe it diligently)
 and
 there has never been anything

given to another, there has never been anything
 received from another . . . (Materialism 37)

What follows then is an even closer look at leaf morphology, anatomy and chemistry, the sciences that only describe the given matter, not-created by man:

Look close, I think. Stem, node,
 bract, pedicel.
 I count the greens.

I slow along the veins.

.....

I'd take a leaf—from here
 (against the light) the chlorophyll exists inside the plastids
 and (where sun is strongest) light
 thickens
 drawing the carbon
 in . . .
 Oxygen steams off.
 Sun picks up mist.

.....

Envelope, rib, protein, thylakoid,
 starch grain,
 acid strand.

And the cuticle of the leaf brim.
 And the loosely packed layer of photosynthetic tissue,
 guard cells,
 substomatal chambers. . . . (*Materialism* 37-38)

The meditation of the protagonist continues with thoughts about the principle of creation and the various forms of destruction in piecemeal stories, news on casualties, including the observation that the couple's skin is marked by needle pricks. However, a shocking story of urban violence and destruction which springs to the protagonist's memory is about to be told at the end of the poem, in section four (4): a boy randomly shooting at passengers in the train car where she was riding at another time and place: "1982 on the downtown Express just out of 72nd Street" (41). This section demonstrates Graham's observation and aspiration to point out that behind different forms of human action and thought, the same desire to understand and conquer matter, governs:

shots, and screams, the boy bending forward with his long
 extended arm as if

trying to include something in himself,
as if trying to sharpen himself for entry, (*Materialism* 42)

The motion of the boy's arm with a gun extended in the air is a form of "penetration" into matter, a search for a "gap" in the attempt to conquer and destroy its forms, in this case people in the train. It is the same principle behind the human urge to know, and the inherent freedom to discover and explore nature or matter, either by "dissecting" it or by "abstracting" it, as Bacon says in *The New Organon*. That is, either by studying and conceptualizing, or by cutting and destroying it in order to enter it. It is the same principle behind splitting atoms and cramming the earth with radioactive waste, as many of Graham's poems suggest. It is the same principle behind the Renaissance painter Luca Signorelli dissecting corpses in order to understand the anatomy of the human body for his fresco-painting, thus serving God or the unknown. These forms and purposes, as we can see, range from the noble and creative to the most violent and destructive, but the motion and the principle of "entering" matter remain the same.

These scientific-like observations and the minutely depicted details in the descriptions are most common in the poems which attempt to capture and explain the chain reactions and the interaction among the animate and the inanimate world, such as "wind" and "light" at play. The excerpts from the poem "Notes on the Reality of the Self" (*Materialism* 10) show how "wind", "light" and "sounds" produced by a practicing band in a field are working their way together, not "knowing" about it, as the poem says. The "bushes" do not "know" that some "screeching, rolling, patterning, measuring" sounds are beating against them, as they do not know that "the wind beats them, beats in them, beats round them / them in a wind that do not really even now / exist". In other words, the "wind" cannot exist if there is not anybody to perceive it, a human being to sense it:

there is a wind that tips the reddish leaves
exactly all one way, seizing them up from underneath, making them
barbarous in unison. Meanwhile the light insists they glow
where the wind churns, or, no, there is a wide gold corridor

.....

the drumroll, rising as the ranks join in,

the wild branches letting the even drumbeats through
ripples let through as the red branches spiral, tease,
as the crescendos of the single master-drummer
rise, and birds scatter over the field, and the wind makes each
thing
kneel and rise, kneel and rise, never ending stringy (*Materialism* 10)

This chain of interactions between inanimate and animate matter makes the observing protagonist deeply aware of “the reality of the self”, that is, the reality of a self-reflexive human being who knows this is happening. This is the same lonely human self among the other selfless and silent forms of matter. There are poems which observe and describe constant and incessant changes in the elements and objects as a result of such interactions, for example, the light and its “offspring”—the shadows and the reflections—as part of the dense texture of the world. They become alive in poems such as “Still Life with Window and Fish” (*Erosion* 32):

Down here this morning in my white kitchen
along the slim body
of the light,
the narrow body that would otherwise
say forever
the same thing,
the beautiful interruptions, the things of this world, twigs
and powerlines, eaves and ranking
branching burn
all over my walls.
Even the windowpanes are rich.
The whole world outside
wants to come into here,
to angle into
the simpler shapes of rooms, to be broken and rebroken
against the sure co-ordinates
of walls. (*Erosion* 32)

If the scientific register is less audible here, then the phenomenon of light is still depicted in all its details in order to make the invisible physical laws of light and reflection visible, as if captured by the more material art of painting. The poem catches the light pouring into the

kitchen and “angling” itself into the shape of the walls. The light inside also *reflects* the living world outside and its shapes; it paints a still life picture of the outside world with shades and reflections on the walls. One therefore has the impression that Graham approaches the world as a painter, thinking of physical categories, such as perspective, geometry, dynamics, light, viewpoints, bodies, etc. In addition, the poem reflects Graham’s ever-present interest in enacting the natural laws in the verbal art of poetry, in a similar way to how the Impressionists did by painting the light and the spectrum of colors, the Cubists by depicting the object from different standpoints, and the Futurists by painting objects in motion. In these five collections, there are many poems based on painters whose aesthetics are motivated by the natural sciences, such as Luca Signorelli’s anatomy of the body; Jackson Pollock’s “drip paint” technique and the free fall (*The End of Beauty*, 81) and Umberto Boccioni’s object in motion and optics (“a galloping horse / has not four / legs it has twenty” [*Materialism* 141]).

Consequently the boundaries of art, science, philosophy, religion and spirituality, and their respective discourses, merge in Graham’s poetry, reflecting a general worldview of oneness, surpassing even the duality of mind-matter, and originating in the *unknown*, as the name for God in Judean tradition implies: *YHWH-Yahweh-am who I am*. I believe that all these themes and their respective discourses are best arranged together in “Geese” (*Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*), which postulates the basic ideational and formal (discursive) program that Graham follows in her later books.

Today as I hang out the wash I see them again, a code
 as urgent as elegant,
 tapering with goals.
 For days they have been crossing. We live beneath these geese

 as if beneath the passage of time, or a most perfect heading.
 Sometimes I fear their relevance.
 Closest at hand,
 between the lines,

 the spiders imitate the paths the geese won't stray from,
 imitate them endlessly to no avail:
 things will not remain connected,
 will not heal,

and the world thickens with texture instead of history,
texture instead of place. (*Hybrids* 38)

The first meta-linguistic sign that this is a poem about a poem, or writing more generally, is the word “code” in the first line. We can make the conjecture that the “geese” are like a “code”, since the poem gives us a curtailed or implied simile, replacing the comparative “is like” by a comma. As a code, “the geese” are seen as part of a larger system of codes, a language under which we live our lives, that is, “a heading”. Consequently, the “lines”, which in the experiential context of the poem are clearly lines for hanging clothes, all of a sudden acquire a new connotation, a new meaning as “lines” of poetry or text. This is even more explicit in the following line: “and the world thickens with texture instead of history, / texture instead of place”, which refers to the world as a “texture”, a kind of text (from old Latin *texere*—“to weave, to fabricate”). In Graham’s poetry it is not uncommon to find references to the world as an open book, a writing, a language, as in the lines: “a rip in the veil which is a storyline (“The Veil” *The End of Beauty*, 88), “An alphabet flew over, made liquid syntax for a while diving and rising, forking, a caprice of clear meanings” (“Existence and Presence”, *Materialism* 142). These metaphors of the world as an open book reflect the aspirations of this poetry to put the codes of the world together in order to read their deeper meanings. Thus, the patterns of the flying geese at a particular time and season become nature’s handwriting, or a script about a deeper, more general pattern and principle of being. The modifier “elegant”, often found in conjunction with “handwriting”, is used to describe the flying of the geese overhead, thus, their “writing”. At the same time, the observation of such a common and “small” event in nature, which our dulled perception often does not register, awakens us to the concept of time and its passing which the geese epitomize. They are not metaphors for time; at the moment of observation they are motion and time together, thus a “passage of time”, as the poem says. They are time materialized and particularized, thus forms which we can comprehend better than the concept itself:

Yet the small fear of the spiders
binds and binds
the pins to the lines, the lines to the eaves, to the pincushion bush,
as if, at any time, things could fall further apart
and nothing could help them
recover their meaning. And if these spiders had their way,

chainlink over the visible world,
 would we be in or out? I turn to go back in.
 There is a feeling the body gives the mind
 of having missed something, a bedrock poverty, like falling (*Hybrids* 38)

The patterns of movement and the existence of such common creatures as “geese” and “spiders” reveal the natural laws and some of the general principles of being which hold the world together: “Yet the small fear of the spiders / binds and binds / the pins to the lines, the lines to the eaves, to the pincushion bush”. These lines announce the most important principle operating in her work which I discussed previously: beginning with observation of movements, changing forms, colors and the behavior of the small and the particular, to discern more general, generic and universal laws and principles of the world, as a scientist, a natural philosopher, or an empiricist, would do:

without the sense that you are passing through one world,
 that you could reach another
 anytime. Instead the real
 is crossing you,

your body an arrival
 you know is false but can't outrun. And somewhere in between
 these geese forever entering and
 these spiders turning back,

this astonishing delay, the everyday, takes place. (*Hybrids* 38-39)

Some of the words which appear at the end of the poem become the key concepts of her system, the poetic ontology that recurs throughout her work. They become our means of entering, or “penetrating”, the layers of knowledge, the strata of the material world, until the end of knowing, when “the feeling the body gives the mind of having missed something, a bedrock poverty”, emerges. Graham often talks about a feeling of passing through life without experiencing it fully and the role of poetry as a remedy for this feeling, as in this interview:

Through poems, I've struggled to make sure I'm in life, as opposed to merely understanding it . . . Poetry has always seemed to me not so much a record of a life lived [than] as a way—through the act of composition—of experiencing an event I missed [by] just living it. Poetry's a way of thinking that only enacts itself in the moment of composition. Things hurt more when I'm about to write. It's like a lens aperture. You suddenly decide you're going to open it up and feel things at a level you didn't feel when you were just living through them. (Cahill, “Daring to Live in the Details”, interview, online source)

In the poem, this state is likened to “falling / without the sense that you are passing through one world / that you could reach another / anytime”. The human inability to fully penetrate the veils of reality, the *maya*²², is to live in that “delay” between the known and the unknown worlds, located in the “gap” between them: the known as material and corporal and the unknown as ethereal and spiritual. The poem circumscribes the nucleus of her philosophy and her investigative poetic methodology, which she pursues in her later work too.

The discussion of the convergent discourses in Graham's poetry finally leads us to recognize one more discourse constructed when they are all combined together: it is the discourse of the protagonist of this experiential poetry, through whose eyes and thoughts we observe the rich textures of this world. If subjected to a discourse analysis, a specific profile emerges. Of course it is Jorie Graham, the poet, behind it, as it has always been in poetry she says:

I could say I would like to find a way to stay out of the picture—but that is one of those theoretical positions which are interesting as hell but just academic. The truth is, you are the one speaking. . . . You can call your subject position a construct all you want; it feels kind of right, but is it sufficiently demanding, are the pressures it generates enough for a wakeful life? (Grubisic, “Instructions for Building the Arc”, interview)

²² In any philosophical or religious text on Hinduism, *Maya* is the false and illusory perception of reality as multiplicity of separate entities and dualisms, as only a veil hiding the oneness of the Supreme Consciousness. See Charles Eliot's *Hinduism and Buddhism: A Historical Sketch* : "The plurality of souls in the Absolute is therefore appearance and their existence not genuine . . . souls like their bodies, are as such nothing more than appearance—Neither (body and soul) is real in the end: each is merely phenomenal".

Yet, in this predominantly experience-oriented poetry, it becomes crucial to speak of a particular protagonist and its discourse in the experiential contexts of the poems. However, the voice speaking and acting as the protagonist is perceived without any reference to the external biographical data. The poem itself provides a verity test. Therefore, by considering all the collections analyzed in this chapter, a discourse of a female speaker/voice/protagonist emerges, an intellectual who understands and interprets all the myths and religions, including Judeo-Christian, as humanity's various endeavors to come closer to understanding God-Being-the-Absolute. This is a discourse of somebody who trusts sensory data, their "report" on the world, and the process of thinking this sensory "report" over, that is, someone who trusts both the dissecting and the abstracting.

Experiential poetry

In addition to discursiveness, the other defining quality of Graham's poetics is what I refer to in this chapter as its *experiential quality*. As indicated before, the meditations and speculations in Graham's poetry most often "happen" within concrete referential frames, or in concrete occasions. These experiential frames are often broken down into smaller scenes, "audible" and "visible" throughout the meditative process. Figuratively speaking, they function like "clasps" holding the digressive, meditative thoughts within the referential and experiential context of the poem, as illustrated before. These experiential elements are often intertwined with the meditative ones, directing the focus of thought toward the particulars, and impelling the mind of the protagonist to firstly observe and describe and then analyze or make references to myths, religion, philosophy and other realms of thought. This poetry does not only conceptualize experience in a meditative and reflective process, it also shows how the conceptualizations are initiated. Even in poems with predominantly discursive elements, such as statements, abstraction, fragmented speech (or what Graham calls the "turn inward" (Ratzabi, "Nothing Mystical About It", interview), there are always some traces of an experiential, causal, and linear structure intended to contain the meditative thought, the "turn outward". These features situate the poems in the realm of experiential poetry. The voice (the protagonist) is imminent in the meditations

and speculations, imbedded within the structure of concrete events or occasions. Even though Graham's poetry perpetuates the discursive style of the 1970s, it simultaneously remains within experiential trend of the 1950s and 1960s, continuing the immanentist and the experiential mode of poetry into the 1980s and 1990s. Besides the purely discursive poems in which no concrete, particularized, experiential qualifications are made to situate the mediations (e.g. "Flooding", "One in the Hand", *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*), my contention so far has been that experiential and immanentist poems prevail in these five books, as the following analyses of the poems will show.

Graham's empirical approach demonstrates a deep trust in sensory knowledge, that is, in the visual, tactile and auditory sense-data "gathered" by the protagonist's observations and descriptions which is then subjected to the more cerebral process of reflection, as shown in the previous analyses. "We have no mind", she says, "in a world without objects" ("Strangers", *Hybrids* 12), or as a statement echoed in many interviews:

. . . [A]s a culture we so distrust and fear the body and its knowledge that we actually think sense data, and imaginative data, have no inherent content unless we raise them to the surface via explanation, abstraction, or generalization. Abstraction of emotion is not a use of abstraction that is positive, it seems to me. Abstraction in which the body thinks in its unbodily reaches is truly powerful, necessary, and—another story—the crucial metaphysical extension of bodily knowledge. (Wunderlich, "*The Glorious Thing*", interview, online source)

That same faith and philosophy leads to her fifth book *Materialism* in which the main concept of materialism is "analyzed" from multiple perspectives in many poems in order to make it large enough to accommodate the whole world which is not created by men, including, but not limited to, nature, mind and body. Beyond this is the *uncreated world*, "the divine", the incomprehensible that remains beyond the reaches of human knowledge.

The majority of the poems in these five books usually begin with a description in a linear and causal language, thus setting the scene for a more meditative experience in a more discursive language. A good example is "Eschatological Prayer" (*The End of Beauty*), in which the physical scenes depicted not only contain and ground the meditation in a particular place and time, but instigate and tease out speculations upon the Christian eschatological idea:

In Montefalco, Italy,
 late in the second millennium
 of a motion measured
 by its distance from the death
 of a single young man,

 we drove up a narrow road cut like a birthcry
 into the hillside, winding and twisting
 up to the top.
 Snow gleamed in the margins, originless.
 Snow gleamed in the miles of birdcry and birdsong,

 yellow birdsong in the yellow light. (35)

The beginning of this poem “documents” the time and the place of the event, but unlike the straightforward reference to place, “Montefalco, Italy”, the time is given in a complex sentence that resembles a winding path in which the “motion” and the “death of a single young man” are the “landmarks”. In order to solve this syntactical puzzle, which effectively draws (critical) attention, and determine the “date”, one has to put the relative clauses in a causal order. This task is made easier in the context of the title, the promise of Christ’s second coming, his kingdom on earth and the resurrection of the righteous. “The motion” is the beginning of Christianity, the point from which we measure our time. This originating point in time, Christianity, is also measured as the distance from his death (“the death of a young man”) and our time, “the late second millennium”.

After the “facts” given in this stanza, the language becomes more figurative but it does not break into diffused, fragmented speculations. The descriptive stanza produces an extended synaesthesia in which the visual, “the narrow road” and “the snow”, is described by means of the auditory: “the narrow road cut like a birthcry”, “snow gleamed in the miles of birdcry and birdsong”. The auditory sounds of the scene are then described by means of visual modifiers: “yellow birdsong in the yellow light”. This image exudes sensory data and initiates the protagonist’s meditation on the numinous, and the spiritual significance of the scene. She begins to see the snow as “originless”, that is, as a phenomenon. Consequently, the already occurring meditation stops as the protagonist adds another element to the scene:

Below us, appearing and re-
 appearing,
 the airplane factory now closed and converted
 into a temporary
 slaughterhouse—
 no sound from there just now,
 the wind being against us, (36)

The meditation and speculation on eschatological ideas, the promises of a “quick young god” as the protagonist refers to Christ, are now happening on the road *up* to the monastery, a physical and the spiritual destination, leaving the “slaughterhouse” *below*. However, all these elements of the actual physical scene, the road, the accompanying wind, the snow, the birdsong, and the slaughterhouse acquire religious and spiritual significances as the poem tells the story of the thirteenth-century patron saint of the monastery, Santa Clara of Assisi. “This Claire”, as the poem refers to her, wrote and spoke so fervently of the visions of Christ dropping down under the weight of the cross and her promises to carry it for him, that the sisters of her order dissected and searched her heart for the cross after her death:

They cut her open when she died, the sisters prying
 between the curtains of light and the curtains

 of light. They found in there,
 in the human heart,
 this tiny crucifix, this eye-sized figure
 of tissue and blood.
 Here are the penknife, the scissors. Here are the towels
 they soaked the blood

 up into, here the three kidney stones, the piece
 of lung in the shape
 of a bird, here the story the hurry like so and like (38)

Besides setting the physical scene of the poem, the experiential elements become ingrained in the poem’s spiritual and philosophical reflection. The “slaughterhouse” and its associations with “body” and “cutting”, then becomes part of the reflection on Santa Clara’s body being cut; the

“birds” are associated with the bird-like piece of her “lungs”; “the narrow road” which leads to the monastery also leads to the highest form of spiritual elevation of the “cloistered sisters” now and in the past. The physical context that provides the meditative foci gain symbolic meanings for the protagonist. This happens on the “way up”, that is, in a process of being enveloped by sublime thoughts about and reflection on the power of the faith of the saint and the sisters, to the degree of the materialization of faith in the act of cutting her body to find the crucifix, or in the act of the spiritualization of the body as a temple, a home for Christ. Here, as in many other poems, if the duality “body-spirit” is not deconstructed as a logocentric oppositional pair²³, it is at least questioned as a purely human construct. The voice seems to imply that what we call the material and the spiritual becomes relative beyond our categories. This is how Vendler summarizes the same general idea of mind and body in Graham’s poetry:

[Graham] brings into postwar American poetry . . . a universe without philosophical coherence though bound by physical law, a universe unconscious of us but which constitutes, by its materiality, our consciousness. (Vendler, “The Nameless and the Material”, on line source)

The meditative protagonist often “exits from” and “enters back” into the experiential frame, embedding past scenes into it. “What the end is for” (*The End of Beauty*) “happens” on a military airfield in “Grand Forks, North Dakota” as the subtitle of the poems indicates:

A boy just like you took me out to see them,
 the five hundred B-52’s on alert on the runway,
 fully loaded fully manned pointed in all the directions,
 running every minute
 of every day.
 They sound like a sickness of the inner ear, (26)

This experiential scene bears multiple connotations of violence, destruction and intensive noise on one side and friendship, sacrifice and love on the other. It creates in the protagonist a deep and painful sense of alienation from the “actual” scene, so that she consequently experiences it

²³ See Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, especially Part I, Ch.3, p. 82.

“like a sickness of the inner ear”. She therefore withdraws into past scenes of another alienation between two people in a relationship. The following quotation captures a variety of remembered scenes, while at the same time demonstrating how their experiential and narrative discourses merge with the discourse of the meditation in the present, “actual” scene:

*What is it the wind
would have wanted to find and didn't*

*leafing down through this endless admiration unbroken
because we're too low for it
to find us?*

Are you still there for me now in that dark
we stood in for hours
letting it sweep as far as it could down over us
unwilling to move, irreconcilable? *What he
wants to tell me,
his whisper more like a scream
over this eternity of engines never not running, (27-28, emphasis
mine)*

Her meditation on “the wind” as she and her young guide are lying down and watching the planes take off, is interrupted by a flash back scene. Her meditative discourse lacks the causal and linear connections between “the wind”, “its admiration”, and “us”. This is because here the language catches a feeling, a sensation or just a thought in process about two humans beings (“us”), missing the grace of “wind”, because they are too “low” in a meadow filled with the violent noise of warplanes, which “drop practice bombs called *shapes* over Nevada” as her companion informs her. It is followed by narrative discourse of a painful past scene of two people irreconcilably alienated and standing still in “darkness”:

of false signals. *The meadow, the meadow hums, love, with the planes,
as if every last blade of grass were wholly possessed*

by this practice, wholly prepared. The last time I saw you,
we stood facing each other as dusk came on.
I leaned against the refrigerator, you leaned against the door.
The picture window behind you was slowly extinguished,

the tree went out, the two birdfeeders, the metal braces on them.
 The light itself took a long time,

bits in puddles stuck like the useless
 splinters of memory, the chips
 of history, hopes, laws handed down. *Here, hold these* he says, these
 grasses these (28)

The (love) scene, described here in detailed linear and sequential language, captures the emotional burden of the people. It resembles a hyperrealist painting by fixating the language on the people and the objects, which disappear in shadow and darkness, so that the silence and the gap created between the couple becomes “loud”. The mind of the narrator freezes and fixates on the visible, that is, the ocular disappearance of the other person, and the objects behind him in minute detail, powerfully suggestive of his disappearance from the relationship. As the last memory scene suggests, they both admit they are not able to “see” each other anymore:

. . . We stood there. Your face went out a long time
 before the rest of it. Can’t see you anymore I said. *Nor I,*
you, whatever you still were
 replied.
 When I asked you to hold me you refused.
 When I asked you to cross the six feet of room to hold me
 you refused. Until I (29)

Although in a realistic mode, the language of the three scenes plays with “darkness” as a metaphor of the alienation and estrangement between the two and their inability to “see” each other. This is a metaphor which is not contrived “outside” the realistic context of the described scene, but is engendered inside. In other words, the vehicle of the metaphor—“darkness”—belongs to or is contiguous with the same realistic context of the physical scene. Thus, two people literally and physically stand and remain in darkness, because their emotions are so stupefying that nobody reaches “to switch the light on”.

The recurrent entering into and exiting from the structure of the actual experience, reminds us of the immanentist quality of Graham's poetry. The ability to be constantly present "here" and "now" and to *present* not *represent*, as she says:

. . . [T]o transform the act of re-presentation into an act of presentation. It forces the poem closer to being an action, further from being the report of an action. It puts the poet in a position of greater accountability, unpredictability—of being the protagonist of the poem more than the narrator of it—"no surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader", says Frost. (Ratzabi, "Nothing Mystical About It", interview, online source)

Even in the most elevated philosophical and religious speculations, she "steps down" to remind us how she (the protagonist) "climbed up" to these thoughts, as the poem "Eschatological Prayer" demonstrated. As we have seen, the poems either establish an experiential frame at the beginning or the experiential scenes are interspersed amongst the meditative thoughts. This causes their respective discourses to intertwine with the fragmented and the symbolic ones. The experiential quality is even more expressly manifested in what many critics refer to as Graham's process-poem. If this is a poetry of constant learning through meditative analysis of sensory-data, consequently, the learning and the discovering must be captured as a process which, as the poems often "decide", is never ending and not always "blessed" with results. The answer often lies in the absence of the answer, as many existentialists claim. Therefore, what remains important for the poem is to catch a thought and experience in progress as if it is happening while we are reading the poem. This is what Graham says about the importance of the poetic experience captured as process and the ethical and epistemological dimension it brings to the poem:

A poem, to slightly mangle Stevens, as an act of mind in the process of finding what will suffice. Most actions born of genuine "process" turn, modulate, choose, swerve, arrive at momentary stays, temporary truths, in a manner that is surprising. Surprise allows for, or insists upon, new moral and emotional ways from point a to point b. New ways to survive. A break from rote to places where the soul finds its wellsprings—not originality so much as a recognition that origin

is still accessible if one breaks what Beckett and Proust both refer to as "habit. (Ratzabi, "Nothing Mystical About it", online source)

The poem therefore remains for Graham an act of "slow" discovery, a process we are "allowed" to witness as readers. This process is often side tracked, comes to a dead end, or, as she implies, breaks through a new layer to come to the "origin" of things. Process in her poetics becomes a principle which makes her experience immanent, as if it is happening during the reader's encounter with the poem. This defines her poetry as experiential, since besides the discoveries, the process leading to them becomes equally important, the "delay" prior to arriving at them.

Chief amongst Graham's predecessors to whom she admits her indebtedness is Emily Dickinson. She shares with Dickinson a trust in the "raw material" of an experience, which resonates in a number of her poems, such as "I watched a Snake" (*Erosion*, 34). However, their language structures belong to opposite poles. On the one hand, Dickinson's condensed, single word utterances, interspersed amongst what Graham calls "silences" (Gardner, "*A Door Ajar*", interview, online source), are signs of intellectual and emotional meditation that have occurred and ceased before the poem even begins. On the other hand, Graham's entire thinking and the ensuing emotional process are depicted in the poem as a whole experience. In other words, Dickinson transcends the process of thinking and feeling and makes immanent only the "grains" of wisdom, the epigrammatic knowledge gained from that process, while Graham makes immanent the full process of attaining the "grains". Helen Vendler identifies the same polarity in their poetics, when she says:

(Even shorter lyrics must, to succeed, convince us of their completeness; they do it by a sort of Dickinsonian implosion opposite of explosion, in which an implied prehistory of ignited totalization is condensed into charred post-hoc indices of itself). At this moment in her writing, Graham chooses to show us her expanding universe by means of a slice of it in conic section. The cosmological excess that Graham has been insisting on recently can be read as a corrective to the current lyric of personal circumscription. (Vendler, "The Moment of Excess", online source)

The poem "Young Maples in Wind" (*Materialism* 136) captures such an "analysis" of sensory data, more precisely, the changing shapes, color, sounds, smells, and tastes, after "the inevitable"

protagonist abandons her meditation, she reinstates the experiential frame of reference and addresses the protagonist *in absentia*, the reader:

exemplification?—I watch the invasion this morning
again and again—airshafts seizing my young maples from
underneath,
making the undersides of leaves *aluminum*,
wrinkling the shadowplay and the seeming till I feel
something I'd call
indecision but, but . . . Reader, do you taste
salt now if
I say to you the air is *salt*—that there is iodine from fresh
after-rain ozone rising in wafts between me and this
illustration . . . Reader, (137)

The poem ends with the protagonist interacting with the reader and inviting him/her to think about the possibilities of participating together, and at the same time, in the process the poem depicts. The protagonist asks the reader if he/she can hear “a hammer now, one car sputtering down”, or “can you remember *marionettes* or is this word you’ve never used”, etc. By trying to implicate the reader in such a way, this self-reflective, meta-poem challenges and questions the aspirations of experiential poetry to render experience as if it is happening in the actual here and now of the reading.

Another interesting example of thinking captured in progress is “Imperialism” (*The End of Beauty*). In the process of meditation, the protagonist is checking if the reader, or a person she addresses, is listening, which creates an illusion that the process is going on at the moment we are reading the poem:

What I want to know, dear are-you-there,
is what it is, this life a shadow and a dust-road have,
the shape constantly laying herself down over the sparkling dust (94)

Here, the experiential frame is just a meditation which the protagonist is trying to convince us is happening “now” by addressing and communicating with the reader, or the addressee. The poem also presents a sequence of past experiences, the story about the mortal body and death the nine-

year-old protagonist had to learn on the banks of the river Ganges. The motivation to tell this story is tied up with strained communication and a lack of intimacy in a relationship: “Last night I touched your face in the lamplight fluttering—we were trying to talk” or “there was a story I wanted to tell you then but couldn’t”. Here is the story from the past embedded in the ongoing meditative process:

bodies crushed, teeming, washing their knives, themselves, their sick,
 and linens, and dishes, and newborn
 calves—tens and hundreds of thousands of bodies mostly
 wet and partly naked even now pressing to get to
 waterfront (96)

In its intention to capture thought or perception as an unfinished process, this poetry often resorts to participles, the stylistic and “grammatical vehicle of perception”, as Helen Vendler observes:

Another formal consequence of the freeze-frame representation of the spontaneous evolving of experience is Graham's reliance on the present participle as the principal grammatical vehicle of perception. Thus she suspends both the past (the principle of that which has been extinguished) and the future (the principle of that which will be extinguished), and writes in 'the delay' between the two. (Vendler, “The Nameless and the Material”, online source)

The depiction of process reflects the ambition of this poetry to capture the created material world in its state of constant change (the big “erosion”), the consequence of interactions of the animate and inanimate worlds at a particular moment in time. It also originates in Graham’s intention that her poems enact the protagonist’s philosophical and spiritual awakening to the constant presence of the *passing of time*. Being able to understand and penetrate the dimension of time is to penetrate or enter a “gap”, a word with spatial meaning that when used in a temporal context, reflects Graham’s observation of time as a fourth dimension. This is what she says about her design to capture passing time and the changes it constantly “inscribes” upon the worlds inside and outside of the perceiver:

In front of me – water and gulls on the beach in a certain moment of sunset, say –
 and I look up and describe the thing – then I look up and it has changed, and I

change the word – I look up again and the “something” has changed again – I put them (gulls, motion, color, shadow) down in the next position, next incarnation. So it actually in an attempt to change the power ratio of witness to the world, to give the world – the subject – more power. To get one’s self to where one is open to being “corrected” by the given . . . Also an attempt to enact the time in which it takes to see the thing, the time in which that seen thing is living and constantly changing, the time it takes to “take” those actions down, the time in which my language is occurring, your reading is occurring, - to make of all that a piece. The mutability of the external meeting the mutability of the internal. (Gardner, “The Art of Poetry No. 85”, interview, online source)

Although the above ideas resonate within many lines of her poetry, the poem which best reflects these issues and, figuratively and literally, “touches” them, is the poem “The Visible World” (*Materialism*). Here the process of thinking through the ideas is happening while the protagonist is digging her hands into soil. Besides reflecting upon the various horizontal strata of the soil, that is, the crumbling “cultures” of past interactions among the animate and inanimate worlds in her hands now, she is deeply aware of the time of action passing “now” and its effect upon the ongoing process of reflection:

I dig my hands into the absolute. The surface
breaks
into shingled, grassed clusters; lifts.
If I press, pick-in with fingers, pluck,
I can unfold the loam. It is tender. It is a tender
maneuver, hands making and unmaking promises.
Diggers, forgetters A series of successive single instances . . .
Frames of reference moving . . .
The speed of light, down here, upthrown, in my hands:
bacteria, milky roots, pilgrimages of spores, deranged
and rippling
mosses. What heat is this in me
that would *thaw time*, making bits of instance
overlap
shovel by shovelful—my present a wind blowing through
this culture (139)

in the notion of the running time, thus awaking our often lulled and dulled perception of the world around us being in constant uninterrupted change. In her well-known *Paris Review* interview with Thomas Gardner (2003), Graham explains how much this technique changed her perception of time and motivated her to apply it to the verbal art of poetry. The film is Tarkovski's "Nostalgia", in which a man is given a clue by a homeless drunk on how to save the world from imminent catastrophes. He is supposed to pass through a fountain of sulfurous fumes with a lit candle and touch the wall on the opposite side. The actual time it takes the protagonist to perform this act is about fifteen minutes and the director presents it without interruption, juxtaposing this sequence alongside the edited scenes of fictional time:

What happens next changed my life, or at least my life as an artist. The filmmaker, having made a traditional movie up to that point, in which representational time is different from actual time (days go by and only four minutes go by on screen), opens the camera and does not interrupt the shot again from the minute his character tries to cross that water. . . . Finally, the third time, the character makes it – touches the far wall. This kind of iconic action can't take place except in real time. . . .

. . . That was a great revelation to me. Tarkovsky knew it had to take the same, say, thirteen minutes of my life in the movie theatre, as it took in the character's, or actor's, or Tarkovsky's life to do it. One can call it the now – real time. It's the hole that opens in the film – no longer a representation, but a presentation, a carrying. (Gardner, "The Art of Poetry No. 85", interview, online source)

This is precisely what she does in her poetry by creating an illusion that the thinking process of the protagonist and the reading process of the reader are happening at the same time. But how, then, is this artistic illusion created? As already mentioned, the means for capturing process in her poems range from abundant deictic tools for place, time and person ("now", "at this moment", "over there", "over here", "this", "that"), participles, the dramatic present simple and the present continuous tenses. However, even more powerful means of capturing "actual" and "shared" time between the protagonist and the reader are the instances when the protagonist addresses the reader to check if he/she is "there" or whether he/she agrees with her thinking. This

technique fully utilizes what Jakobson calls the *phatic*²⁴ function of language. This involves the addresser checking the channel of communication, more precisely, the cognitive and physical conditions of the communication with the addressee. Similarly, the protagonist's performative statements, mostly in the imperative mood, ask the reader to choose an answer ("x" or "y", fill in "____"), that is, to finish the poem or change the direction of the thinking process. This technique exercises what Jakobson calls the *conative*²⁵ function of language, when the addressor asks, pleads, or orders the addressee to do certain things in the act of communication.

The poem "San Sepolcro" (*Erosion 2*) is an illustration of the spatial, temporal and personal deictic devices used in service of capturing the "shared" time and place of the action taking place in the poem. We shall see how they point out the distance in space and time between the speaker and reader, and the relation to other persons involved in this "communication". With such precise "coordinates" of the action, the poem creates the sense of passing time captured:

In this blue light
 I can take you there,
 snow having made me
 a world of bone
 seen through to. This
 is my house,

my section of Etruscan
 wall, my neighbor's
 lemontrees, and, just below
 the lower church,
 the airplane factory.
 | A rooster

²⁴ This is how Jakobson defines PHATIC function: "There are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works "(Hello, do you hear me?"), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm this continued attention ("Are you listening?")" (*Language in Literature* 68)

²⁵ "Orientation towards the addressee, the CONATIVE function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative, which syntactically, morphologically, and often even phonemically deviate from other nominal and verbal categories" (*Language in Literature* 67-68).

.....

. . . Come, we can go in.
 It is before
 the birth of god. No-one
 has risen yet
 to the museums, to the assembly
 Line—bodies (2)

The deictic devices for space (“there”, “this is”, “just below”, “the lower”) and for time (“in this blue light”, “no-one had risen yet”), capture the protagonist’s open invitation to us (the readers) to be taken *there*, to San Sepulcro, “now”. The poem continues to point deictically to different places worth visiting in the town. More importantly, however, it foregrounds the details of the fresco “Madonna del Parto” by Pierro della Francesca, which also captures a particular moment in time, one of the most significant for the cultural history of Western civilization. Both the painting, and by extension the poem, depict the pregnant Mary unbuttoning her blue dress to give birth to Jesus. However, as the poem suggests, the captured moment will be “stillborn”, with the emphasis on “still”, forever fixed in the painting:

 Inside, at the heart,
 is tragedy, the present moment
 forever stillborn,
 but going in, each breath
 is a button (3)

By capturing and forever fixing the moment of Christ’s birth, the painting becomes a grand temporal deixis, according to which our civilization orientates and measures time’s proximity. In other words, Christ becomes an embodiment of the chief temporal and personal deictics in our culture.

One of the poems which best illustrates how the interactive and immanent protagonist uses certain devices to implicate the reader and capture the ongoing process in the poem is “The Veil” (*The End of Beauty*). It begins with a multiple choice question and an empty space allocated for the reader’s presence or absence:

In the Tabernacle the veil hangs which is (choose one):
 the dress dividing us from ____; the sky; the real,
 through which the x ascends (His feet still showing through on
 this side)

into the realm of uncreated things,
 up, swift as proof,
 leaving behind this *red* over our row of poplars now, (45)

In addition to being devices that involve the reader, the empty space and “x” can also stand for the Judean notion of god as one who cannot be seen or explained, thus he is an “x” or an empty line. Perhaps the protagonist is inviting the reader to insert a new name for god, one of many mankind has coined? The next lines signal remarkably swift transition as the poem moves from the uncreated realm and the place of his ascension (“His feet still showing through on this side into the realm of uncreated things up, swift as proof”) back to the realm of the created²⁶ things, this world: “the red over our poplars now”. The adverb of time “now” in the last quotation denotes the beginning of the ongoing process of meditation on the “veil”, which is there and is not. Yet, the “rip in the veil, which is the storyline” is more important, as it is a familiar line from our religious stories and interpretations; they are only epistemological “rippings” of the same “veil” that separates us from the ultimate answers, from the “x” and the empty line.

As we have seen in these examples, the poem captures and implies process by devices and markers of the “actual” time and place of the events happening. At the same time, these devices mark the immanence of the voice (the protagonist) in the experiences arrested by the poems. These markers and devices are constitutive parts of the experiential quality of this poetry and range from narrations and descriptions of scenes and occasions, to spatial, temporal and personal deictics, and conative and phatic statements. They set the scene and initiate the meditative thought, helping the poem create an illusion of thought and action depicted during the “actual time” of their happening, which the protagonist wants to share with the reader.

²⁶ The world and nature created, but not by man, versus the uncreated, eternal, “divine”, unknown origin of everything.

Ultimately, they mark the protagonist's full *presence*, her full *imminence* in the experiential structures of the poem.

Metonymic/Metaphoric

Any overview of the critical work on Graham's poetry demonstrates that her poetic motifs, concepts and philosophy have been analyzed in greater detail than her formal and stylistic features. This is not peculiar since Graham has always targeted the deep and complex *matter* of things and the derivatives of the crucial ideas from our cultural history. Criticizing the tendency in modern culture for speedy and superficial readings, this is precisely how she defines the role of poetry: "Of course, it is poetry's job to try to provide the very opposite—to re-complicate the oversimplified thing" (Gardner, "*The Art of Poetry No.85*" interview, online source). Critics, therefore, have discerned, categorized and mapped out the references in her work to external sources such as Greco-Latin myths, philosophy, science, Judeo-Christian religious traditions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and linguistics.

However, most critics agree that she has developed a very idiosyncratic language throughout her long writing and publishing career, which accommodates her various philosophical interests and the experiential and discursive qualities of her poetics. Thus, Graham's specific discourse has been extensively analyzed in terms of their main concepts to the extent that certain critics, such as Calvin Bedient, have developed a poetic lexicon for Graham ("Toward a Jorie Graham Lexicon"). In regards to the more formal aspects of her poetry, critics have done justice to her specific rhythm, analyzing it as a result of congruence or incongruence between her long lines and her long sentences, or the interchange between her long and short lines. Her syntax has been analytically examined by critics such as Helen Vendler in relation to her trilingualism, and the radical change in her style that occurred with the publication of *The End of Beauty* ("The Moment of Excess", online source).

However the structure of her poetic discourse has not been analyzed from the stylistic perspective of the main language tropes such as metonymy and metaphor, and the structures they generate. In this part of the chapter I want to address why her poetic discourse is predominantly

metonymical, that is, how one topic or concept leads to another on the basis of their contiguity and closeness, and much less than on the basis of similarity of concepts through comparison, which is more conducive to metaphoric language structures. I will apply Jakobson's theory of the two processes of discourse formation, the metonymic and the metaphoric, bearing in mind his warning that one can never exclude the other, as both are present in any language behavior. The question is, he stresses, the predominance of one over the other:

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or their contiguity. The metaphorical way would be the more appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. . . . In normal verbal behavior both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other. (*Fundamentals of Language* 76)

The predominance of metonymy over metaphor in Graham's poetry will be examined at the level of (i) individual tropes and (ii) as a structure of poetic discourse developed on the basis of the two processes: either metonymic combination or metaphoric selection and comparison. It is important to note that although prevalent, the metonymic structure does not exclude metaphors as tropes and metaphoric structures are imbedded in particular sections of Graham's longer poems, especially the fragmentary and symbolic parts. Also, I will argue that the sections of Graham's longer poems create among themselves either metonymic or metaphoric relationships, with predominance given to the latter. Since the act of substitution of the sections in longer poems is not present as it is in metaphoric constructions, the resultant relationships are more simile-like than metaphorical. This is what David Lodge says about the verbal constructions which have metaphorical force of comparison but lack the substitution of comparable elements:

These are of course similes, not metaphors proper. Although Jakobson does not comment on simile as such it must belong on the metaphorical side of his bipolar scheme since it is generated by the perception of similarity, but it does not involve substitution in the same radical sense as metaphor. For this reason it is more easily assimilated into metonymic modes of writing. (Lodge 97)

Graham's poetics of discovery, the unending and unfinished process which the poems capture, are conducive to metonymic verbal structures, as with the other experiential poets discussed in this thesis. On the one hand, the already identified and discussed scientific-like discourse and the experiential frames constructed to situate meditative and speculative thoughts are developed by the process of combining adjacent and contiguous poetic "material" that belongs to the same contexts. The immediate result is a prose-like discourse of linear, causal and sequential syntagms which operates according to Jakobson's "horizontal axes of language".²⁷ The symbolic (metaphoric) discourse, on the other hand, operates according to Jakobson's paradigmatic vertical axis by selecting and comparing similar linguistic units, an operation which is invisible in language. In order to explain how Jakobson's theory is used in this analysis, I draw from Roger Fowler's graphic presentation of Jakobson's model of horizontal and vertical axes, and their corresponding syntagms and paradigms in any language formation (*Linguistic Criticism* 98-99):

S Y N T A G M

P	The	child	sleeps.
A	a	kid	dozes.
R	some	youngster	nods.
A	<i>etc.</i>	tot	naps.
D		infant	wakes.
I		boy	dreams.
G		woman	<i>etc.</i>
M		<i>etc.</i>	

We can see from these graphically presented language operations that a sentence results from two operative principles, the *mind selecting* from the paradigmatic column of words to fill in the places in the syntagms of combined linguistic units. The former are invisible since they are the codes of language, *langue*, the latter are visible in language as the message, *parole*. Each linguistic unit in the syntagm can be substituted with a new word from the corresponding paradigmatic group. For example, "the child" can be replaced with "kid", "youngster" or "woman", as long as each belongs to the paradigmatic group of nouns that can play the role of

²⁷ The reference is to Jakobson's well-known pronouncement: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (*Style in Language* 358).

subject in the sentence. The more congruent or contiguous the new word is to the context of the sentence/discourse, the more metonymic the structure of the sentence, and contrary to this, the more incongruent or non-contiguous the new word to the context of the sentence, the more metaphorical the structure. In other words, the bigger the discrepancy between the tenor (the produced meaning) and the vehicle (the actual word) of metaphor, the stronger the metaphor as a trope, and the more symbolic and metaphoric the structure. However, metaphoric and metonymic structures in a text are never exclusive, as David Lodge explains:

Furthermore, it must always be remembered that we are not discussing a distinction between two mutually exclusive types of discourse, but a distinction based on dominance. The metaphoric work cannot totally neglect metonymic continuity if it is to be intelligible at all. Correspondingly, the metonymic text cannot eliminate all signs that it is available for metaphorical interpretation. (Lodge 111)

The descriptive and narrative structures, especially of the scientific-like discourse and the experiential frames are naturally more metonymic. It is so since the operation of combining (adjacent and contiguous elements) corresponds to the process of describing and narrating characteristics and elements of an object or a scene. Accordingly, language moves from one characteristic, element or percept to the next contiguous one, combining them in descriptive or narrative syntagmatic chains. The result is metonymic, prose-like discourse which intrinsically consists of relationships such as cause-effects, parts-whole or attributes-whole. It is important to add here that in the formation of metonymy proper, there is an invisible mental process of deleting one of the elements of metonymy. For example, instead of saying “Two men’s heads are better than one”, we have the metonymic expression: “Two heads are better than one”,²⁸ in which “heads” stands alone for the deleted “men’s heads”. The trope is produced when the more inclusive element, the whole, is deleted and the less inclusive element, the part, functions as the whole. The same deletion of “the whole” is present in metonymic structures, except here more parts stand for, that is, represent the whole.

²⁸ David Lodge proposes the term “deletion” instead of Jakobson’s “contexture”, as it describes better the verbal process behind the metonymic agency: the element which includes the other element(s), logically the less dispensable one, is deleted. Thus, deletion for metonymy is what substitution is for metaphor (*Modes of Modern Writing* 76).

The following excerpt illustrates the use of metonymy as a trope to portray the personalities of the protagonists by foregrounding a single characteristic they all share:

This is the sugar
 you are stealing
 from the nurses, filling
 your pillow
 with something
 for nothing,
 filling my pockets
 till I'm some kind
 of sandman
 you can still

.....

Out there,
 deep in the sleight
 of hand

is where you whipped
 my mother
 for a stolen pencilbox
 till they thought
 she was dead. And there
 is her sister,
 the one who's never cut
 her hair,
 and there the one who died leaving
 a freezer full

of meals twenty years old
 or more. Maybe (*Erosion* 24-25)

The quoted stanzas from “The Long Island Geriatric Home”, develop a common attribute which describes the “grandfather”, the “mother” and the “two aunts” stealing and hoarding things. They are described by this attribute as a part that stands for the whole, or as an effect that represents the cause. This habit, the compulsion of the grandfather to hoard and appropriate things (“This is the sugar / you are stealing / from the nurses, filling / your pillow”), stands for him as a whole character. However, at this stage of the poem, this portrayal resembles a caricature, which is also a metonymic process of exaggerating a single attribute or characteristic to portray a distorted

version of the whole person, as Paul Simpson says (*Stylistics* 44). Next, the poem metonymically depicts the psychological effects of this personal trait upon one of his daughters: he beats her up for stealing a pencil box, probably trying to beat out his weakness in his child. The mania for hoarding and not letting go has an effect upon his other two daughters (“the aunts”): one has never cut her hair and the other stocks up twenty-year-old food in the refrigerator. They too are portrayed through the same metonymic procedure of one element standing for and describing their whole personalities and their entire life stories. This attribute, the petty theft and subsequent hoarding, is not selected as a concept from a distant context to compare the protagonists with, which would be the metaphoric procedure. To the contrary, it is contiguous to the protagonists and belongs to the same context of their lives which is the metonymic manner of constructing the discourse.

As the poem’s structure becomes more complex, the language becomes more metaphoric, and we realize that grandfather’s quotidian “sin” lies at the core of his philosophy of life and his understanding of how the world of nature and people functions: the tree *steals* its sap from the parent rocks and soil, he explains to his granddaughter, the narrator of the poem. Also, this worldview fits into the context of his Jewish culture of survival and pragmatism, which he has obviously embraced. According to his “doctrine” of circular movement, all matter is intrinsically self-feeding and self-sustainable by the act of “stealing”, taking and hoarding, from the source. Thus, “stealing/taking” inevitably becomes the principle of survival for everything during its short stay, its “delay” in the circle which begins and returns to “the fountain”, the source:

... You showed me how
 only a tree
 can steal (through sap
 and leaves)
 the minerals of parent rock
 and feed them
 (by the leafrot) to
 the soil.
 How that delay (you drew
 a fountain
 in the dirt) is all
 we ever

are. *Who wants a handout*
anyhow,
 you say. Family hours (*Erosion* 25-6)

From this point on, “stealing” acquires deeper meanings, evolving into a pivotal point of the general structure. The protagonist remembers taking a branch from her grandfather’s orchard, from the source and locus of his vegetal philosophy, which has the metonymic force of a part standing for the whole, an effect stemming from the cause which has affected the other family members. The language here shifts gradually toward the metaphoric pole, creating a simile, the branch is shaped *like* a woman running away who, as the poem tells us, “looks like she could outrun anything, although, of course she’s stuck”. There are good reasons to see the branch as a metaphor for the protagonist’s mother, who unlike the other two sisters, tried to break away from the “parent” tree. The discourse becomes even more metaphorical when the running “woman-branch” reminds the protagonist of the fleeing Daphne chased by the god Apollo. The severed branch-mother is thus compared to a character from a very distant and remote context of discourse, the mythological and symbolic, which belongs to the metaphoric way of structuring discourse. The general metonymic structure of the poem grows out from a single metonymy as a trope, petty theft and hoarding, to its general structure, the grandfather’s philosophy, while the individual metaphors and the metaphoric structures, are just parts of it.

The poem “Steering Wheel” (*Materialism*) also demonstrates the operation of metonymy at two levels. In the first stanza it operates at the level of a trope, the human being represented by one of its objects, a “hat”:

Then a hat from someone down the block
 blown off, rolling—tossing—across the empty macadam,
 an open mouth, with no face round it,
 O and O and O and O—
 “we have to regain the moral pleasure
 of experiencing the distance between subject and object”, (5)

The experiential frame of this poem is the protagonist backing up into her driveway and speculating about the sudden uplifts of autumn leaves caused by the change of wind, and the similar effects this has on her and the surrounding trees. These scenes initiate her meditation on

the physical laws which govern and affect both inanimate and animate worlds, leading her to the phenomenological speculations of subject-object relations:

In the rear-view mirror I saw the veil of leaves
suctioned up by a change in current
and how they stayed up, for the allotted time,
in absolute fidelity to the force behind,
magenta, hovering, a thing that happens,
slowly upswirling above the driveway
I was preparing to back clear out of—
and three young pine trees at the end of that view (5)

At one point a human object, a “hat”, enters the scene, brought by the same current of wind. The “hat” becomes a metonymy for the human being, the subject “thrown” among the speechless objects, elements and forces of nature. The man-made “hat” is not introduced on the basis of its similarity with the human being, but rather as an object which belongs to the human being, that is, as an element which is contiguous to the context. Sometimes, this kind of metonymy acquires metaphoric force and can function as what David Lodge calls “metaphorical metonymy, or as we more commonly say, a symbol” (*The Modes of Modern Writing* 100). He draws this conclusion analyzing the description of London in a muddy November day from Dickens’ *Bleak House*. He characterizes it as “prose pushed much further towards the metaphoric pole” because the contiguous items of the text—nineteenth-century London, its streets, landmarks and financial institutions—are “elaborated metaphorically rather than represented metonymically”. Yet, the recurrent presence of “mud” in the text acquires the status of a “metonymic metaphor” as it is not only a contiguous attribute of London but also an attribute of the “dirty” financial institutions which cause poverty, as Lodge explains. Thus, the “mud” becomes a symbol of crookedness and the general moral “mire” in the text (99-100).

In Graham’s poem, the shape of the “hat” reminds the observer of an open mouth pronouncing “O” sounds as in human pain or wonder. Although the “hat” is contiguous to the context of a street where people live, it still acquires the symbolic power and becomes a “metaphorical metonymy” by standing for any human being endowed with emotions and the capacities of speech to express them:

—me now slowly backing up
the dusty driveway into the law
composed of updraft, downdraft, weight of these dried
mid-winter leaves,
light figured-in too, I'm sure, the weight of light,
and angle of vision, dust, gravity, solitude,
and the part of the law which in the world's waiting,
and the part of the law which is my waiting, (5)

As this excerpt demonstrates, the poem continues with a chain of metonymies representing the whole, the material world, the object/nature versus the subject/man. This is a paratactic list which creates the scene, the whole which consists of a human being (the protagonist as an observer), leaves, dust, light, force of gravity and speechlessness. They all are governed by the same physical laws, although they are affected in different ways.

This poem is a good example of the meditative and descriptive discourses developed by the same metonymic verbal agency. On the one hand, we have the descriptive discourse of the scene of “backing up” with all its details of leaves and wind swirls joined by a human “hat”. On the other hand, we have the meditative discourse initiated by the same scene and its particulars, which leads the protagonist to speculate on the universal material laws and subject-object relations (“we have to regain the moral pleasure in experiencing the distance between subject and object” [5]). Both discourses are developed by metonymic combinations of the present, contiguous and contextual details, and particulars, which all stand for and represent the whole—the material world, including the human being.

Graham's poetry, as we have seen, approaches experience as a process of spontaneous speculation without premeditation, or more precisely, it creates an artistic illusion of such spontaneity. Therefore, its poetic discourse predominantly develops and moves forward by associating unpremeditated, contagious conceptual elements in chains of linguistic units. This is a process, or progressive verbal act, in which one element or topic leads to a next contiguous one in the sequence of a speculative and meditative thought. Consequently, the metonymic structure proves more conducive to capturing thought in process than the metaphoric which presupposes premeditation. In order to compare and substitute concept with another on the basis of their similarity, these concepts must be known, preselected and defined *a-priori*. However, the

speculative thought in progress identifies and defines its concepts through the actual process itself, without premeditation or a-priori definition, which is a tendency of combining concepts in language, thus closer to the metonymic pole.

The typical metonymic structures of the process-poems reflect the basic relationship of parts and whole in which the parts represent the whole. Individual poems define this whole differently, as, but not limited to, god, spirit, body, matter, beauty, story, etc. These poems approach the world as an essentially unknown whole for which only the parts speak, but in encoded messages. Thus, “History” (*The Dream of the Unified Field*) speaks about a world in which it is difficult to discern cause from effect or a part from whole in order to be able to read the encoded message:

So that I had to look up just now to see them
sinking—black storks—
sky disappearing as they ease down,
each body like a prey the wings have seized . . .
Something that was a whole story once,
unparaphrased by shadows,

something that was whole cloth floating in a wide
sky
rippling, studded with wingbeats,
something like light grazing on the back of light,

now getting sucked back down
into the watching eye, flapping, black
hysterical applause,
claws out now looking for foothold (144)

The poem engages with the idea of parts and whole from the very beginning, when the big black “storks” are seen as carrying their bodies in their wings as prey, that is, their parts (the wings) are carrying their whole (the bodies). It is a viable and common image when storks feed, which the poem hurries to tell us is the “whole story” of which this scene, happening “now”, is only a part. Their movements, the screeching and flapping of their wings, are like black “applause” when landing “fast-forward into the labyrinth” of the present moment. The observer wonders if the

“storks”, landing on the tree where she is standing, are some kind of “knowledge”, or a part of something bigger and more meaningful to be discerned in the segment of this partially narrated story. What kind of voice or a messenger are they?, she asks:

Voice of what. Seems to say what.

This is newness? This is the messenger? Screeching. (145)

On a semantic level, the important notion of parts and whole illustrates the protagonist’s attempt to read the speechless but intriguing parts of the implied, unknown whole. While on a linguistic level, the same notion demonstrates how the overall metonymic structure of the poem is composed of parts that are contiguous and contextual to the whole scene or event, watching storks land on a tree and meditating upon passing time in the present moment. At the same time, it constructs what I call here the overall experiential frame of the poem, that is, an event. However, the symbolic and figurative parts imbedded in the overall metonymic discourse pull toward the metaphoric pole of language. They are visible in the lines which paradigmatically introduce in the syntagms concepts such as “story”, “cloth” and “monks”, which do not belong to the context of the scene, but occur on the basis of their similarity in the process of comparing. The concept “story”, often used in this poetry to refer to the world, or the “amazing creation” (as Graham implies in her interviews), has lost its full metaphoric strength and is more a symbol and a significant, contiguous part in Graham’s philosophical *lexicon*.

After the “storks” land and cast their shadows, interrupting a previous “story” in the sky, the ongoing story gets complicated by the presence of the protagonist, watching and paraphrasing it, and what she calls “x”, most likely her dog. The meditation continues further, the language moving toward the metaphorical pole, when their flying is compared with “cloth”, “something that was the whole cloth floating in a wide sky”. The word “cloth”, as a man-made object belongs to an entirely opposite context to the present, natural one. Introduced in the context of nature, it has more metaphorical strength than “story”. Their flying is *like* a “cloth” which covers the entire tree with “knowledge” when they land. Symbolically, it becomes the “tree of knowledge”, metaphorically echoing the biblical tree, which she needs to ponder. Thus, the contiguous items “tree” and “storks” are “metaphorically elaborated”, as Lodge puts it, with the symbolic “cloth and “story” and become the intriguing “knowledge”.

Whether a poetic discourse becomes more metonymic or more metaphoric will depend on the distance between the vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor used in the text. Since the vehicles of the metaphor here are “the tree” and “the storks”, the contiguous elements to the context, the created tenor—the biblical tree of knowledge—is still close to the context and does not interrupt its realistic semantic flow. Thus, the language of these sections does not bend too much towards the metaphoric pole. Here is Lodge’s explanation of metaphor’s roles in metonymic, realistic contexts:

. . . [I]t is that, in the metonymic text, metaphorical substitution is in a highly sensitive relation to context or contiguity. The greater the distance (existentially, conceptually, affectively) between the tenor (which is part of the context) and the vehicle of the metaphor, the more powerful will be the semantic effect of the metaphor, but the greater, also, will be the disturbance to the relationships of contiguity between items in the discourse and therefore to realistic illusion. (Lodge 112)

What these embedded metaphoric structures, or “local” metaphors, do to the metonymic “environment” in Graham’s poetry, is also visible in the purely meditative section of the poem. The protagonist speculates on her being “here” and “now” at the present moment and the relation to the common, geological pre-history:

Forget what we used to be, doubled, in the dark
age where half of us is cast
in and down, all the way,
into the silt,
roiled under,

saved in there with all other slaughtered bits,
dark thick fabric of the underneath,
sinking, sifting.

It is four o’clock. I have an appointment.
The tree above me. The river not flowing. Now: (145)

In addition to this example, the rest of the purely meditative and discursive parts of the poem seem to abandon its general context and create metaphoric structures by introducing non-contiguous concepts from other contexts (e.g. “the dark age”). However, the protagonist abruptly snaps back to the actual time of the poem: “It is four o’clock. I have an appointment”. If we consider that in the next stanza the poem introduces “the dredger parked into the river-house”, then the previously “alien” concepts of the geological past become contiguous. Here both the metonymic combination of the contiguous elements (tree, storks, river, dredger) and the metaphoric selection of paradigmatic elements (geological times, past events, existential thoughts, decisions, etc.), all constitute the experiential frame of the event. They generate the immanence of the whole experience.

The poem uses several similes, which have striking metaphoric power, to compare similar concepts which belong to entirely dissimilar contexts:

If the x is on a chain, licking its bone,
making the sounds now of monks
copying the texts out,
muttering to themselves, (146-7)

The protagonist sees the same “story” of different modes of existence narrated in the smacking sounds “x” (the dog) is making gnawing a bone, “whole long stories which are its gentle gnawing”. These sounds are then compared to the similar sounds produced by “monks copying texts”, thus bridging two entirely remote and distant contexts. It is as if the poem is saying that in the general interconnectedness of everything, the dog’s gnawing as its way of telling its story is as relevant as any other’s including the “monks” or the “storks” stories. The simile retains the metaphoric comparison and selection by similarity, but it also retains the link between the two contexts—“is like”, showing the leap of the mind in different realms, searching for the right way to capture the knowledge in the parts of the whole. Thus, the simile here is in service of the metonymic semantic and linguistic structure.

Another point worth examining is the metonymic and metaphoric relationship produced by the scenes/sections of the longer poems, revealing the associative leaps between different meditative foci of thought in progress. Again, we come to similar results depending on how close the context of the next scene is to the previous. The more contiguous the context, the more

metonymic the relationship, while the more dissimilar the context, the more metaphoric the relationship. In metaphoric relationships between the scenes, the relationships become simile-like, since the act of substituting one for the other does not occur. Thus, the scenes are like the compared concepts in a simile—both parts remain in the language revealing the link between them. Also, the important themes or concepts, recurrent in individual scenes of these poems, function as connective tissues in the overall metonymic structure. For example, in “Noli Me Tangere”, concepts such as “entering”, “delay” and “gap” between the material and the spiritual world are *like* the motions of the birds in the garden; in “What the End is For” the alienation and violence of the military airfield is *like*, or similar to, the estrangement that occurs in loving or marital relationships, while in “Imperialism”, the mortality of the body and the alienation from others experienced by the river Ganges are *similar* to the feelings in a strained relationship. Discussing the “metaphoric disturbance” of a realistic context, David Lodge also proposes simile as a more realistic figurative device:

This disturbance can to some extent be muted by using simile rather than metaphor proper, for simile, although it creates a relationship of similarity between dissimilars, spreads itself along the line of combination which metaphor, by its radical strategy of substitution, tends to disrupt. Metaphor, it is sometimes said, asserts identity, simile merely likeness, and perhaps on this account the former trope is usually considered the more ‘poetic.’ (Lodge 112)

A good example of a metaphorical leap from one scene to another from an entirely different context is “Notes on the Reality of the Self” (*Materialism*). The scene of a man in prayer prior to cutting a loaf of bread with the knife in front of him, leaps into a scene of a fallen birch tree in the woods he left the night before. This sudden leap happens in a single line, from the context of the bakeshop to the context of the woods. This is made on the basis of the similarity of the predicate: *cutting bread* and *cutting a tree*, the same action in two entirely different contexts:

In the bakeshop, at one of the tables,
there is a man about to eat his morning’s slice,
who sits, hands folded eyes closed,
above the loaf still entire, and speaks inwardly
huge strange thoughts of thanks.

The knife, a felled birch left overnight
 for tomorrow's work on which the moonlight,
 in the eyes of no one, plays gleaming, the knife
 sits awaiting the emptiness it will make appear (12)

This leap has a strong metaphorical force because it initiates a whole succession of leaps backward and forward between these two different scenes. It also reflects the meditative stream of thoughts the observer, or protagonist, experiences in the bakeshop. The entirely distant scenes become constantly merged, thus establishing firm metaphoric relations, or more precisely, similes with metaphoric force: cutting the loaf is like cutting the tree. Thus, they metaphorically become the same symbolic “landmarks”, sacramental acts, in his meditative thought about his identity, his presence at that very moment in the bakeshop and in the woods at the same time, and of their intersection:

. . . His weight is on his elbows, and carried through
 onto the imitation-woodgrain tabletop.
 Nothing distracts. The loaf is a crucial landmark
 in the small landscape which is his place—
 a way to find the road back to the felled
 tree, even in moonlight, even if strong rains intervene
 and no moon or sunshine can get through. For days (12)

“Breakdancing” (*The End of Beauty* 53) is a poem with a complex structure whose main scene, or event, is the protagonist changing TV channels and reflecting on the various forms of violence. This scene generates a series of metonymic sub-scenes, which are then metaphorically juxtaposed to the scenes of Saint Teresa, who tortured her body and had strong visions of Christ in his resurrected bodily form. All TV scenes stand in metonymic relationships to one other, being different parts of the whole, that is, violent America on TV. The poem begins with a large metonymy—the breakdancing—and each sub-scene that follows depicts a different form of violence in the present day, secularized, materialistic, commercialized and economically polarized America. Either individually or in conjunction, they also establish metaphoric relationships with the meditative scenes of Saint Teresa. Therefore, the present day violent acts committed against the human body are compared to similar acts in remote and alien contexts and

discourses of sixteenth-century Medieval Spain. America producing radioactive waste and constantly “needing bodies”, is a self-injury as the exaggerated Medieval Christian, faith-induced infliction and annihilation of the body over the mind. This simile relationship with metaphoric force compares various forms of modern day infliction, such as wars, pollution, and materialistic greed to the medieval, religious and fanatic attitude towards the annihilation and torture of the human body. Thus, the story repeats itself in time.

The opening scene – a boy doing a breakdance—captures the sociological stereotype of the poor, black, street boys, dancing to earn money or attention, “staying alive” as the poem says. The movements of the dance are described as controlled, yet seemingly spasmodic and painful, while as a means of making a living, they become a form of violence and torture against the body:

Staying alive the boy on the screen is doing it,
 the secret nobody knows like a rapture through his limbs,
 the secret, *the robot-like succession of joint isolations*
 that simulate a body's reactions to
electric shock.

 This is how it tells itself: pops, ticks, waves and the

float. What
 is poverty for, (53)

.....

. . . Don't push me the limbs are whispering, don't push
 'cause I'm close to the edge of the footwork is whispering
 down onto the sidewalk that won't give in won't go some other (53)

This TV scene is contiguous to the next showing the American flag fluttering and the ironic comment “the greatest democracy on earth”. It is followed by the protagonist's thoughts on the various forms of corporate and military violence:

 like a muttering passing through a crowd and coming out an
 anthem,

string of words on its search
and destroy
needing bodies, bodies. . . .
I'm listening to where she must choke. I'm listening
to where he must not be betrayed. I'm trying (53)

The last two lines of the quoted stanza mark the point of transition between the two parts of the poem: the first, the protagonist watching violence on TV, and the second—thinking about Saint Teresa's words about the body. Her words come after long periods of self-inflicted torture and the temptation to transform her body, to make it more "spiritual" and worthy to carry Christ, despite his words of warning to her: "Don't try / to hold me in yourself (the air, hissing) but try to hold yourself / in me" (54).

However, the present and the "historical" scenes are best merged with the metaphor "blowzy story" in the following line: "in the story that flutters blowzy over the body of the land". Saint Teresa's whispers to Christ to show her the ways to welcome him in her, which is essentially her corporal self-annulment, is the same "blowzy story" as our modern times ramming "radioactive waste into" in the body of earth. The adjective "blowzy" is phonetically close to "blouse", a piece of garment. This produces the aural association of a dirty blouse fluttering "over the body of the land". The story of violence therefore becomes a dirty garment which constantly covers the body of the earth:

(whispering Lord, what will you have me
do?) for his corporal
appearance
in the light of the sixteenth century, in the story that flutters
blowzy over the body of the land
we must now somehow ram
the radioactive waste

into. He (54)

The final section of the poem brings together all the references to bodily violence and physical pain from the previous scenes and discourses—the TV scenes, Saint Theresa's quotes and the

protagonist's speculations. The poem ends with another TV scene—jackpots and “silver dollars exploding” as another form of happiness or pain.

Section Six of the often anthologized poem, “The Dream of the Unified Field” (*Materialism*), develops the same idea of parts metonymically representing the whole, a cause representing its effects and vice versa, all in an attempt to capture the most elusive experience of all, “the reality of the self”. The section quoted below makes reference to the instances and experiences captured in the five previous sections. Standing in the midst of a snow storm, the protagonist tries to arrange these sections together in order to understand, that is, *appropriate* them (“to make it *mine*”), and settle down “the storm” in her thinking:

The storm: I close my eyes and,
standing in it, try to make it *mine*. An inside
thing. Once I was. . . . once, once.
It settles, in my head, the wavering white
sleep, the instances—they stick, accrue,
grip up, connect, they do not melt,
I will not let them melt, they build, cloud and cloud,
I feel myself weak, I feel the thinking muscle-up—
outside, the talk-talk of the birds—outside,
strings and their roots, leaves inside the limbs, (85)

There are many parts, causes and effects to ponder and connect the meaning of her life now; the relationship with her daughter practicing ballet as she did when young, the clues of the scene with her old ballet teacher, “Madame Sakaroff”, all in black and gazing strangely in the mirrors of the dancehall. The urge to put all these parts together and to understand their connection becomes similar to the act of the ballet teacher gazing at herself in the mirrors in order to comprehend the reality of herself. It is the Self of a Russian émigré from Stalingrad made to exclaim after some news brought to her by a compatriot: “*No one must believe in God again*”. The protagonist's past and present experiences (“the instances”) are the contiguous elements, the parts which she is aware can stand for her whole Self, although not quite as she is struggling to put them together, and thus grasp the elusive whole. The experiences captured in the scenes of the poem all become tropes, multiple metonymies representing a Self, which is difficult to see as one. The main trope though is the forgotten “leotard” which initiates the experience captured in

the poem, its experiential frame. First of all, it stands for and defines the ballet and the mother-daughter relationship in which she, the mother, wonders “what should I know / to save you that I do not know”. Thus, the “leotard”, the primary metonymy, connects the present and the past scenes as contiguous elements on the metonymic string that produce the main structure of the poem.

It is interesting how each scene on this metonymic string melts into the next one. Walking in the snow and taking the forgotten “leotard” to her daughter, consequently moves into walking back home in the same scenery (or the same context) of falling snow and her watching a flock of starlings, their limbs and their blackness. This scene overlaps into the adjacent scenery of a “crow” with all the meanings it stirs in the “early evening snowlit scene”. Finally, these two “black bird scenes” and the leotard scene, bring back the memory of the past scene of her childhood ballet lessons and the crucial instant of Madame Sakaroff in black, like a black bird, tying to “see” herself. The contiguous scenes do not move the discourse forward through comparisons, but through combinations of the parts of the whole. Thus, all the scenes establish metonymic relationships among themselves as parts of the same whole, the protagonist’s life and her Self.

The snow storm also unites all the parts together, including the snowy day when Columbus appropriated San Nicolas Bay in the final, Seventh Section of the poem. Since the snow builds the experiential context of all scenes / parts of the poem, excluding Section Five, it somewhat loses its metaphoric force as a mental “storm”, going on inside the protagonist’s mind, and becomes a dead metaphor.

anchored by these footsteps, now and now,
the footstepping—now and now—carrying its vast
white sleeping geography—mapped—
not a lease—*possession*—“At the hour of vespers
in a sudden blinding snow,
they entered the harbor and he named it Puerto de

The last part of Section Six and the entirety of Section Seven form a transitional relationship between the protagonist trying to grasp the sense of herself, and the Columbus scene. She ponders her presence “here” and “now”, occupying and possessing a place within the universal geography and history of being (“Like a runner my body, my tiny piece of the century—minutes, houses going by”, 86). Her possession of the spot “now and now” is compared to Columbus’ expropriation and possession of a part of the American continent. Accordingly, the scenes which belong to completely dissimilar contexts—the life of a present day woman and Columbus’ explorations and occupations—are metaphorically joined and compared. The simile with the force of metaphor is in service here of the expansion and occupation of new meditative and creative territories in the structure of the poem.

Analyzing these multifaceted poems, the focus of attention has been on some of their stylistic features and their tropological make-up. The analysis has been centered on two main principles of language construction, defined by Jakobson as selection from paradigmatic groups and combination into syntagmatic chains of linguistic entities, which are operative and therefore generate metaphoric or metonymic structures, respectively. In an immanentist and experiential poetry such as Graham’s, everything begins, happens and ends within the frame of an immanent, particularized experience which happens to an individualized, particularized agent (here the protagonist). Therefore, the metonymic principle that produces causal, linear and prose-like discourse by combining contiguous linguistic units is congruent to the experiential and referential structures of Graham’s events or occasions. These situate the discursive operations in concrete temporal and spatial frameworks.

In this experiential poetry, the protagonist discovers concepts, ideas, premises, and knowledge empirically, that is, during the ongoing process which the poem captures. These process-poems create an artistic illusion of operating without apriority of concepts, ideas or topics, as their identification and definition happens in the process of experiencing them. Again, the metonymic principle of combining of subsequent, that is, closest and contiguous points of focus or reference, corresponds more to the process-like discoveries of Graham’s meditative and speculative thought in progress. The metaphoric selection and substitution of paradigmatically similar concepts from dissimilar and remote contexts and realms of discourse, presupposes and requires first identification and then definition of concepts for their comparison to be possible.

Graham's spontaneous-like, and consequently, unpremeditated experiential discovery of concepts is directly opposed to the premeditated and conceptualized process of metaphoric selection and comparison.

However, the predominant principle of metonymy operating in this poetry does not exclude metaphoric structures and metaphors as tropes. The metaphoric, symbolic discourse is present in the more discursive, fragmentary and symbolic parts of the meditations. In addition, the parts of the longer poems most often stand in metaphoric or simile-like relationships with metaphoric force. The results are links based on similarity, tokens of expansion of discourse in remotest realms, since simile, as Lodge says, "lends itself more readily than metaphor to the empiricist philosophical assumptions that historically underpin realism as literary mode" (112). Graham's experiential poetry takes a tentative step in this direction.

The resulting feature is immanence, or more precisely, forms of immanence, which this chapter has located in Graham's "deeply" reflective voice from the meditations and the speculations, that is, the discursive quality of her poetry. In its engagement with the discovery of answers about matter, God, time, beauty, physical laws and spirituality, this voice resorts to scientific-like observations and descriptions/narrations of sensory data and, consequently, to philosophical-like speculations and meditations on the same issues. These reflective occasions, as we have seen, generate different poetic discourses which resemble scientific, philosophical and spiritual ones. Yet, the presence of the human consciousness trying to reveal the visible and the invisible layers of matter and phenomena is not a general poetic voice but a concrete protagonist in a concrete experience. In this poetry, this concrete experience is identified and referred to as an *experiential frame of reference* or an *occasion*. Even the most speculative poems rarely appear outside of empirical frames of reference or experiential scenes which, by their details, construct the protagonist's concrete "identity". The result is, thus, immanentist and experiential poetry.

The presence of the concrete protagonist is felt even more deeply in the poems which communicate with the implied reader in a shared "actual", or "real", time. The result is primarily an ongoing process, captured as if happening in the "here" and "now", marked by various stylistic deictic devices. The poetic "project" of capturing process, as I have argued, also reiterates Graham's recurrent themes. Among these, the phenomenon of *passing time* and the

constant changes it generates in the intersections of the material and human worlds, which if it is not for poetry, remains “unrecorded” by any history.

These important questions captured as processes lived through, generate metonymic linguistic structures. I have argued that the descriptions, narrations and gradual process-like discoveries, are intrinsically susceptible to metonymic structures since the same process of combining the congruent, contiguous concepts in what Jakobson calls “syntagmatic chains”, is at work. Metaphoric structures, generated by comparing similar concepts from dissimilar and remote contexts, are present and remain imbedded parts in the predominantly metonymic poetic structures of Graham’s poetry.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to show several recurrent and resilient features in contemporary American poetry which, as I have argued, constitute a poetic tradition defined here as a poetics of immanence and experience. By choosing those poets who demonstrate the same disposition towards the Object-world and whose poetry generates similar characteristics during the decades between the 1950s and the 1990s, I have tried to demonstrate that this poetics continues to be one of the dominant and persistent strands in mainstream American poetry. In the initial stages, the research raised some unavoidable questions such as: why are narrative and confessional modes still strong trends in American poetry?, is the strong narrative trend a result of a general shift towards literary conservatism after the 1970s?, has poetry adopted more narrative, confessional and interactive elements competing for audience with the new media and film as New Narrative and New Formalist poets contended in the late 1980s? Although fascinating to contemplate, these questions will remain open as possible topics for future research projects. Since the main aim of this thesis has been to identify a general poetic model as a strand of mainstream American poetry, I have opted for an empirical approach, analyzing what I consider the most relevant collections from each poet during this period. This approach has enabled me to demonstrate that the shared qualities of the poetics of immanence and experience have emerged and reemerged as different forms of immanence in each decade of American poetry after the mid-century.

The analyses of the poems have revealed the same trust by the poets in relation to their personal and concrete experiences, perceived, narrated or reflected upon by a concrete agent or present/immanent human consciousness. This trust prevails through the work of each of the four poets analyzed and surpasses the differences in the poetic modes and aesthetic designs of the selected poets, Lowell, Wright, Hugo and Graham. Even in the decade of the 1950s, marked by the New Critical dictum which placed its main trust on the human imagination and its energies to transform and recreate reality or the Object-world by metaphoric and symbolic structures, poets such as Lowell and Wright had already begun the great turn towards personal experience and its structures and forms as found in the Object-world.

I have not considered in great detail the well-known and frequently referred to links firstly between the strict formal tenets of New Critical poetry and the *culture of containment* of

the 1950s and, similarly, and secondly between Beat and Confessional poetry and the *counter-culture* of the 1960s.²⁹ Instead, I have focused upon the more significant change within American poetry following World War II, derivatively adopting the idea of *immanence* from the influential American critic, Altieri. He develops this idea of immanence by analyzing the changing “modes of poetic thought” (29) among the poets in America in the 1960s in his seminal work, *Enlarging the Temple*. He recognizes the great turn by American poets towards Nature and the general Order of Nature, as a value-generating principle, a legacy of Wordsworth’s early poetics and philosophy. I have adopted Altieri’s idea, adding the additional value-generating concept of *experience*. As poets at mid-century turned towards the Order of Nature, they consequently turned towards experience too, trying to capture it or create an illusion of capturing it “as it happens”, or “as it occurs”, in the Object-world. This general turn towards realism is manifested in Lowell’s photographically “objective” surface descriptions and narrations which capture his “flux of reality”, Wright’s transcendental moments inspired by moments of contact with numinous nature, Hugo’s projections of the human Self upon the Object-town and Graham’s experiential frames of reference filled with the meditations and speculations of her discursive voice. By mid-century, as Altieri remarks, American poets lost their trust in the values of society and the man-made culture of past and present civilizations, caused by a chain of historical, socio-political events and the long, socially, economically and culturally devastating Vietnam War. The culture and past achievements of human civilization ceased to provide the ideals and stable criteria for poets in the disintegrating American culture at mid-century as they had been for poets such as Pound and Eliot in the High Modernist era. This is Altieri’s starting premise in deriving the concept of immanence and immanentist *poetry* as a postmodern poetic mode of thought which follows the Modernist, symbolic mode of thought. The present/immanent human consciousness in the poem as an individuated and particularized agent reveals his/her personal story (experience) in causal, narrative language, generated by the structures of that story (experience). Hence, the result is an artistic illusion that the poem depicts the experience as “it

²⁹ See Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1977); Douglas Field, ed. *American Cold War Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005).

happened” and/or as an ongoing process which is only transferred to the poem-world from the Object-world.

The thesis has demonstrated that the model of immanence and experience is still an important and resilient strand within mainstream American poetry, which now, after the 1990s, I see taking the form of either a medium-length narrative poem or a discursive longer meditation upon a concrete event. In other words, the narrative, concrete/colloquial, metonymic and confessional poem remains markedly visible in American mainstream poetry, as the literature review has shown, in addition to other significant mainstream and experimental modes. Testing the poetics of immanence and experience on the poetry of some of the most significant American poets in the decades following the 1950s has revealed that American poetry, and consequently American culture, is consistently conducive to the valuing of personal experience as *praxis*, which is a deeply rooted trait since the Puritan period owing to its pragmatic Calvinist doctrines and the philosophical theories of the Pragmatists themselves.

The Introduction clearly states that the subject of my research is one of the many strands in American poetry, generally defined as mainstream by literary critics. Through the overview of literature discussing the general modes of poetry in America after the 1950s, I position my analysis in this debate by demarcating the line of poetry that I have followed and the typical characteristics that I have defined in the thesis. I have put a special emphasis on some crucial points in this debate, which have served as the starting points for my argument about a poetic model which I saw emerging and re-emerging in the given period.

Owing to the considerable amount of critical attention paid to the primary themes of religion, Puritan ancestry and close familial relations in Lowell’s poetry, I have limited my study to its rhetorical aspects, focusing on the two realistic forms—description and narration—and the specific lexis which reflects the material and spiritual culture and ideology of the given period. The concepts defined in the Introduction as “immanence” and “experience” have been shown operating in his poetry, producing Lowell’s confessional, descriptive and narrative modes. Combined with his culturally “branded” lexis, these modes correspond to his newly acquired aesthetics after the mid-fifties to capture the flux of reality as prose does, confirming my argument that the aesthetics of immanence and experience first took roots in Lowell’s poetry before becoming an established poetic tradition. Since the category and the term “confessional”

was precisely invented to accommodate Lowell's poetry, and subsequently the poetry of Snodgrass, Sexton, Berryman and Plath, I have emphasized my understanding of the term as a rhetorical concept, arguing that the immanent and personalized voice in the poems, inevitably adopts this rhetorical model in order to give "my true story", "my true confession". At the same time, it is a poetic simulacrum, an artistic illusion of a "true confession" that does not have to coincide with the poet's life, since it is only a form of rendition of his/her poetic experience. In Lowell's case, it mostly coincides with his life, as scholarship indicates, but my interest here rests mainly with his "confession" as a rhetorical mode.

Wright's poetry from the 1960s provides important correlations with his earlier volumes published in the 1950s, such as *The Green Wall* and *Saint Judas*, and counters the claim made by certain critics that Wright made a huge leap from the New Critical aesthetics of the 1950s to the new aesthetic of free-verse in the 1960s. I have argued that this leap is not a huge one, since his new aesthetics is strikingly visible in his poetry during the 1950s. Similar to the approach used in the analysis of Lowell, I consider Wright's poetry in the light of the poetics of immanence and experience and map out the four previously mentioned characteristics of concrete/colloquial, narrative, confessional and metonymic. My aim, again, has been to demonstrate that his poems rest on the model defined in the Introduction: a concrete, personalized voice immanent in the poem tries to discover and understand its experience and the poem becomes the story of its discovery. However, the emphasis of my analyses has been on Wright's use of concrete place-names and time-markers and their effects on his poetic rhetoric. Consequently, I have analyzed and tried to discern the various cultural discourses layered in the language, or the Bakhtinian heteroglossia, of his immanent poetic voice, committed to the story of the Midwest, his chronotope.

Despite the fact that literary criticism places Wright among the Deep Image poets centered around Bly's poetic manifesto that foregrounds the leaps of the unconscious into the conscious and vice versa, I have tried to demonstrate that Wright's poetry is a continuation of the immanentist and experiential tradition. By comparatively contrasting the Spanish surrealist poet Lorca with the deep image poetics of Bly, I have argued that deep image poetry is just another component added to the nexus of the immanentist and experiential tradition, since the realistic and metonymic framework is never abandoned in Bly's poem as is the case with the Spanish

surrealist poet. Wright's poetry explicitly exhibits a deep trust in nature as opposed to culture. This poetic voice often presents experiences of transcendence into numinous nature similar to the Emersonian variety, which I argue, reveals an ontology that is closer to the Panentheistic religious and philosophical thought that God (Emerson's Spirit/Over-Soul/Father) is inside (*en*) and, at the same time, everywhere (*pan*), that is, inside and beyond its creation-world. Accordingly, the critical attention of this chapter has been on the language of such experiences which is usually narrative and imagistic with carefully selected realistic details that acquire their new symbolism and generate metaphors inside the metonymic structures of his poems.

In Hugo's collections from the 1970s, the approach to immanence and experience has been shown to operate through his distinctive tone and atmosphere which, in their own ways, allow for the presence/immanence of a particular human consciousness journeying through the spiritual and physical geography of Montana and the American Northwest. The low-key and emotionally "hurting" poetic voice of Hugo's poetry reveals a human being that is striving towards self-acceptance and an existential reconciliation with the world, encountered in the small, almost forlorn American towns. In addition to tracing the model of immanence and experience throughout Hugo's "triggering towns", his poems about Montana and the Northwest, his authentic chronotope, the analysis also focuses on a number of the semi-discursive elements in the context of the more general shift towards discursiveness during this decade. This trend, which has been traced in the 1980s and the 1990s in Graham's meditative and speculative undertakings, is most succinctly expressed in Pinsky's sentence: "The poem is a statement, made in the tone of a human being speaking of and to human beings, with all the excitement of poetry" (*The Situation of Poetry* 162). The rhetorical effects of the "remarks" made by Hugo's poetic voice are significant, for they engage in scenic descriptions, which I have termed "succinct expressions in wordy poems". The wordiness of the poem, that is, its lengthy, detailed exposition and description, is interspersed with highly condensed and expressive single-line statements that summarize the whole experience in a limited number of words.

Analyzing these recurrent semi-discursive and semi-descriptive patterns has led to the conclusion that they are rhetorical methods that restate the main theme of this poetry—the Subject's (the human voice's) constant interactions with the Object-towns. In this dual relationship, the descriptive structure reflects the Object-town, while the discursive structure, the

witty and poignant statements and comments, articulates the human Subject. In these encounters, the human Subject constantly projects its Self upon the Object-town. Generally, this dual relationship is seen as a mental trajectory of the speaker projecting its emotions upon the encountered locations and their inhabitants, and the encountered locations and their inhabitants reciprocally triggering emotions in the speaker and producing his subjective perceptions. These interactions are analyzed as important stages in the process of self-discovery and self-perception the speaker undergoes as the active Subject in this relationship. The stages of the Subject's consciousness and its equally changing perceptions are further examined and tested with the phenomenological apparatus of *being-for-itself*—the Subject's awareness of itself and *being-in-itself*—the Subject's unawareness of itself, Sartre's "bad faith"—the act of self-deception and escape from responsible freedom, and *being-for-others*—a Subject's perception of itself as others see him/her, and Heidegger's *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others*, as inescapable, ontological givens. While remaining aware of the differences between these two philosophers' definitions and understandings of these concepts and, at the same time, being equally aware that they are interpreted differently by different scholars, I have opted to apply them in their most essential and basic meanings.

Personification is another stylistic means that restates the same phenomenological relation, more precisely, the projection of human emotions and perceptions upon the inhuman Object-town. By ascribing human characteristics and faculties to the Object, the Subject perceives the inhuman world (that is, Nature) according to his own human terms, consequently turning Nature into a conscious *for-itself* that can communicate to the human being what it wants to hear. However, in the never-ending and alterable states of consciousness and perception, the poems are always aware that it is only the Speaker's immanent consciousness that we see in the Other. Therefore, Hugo's attitude towards Nature as the Object is neither the familiar Emersonian constant dialogue with Nature, nor Wright's numinous moments. For Hugo, nature does not speak, rather we "make" nature communicate to us what we want to hear. This is the attitude of a realist who needs "you" (the reader) to discuss and share the unstable knowledge of the world and of himself.

Finally, I have approached Graham's poetry published in the 1980s and the 1990s as forms of discursiveness situated within broad experiential frames, dubbed "experiential frames of

reference” for the purpose of analysis. Essentially, they are viewed as the metonymically structured frameworks of the poems that contain the reflexive and meditative flows and thematic ramifications of her immanent “protagonist” as she often refers to her poetic voice in her interviews.³⁰ I have therefore recognized three main discourses in her poetry—the scientific-like, the philosophical and the spiritual, and have analyzed them as different cognitive stages that her thinking protagonist, her poetic voice, goes through to solve constant puzzles posited by experiences, or as she calls them, “the occasions”. What her protagonist observes with scientific accuracy and renders in precise and detailed descriptions is then analyzed and reflected upon philosophically, pushing the final limit of knowledge and thought to spiritual spheres where the grand “unknown” unavoidably emerges. The poems capture this cognitive trajectory which begins with the inductive principle of first observing “data”, then progressing to the deductive principle of analysis, synthesis and establishing conclusions, which often become feelings of devotion, humility and humbleness before the ultimate unknown(s). By capturing the cognitive stages and their corresponding discourses, Graham’s poetry often results in a processual poetics that attempts interactive communication with the reader. However, as I have noted, her experiential frames of reference, the concrete events or “occasions” that the poems depict, often remain stable and “intact” against the expansion and overflows of the scientific, philosophical and spiritual discourses. In other words, the general metonymic structures of her poems provide the necessary links and keep the experiential frames of reference cohesive. However, as it has been shown, the parts or the elements of these general metonymic structures, the scenes, sections or stanzas, enter into metaphoric and symbolic interactions that generate relations of simile-type or simile relations with metaphoric force, as David Lodge calls them (*Modes of Modern Writing* 109-124). As shown in her well-known poem, “Breakdancing” (*The End of Beauty* 53), modern-day scenes of violence constantly inflicted upon individual human bodies and the earth (“we must now somehow / ram the radioactive waste into” [54]), are similar to the scenes that depict the medieval nun and writer, Saint Teresa of [Avila] Spain, who tortured her body and instigated a long personal war against the carnal, incited by her religious zeal and irreducible love for Christ and his suffering. Finally, as this thesis contends, Graham extends the dominant line of the poetics of immanence and experience in the last decade of the twentieth century of American

³⁰ See especially her interview with Thomas Gardner (“The Art of Poetry No. 85”. *Paris Review* 65 (2003).

poetry through her experiential frames of reference that hold meditative experiences together and the constant presence of the interactive protagonist.

Finally, the main intent of this thesis has been to identify a number of dominant characteristics in several decades of American poetry after the 1950s. In the course of the research, these characteristics were beginning to reveal a pattern which I attempted to scrutinize and define. The result has been the *poetics of immanence and experience*, which, as I have argued, reads American poetry in the referred period, especially American mainstream poetry, as the product of the poetic culture which has nurtured the century-long belief in the concrete, personal experience as value generating *praxis*.

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