The Dissertation Committee for Louisa Hall Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Forms of Release: The Escape Poetry of Hester Pulter, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Frost

Committee:

John Rumrich, Supervisor

Tom Cable

JK Barrett

Wayne Lesser

Kurt Heinzelman

Forms of Release: The Escape Poetry of Hester Pulter, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Frost

by

Louisa Hall, A.B; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin
May 2014

Acknowledgements

Forms of Release: The Escape Poetry of Hester Pulter, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Frost

Louisa Hall, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: John Rumrich

The four poets in this dissertation--Hester Pulter, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Frost--write poems that resist domestic confinement. In these poems, houses become prisons from which the poet must enact an escape. Pulter, Bradstreet, Hardy and Frost--writers drawn from two sides of the Atlantic and two different centuries--are nevertheless linked by the urge to create poems that will provide doorways to less confined states of existence. They are also linked by the formal strategies they use for the attainment of such poetic release, and by the scale of their rebellion against enclosing structures. All four poets make claustrophobic domestic spaces the topic of their poetry, but rather than writing their objections into the unbounded space of free verse, they mimic the confinement of small rooms in the restrained dimensions of their poems. Rather than discard the enclosure of poetry, they accept its confinement. Their forms of release, then, are more pointed; they emerge at brief instances, as opposed to making wholesale departures. Instead of using their poems to create boundless spaces,

unrestricted by walls and ceilings and floors, they use their poems to create rooms similar

to those occupied by their personae. In poems such as these, poetic freedom is less

absolute than relative to the extent of confinement, and it is made sweeter by the

awareness of inescapable limits.

Table of Contents

Introduction

One way to imagine a poem is as a miniature monument, built in honor of a person or an idea; its shape, composed of black lines on a page, could be understood as a multi-dimensional structure in which an airy concept or absent person might be kept safe and secure. This concept--the poem as a lasting monument--stretches back to Horace, who wrote in Ode 3.30 that "I have created a monument more lasting than bronze,/ and loftier than the royal structure of the pyramids" (Horace, 142). From Horace to Shakespeare to Shelley, this trope of the poem as a solid architectural tribute has long flourished. The firm lines of a poem, its shape within the rectangle of a page, its very geometry, all contribute to the sense of a stanza as a room or a monument in which ephemera might be contained. This promise of shelter in the room of a poem has driven the production of country house poems, bedroom poems, courtyard poems and sepulcher poems. There is comfort in the idea of taking refuge within poetic walls.

The same poetic walls, however, have also produced prison poems. If a poem's lines can serve as sheltering walls, they can also serve as immovable bars. Two memorializing poems, one by Shakespeare and one by Milton, demonstrate the thin line between prison and poetic chamber. In both, the poem is figured as a tomb that will contain the spirit of the dead more fully than a monument. While this seems, at first, to be a positive attribute of poetic form, the containing power of verse begins to loom more darkly by the end of both poems. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 71, the poet commands the youth not to mourn for him when he has died:

1

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse.
But let your love even with my life decay,
Lest the wise world should look into your moan
And mock you with me after I am gone. (Shakespeare, 71)

The author of this poem invests little faith in the power of physical memorials: the grave

is a dwelling shared with 'vilest worms,' the funeral bell is 'surly' and 'sullen,' and the

entombed body is 'compounded' with 'clay.' The physical rituals of mourning as they are

depicted here are neither comforting nor noble; they are grossly inept representations of

life.

The same cannot be said, however, of a written monument, which threatens to

consume the reader with recollection and grief. So threatening, in fact, is the monument

of the poem that the poet must instruct his reader how *not* to pay too close attention. The

poem is dangerous because it calls attention to the writer's hand, his body, his name, and

his life, thus producing unseemly grief in the still-living youth. It is dangerous,

moreover, because it combines the writer and the youth in a shared monument. The

youth is now reading the lines that the poet wrote, rehearsing his words, grieving aloud in

his cadence, dwelling in the stanza built by the poet. The living reader and the dead

writer are, in the space of the poem, combined. Reading, in this context, is re-hearsing:

enacting a second burial service, opening an old grave, standing again on that edge. This

threatening potential is underscored by internal rhyme in the final two lines of the poem: the slant rhyme of 'mock' and 'look'--the final verbs of the poem--links those two words, summoning, between them, the ghost of the word 'lock.' This produces an alternate reading of the sonnet's final turn: "Do not so much as my poor name rehearse/ But let your love even with my life decay,/ Lest the wise world should look into your moan/ And lock you with me after I am gone." Excessively attentive reading of a memorializing poem--which contains departed spirits more securely than a worm-riddled tomb--can relocate the reader from the world of the living and place him in a shared room with the dead, where he will be buried alive.

In his poem memorializing Shakespeare, Milton, like Shakespeare, describes a well-written poem as a more secure type of sepulcher. Also like Shakespeare, Milton writes his way to a creeping sense of claustrophobia, as though the act of reading a small poem might trap the reader, the subject, and the poet together in a shared tomb:

> What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones,
> The labor of an age in piled stones,
> Or that his hallowed relics should be hid
> Under a star y-pointing pyramid?
> Dear son of Memory, great heir of Fame,
> What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
> Thou in our wonder and astonishment
> Hast built thyself a livelong monument.
> For whilst to th'shame of slow-endeavoring art,
> Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
> Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
> Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
> Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
> Dost make us marble with too much conceiving
> And so sepulchered in such pomp dost lie,
> That kings for such a tomb would wish to die. (Milton, 34)

Just as Shakespeare warns that reading might bind the living to the dead, Milton expresses concern that Shakespeare's poetry will transform his readers into a marble extension of the Bard's elaborate tomb. So deep will be the impression of Shakespeare's words on the heart of the reader that the reader will become stone, silent and still, as 'sepulchered' as the poet himself. The poem is, in the end, an expression of mourning not for the Bard but for the reader's entombed imagination, of itself bereft because the grandeur of Shakespeare's influence has overwhelmed it.

While both poems attest to the comprehensive embrace of poetic form, one that is able to contain the departed more surely than a hollow grave, both poems also attend to the threat of entrapment posed by such an enclosing form. For the sake of idealized poetic shelter, it seems, certain freedoms must be sacrificed. Both poets--and Milton more than Shakespeare, I would argue--seem slightly uneasy about this exchange. Milton's poem, in fact, takes formal action against the perfect enclosure that his lines ostensibly praise. In addition to exchanging Shakespeare's quatrain rhyme scheme for couplets, he adds two extra lines to Shakespeare's favored sonnet form. In a poem that borrows heavily from Sonnet 71, and that speaks of the imaginative paralysis that results from Shakespeare's too-weighty influence, Milton does not take the impression of Shakespeare's fourteen lines but instead writes a tribute composed of sixteen. Similarly, if the poem's early lines find timely closure (the first sentence takes four lines, the second and third take two), the poem's last eight lines are part of one continuous, overflowing sentence that seems to refuse the stillness that Shakespeare threatens. In some ways, these final eight lines are like an extended Petrarchan sestet, turning on the opening

octave; in any case, they are no tribute to Shakespeare's form, but rather an insistence on overflowing whatever predetermined structure Shakespeare has provided. Like its formal devices, the poem's rhetorical devices also do not remain enclosed in their compartments. On the plane of metaphor, Milton confuses a reader's imaginative "conceiving" with the moment of becoming trapped in a tomb. The reader's "astonishment" is also made paradoxical: a stony monument is exactly the sort of memorial that Shakespeare's poetry—with its 'easy numbers flow'—is meant to excel.

This is not, then, a poem made stony by the astonishing impression of Shakespeare's lines. Through these techniques of overflow, Milton balances an impulse toward developing individual voice alongside the impulse to praise an admired predecessor. In so doing, he writes a slightly different type of memorializing poem than the one that Shakespeare wrote for the youth. Both invite the solid shelter of a poetic memorial, both recognize the confinement threatened by such a shelter, and Milton uses formal devices to break free of his constraints. Like Grey's eighteenth-century "Elegy on a Country Churchyard," which refuses to glorify "storied urn or animated breast" (l. 41) and instead chooses to prioritize the more flexible if also more fleeting memorial of spoken word, Milton prefers--even in the face of a beloved poet's death--to choose a form that permits some personal freedom over a form that provides for maximum solidity.

These two poems by Shakespeare and Milton illustrate one category of poem in which poetic shelter becomes a prison from which the poet must try to escape. These are sepulcher-as-prison poems, as opposed, for example, to literal prison cell poems.

5

Categories such as these are my fabrication, created for purposes of analysis, and they are not necessarily discrete. Such categories are helpful, however, in analyzing more ephemeral types of poetic 'prisons.' One of these more ephemeral types is the poem of domestic entrapment, which draws on the conventions and imagery of more literal prison poems to depict a less traditionally grisly domain. These poems are created in the model of 'little rooms,' and they concern themselves not with live burial or imprisonment but with domestic circumstances that have begun to feel painfully claustrophobic. In the domestic imprisonment poem, too, the attitude ranges from acceptance to resistance. There are poems that accept and even embrace enclosure within straitened domestic spaces; but there are also poems that resist confinement to the same small quarters. These latter poems of resistance compose a tradition that I will call domestic escape poetry. These are the poems with which this dissertation is concerned. The four poets I have chosen as representative examples of the tradition of domestic escape poetry-- Hester Pulter, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost--all resist the idea of confinement in bedrooms and houses. They do not accept a life bounded by walls. Like Milton in his sepulcher poem, these four poets explore domestic claustrophobia by placing themselves within confining forms; having done this, they then use formal mechanisms such as prosodic break, overflowing syntax, and metaphorical freedoms to enact poetic escape.

Before examining the more ephemeral category of domestic escape poetry, however, it is helpful to momentarily focus on more concrete categories of prison poems, to see the ways in which these four poets of domestic spaces utilize similar strategies.

The same dynamic between forms of confinement and forms of release that is present in

Shakespeare and Milton's sepulcher poems--and in Pulter, Bradstreet, Hardy and Frost's

poetry of domestic escape--is present in Wyatt and Surrey's poems about the literal

imprisonments they endured in the treacherous court of Henry VIII.[i] Like Shakespeare

and Milton's sepulcher poems, Wyatt and Surrey demonstrate the spectrum in prison

poetry between forms of acceptance and forms of resistance. At first glance, both Wyatt

and Surrey's prison poems seem to accept, or even welcome, the state of poetic

imprisonment. Both poets draw from the tradition of love-as-prison poems, to which

they would have been exposed in reading Petrarch and Chaucer.[ii] This tradition

emphasizes courtly resignation to the imprisoning bonds of love, and it seems to have

struck both Wyatt and Surrey's imaginations. In "I Fynde no Peace and All my War is

Done," Wyatt translates Petrarch's characterization (from *Rime, cxxxiv*) of love as a

jailer: "That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison/ And holdeth me not, yet can I scape

nowise" (Sylvester, 135). Similarly, in "Though I Regarded Not," Surrey writes that he

would never think "my bondage to unbinde," thus freeing himself from a frustrating love

(Sylvester, 213). In both poems, accepting love's imprisonment is a sign of noble

constancy, maintained despite the fickle nature of the loved one.

In addition to an awareness of the Petrarchan tradition of imprisoned resignation,

both Wyatt and Surrey also would have written their prison poems with an awareness of

the many biblical references to imprisonment. The bible is full of imprisoned heroes

uttering prayers, such as the one in Hebrews 13:3: "remember those that are in bonds, as

bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body"

(KJB, 1043). This passage establishes, like the love-as-prison-poems, the importance of humble acquiescence to, and even embrace of, the unavoidable fact of mortal imprisonment. In both this biblical passage and in love-as-prison poems, there is a promise of intimacy (in this case with the afflicted, rather than with a lover) if one is able to accept that the body--and the poem or prayer-- is no more than a prison. The passage also emphasizes a collapse of the boundaries between the body, the poem, and the prison, using poetic devices that mimic containment: the four corners of the four alliterative b-words work to enclose the substance of the poem, as does the central chiasmus of *those-bonds-bound-them,* which turns back on itself as though outward movement is impossible. These tenets of prison poetry also appear in later prison poems such as the ones written by Queen Elizabeth,[iii] Chidiock Tichborne's "Elegy," and the imprisoned speeches of Shakespeare characters.[iv] Before any of these, however, Surrey and Wyatt's prison poems toy with these conventions of prison poetry, finding in them varying degrees of solace in their distress.

The two poems that Surrey wrote during his 1537 imprisonment in Windsor reflect a certain unwillingness to accept the biblical promises about prison as a natural extension of the human state. Still, "When Windesor Walles," allows itself only a very contained type of resistance. It is a sonnet, and from the start Surrey accepts the restraints of the stanza that contains him: there are no abnormalities in the rhyme scheme, and, with the exception of one rogue line, his meter maintains iambic pentameter. Similarly, he makes himself subordinate to his physical prison, enacting the collapse between body and prison to which Hebrews 3:13 alludes:

> When Windesor walles sustain'd my wearied arme,
> My hand my chyn, to ease my restles hedd,
> Ech pleasant plot revested green with warm,
> The blossom'd bowes, with lustie veare yspred,
> The flowred meads, the weddyd bird's so late,
> Mine eyes discovered. Than did to mynd resort
> The joily woes, the hateles shorte debate,
> The rakehell life that longes to loves disporte.
> Wherwith, alas! myne hevy charge of care
> Heapt in my brest, brake forth against my will,
> And smoky sigh's, that over cast the ayer.
> My vapored eyes such drery teares distill
> The tender spring to quicken wher thei fall,
> And I have bent to throwe me down withal. (Sylvester, 184)

In the opening lines, Surrey makes his body and the prison continuous structures: the walls build up into his arm, hand, chin, and finally his head. Furthermore, he is not the subject of the sentence, but the controlled object of the walls: the walls sustain *him,* a body even more inanimate than stone. Similarly, the poem itself takes on qualities of a prison, its words building towards ordered, self-contained symmetry. The opening line is cornered by four alliterations ('when,' 'Windesor,' 'walles,' 'wearied'), and he evokes his body with four points ('arme,' 'hand,' 'chin,' 'head'). Subsequently, four outside elements are laid out to perfectly correspond to the four points of his body: the next two lines each describe one green aspect of environment, and the fifth line is evenly divided into two additional aspects of the surrounding environment. Like Surrey's body, each of these symmetrical elements is an object, acted upon, described with past participles. In an additional symmetry, like the four w's of the first line, two pairs of alliteration ('pleasant plot' and 'blossom'd bowes') set up another four-square structure containing inanimate objects. We get the sense of a mind within and a world without that both obey

the constraints of the prison: they are four-cornered, contained, composed in the past tense, more object than living.

Only in the fifth line do we realize that we have operated under a mistaken impression as a result of a reversed syntax, which places the subject of the final clause at the end of the sentence. The walls are no longer the subject, acting on a list of various objects; instead, the they've been replaced as the active agent by Surrey's eyes, which have, in actuality, been the subject of the previous three lines. These lines, which seemed unmoored to an active subject, are redefined once we have read the fifth line: each lush aspect of nature is discovered by Surrey's outward-looking eye. Having tested this strange, belated agency, however, the poet stops mid-line in a rare caesura, beginning again in a passive mode, the human mind depicted as the indirect object of a sentence: "Than did to mynd resort/ The joily woes, the hateles shorte debate,/ The rakehell life that longes to loves disporte." Disembodied, unclaimed memories are the agents in this sentence, acting upon a mind that is not even specifically the poet's own (it is just "mynd," not "my mynd"). By the end of the octave, we are left with a passive mind that is no one's: it is a hollow mind, a head that is the same as a space-enclosing wall. Having read through eight fairly impersonal lines, divided by four rhymes and numerous other four-cornered symmetries, the reader is left with the impression of contemplating, from the outside, a well-built, locked space.

Having laid such a sturdy foundation however, Surrey opens the sestet with an exclamation, the first expression of anger and frustration in a generally pacific poem. Caught by the abruptness of the exclamation, the reader is pulled into his prison. Having

pulled us in, Surrey will not pretend that he is at peace with the place: "Wherwith, alas! Myne hevy charge of care/ Heapt in my brest, brake forth against my will,/ And smoky sigh's, that over cast the ayer,/ My vapored eyes such drery teares distill/ The tender spring to quicken where thei fall,/ And I have bent to throwe me downe withal." Here, his language breaks with the even symmetries of his prison-self. The first line of the sestet is asymmetrically broken, once after the first word and again, even more emphatically, after the second word: it is a line in three parts. The second line of the sestet opens with a metrical irregularity: the trochaic substitution of "Heapt" adds an uneven force to the line, which is again broken by a caesura which splits the line's alliteration in half. The composed past tense of the poem is ripped into the present: if "brake" and "over-cast" are ambiguous in their tense, "distill" is most certainly a present-tense verb, and "to quicken wher thei fall" even gestures towards the future. This is not a poem of impenetrable stone surface: it is, instead, a poem about rupture. Where a poem of stone might insist on composure--past tense, stilled verbs, symmetrical poetics--this poem breaks tense, inserts action, and disrupts symmetries. In so doing, it breaks free of its confinement.

Despite this movement toward release, Surrey's narrator is divided in the end. If his lines pull him toward a state of greater release, half of the poem remains as rigid as those prison walls he leans against. If his care breaks free, his will strains against it; if his sighs escape, his eyes pull them back in as water vapor; if his eyes restrain his departing breath, his tears leap down to the greenery below. This is a split self, one mental aspect having taken on all of the attributes of its prison, the other stubbornly insisting on escape.

11

For the escaping self, however, the poem's final line is a death knell. If, before that line, the poem was hurtling out of the past and into the present-future, this line returns it to its appropriate tense. If tears were previously escaping, the body itself, source of the tears, makes one small gesture to follow its rebellious impulses and then stops, as though rooted to the ground, a figure half-human and half-prison whose stony intransigence wins out over living fluidity and impulse towards liberty. As Hebrews instructs, Surrey's final line accepts the idea that he is, himself, a prison.

Wyatt's prison poems also demonstrate a willingness to accept the boundaries of a cell. "You that in Love Finde Luck" makes an interesting contrast to Surrey's "When Windesor Walls": while Alicia Ostriker argues that "Surrey's silver tones seem almost a deliberate correction of Wyatt's ironic, lively, present-tense, definitively first-person challenge to fortunate mankind" (Ostriker, 397), I would argue there is more resignation to Wyatt and less strict correction in Surrey than this scheme affords. Like Surrey's poem, Wyatt's poem is a sonnet, that form which mimics a small, enclosed room:

> You that in love finde lucke and habundance
> And live in lust and joyful jolitie,
> Arrise for shame! Do away your sluggardie!
> Arise, I say, do May some obseruance!
> Let me in bed lye dreming in mischaunce,
> Let me remember the happs most unhappy
> That me betide in May most commonly,
> As oon whome love list litil to avaunce.
> Sephame saide true that my nativitie
> Mischaunced was with the ruler of the May:
> He gest, I prove, of that the veritie.
> In May my welth and eke my liff, I say,
> Have stoned so oft in such perplexitie:
> Rejoyse! Let me dreme of your felicitie. (Sylvester, 153)

A Petrarchan sonnet, the rhyme scheme itself forms a kind of chiasmus, two sets of A-rhymes enclosing, between them, two sets of B-rhymes, so that, in the first octet, there are four of each. This is a form that nicely suits the idea of a prison cell. In the sestet of Wyatt's poem, the enclosed B-rhymes become the walls themselves, re-appearing four times to enclose lines 9, 11, 13 and 14; this mimics the transformation of enclosed substance becoming enclosing walls. Metrically, Wyatt makes his poem freer than Surrey's sonnet; still, however, in its Petrarchan rhyme scheme it is more bound by convention, and in its incessant repetition of the enclosed b rhymes it is a downright claustrophobic Petrarchan structure. All rhyme works, as the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics puts it, to "structure the aesthetic space either by adding higher levels of order or by opening up spaces within the order for some amount of free play" (Green, 1189). Rhyme "segments the sound stream into equal or perceived-equal units or sections" (Green, 1185); depending on the particular rhyme scheme chosen by a poet, these segments, or structures of aesthetic space, are either expansive or narrow. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics uses the Shakespearean sonnet as an example of a rhyme scheme with especially restrictive 'bond force,' but the Petrarchan sonnet might have been used as well: "Not all rhyme schemes bind sound, meaning, and poetic tradition as tightly as the typical Shakespearean sonnet, however, and various rhyme schemes have greater and lesser degrees of complexity and bond force" (Green, 1195). Wyatt's Petrarchan rhyme scheme, which returns so incessantly to the b-rhyme, would fall very high on the spectrum of rhyme schemes that internally bind, dividing the poem's aesthetic spaces into very close quarters. Even Wyatt's free meter (which shifts

13

between four and five beats per line and is riddled with substitutions) straightens by the end of the poem, resolving its wildness into five final lines of nearly perfect iambic pentameter (with the exception of two anapestic substitutions in the tenth and fourteenth lines). If roughness of meter opens cracks in the lines of a poem, these final lines move away from openness toward heightened poetic confinement.

As does Surrey's initial character, Wyatt's character remains still as stone, stationary as his cell, lying prone on his bed throughout, one more straight line in a landscape of straight lines. In fact, the crucial difference between Surrey's poem and Wyatt's poem lies in just this fact: Wyatt never makes a gesture towards escape. If Surrey half-bends, Wyatt stays still. The division between him and the outside world is continually emphasized: sentences that refer to outside people are all curt commands, curbed with exclamations, while sentences that refer to himself are written in a different register. Twice he commands the outside people to 'arise'; twice he begs that they 'let me' lie in bed: they should be active, and he should be permitted to be passive. The different distances that Wyatt and Surrey keep between themselves and the world are made more clear by their positions within their cells. If Surrey describes the outside world as an actual observer at the window, carefully noting its details, its colors, and its shadows, Wyatt leaves the impression that he is concocting hypotheticals. The people he commands are generalized, without specific attributes such as colors, and the actions he would have them enact are unnamed, just "some obseruance." These are people whom Wyatt is addressing blindly from his bed within the cell, while Surrey observes nature from the window, at the edge of the cell.

All these details—his centeredness in the cell, the sturdy wall he erects between himself and the outside people, and the enclosing forms out of which his poem is built— give the impression of a poet who is taking on qualities of a fixed room without fighting against the transformation. Although he expresses some bitterness at his confinement, Wyatt settles for enclosure. This is not the case in Surrey's sonnet. Although he ultimately curbs his wildest impulses, Surrey expresses the desire to be out in the world, free of his prison's walls, acting in and observing the real world. Both poets choose the small forms of poems in which to express their sense of imprisonment. Wyatt fortifies the boundaries of his poetic forms, taking solace in the sheltering divisions he sets up between himself and the outside world; Surrey, on the other hand, places himself within a prison of a poem and then seeks forms of release, as if to escape from enclosure within a poetic line would permit an escape--psychic, if not physical--from the confinement of house arrest.

There is a paradox at play in this kind of poetic effort, which Surrey shares with the four poets I examine in this dissertation; in order to escape from claustrophobic structures, these poets place themselves or their subjects in the even smaller boundaries of poems, the 'little rooms' of stanzas on a two dimensional page. It is no small concession, for a poet seeking freedom, to accept the walls, ceilings, and locks of poetic form. For every poet like Robert Frost, who spoke of writing free verse as tantamount to playing tennis with the net down, scores of poets have chafed against the constriction of

form. Even before the free verse movement in the first two decades of the 1900s, poets have made claims about the moral imperative of loosening the strict bounds of formal verse. The Princeton Encylcopedia of Poetry and Poetics cites *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as an early example of free verse, as well early Greek poetry and certain translations of the King James Bible. The history of poets choosing to refrain from formal obedience is a long one, rooted in objections to the restrictions inherent to formal conventions. In his note on the verse in *Paradise Lost,* for instance, Milton explained his decision to reject the convention of terminal rhyme in terms of human liberty: "This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming" (Milton, 291). The choice of form, according to Milton, is akin to the choice between freedom or enslavement. For poets such as Milton, writing in the wake of wars fought over personal freedom, the choice to submit to formal restraints becomes laden.

If Milton released his poem from the bondage of rhyme, so that sense might be "variously drawn out from verse to verse," later poets released themselves from more and more types of poetic bondage. Walt Whitman's poetry, also written in the wake of a war fought over personal freedom, looses itself from more formal bonds than simple end-rhyme. In his 1976 preface, Whitman writes that he saturated his poem with the "audacity of freedom necessary to loosen the mind of still-to-be-form'd America from the accumulated folds, the superstitions, and all the long, tenacious and stifling anti-democratic authorities of the Asiatic and European past--my enclosing purport being to

express, above all artificial regulation and aid, the eternal bodily composite, cumulative, natural character of one's self" (Whitman, PAP, 1032-33). Whitman's form, then, strives to loosen the 'accumulated folds' of European tradition; for this loosening to occur, more than just rhyme must be gotten rid of. In *Song of Myself,* the sense of a passage, for instance, often spills over lines too long to be printed without interruption, lines which often cover multiple pages. Averse to forced endings, the poem will not remain within its typographical boundaries, its lines having been released from the endings required by rhymes, by meter, and even by pagination. Inspired by Whitman, poets in the early twentieth-century carried this imperative further, insisting, with T.E Hulme, that the line should "(follow) the contours of (the poet's) thought and (be) free rather than regular" (Greene, 522). For poets such as Hulme, freedom is the ideal after which poetics should strive.

For other poets, however, freedom from poetic restraints represents not an ideal state but a dangerous unraveling. Where Whitman uses free verse to express transcendent liberty, Shakespeare uses prose interruptions from verse to represent madness. According to A.C Bradley, Shakespeare's shift away from verse regularity is an expression of the terrible openness that afflicts an unstable mind:

> The idea underlying this custom of Shakespeare's evidently is that the regular rhythm of verse would be inappropriate where the mind is supposed to have lost its balance and to be at the mercy of chance impressions coming from without (as sometimes with Lear), or of ideas emerging from its unconscious depths and pursuing one another across its passive surface. (Bradley, 399)

When a mind is permeable--when it is not soundly enclosed within the sphere of itself-- the restraints of verse cannot be accepted. Free verse, then, is the form of a mind at the

mercy of chance impressions, a mind too permeable to properly function. The mad mind of Shakespeare is the evil twin of Whitman's more transcendent version of an unlocked mind, perfectly (or terribly) open to impressions coming from both without and within.

The idea, of course, that any of these passages from *King Lear* to Walt Whitman are in fact perfectly free or unconfined is dubious. When, in his 1876 preface, Whitman describes his poetry as having an impulse toward freedom, he still acknowledges the architectural nature of poetry, the pressure that a poetics of freedom must exert against the natural boundaries of written expression. His poetic style is not absolutely unconfined; rather, it leaves "dim escapes and outlets" from enclosing forms:

> human thought, poetry or melody, must leave dim escapes and outlets—
> must possess a certain fluid, aerial character, akin to space itself, obscure
> to those of little or no imagination, but indispensable to the highest
> purpose. Poetic style, when address'd to the Soul, is less definite form,
> outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than
> half-tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-
> wood, or the best effects thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in
> the wind, and the impalpable odor. (Whitman, PAP, 1037).

Whitman may privilege 'half-tints' over 'definite form,' but his poetry is composed as much of waving oaks and cedars as it is of the wind that sweeps through them. Even the rectangle of a page enforces spatial limits on a poem, which may spill over the page but must still acknowledge that wall with a break. Thoughts must be enclosed in the shapes of words, and even in a poem as free as Walt Whitman's, patterns of repetition--at the level of punctuation, word choice, even letter choice--assert themselves over the poem as a whole. Part--if not all--of the impetus toward written expression is to pin down free-floating ephemera in a structure that has recognizable dimensions.

This inevitable solidity, as well as the potential threats of unenclosed verse, make the challenge of writing towards freedom from inside the form of poetry all the more challenging. How can written expression be used to achieve a release from the constraints that it itself has imposed? Poets such as Whitman who write free verse, or playwrights such as Shakespeare who write moments of mad prose, contend with this contradiction by moving their verse as close to a state of freedom as possible within the framework of a page, an alphabet, and a language. In approaching the edge of free expression, these poets access a state of language that is, in Shakespeare, representative of madness, and Whitman, representative of the great spiritual capacity of the common man. By slipping off the confinements of verse, both write from the vantage point of what Lear calls "unaccommodated man." There is danger, then, as well as freedom, in verse that moves away from confinement.

If the option of unaccommodation is too absolute, another approach to making a poem that will serve as a vehicle of release is to accept any number of formal poetic restrictions--rhyme, stanzaic structure, lineation, prosody, etc--and then enact brief moments of radical break. Like Surrey and Milton, and unlike Shakespeare's mad characters and Whitman's common man, the four poets in this dissertation abjure expressions of unboundedness for more formally involved and subtle methods of expressing breaks from confinement. Their escape from confinement does not involve the whole-scale destruction of formal walls; instead, it involves thin cracks and steady erosions of the boundaries that their poems acknowledge. These writers, like the blessed poets in EA Robinson's "Many Are Called," are able access Apollo's impregnable domain

through slight cracks in the 'sullen walls.'[v] Unlike Wyatt, they do not accept or embrace

enclosure within the cell of their verse. This refusal to accept confinement does not

mean, however, that they can write as if it did not exist; instead, these poets recognize the

walls that pen them in and, in poetic response, pen walls that are formidable but not

entirely invulnerable.

To demonstrate the range of this particular poetic tradition, I have chosen four

representative poets, although I might have chosen others. I've selected these particular

poets--drawn from two sides of the Atlantic and two different time periods--because, as

examples, they highlight some of the tradition's rich variety. Pulter's poetry of escape, for

instance, addresses autobiographical imprisonment, while Frost's deals with a non-

autobiographical narrative of escape. Bradstreet's poetry contends with psychic

imprisonment, while Hardy's struggles with a more concrete claustrophobia. I've also

chosen them because, in pairs, they show the ways in which domestic escape poetry

draws on conventions and imagery of the first two categories of prison escape poetry that

I examined: the literal prison poem and the sepulcher-prison poem. In their poetry of

domestic escape, Hester Pulter and Thomas Hardy draw heavily on the literal prison

poem genre: the old houses and locked chambers that they describe come to seem as

confining as jail cells. Anne Bradstreet and Robert Frost, on the other hand, link the idea

of escape from domestic spaces directly to the idea of opening old graves so that trapped

voices might be released. Together, these four poets demonstrate the poetic range

available to writers in this particular genre. In their poetry of domestic escape, they utilize four different formal strategies for the attainment of release--broken prosody, revolving poetics, asymmetrical stanzas, and dialogic roughness--as well as four different imaginative frameworks for poetic escape.

In terms of imaginative frameworks, each of these four poets chooses a distinct stage on which to enact enclosure and escape and a unique dialectic between imprisonment and release. For Bradstreet, the drama is played out between the mother's cot--solitary, silent, and far away from the literary center--and the public marketplace, which she depicts as noisy, glamorous, and laden with riches. For Pulter, science provides the framework on which her escape from the confinement of childbirth can be constructed. While her poems depict intense isolation in her country house, the scientific foundation on which she builds most of her poems is so radically free that it undermines the constraints of her verse, literally and metaphorically setting her poems in motion. Hardy's framework is the architecture of England, which he depicts as either stiflingly sound or ancient and decaying: in buildings that are in a state of decay, his poetic subject is able to escape into the freedom of open sky and windy air. In *North of Boston*, a book of poems about houses that have become claustrophobic, Frost uses the dynamics of village life to test the boundaries between liberty and imprisonment. The drama of his poems plays out between empty nighttime streets and warm, well-lit houses with carefully--even excessively--bolted windows and doors.[vi]

In terms of formal strategies, Anne Bradstreet writes her early elegies in strict heroic couplets, but at moments of intense frustration, she allows formal error to break

21

the perfection of her prosody and her rhyme so that a suppressed voice can be heard through the cracks. Hester Pulter writes poems that are regularly rhyming and prosodically obedient, refusing the breaks that Bradstreet uses to enact her escape; throughout her manuscript, however, she utilizes a revolving poetics, rotating constantly around central titles and words, so that her manuscript is set into Copernican motion. Thomas Hardy writes an elegiac sequence for his wife that appears to embrace the architectural conventions of elegy; despite appearing to adhere to tradition, however, the poet undermines the architectural coherence of his sequence by eschewing the symmetries that are typical of that tradition, instead writing poems that are formally asymmetrical. To effect his moments of release, Robert Frost writes poems that are torn open at times by the interruptions of dialogue, using dialogic roughness to break free of the lyric constraints of his verse.

In addition to formal and imaginative strategies, there are also other differences. Pulter and Bradstreet are women, confronting not only confining houses but confining definitions of gender that reinforce the walls of their chambers. Frost and Hardy face far fewer restrictions on their own movements between domestic places and the public market. If Bradstreet and Pulter are largely concerned with the autobiographical work of freeing themselves, as poets, from the silencing space of locked bedrooms, Hardy and Frost are mainly concerned with freeing female subjects (either fictional or real) from the silencing space of such enclosures. While Bradstreet and Frost write about enclosure in New England villages, Pulter and Hardy write about confinement in the English country. Bradstreet and Frost struggle to free themselves or their characters from humble village

structures; Pulter and Hardy desire release from ancient and venerable English structures, from country houses to cathedrals. Despite these differences, however, these four poets are nevertheless linked to each other--and to predecessors like Milton and Surrey--by their dedication to strategies of escape from houses and poems that have come to resemble prisons and tombs.

They are also linked by the subtle scale of their rebellion against stifling enclosure. All four poets make stifling domestic spaces the topic of their poetry, but rather than writing their objections into the unbounded space of free verse, they mimic the confinement of small rooms in the restrained spaces of their poems. Rather than shuck off the enclosure of poetry, they accept its confinement. Their forms of release, then, are more pointed, more minute; they emerge as brief instances, as opposed to wholesale escape. Rather using their poems to create unaccommodated spaces, unruled by walls and ceilings and floors, they use their poems to create spaces similar to those occupied by their poetic personae. In poems such as these, poetic freedom is less absolute than relative to the extent of confinement.

It is questionable, I realize, to enclose two seventeenth-century female poets and two twentieth-century male poets in the same aesthetic house, and it is true that, while there are natural connections between the domestic escape poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Robert Frost, Hester Pulter and Thomas Hardy, the modern male poets in this dissertation had the luxury of writing about domestic confinement from a cooler volitional distance

than their female predecessors, whose lot in life was in fact much more confined to domestic spaces.[vii] The modern male poets I examine also would have had more liberty to utilize strategies of formal roughness in order to escape from confinement than would their early modern female counterpoints, whose experimentation would have been viewed by contemporary readers with much more skepticism. The same formal qualities that contemporary readers appreciated as innovation in the poetry of Hardy and Frost might have seemed, to contemporary readers of Bradstreet and Pulter, like the natural ineptitude of female poets. What seemed like the well-honed poetic distress in the poetry of Hardy and Frost might have struck contemporary readers of Bradstreet and Pulter as the waterworks of women poets.

These differences in reception and poetic environment do not mean, however, that these poets do not belong in the same analytical frame. For one thing, the tradition cultivated by Bradstreet and Pulter--as well as other female poets in the seventeenth century--has been changed by interventions into the same tradition by male poets during the modern era. Breaks in Bradstreet's poetic veneer might, as she herself acknowledged in "The Prologue," have been read as clunky prosody; in the light of modern practice, however, these same breaks may be read as strategies to create productive dissonance. Hester Pulter's manuscript, composed of poems that promise the outward movement of space travel, might have been read at one point as the inflamed fantasies of a bedridden housewife; in the light of the centrifugal style of modern poets, however, these outward-reaching forms can be understood as a technique for poetic release. It may be anachronistic to evaluate a pre-modern poet on the basis of modern aesthetic values, but

avoidance of anachronism should not preclude attempts to understand early-modern poems in relation to pertinent poems of the modern era.

The importance of reading backwards as well as forwards does not, however, demonstrate active connections between poets of different periods. The more pertinent link between these four poets is the material connection they share. All poetry shares the connection of being poetry and using the same materials: line, stanza, meter, metaphor, etc. Certain poets, regardless of gender or historical period, may possess a kind of family relation, based on their particularly similar use of these materials. To read poetry in the light of these family connections might be called "kinship poetics"[viii]: a study of the material relationships between poets, regardless of evidence of influence. These four poets are linked not by a demonstrated influence or by a shared era or gender; rather, they are linked by their material bond, their related use of domestic structures as overarching metaphors and their manipulation of small breaks in form to escape from those structures.

To read them in the light of this trans-historical kinship permits them a certain degree of movement that would not be available to them were they read in the limited frame of a time period or a specific gender. For poets such as Bradstreet and Pulter, who write about the loneliness and claustrophobia of confinement, and who create poetic strategies to escape out of their constraints, poetry represents a freedom from the kinds of enclosures they were born into as a result of historical circumstances. There is something callous, then, about a narrow chronological insistence that their poetry remain defined by historical circumstances, rather than by the 'living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.' Similarly, there is something callous about reading their poetry as defined

by gender, in relation to other female poets, rather than reading their poetry as a mechanism by which it is possible to escape from confinement within gendered expression. While it is important to remember the historical differences that undergird each century's poetry, there is a certain kind of release in the idea that no poem must be confined to the century that produced it, but might be, instead, free to wander through the history of poetry, finding its meaning as much in its kinship to other similar works as it does in relation to historical events.

One way of imagining the tradition of domestic escape poetry--and the ways that it connects poets of different periods--is to think of it as a genre, connected by stylistic and symbolic features. Genre studies, as Alastair Fowler describes them, pair nicely with Heinzelman's idea of 'kinship associations' in that they have what Fowler calls an "associative function" (Fowler, 190); in other words, genre studies look for the connections between an individual poem and the "living whole" of poetry. According to Fowler, genres are "fields of association" that:

> differentiate, more or less systematically, a combination of features, both formal and substantive, ranging from minute to large, from specific topics to elusive moods. This repertoire may include characteristic diction, favorite rhetorical figures, peculiar meters, principal subjects, and typical themes. Each genre has more or less obligatory topics, for which material has to be found by the writer. (Fowler, 190)

The four examples of domestic escape poetry that this dissertation examines utilize a distinct "combination of features, formal and substantive" that differentiates them from other poems of enclosure. On the substantive plane, each focuses on the stifling nature of

26

domestic spaces, from cottages in New England to country houses in England. This preoccupation with confinement is not limited to the physical setting of the poems. Each of the poets I examine is also concerned about the limits on audience that locked spaces enforce. Each seeks not only larger spaces in which to exist but larger social frameworks in which to find audience: future audiences, male or female audiences, or audiences with the dead.

Each example is also linked by the development of specific formal mechanisms to enact careful escapes. Each seeks to grant poetic personae freedom from such spaces by placing them (somewhat paradoxically) in the even smaller spaces of a poem, which redefines what it means to exist in the 'little room' of a stanza: somehow the stanza must become more expansive if it is to contain such centrifugal authors. In order to write stanzas that will do so, each example experiments with various techniques of minute break from perfected poetic form. None of these poets releases themselves completely from the restrictions of conventional structures, such as rhyme and lineation; instead, they experiment with interruptions to form, brief moments of break that punctuate the regularity of the poem. These small breaks come, most often, in moments of loneliness or frustration too potent to mask with a formal poetic veneer, or to be contained within the small room of a stanza.

One of the most crucial aspects linking these examples of domestic escape poetry is the central metaphor that all of them share: that of the locked house or the shut bedroom, which represents an aspect of the poet's life and also the medium in which the poet has chosen to write. The poem--or an aspect of the poem, such as a couplet, an

elegiac convention, or a dialogic exchange--is compared to a house or a bedroom, just as the poetic subject's frustration is also linked to life in a sealed house or a closed bedroom. In addition to locked houses and shut bedrooms, a host of accompanying domestic symbols also dually serve as aspects of the narrative and metaphors for the act of writing. There are doors, windows, window shades, and inescapable beds throughout this poetry, each of which symbolizes substantive issues as much as poetic devices. These dual-functioning symbols serve to unite the genre of domestic escape poetry. According to Fowler, location of shared metaphors is essential to the process of genre-formation: "during the process of conceptualizing a genre, an important part was played by metaphors. Many genres had regular metaphors or synecdoches associated with them" (Fowler, 188). If the reed pipe metaphor links the genre of pastoral poems, the locked house links these poems of domestic escape, representing not only their shared concern with the claustrophobia of living behind closed doors but the frustrations involved with attempting to open these doors within the small spaces of poems.

        This dissertation examines poems of domestic escape in two different historical periods--the seventeenth-century and the twentieth-century--and two different countries. It also examines poems of domestic escape written by both female poets and male poets. As I have argued, the formal and imaginative strategies that these poets use to counteract their confinement are also distinct. All these are significant differences, and yet there is crucial overlap in the kind of release that each of these poets offers. Rather than

advocating whole scale demolition of imprisoning walls, these poets recreate structures of confinement, then experiment with minute strategies for undermining the solidity of those structures. Rather than suggesting a type of poetics that does not constrict, these poets accept the enclosing nature of poetic lineation but still advocate small forms of internal rebellion. In the case of each of these poets, these small forms of internal rebellion take the form of purposeful roughness or poetic error, gaps in their poetics compromising the wholeness of their confinement.

The first chapter examines Hester Pulter's poetry, discovered by Mark Robson in 1996, in the Brotherton Library in Leeds. In particular, it explores Pulter's poetry of space travel. While many of her poems take the form of complaints about the loneliness and claustrophobia of her confinement during pregnancy, the poems also undertake a massive escape effort, based on redefining the nature of the universe in which they are written. This chapter examines Pulter's poetry of space travel for the ways in which her scientifically accurate Copernican universe undermines the stability and closed form of her poems by placing them on a moving planet, at the relative peripheries of an expanding universe. Pulter's depiction of an accurately Copernican universe places her, alongside Milton, at the forefront of seventeenth-century poetic engagement with astronomy. The Copernican system--which banishes earth to the relative periphery of its solar system and describes earth's constant motion, a potential multiplicity of worlds, and the permeability of the universe--provides comfort to Pulter (1605-78), who writes most often about feeling stuck in the marginalized space of her confinement. While her individual poems appear to be written in traditional forms, rhyming in either couplets or

alternating lines and remaining relatively obedient to the constraints of tetrameter or pentameter, it becomes apparent that the form of the work as a whole echoes the subject matter of her poetry in ways that are experimental and unique. As the cosmos of Pulter's poetry rotates around the central pole of the sun, so Pulter's manuscript is built in cycles, using repeating tropes, titles and words to emphasize the poles around which the poems perpetually spin. The Copernican universe that Pulter posits and the poetic techniques she uses to materialize the concept of an endlessly moving planet make her a poet of domestic escape. Despite the cramped premises of her poems--written from confinement within her bedroom--Pulter manages to write her way to release. By depicting the universe as Copernican, Pulter is able to transform the state of living as a marginalized, obscured woman into a state that is common to all earth dwellers, each of whom is living on a banished planet, running perpetually at the relative peripheries. Thus, while the Copernican system is an object of dread to many poets in the seventeenth-century, including John Donne, Pulter proves herself willing to marry poetry to the most cutting-edge science of her time for the sake of release from domestic confinement.

The second chapter turns to Anne Bradstreet's early elegies, written for male poetic predecessors. As opposed to her late, domestic poetry, these early elegies for public figures announce their intention to engage in a public forum that is typically male. In order to contain such ambitious content, Bradstreet (1612-72) chooses to write in the form of heroic couplets--widely considered the most noble, solemn form in which to write--in order to express the ambition of her elegiac efforts. Bradstreet's early poetry, then, is contained within the neat compartments of heroic couplets, each of which is

caulked closely together by rhyme. Despite this formal containment, however, she often allows her elegiac verse to slip into expressions of frustration at her inability, as a female poet, to occupy a central role in the 'market' of literary ideas. She is banished to the domestic hearth and the distant outpost of colonial New England; she is aware, even as she writes these public poems, that they will not be considered seriously in the London literary scene. In these moments, Bradstreet's frustration expresses itself in pointed breaks from the smooth form of her heroic couplets. These breaks are sometimes prosodic, sometimes rhyming, and sometimes rhetorical. They often take place at points in the poem where Bradstreet is describing her own confinement to domestic spaces, far from the center of any literary scene. Many critics have considered these formal breaks to be the mark of Bradstreet's inferiority as a poet, or the mark of her early poetry's inferiority to her later, more domestic, verse; I argue, however, that these moments of break are purposeful expressions of the desire for release from confinement within traditional gender roles, traditionally feminine spaces, and from colonial marginalization. This strategy for release sets her at the forefront of a modern resurgence of similar poetics which use error and dissonance to express an uncontainable frustration at the divide between private desire and public impact.

Bradstreet's direct impact on modern poets such as John Berryman, who wrote a long poem in homage to her, bridges the gap between Bradstreet and the twentieth-century writers who inherit her strategies for domestic escape. The third and fourth chapters examine the elegies of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and the dialogic poetry of Robert Frost (1875-1963). Hardy's *Elegies of 1912-1913*, written after the death of his

31

long-estranged wife Emma, grieve not only for the loss of a wife but for the ways in which their long, unhappy marriage has caused the poet to forget an original Emma, with whom he fell in love on the coast of Cornwall. His elegies, then, veer away from traditional efforts toward reconstitution, since the poet realizes that the reconstituted woman his poems would contain might be vastly different from the actual woman, a misperception resulting from of their marital discord. Rather than attempt to contain her in conventional architectural or monumentalizing elegies, then, these elegies balance a desire for recollection with a desire for release. If years of unhappy domestic confinement made Emma an unpleasant woman, as Hardy himself partly concedes, Hardy's elegies seek to allow her the outdoor freedom that was her original condition. As a former architectural draftsman, Hardy was well prepared to enter the tradition of architectural elegies, and he might have written elaborate, enclosing monuments to his deceased wife.   Instead, he pursues three impulses which resist the enclosures of architectural space: he makes his sequence and his poems asymmetrical and architecturally unsound, he decreases the visual clarity of the image his poems pursue, and he consistently moves his subjects out of the houses that have enclosed them. These are Thomas Hardy's strategies of release, undertaken in order to provide his unhappy wife the liberty she enjoyed before her long marriage.

The final chapter examines the forms of release in Robert Frost's *North of Boston,* a book of poems composed almost entirely in the form of dialogic conversation, each poem featuring the voice of a new character or characters, each with his or her own unique accent. In these poems, which take place in or around a cluster of New England

houses and focus intently on walls, windows, and doors, Frost deals with the subject of escaping the enclosure of houses at the same time that he deals with the project of escaping the confinement of one subjectivity and slipping into the voices of others. In so doing, Frost seeks to escape not only domestic confinement but also the even smaller enclosure of subjective perspective. By comparing Frost's perspective on the possibility of escaping subjectivity with that of Emerson, a writer whom Frost engaged throughout his career, this chapter examines the ways that Frost alternated between believing that escape from the individual mind was possible and believing that any attempt to speak in others' voices was an unnatural intrusion. His dialogic poems, then, alternate between the pain of enclosure in a narrating voice and moments of release into other people's patterns of speech. At the level of form, these moments of escape are marked by dialogic interruptions that impose broken forms on the neat symmetries and structural conventions of Frost's narrative voice. Just as his poetics alternate between enclosure and rupture, his poems place characters on thresholds, standing at doors, unsure as to whether those architectural structures will serve as points of enclosure or points of release. As a whole, the book represents two opposite poles: the allure of formal and architectural enclosure and the appeal of rupture from such enclosure, if rupture could lead to a fuller experience of the world outside our own minds.

These four poets are linked, despite differences in gender and era, by the conceptualization of poetry as an intimate space that both confines and protects. They are also linked by their gestures toward escape from such poetic confinement. These gestures are partial; rather than abandoning the shelter of poetry, these poets probe for

minute cracks, isolated points of opportunity that will not topple the entire structure. In

so doing, they create a poetic dialectic between private and public expression, free and

confined verse, rebellion and compliance. This dialectic is the hallmark of the genre to

which these four poets contribute, one that treads a fine line between enclosure and

release, rather than privileging either extreme.

[ii] Wyatt and Surrey would have known Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, in which two men, imprisoned, are given visual access to their love. Later, freed from prison, Arcite wishes he could return to his cell, in which he was closer to his love than he is in the world of liberty. Palamon breaks from the prison-of-love tradition by wishing he were free, in order to be closer to his love; this breakage, as well as the terrible physical descriptions of the prison, show Chuacer's discomfort with the genre of prison-love. Interestingly, Wyatt and Surrey break along similar lines, Surrey flaring in anger against his cell as does Palamon, Wyatt finding comfort in his confines as does Arcite. Wyatt and Surrey also might have known Froissart's *La Prison Amoureuse*, written in 1372, which foregrounded the image of love as a prison to which lovers must acquiesce.

[iii] "Written with a Diamond on Her Window at Woodstock" and "Written on a Wall at Woodstock" both demonstrate certain tenets of the biblical tradition. First, in "Written on a Wall at Woodstock," there is a degree of resignation to the state of imprisonment, a turning to God to rectify all that is wrong with the outside world while she waits within. Second, the emphasized fact of the author writing on walls creates a continuous line between prison, poem, and body. According to Leah Marcus, Elizabeth's equation of herself and her prison transformed her poems from private self-expression into a cherished public symbol of Protestant martyrdom: "the Woodstock poems were important to Elizabeth's contemporaries not so much because of their content or their skilled versification and neatness of expression, but because of their highly-charged symbolic status as monument for the beleaguered international community of Protestants" (Leah Marcus, "Elizabeth I as Public and Private Poet," in *Reading Monarchs Writing: The Poetry of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I,* ed. Peter C. Herman(Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 139-140).

[iv] When Cordelia and Lear are taken prisoner, Lear counsels Cordelia in acquiescence to imprisonment: "No, no. Come, let's away to prison./ We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage./ When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down/ And ask of thee forgiveness;/ So we'll live,/ And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/ At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues/

Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too--/ Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out,/ And take upon's the mystery of things/ As if we were Go'd spies; and we'll wear out/ In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones/ That ebb and flow by th' moon" (William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 257). Lear's quote demonstrates the biblical idea that a greater nearness to God and a greater empathy for lowly people ('poor rogues') that are accessed through imprisonment. One hears echoes of Wyatt's prison poems in Lear's conviction that the imprisoned are safer than the "great ones" of the outside world, whose power ebbs and flows with the moon.

[v] See EA Robinson, "Many Are Called," in *Avon's Harvest:* "Only at unconjectured intervals,/ By will of him on whom no man may gaze,/ By word of him whose law no man has read,/ A questing light may rift the sullen walls,/ To cling where mostly its infrequent rays/ Fall golden on the patience of the dead."

[vi] For an exception to this dialectic, see "An Old Man's Winter Night," published only two years after *North of Boston.* In it, Frost depicts a domestic space that is entirely sealed off from the world, disengaged from the country around it.

[vii] After marrying her husband, Hester Pulter apparently spent the rest of her life confined to his Hertfordshire manor, often writing poems about the isolation of her domestic existence. She gave birth to fifteen children, and seems to have spent some time in confinement before and after each of her pregnancies, so this domestic space, already claustrophobic to Pulter, was often straitened further to the dimensions of her chamber. For more biographical information on Hester Pulter, see Alice Eardly, "Lady Hester Pulter's Date of Birth." Anne Bradstreet undertook a transcontinental voyage, but after that her voyaging stopped. Many of her poems are written in the particular distress of waiting at home while a male relative (her father, her husband or her son) is traveling abroad. When her manuscript is taken to England, it is taken by a male relative, rather than Bradstreet herself. The fact of her gender, then, keeps her more at home than the men in her life. In addition to that, seemingly endless illnesses and eight pregnancies kept her close to her chamber. For more biographical information on Anne Bradstreet, see Jeannine Hensley's introduction to *The Works of Anne Bradstreet.*

[viii] For this concept of "kinship poetics," and for an understanding of its importance to this dissertation, I am indebted to Kurt Heinzelman. For more on the material affinity or relation between poets, regardless of proven influence, see "Williams and Stevens: The Vanishing Point of Resemblance," in *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas,* 29 (1984), p. 85-113.

Chapter 1: Hester Pulter's Brave New Worlds

In the early seventeenth-century, the thirteen-year-old daughter of the first earl of Marlborough married a Hertfordshire gentleman named Arthur Pulter. Hester Ley became Hester Pulter, and she almost immediately embarked on the process of giving birth to fifteen children. Fifteen children makes for a great deal of pregnancy; if she bore her children to term, she would have been pregnant for 135 months, a bit over eleven full years. In addition to getting pregnant and giving birth, she also composed an extensive literary manuscript, consisting of poems, emblems, and a partially completed romance about a woman called "the Unfortunate Florinda," none of which she went on to publish. From the titles she gave her poems, such as "Written in 1648 While I Lay Inn, with My Son John," to the constant complaints she makes about finding herself trapped alone in her bedroom, constrained from contact with the outside world, we know that many, if not all, of her poems were written during confinement as a result of pregnancy. Pulter's poetry, then, was born out of confinement, a poetics of escape that explores what it means to write through the boundaries of enforced isolation.

If the issue of confinement is the foundation of her work, Pulter continually returns to one method for escape: movement out into the universe, which she describes as heliocentric, permeable, and endlessly vast. By positing faith in the Copernican system--which describes earth as relatively marginal, revolving around the centralized sun--Pulter

sets herself apart from most other poets of her century, who struggled to accept such a marginalized position in the firmament. In the Ptolemaic system, earth remained still, the fixed center of the cosmos. This system appealed to the wish for cosmic order and meaning, a universe in which human beings played the main part, leading their lives on center stage. Even Donne--whose poetry is metaphorically suggestive of space travel and defies orthodox religion by positing the existence of other worlds besides earth[viii]--shies away from the concept of a heliocentric universe, the idea of which seems to strike him as aesthetically, if not religiously, blasphemous. Milton was willing to accept more of the indeterminacy of Copernicus' system than was Donne, although he still suggests some degree of doubt on the issue of heliocentrism.

Pulter went farther than either of these inspired poets. Her willingness to embrace the new system, while other poets found it worrisome, is the result of her desire to use poetic means to slip out of earthly constraints. The locked and uniform stability of the Ptolemaic universe--comforting to some--had no allure for Pulter, stuck in her lonely bedroom. Copernican motion, however, harbored all kinds of appeal. For instance, by placing earth at the edges of the solar system, Pulter is able to imagine her marginalized confinement--off in the country, socially invisible--as common to all earth dwellers, even the ones at the center of the London scene. In the Copernican universe, every person on the planet is banished to the edge of a system in which they once imagined themselves to be central, making Pulter's status universal rather than discriminatory. The Copernican system is humbling and destabilized, a vast space through which earth moves, rather than maintaining its original position. By accepting her planet's humiliation, Pulter is able to

37

redeem her own status. Its equalizing logic, furthermore, is not the only boon of a

Copernican heaven: by embracing the possible plurality of worlds that Copernican

science suggested, Pulter is also able to conceive of a less isolated afterlife. Lastly, by

accepting what Copernicus first described as earth's perpetual motion, Pulter is able to

imagine freedom from the stasis of a shut bedroom.

The use of a Copernican lens to understand a seventeenth-century poet's output is

not a particularly common critical approach, despite the influence that the new astronomy

must have exerted on contemporary imaginations. While critics often suggest the

importance of the new science in contemporary poetry, full-bodied explorations of the

topic are rare. In 1935, Marjorie Nicolson optimistically described a new wave of

interest in the literary effects of science:

> During the last few years--perhaps because of the dominant interest
> of our own time--students of literary history have become more and
> more aware of the importance of the scientific background in
> determining the direction of certain currents of literature, and have
> been increasingly conscious of the extent to which major and minor
> writers have felt the pressure of contemporary scientific conceptions.
> (Nicolson, 233)

It is worth wondering what has become of the rising tide of scientific literary criticism

that Nicolson noticed (and to which she contributed so significantly) in the 1930s. In the

field of seventeenth-century literature, at least, it now seems that the wave never quite

built as predicted. This failure is startling, considering the scientific revolution that was

occurring in the seventeenth century alongside the English Civil War, as well as the

founding of the Royal Society in 1660. We have spent a great deal of time discussing the

pressure that the civil war and its shifting power dynamics exerted on seventeenth-

century literature, but much less time theorizing the effects of the scientific revolution that occurred at the same time. In particular, the debate between a Copernican and Ptolemaic conception of the universe, which raged throughout the seventeenth century and carried cultural consequences as monumental as Einstein's theory of relativity did in the twentieth century, has been rather overlooked.

While we do know quite a bit about Milton's relationship to the new astronomy,[viii] and a handful of articles have been written over the past century about Donne's relationship to Copernicus,[viii] the relationship between other writers and the new astronomy, which Nicolson saw developing nearly a hundred years ago, has remained more mysterious. We have very little record of critical interest in the astronomical poetry of what Nicolson calls "minor writers."[viii] Even our interest in Milton's astronomy, moreover, seems tainted by a reluctance to associate poetry with scientific rigor. While Milton's telescopes have been enough to ensure that we pay some attention to his astronomical references, most critics seem compelled to think of his astronomy as either conservative or amateur,[viii] and a recent school of critics insists that his telescope references have nothing to do with contemporary debates on astronomy but are instead nice metaphors about artistic creation, unmoored in actual science.[viii] This insistence, I think, reflects more than anything else a contemporary disinclination to read poetry as scientifically informed, despite its apparent acumen, which is strange considering how readily we imagine poetry to be politically informed even when it is concerned with other topics, like love, for example, or even astronomy. Poets clearly do not exist in vacuums, and scientific revolutions in the seventeenth century were as captivating to the

contemporary imagination as religious revolutions. Both were in fact intertwined with each other, for radical new astronomical discoveries forced citizens of seventeenth-century England to re-imagine what both Christianity and monarchy meant on a planet that was no longer central or unique, but instead relative to other worlds in a vast and ever-expanding universe. The assumption that poets of the seventeenth century--other than Milton or Donne--were ignorant or heedless of the science that was shifting their very position in the universe is not sustained by the poetry.

Some recent Milton criticism, such as that of Danielson, Sarkar and Chaplin, reverses these trends, returning to the ethos of Marjorie Nicolson's era and figuring Milton as an engaged student of astronomy who employed the tools of new science in his poetic universe. But in general the astronomical lens has not been used on other poets of the seventeenth-century. We seem afraid to accept that other poets might have seriously engaged with the debate between Ptolemy and Copernicus, as though poets less massively educated and ambitious than Milton must have written in ignorance of new science.   But references to cutting edge science can be found throughout seventeenth-century poetry. As Malabika Sarkar shows us, there are explorations of new astronomy and other worlds in the poetry of Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, and Traherne, as well as Milton and Donne (Sarkar, 1). Given this widespread interest, it is well worth dedicating more critical energy to parsing the science fictions and the science in fictions of that era.

Copernican astronomy was the central cultural foundation on which the poetry of Hester Pulter was built. The fact that Pulter--an undereducated, mostly housebound, unpublished poet--engages so seriously with the new astronomy indicates that

40

Copernicanism cannot be negated as a tool by which other poets of the seventeenth-century imagined their place in the world. We ought to consider it more in reading the poetry of that period. In 1957, William Empson, who wrote one of the past century's only arguments that a poet other than Milton might have seriously engaged with the new astronomy, declared that:

> no other poet of the time [other than Donne], I have to admit, betrays this excitement about the topic; not even the imitators of Donne. I quite understand that this makes scholars unwilling to recognize the topic in Donne either; indeed, anyone who has had to supervise a university thesis on "The Literary Effects of Copernicus" in the period will be driven to conclude that he had surprisingly little. But it is intelligible that Donne should be alone here. (Empson, 775)

Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate this statement, and to extend the same courtesy that Empson extends to Donne to the rest of the century's poets. To do so might not only elucidate their poetry, but help us understand the ways in which artists many centuries ago worked to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable tenets of a new science and a cherished religion. We might learn from their strategies.

More than any other topic, Pulter's poetry is concerned with the notion of oppressive confinement. She uses the word 'confin'd' repeatedly, supplementing the participle with descriptions of her shadowy room and her lonely garden that make her manor house seem less like a country retreat and more like an inescapable prison. Eleven years of pregnancy in a house that feels like a jail cell is a very long sentence. Her fate must have sometimes felt like a slightly less horrific version of the fate Milton gives to Sin in *Paradise Lost*, as a woman pregnant with hellhounds who are "hourly conceiv'd/

41

And hourly born" (2, 796-97).[viii] In addition to the physical discomforts of fifteen pregnancies, Pulter's procreative career would have resulted in fifteen periods of some degree of social isolation. Depending on their class and religious persuasion, early modern women submitted to various extents of retirement around the event of a birth.[viii] While it is impossible to know the precise conditions of Pulter's pregnancies, we do know, from her poetry, that she often felt trapped in her bedroom. The inability to move from the location of her birthing chamber--perhaps as a result of early modern doctors' recommendations, perhaps as a result of the "lying-in" period before churching, or perhaps because of illness during pregnancy--is a central complaint for Pulter, who must also have related sometimes to another of Milton's excessively procreative figures: the mind that becomes paralyzed by fertility--"made marble with too much conceaving"-- after reading Shakespeare's poetry. While we cannot say how much of Pulter's loneliness and paralysis was a result of her pregnancies and how much was a product of other factors in her life, it is safe to say that Pulter, more often than she would have liked, had perforce a room of her own in which to write poems.

     While poets across centuries have romanticized the notion of creative solitude, that state was abhorrent to Pulter. Rather than write lyrics about the sweetness of retirement, Pulter wrote most of her poetry about the wretchedness of "obscurity." In an untitled poem, for instance, she wonders why all the wild creatures of the earth are free to roam while she must remain trapped in the small space of her bedroom: "Why must I thus forever bee confin'd/ Against the noble freedome of my Mind/ When as each hoary Moth, and Gaudy fly/ Within their spheirs injoy their Liberty." Even the most hideous

creatures--"bold worms" and "the tarantula that kills with laughing"--are permitted motion, while Pulter is "buried thus alive," fated to "in sad confinement living die." This wretched depiction of solitary confinement is a stark contrast to other early modern depictions of small quarters, such as Hamlet's protestation that "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself King of infinite space" (II.ii.251-252), or Barabas' celebration of enclosing "infinite riches in a little room" (I.i.37). But both of these characters are free to wander when they speak these lines. For Pulter, excessively well-acquainted with her own chamber, a life spent in confinement is living death, and freedom for the pent up woman can only come in the coffin: "for I noe liberty expect to have/ Untill I find my freedome in my grave."

This philosophy--a common facet of many of Pulter's poems--raises an odd conundrum. If confinement and solitude haunt your living days, how can thoughts of the 'grave' provide real solace? If life is terrible because it's like being buried alive, and if your house is awful because it reminds you of a coffin, how can the solution you imagine be nothing other than actual burial in a literal coffin? Belief in a Christian afterlife provides one kind of solution to this problem, by ensuring that even if the body is buried the soul becomes free. This partial freedom--the body is, after all, still stuck, at least until Doomsday--does not, however, seem to provide Pulter with the kind of consolation it is intended to provide. Instead, she seems to wish for a more total freedom, one that will address both bodily and spiritual deprivations.

The Copernican universe allows for the imaginative fulfillment of this wish. For Pulter to imagine a satisfactory kind of freedom in death--one that reverses the physical

and spiritual deprivations of her life--requires that she redefine the traditional Christian afterlife in several related ways, each of which makes death less confined, less isolated, less deprived of social and sensory engagement. She does this by imagining heaven as a Copernican space. If her life consists of various states of deprivation--physical, social, and literary--her descriptions of Copernican death involve a reversal of each of these infringements. Her heaven--informed by the new science--involves free motion, bodily mass, and immeasurable vastness, none of which was possible in the Ptolemaic system or traditional religious depictions of death.

For Pulter to define death as an escape from mortal shackles is not, of course, an original move in itself. Her insistence that death not involve bodily deprivation, however, is much more unique. The more common depiction of death is as a temporary antechamber of physical deprivation that opens out to freedom for the soul. Ultimately, the privation of the body is negated by the liberty of disembodied existence; still, deprivation is an important stage of the process. One of the more common early modern usages of the word "privation," in fact, is in the phrase a "privation of life," or death. In the middle ages, the popular poem *The Prick of Conscience* describes death as "a privacion of the life/ When it partes fra the body in strife." In 1607, T. Walkington writes in *The Optick Glasse* that "the privation of the air deprives us of our life." Similarly, the act of killing another human being is often described as an act of deprivation. In *The Rape of Lucrece,* Shakespeare has Lucrece claim that, "'tis honor to deprive dishonored life," and J. Stowe's *Annales* describe an execution thus: "His head was severed from his body by the Axe at three strokes, but the first deadly, and absolutely depriving all sense

and motion."[viii] Death, then, is not just a portal into the freedoms of afterlife; it also

involves a deprivation of sense and motion, a privation of life. In traditional depictions

of heaven, a human being must endure a phase of privation before the soul can enter the

glory of eternity.

Pulter's version of death skips this grim antechamber. This leap is made possible

by the radically innovative nature of the afterlife she imagines, which casts heaven as a

scientifically plausible astrological system, rather than as an ephemeral realm of chiming

music and angel wings. In her astrological order, death consists in a body's physical

movement through a permeable universe, away from earth towards other planets closer to

the sun. Corporeal decomposition ends not in the cold obstruction of the grave, but in re-

constitution as a mobile planetary body somewhere else in the universe. In this version

of afterlife, the atoms of our bodies will disperse, move through a permeable universe,

and re-form again as planets, rotating around the sensual warmth and light of a central

star. Rather than shedding the body, with all its attendant senses, dead souls become all

the more bodily in the afterlife, acquiring the mass and density of planets and the

heightened sensory stimulation provided by closer proximity to the sun, as well as the

power of unimpeded motion through a permeable rather than crystalline universe.

Pulter's planetary souls are also less alone than living bodies, for they exist--as

Copernicus predicted--amidst innumerable other rotating worlds. Finally, in addition to

accessing a corporeal, social afterlife, Pulter's dead souls avoid the confinement of the

grave; instead, they orbit constantly around the sun. All three of these principles--the

permeability of the universe, the multiplicity of worlds, and heliocentric orbit--are

Copernican principles, which sets Pulter, in the company of Milton, at the forefront of seventeenth-century poetic engagement with evolving astronomical discoveries. Like Milton, and unlike Donne, Pulter found herself willing to accept all the implications of a non-Ptolemaic universe, despite the emotional and artistic threats posed by a system that depicts earth as neither central nor unique.

Pulter, then, is an innovator in the poetry of outer space, accepting and accessing the forefront of scientific discovery despite Christianity's aversion to the new science. She is also an innovator in the language of confinement, using a new planetary system to redefine old words. Just as Pulter redefines the status of her peripheral existence as central to the experience of life as a dweller on a peripheralized earth, she redefines the very concept of deprivation, making it less private and more public. This process of redefinition echoes the evolution of the word "privacy" at the time that Pulter wrote. During much of the English Renaissance, the word "privacy" remained tied to its root in the Latin word for 'deprived.' As a result, for most of the sixteenth century the word was commonly used in a purely negative sense. The *OED* gives one now obsolete definition of 'privacy' as 'deprived, bereft, or dispossessed.' Used as a verb, "private" means to deprive or cut off from. An example of this painful usage can be seen in Wyatt's sonnet ccxxviii: "All worldely felicitye nowe am I pryvate, And left in deserte moste solitarilye." The second half of the Renaissance, however, witnessed a shift in the connotations of privacy. The *OED*'s final instance of that negative usage comes in 1599, in A. Hume's *Hymnes*: "Sodainely the Sun by day, is priuate of his light." After the turn of the century, the word seems to have migrated towards its more modern connotations of privileged

ownership, refuge or chosen apartness, and personal mystery. This sort of positive privacy is suggested when Michael Drayton wishes he could keep some part of himself hidden from the watchful eye of God: "Oh God from you that I could private be." By the time that Drayton wrote this in 1599, the "private" self was becoming something more than a deprived self--though it was that, too. Rather than a self that has been denied a public role, the new private self was one that sought refuge from the prying eye of the world. By redefining her deprivation as something common to all earth-dwellers, and by outlining a future in which we will escape our earthly confinement, Pulter recreates privacy as something that is temporary and essentially human, something that is not a personal loss but a stage to be endured and even enjoyed, because it is part of the condition of being alive and will eventually end. At a moment in which the word 'privacy' was shifting towards its modern, positive significance, Hester Pulter was an innovator, working within her Copernican poetry to extract the privation from privacy.

Finally, in addition to innovating the poetry of outer space and the language of deprivation, Pulter's astronomical poetry allows her to stand at the forefront of a dialogue between science and religion that has remained troublesome throughout history. Without ever expressing a crisis of faith, Pulter reconciles a religious heaven with an astronomical heaven by embracing the idea of a material afterlife. In her poetry, Pulter makes little mention of angels, celestial music, rarified spirits, or any of the other conventional accoutrements of heaven; instead, she enthusiastically describes an afterlife composed of planets and stars, eclipses and poles, and constant outward motion through space. It is because her spiritual heaven is a literal, astronomical location that Pulter is able to

47

imagine pre-apocalyptic death as devoid of its traditional privations, composed instead of bodily presence, material sensation, and social company. As a result of its Copernican orientations, a physical heaven permits a physical soul many of the freedoms traditionally reserved for a disembodied soul: freedom, light, eternal flight through the universe. In making the transformation from a figurative to a literal heaven, then, Pulter brokers a truce between her Christianity and her scientific acumen, between her physical body and her ephemeral soul.

Pulter frames her Copernicanism not only in the subject matter of her poetry, but also in the architecture of her manuscript, which continually cycles back to poems that function like poles. Out of sixty poems, for instance, four are entitled "The Circle." There are three poems called "Prayer," three called "To Aurora," and two called merely "Aurora." All of these repeated titles occur at least once in a series from the fifteenth to the twenty-seventh poems that forms a kind of titular vortex at the center of the manuscript: "The Revolution," "The Circle," "The Desire," "The Welcome," "Prayer," "The Circle," To Aurora," "To Astraea," "The Circle," "To Aurora," "On the King's Most Excellent Majesty," "My Soul's Sole Desire," and "The Center." This reiterating pattern of titles reinforces the Copernican sense of movement around a central star. In addition, the forms of individual poems--all of which are long and narrow, rapidly tripping along the page--also contribute to a feeling of perpetual motion through largely blank space. In these ways, Hester Pulter's manuscript formally and textually mimics Copernican

dynamics, becoming a miniature extension of a vast system by which the author is able to re-imagine her earthly constraints as both universal and temporary.

By writing her own constellation, Pulter creates an extraterrestrial body for herself. In her body of poetic work, she exists in a vast and orbiting domain that is the polar opposite of the miniscule, motionless world in which she writes. This change in location is, I would argue, the main pursuit of her poetry. In the vehicle of her poems, Pulter is able to get moving, out of her bedroom and into space. Her poems provide her a preliminary taste of the freedom, light, and perpetual motion promised by her astronomical version of heaven.

There are three aspects of the Copernican system with which Pulter engages in her poetry, and on which the redemptive potential of her astronomical heaven depends: heliocentrism, the permeability of the universe, and the multiplicity of worlds. These concepts were introduced in England in the sixteenth century by Thomas Digges, who translated Copernicus into English and, in *Perfit Description of the Caelestiall Orbes* (1576), praised the astronomer for proving that:

> the earth resteth not in the centre of the whole world, but only in the centre of this our mortal world or globe of elements which, environed and enclosed in the moon's orb, and together with the whole globe of mortality, is carried yearly round about the sun, which like a king in the midst of all reigneth and giveth laws of motion to the rest, spherically dispersing his glorious beams of light through all this sacred celestial temple. And the earth itself to be one of the planets, having his peculiar and stryaing courses turning every twenty-four hours round upon his own centre, whereby the sun and great globe of fixed stars seem to sway about and turn, albeit indeed they remain fixed. (Digges, M1R-M2V)

In making this case for heliocentrism, Copernicus and Digges radically re-aligned the universe as it had been imagined up to this point. But Copernicus did not stop there. In *Commentariolus,* he asserts not only that the sun is the center of earth's galaxy, but also that, in all probability, there are other suns at the center of other galaxies (Danielson, 218). This assertion, which was later proven by Galileo's observation of the moons that rotate Jupiter, further decentralized the early modern concept of the universe. As Dennis Danielson puts it, these assertions caused "astronomical nouns" to take on "plural forms" (Danielson, 218). By the late sixteenth century, as a result of these scientific developments, Giordano Bruno could describe (and be executed for describing) the universe as one containing "innumerable suns, and likewise an infinite number of earths circling about those suns" (Danielson, 218).

If the pluralization of suns and worlds was a second result of the Copernican system, a sense of the universe as permeable--rather than divided into concrete crystal spheres--was a third. Dennis Danielson tells us that, "by the seventeenth century, the crystalline spheres had melted away," a shift in opinion that allowed Robert Burton to write in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1638) that all contemporary astronomers are of "the selfsame opinion about the essence and matter of the heavens: that it is not hard and impenetrable, as the Peripatetics hold...but that it is penetrable and soft as the air itself is.'" From here to space travel was not an impossible imaginative distance for writers such as Burton to cross. As Danielson puts it, "from the absence of such cosmic glass ceilings Burton drew the inference that is the *sine qua non* of space flight: 'If the heavens

then be penetrable, as these men deliver, and no lets, it were not amiss in this aerial progress to make wings and fly up'" (Danielson, 221-22). And so, in the seventeenth century, English citizens received a model of the universe that was not only crowded with other potentially habitable worlds but through which space travel was imminent. This universe stretched vastly outward, spiraling further and further away towards innumerable and even infinite possibilities.

While such a system held rich imaginative potential for writers such as Pulter and Burton, it was disturbing to many others, including John Donne. As William Empson shows us, Donne's early poetry takes refuge in the destabilizing potential of other, extraterrestrial worlds that might require other incarnations: "the young Donne, to judge from his poems, believed that every planet could have its Incarnation, and believed this with delight, because it automatically liberated an independent conscience from any earthly religious authority" (Empson, 773). Despite his early fantasies about metaphorical flights to distant worlds that might be shared by two lovers in private, however, Donne still struggles to accept the scientific terms of a system that would actually permit this. In *An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary,* Donne complains about the lack of stability in a perpetually moving, outwardly expanding universe:

> And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The element of fire is quite put out;
> The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him, where to look for it.
> And freely men confess, that this world's spent,

> When in the planets, and the firmament,
> They seek so many new; they see that this
> Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
> 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
> All just supply, and all relation. (Donne, l. 205-214)

For the Donne who wrote the Anniversaries, the idea of a living on a rotating planet in an expanding universe is frightening in its incoherence, disturbing in its relativity. Despite his own early poetry's propensity for space travel, Donne recognizes in these lines something deleterious in the desire to move ever-outward, to find new world after new world until the gravity of the earth itself is "spent," its miraculous fires quenched. It's possible that this reaction against the new science was part of a posture formed for the sake of patronage, or a later-life reaction against the instabilities of his youth. It's also possible that Donne was using the new science as a metaphor for a more general historical disillusionment of the kind that Yeats later describes in "The Second Coming": "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" (Yeats, 187). Just as the gyre worked for Yeats as a representation of a woefully decentralized universe, the Copernican universe may have worked for Donne as a representation of a world plagued by new relativity. It's possible, in other words, to believe in a revolutionary science without celebrating it's aesthetic implications. Still, it does seem clear that Donne was at least conflicted about embracing the new science, with its incoherence, its relation, its many scattered pieces.

Perhaps as a result of his anxieties such a system, Donne goes on to describe a

universe that is distinctly un-Copernican, one that is firmly entrenched in Ptolemaic

order:

> We think the heavens enjoy their spherical,
> Their round proportion embracing all.
> But yet their various and perplexed course,
> Obvserved in divers ages, doth enforce
> Men to find out so many eccentric parts,
> Such divers down-right lines, such overthwarts,
> As disproportion that pure form. It tears
> The firmament in eight and forty shares
> And in these constellations there arise
> New stars, and old do vanish from our eyes:
> As though heaven suffered earthquakes, peace or war,
> When new towns rise, and old demolished are.
> They have impaled within a zodiac
> The free born sun, and keep twelve signs awake
> To watch his steps; the goat and crab control,
> And fright him back, who else to either pole
> (Did not those tropics fetter him) might run:
> For his course is not round; nor can the sun
> Perfect a circle, or maintain his way
> One inch direct; but where he rose today
> He comes no more, but with a cozening line,
> Steals by that point, and so is serpentine:
> And seeming weary with his reeling thus,
> He means to sleep, being now fall'n nearer us. (Donne, l. 251-74)

In that the universe has forty-eight concrete "shares," is not perfectly spherical but

composed of complex intersecting patterns, and features a sun that moves each day

around the earth, Donne's depiction of the heavens is securely Ptolemaic. But even this

universe--much more stable than the Copernican universe--inspires in Donne a wistful

nostalgia for the perfect spheres of the Aristotelian universe.[viii] It was widely believed in

the Renaissance that the sun was moving ever closer to the earth, a concept most likely

derived from the fact that Ptolemy's measurements asserted a wider distance between the earth and the sun than did subsequent scientists (Donne, 463). The sun's collapsing course, as well as the perplexing and uneven motions of the spheres, are enough cause Donne to yearn for an ancient astronomical systems that configured a universe with cleaner lines. For Donne, it is comforting to imagine the disturbed earth--fraught with wars and earthquakes and collapsing towns--as ensconced, at least, in a perfect universe; disorder in the universe, on the other hand, implies that violence is not merely human but a systemic part of God's whole cosmic plan. For Donne, the universe ought to provide a more innocent counterpart to the violence of earth: as he describes it in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," "Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,/ Men reckon what it did and meant,/ But trepidation of the spheres,/ Though greater far, is innocent" (l. 9-12). Even if it shatters the symmetries of the ancient systems, the Ptolemaic universe at least describes a reliable progression of spheres moving away from the earth's imperfections toward the purity of the ninth crystalline sphere. A Copernican universe, proportionless in its enormity, incomprehensible in its perpetual spinning motions, only magnifies the disorder of earth in a way that seems to have been difficult for Donne to accept.

The Copernican universe didn't only threaten poets' sense of proportion and celestial beauty. More dangerously for its proponents, as William Empson has shown, it also threatened religious leaders' centralized authority:

> Protestant leaders on the Continent had at once called
> Copernicanism absurd because it contradicted the Bible (e.g., Psalm
> 93: "the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved") but seem
> to have thought it too absurd to require organized persecution;
> whereas Rome, taking the matter slowly and seeing it as a whole,

54

eventually decided to stamp out belief in inhabitants of worlds out of reach of the Pope. (Empson, 774).

Not only did the possibility of other worlds suggest corners of the universe that might have been unresponsive to the central power of Rome, it also suggested that Jesus might not be unique. According to Empson, this threat of non-uniqueness was as unsettling on several theological levels:

> In our time no less than Donne's, to believe that there are rational creatures on other planets is very hard to reconcile with the belief that Salvation is only through Christ; they and their descendants appear to have been excluded from salvation; by the very scheme of God, indefinitely and perhaps forever. One might suppose, to preserve God's justice, that Christ repeats his sacrifice in all worlds...but this already denies uniqueness to Jesus, and must in some thorough way qualify the identity of the man with the divine Person. It becomes natural to envisage frequent partial or occasional Incarnations on this earth. (Empson, 772)

Thus, the relativity that haunts Donne on the aesthetic level would have haunted religious leaders on the doctrinal level: if there can be many Christs throughout the universe, what is to keep us from imagining many Christs on earth, both partial and whole, in a way that would fracture organized religion to the point of incoherence. The doctrinal threats posed by Copernicanism were enough that the Catholic Church burned the astronomer Bruno Giordano at the stake for expressing his heretical Copernican beliefs.

This is not to suggest that Donne aligned himself with the orthodox Catholic Church in his ultimate refusal to accept a Copernican universe, or that he was unaware of recent developments in astronomy. To begin with, Donne's poetry proves an acute awareness of Copernican science. His third Letter to the Countess of Bedford, for instance, neatly summarizes the new philosophy: "As new Philosophy arrests the Sun/

55

And bids the passive earth about it run,/ So we have dulled our mind, it hath no ends;/ Only the body's busy, and pretends" (l. 37-40). As I have suggested earlier, the fact that Donne expresses a nostalgia for a conception of the universe in which earth held a special agency does not mean that he is ignorant of or refuses to believe in the Copernican system. It also does not mean that he supported the orthodox power structures that Copernicus threatened. On the contrary, as Empson shows us, the young Donne passionately imagined the possibility of space travel in his poetry, as a metaphor for using erotic love to create a separate, private planet away from the auspices of authorities such as the church. The Donne who wrote *Songs and Sonnets* often proposed a variety of metaphorical worlds where erotic exploration might evade censorship; in these poems, Donne finds worlds in eyeballs, worlds in little rooms, worlds encompassed by "us two." How can this poet of plural worlds, then, go on to repudiate a decentralized Copernican universe?

Empson answers this question by claiming that, for Donne, the magic of space travel lay in the fact that these distant worlds could be more ideal than the compromised world of earth: they were worlds in which true love was possible, where the union of two souls into one could be achieved, unfettered by the watchful eyes of tyrants and meddlers. Space travel was desirable because it allowed ascension above the role of "dull sublunary lover," as he puts it in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Space travel permitted access to a less tarnished state of being, a kind of existence where proportion and beauty is heightened rather than parallel with the fallen state of affairs on earth. It is this very fantasy, according to Empson, that causes Donne to hesitate in accepting the Copernican

56

system, which treats earth as just another planet, equal in footing to all the other planets circling the sun. In the Copernican system, life on other planets is composed of the same sort of matter as life on earth; in the Ptolemaic system, matter is far more refined in space, so Donne's lovers can maintain their corporeal presence while also becoming more pure, approaching the ideal blend of material and ethereal that Donne imagines in "Twixt Air and Angels" (Empson, 783). Thus, for reasons that have nothing to do with an insistence on the singularity of either earth or Christ, Donne was reluctant to relinquish his belief in aspects of the Ptolemaic system, choosing instead to write poetry that straddled the line between two conceptions of the universe.

If anything, the fact that *An Anatomy of the World* (in which Donne writes his harshest critique of the Copernican system) was written after his early satires shows that Donne had matured, losing touch with some of his youthful wildness. The instability of a plural world began to work more as a threat than an appeal to the older Donne. As Empson puts it, "by the time he took Anglican Orders...he was thankful to get back from the interplanetary spaces, which are inherently lonely and ill-provided" (Empson, 775). As a middle-aged man, trying to finally find a secure place in the world, Donne faced two possible models of the universe: one was stable, idealized and reliable, the other unmoored, relative, and full of the potential for outward expansion. The iteration of Donne who wrote "The Anniversaries" was willing to sacrifice the freedoms of the latter for the aesthetic hierarchies of the former.

While Donne ultimately curbs his willingness to travel outward into Copernican space, Milton seems more willing to find hope in the new philosophy. Like Donne, Milton does not dispense with Ptolemy entirely; however, his poetry is clearly less disturbed by and more committed to Copernican potential than that of the mid-career Donne. On one hand, Milton famously hedges his Copernican bets when he has Raphael equivocate about whether the earth revolves around the sun or the sun revolves around the earth; like Donne, Milton seems (at least in these lines) reluctant to relinquish the idea of earth as a point of agency at the center of the universe. Throughout the twentieth century, this single line inspired the majority of Milton critics to claim that he was, despite his admiration for Galileo, a fundamental believer in Ptolemy's medieval system.[viii] Outside this line, however, as Dennis Danielson shows us, most other aspects of the Paradise Lost astrology are solidly Copernican. Milton's embrace of the new system manifests itself in an array of instances, from affirming the stellar character of earth (echoing Digges' assertion that earth is "one of the planets," not singular in character) to the pluralization of worlds that attends such a realization. His affirmation of the plurality of worlds asserts itself, as Gregory Chaplin shows us, in Satan's travels through space, when he passes by 'stars' that he compares to 'other worlds,' or 'other Hesperian Gardens' (Chaplin, 355). But Milton presses past even this heterodox assertion. Not only does Raphael predict that in the future Adam might witness 'other suns perhaps/ With their attendant moons' (*Paradise Lost,* VIII.148-49), he also carries this logic several steps further, using a technique that Danielson describes: "perhaps the most intriguing example of Milton's participation in the (pluralizing) patter is his use of

the plural of *world,* which in the seventeenth-century could mean either *earth* or *universe*" (Danielson, 219). Thus, Milton allows his readers to imagine the possibility not only of multiple earths, but of multiple universes, the vastness of the system expanding even as it begins to be explored. While Ptolemy's universe is measurable and contained, Milton's universe escapes measurement, another way in which he echoes Copernicus, who asserts that earth's orb is "a point in respect of the immensity of that immovable heaven" (Danielson, 219). Another instance of this willingness to accept vastness comes when Adam tells Raphael, "When I behold this goodly frame, this world/ of heav'n and Earth consisting, and compute/ Their magnitudes, this Earth a spot, a grain,/ An atom, with the firmament compared/ And all her numbered stars" (VIII. 15-19).[viii]

In addition to describing a plurality of worlds and an immeasurable universe, Milton makes a strong case for the permeability of the universe by allowing his Satan to travel through what would have been, in Ptolemy's system, a series of impenetrable crystal spheres. For Satan, however, flight is infinitely easy, a refreshing jaunt through a universe composed of "pure marble air" (III.64). Furthermore, the unfallen future that Raphael describes to Adam consists, as Dennis Danielson describes it, of human ascension: "humans literally taking wings and ascending angel-like, with choice of earthly or heavenly dwelling places" (Danielson, 223). The universe of *Paradise Lost,* then, is infinite, expanding, and travelable. Expansion outward, then, seems to have been less terrifying for Milton than it was exhilarating. The tininess of earth, its relative obscurity in the enormous scheme of things, only made God's universe more wondrous.

As Danielson beautifully puts it, "(Milton's) was a universe, according to *Paradise Lost,*

abounding in manifold kinds of potentiality, beauty, excellence, and 'solid good'--great

things that yet can be loved and enjoyed by the tiny, at once privileged and humble,

inhabitants of this particular exquisite wandering star" (Danielson, 224).[viii] And yet even

for Milton--enthralled by Copernican indeterminacy--the idea of heliocentrism, that

stickiest of all of Copernicus' theories--felt uncertain enough to at least shroud in some

ambiguity.

For Hester Pulter, an unknown poet crafting her manuscript in the confinement of

her country house bedroom, the new system seems to have held nothing but unadulterated

promise.[viii] From the start, Pulter establishes herself as an enthusiastic heliocentrist, a

lover of the vast, decentralized universe as it was observed by Galileo. In "The Center,"

she writes a tribute to the central power of the sun, around which the other planets move:

> Oh that the splendent and Illustrious Sun
> Round whom the Planets triple (various) motions Run
> Diurnall, Annual, Trepedation
> Yet that all Quickning Orb keeps still his station
> Whilst they about his Throne Dance each his measure
> According to the Great Creators pleasure.

Pulter might have been describing her own poems, dancing "each his measure" in a

cyclical formation around their creator, who "keeps still" in her "station." There is a

galloping pleasure, here, in the idea of multiple--"triple (various)"--kinds of motion about

a central star. In "A Solitary Complaint," Pulter moves beyond this joyous expression of

general heliocentric motion to sketch a scientifically accurate Copernican cosmos, complete with each planet in its accurate position relative to the sun:

> Must I bee still confind to this Sad Grove
> When as those vast and Glorious Globes above
> Eternally in treble Motions Move
> Thrice Happy Hermes moves in Engles(?) day
> Beeing underneath the suns illustrious Raie
> Next Lovly Venus swiftly Hurries Round
> The Suns Bright Throne, with Equall Luster Crownd
> Next Tellus to whom Sol his Light extends
> Runs Round his Orb, fair Cinthia her attends
> Whom hee Irradiates with constnat Light
> Though shee appears so various to our sight
> Ars Soldiar like, noe sabboath ever knowes
> For Round the Fount of Light hee ever goes
> Then Jupiter attended like a king
> Four Raidient Moons he his brain doth bring
> Saturn as many following his huge Spheir
> At least no more to our dim sight appear.
> All these in Circle Phoebus Glorious Mound
> By whom with splendour all these starts are Crown'd

Before writing such a poem, Pulter must have encountered and accepted a diagram of the Copernican system, such as the one that Thomas Digges published in his *Perfit Description of the Caelestiall Orbes,* which details the position of Venus and Jupiter relative to the sun, as well as describing the motion of earth, itself orbited by the attendant moon.

In addition to embracing heliocentrism, Pulter was happy to acknowledge the concept of plural worlds that sprung from Copernicus' description of earth as "one of the planets." The passage quoted above from "A Solitary Complaint" goes on to examine the possibility that there might be other suns, around which other cosmos full of other worlds might rotate:

> But whether this Sun his Influence doth owe
> Unto som other Sun, none sure doth know
> But every Orb his fellow doth illustrate
> For non the ends of Nature dares to frustrate

In writing these lines, Pulter--like Milton--imagines not only other worlds but other galaxies. Her imagination does not stop, moreover, at the concept of other galaxies, but goes on to conceive of other civilizations inhabiting these other galaxies. In a poem written during the confinement of her fifteenth pregnancy, Pulter surmises not only that the moon might be another world, but that it might be inhabited by other people who could perceive the earth as nothing more than a moon:

> My thoughts being free I bid them take their flight
> Above the gloomey shades of Death and Night
> They overjoyed with such a large Comission
> Flew instantly without all intermission
> Up to that spheir where Nights Pale Queen doth run
> Round the Circumference of the Illustrious Sun
> Her Globious body Spacious was and bright
> That Half alone that from Sols Beams had light
> The other was imured in Shades of Night
> Nor did shee seem to mee as Poets fain
> Guiding her Chariot with a silver Rein
> Attir'd like some fair Nimph or Virgin Queen
> With naked Neck and Arms and Robes of Green
> Love sick Endimion oft hath thus her seen
> *But as my thoughts about her Orb was Hurld*
> *I did perceive shee was another World*
> *Thus beeing in my fancies raised so far*
> *This World appeard to me another star*
> *And as the Moon a shadow Casts and Light*
> *Soe is our Earth the Empres of Their Night* ("Written in 1648, When I
> Lay Inne, With My Son John"; Italics Mine.)

Pulter's poems--which, unlike her body, are free to travel to space--do not depict the moon in mythical terms but instead describe it in the terms of Copernican science. In so

doing, she sets the earth and the moon on common footing as fellow planets. This

leveling, in turn, allows her to conjure images of lunar citizens watching her through the

course of the night, and even allows her to go so far as to switch perspectives with these

lunar citizens, viewing Earth as a distant, luminous planet.

In addition to embracing the concept a heliocentric galaxy (or series of galaxies)

replete with a plurality of worlds, Pulter also accepts that the universe is permeable

enough to allow space flight. In a description that echoes Raphael's description of the

unfallen future of man, Pulter expresses the wish that her soul were pure enough to

ascend on wings through permeable space:

> For were my Soule from all transgression free
> Earth's fading pleasures I would then eclipse
> Corruption I would trample over thee
> And with Swift Eages Wings I'd mount the skie
> But o my Sins they will not let mee flie
> They fetter me more than Mortalitie. ("The Eclips")

But Pulter's universe is not only permeable to perfect souls. It is also, more radically,

permeable to dispersed mortal atoms, which fly outward into space after the body has

decomposed:

> For I noe Liberty expect to see
> Until to Atoms I dispersed bee
> Then beeing infranchis'd free as my Verse
> I shall surround this Spacious Universe
> Until by other Atoms thrust and hurl'd
> Wee give a being to another World. ("Untitled")

After death, then, Pulter's body will become as free as her mind and her verse, for it will

have dispersed into atoms and spread outward through the airy universe, flying

unconfined until they become the substance of one of the pluralized universe's pluralized

worlds. As in "The Center," when celestial bodies moved with joyous 'measure,' Pulter

links the freedom of space flight to her the form of her "verse," which is, unlike her own

body, capable of various kinds of motion through a universe that is--as redefined by

Copernicus--is infinitely open and free.

When Pulter talks about the Copernican heavens, she is not only describing the

physical universe but also the soul's eternal habitus. For Pulter, the astronomical heavens

are not a metaphor for a heaven; rather, they *are* heaven, in a radically literal sense. Her

Copernicanism, then, allows her to invent a radical new version of the afterlife. Her

afterlife does not entail ascension into an incorporeal, invisible realm. Instead, it entails

ascension into the visible universe in the form of dispersed atoms, which will cohere

again in the form of another planet, orbiting closer to the light and warmth of the sun. In

the passage quoted above, Pulter describes this process with physical precision,

imagining a kind of afterlife for both her body and her soul that does not depend on

forces of chemistry and physics rather than God's direct intervention. These forces will

disperse her body to atoms, in which state she will be free to wander around the

"spacious universe" at her will, still apparently conscious and sensate, endowed with

some measure of comprehending spirit. After this period of happy wandering, physics

will then push her atoms (and her spirit) back together into a new world of the sort that

she watches at night.

The dissolution of coherence that is the first stage of this process does not, for

Pulter, possess the same horror that it holds for Donne in "The Anniversarie," when he

complains, 'tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.' If Donne was called away from the lonely vastness of space by the offer of a stable position in the Anglican Church, this call never came for Pulter, for whom there was no place at the center of society to beckon her home. Perhaps as a result of this deprivation, her poetry commits itself to the freedoms of atomic dispersal in a way Donne stops short of.

Space also differs for Pulter and Donne in other pivotal ways. If, for Donne, space travel figures the chance to exist on a private planet-- alone with his love, free from the prying eyes of authorities--space travel must represent something slightly different for Pulter. She lived her life in privacy, alone in her country house, confined as a result of her pregnancies; there was no need for her to escape from surveillance, unless we are talking about the watchfulness of an internalized censor. Even if Pulter was haunted by an internalized oppressor, her poetry does not register an objection to this; it is her obscurity, her unwatched isolation, that pains her most directly. What, then, can the "inherently lonely" distances of space offer this woman, who lived her life on a lonely planet?

For one thing, as I have previously mentioned, the Copernican afterlife that Pulter imagines in her poetry provides an alternative to traditional Anglican definitions of death and afterlife, during which one's body dies then waits in the dark confinement of a coffin until the resurrection, when one's soul comes back to collect it. Pulter's poetry depicts this kind of death in particularly grisly terms. In "The Perfection of Patience and Knowledge," for instance, she imagines that her soul comes looking for her body but her body will not immediately wake, risking, therefore, the wretched fate of eternal

entombment. This kind of coffined afterlife, even if one's body does eventually wake and particularly if it might not, is unappealing even if you haven't spent your life in confinement. Pulter's alternative afterlife--in which the body decomposes, ascends, then coheres again as a star--avoids this coffined stage entirely. It also provides her the chance to never separate entirely from her body. In the process of dispersal and re-embodiment, there is no mention of a separation between body and soul; instead, soul is contained in matter that is rarified into imperceptible particles and then collected again for eternal existence. In this way, Pulter is like Milton in her monist conjunction of the spirit and the body,[viii] and even, one might argue, like Milton in her sense that matter will change form but never be destroyed. In the future that Pulter's poetry presents, absolutely nothing of a person's physical life will be lost in her afterlife. Her children will still be her children, her husband will still be her husband, and she will still be she, with her own very physical materiality. The materiality of her afterlife is magnified, moreover, by the fact that, while the first step of reincarnation is dispersal to rarified atoms, the second is condensation into the massive shape of voluptuously described, "globious" planets. In the afterlife that Pulter describes, then, a person will be even more materially present than she was in life.

The idea that a body could disperse and then travel through space, dependent on the Copernican theory of universal permeability, is one comfort provided by extraterrestrial travel. By imagining her re-embodied soul as orbiting among a multiplicity of other worlds, Pulter is also able to imagine the afterlife as a heavily populated, social existence. The dead are not lonely worlds, stationed by themselves at

the center of a vast universe, but rather members of a company of orbiting worlds. In

other words, where Donne returns from outer space to become an established member of

London society--and procreate rather feverishly--, Pulter travels to outer space to escape

procreative confinement and become an established member of interplanetary society.

Her enthusiasm for this social version of heaven is palpable in many of her poems, all of

which describe space orbiting as a highly convivial affair. In a poem written to her

daughters, for instance, Pulter complains about the loneliness of her life in the country

but goes on to describe the solace she takes from imagining that a "game of football with

the stars":

> Come my Deare Children to this Lonely Place,
> Where Grayes coole, stupifying Spring, doth Trace,
> Trust mee I think, I of this fount pertake;
> I am soe dull, and such sad fancies make;
> Nor can the quintissence of Bacchus Liquor,
> Nor the Elixer, make my spirits quicker.
> Those gross extractions doth my thoughts annoy;
> Tis fasting fancies are my soul's sole Joy.
> When my freed soul flies to her place of birth;
> Then am I brave, my foot then sprurns the earth.
> My mind being rais'd above these worldly Jars;
> Mee thinks I play at football with the stars.
> Contemning all these Garish Empty toyes
> My thoughts are fixt on true Celestiall Joyes.
> Come then, Exhillerate my drooping Spirit,
> Soe may you those eternall Joyes inherit.
> Soe may there ever in your happy breast,
> Those blessed Jems, Joy and Peace still rest.
> Then when Astrea, with her Sacred charms
> Hath thrown you in a mild mercies downey armes
> O're Look'd by Providence, allur'd by Love,
> To those Immortall Mansions above,
> Then when Each Eliment it's part shall claim,
> May you all live in Glory and in Fame. ("To My Deare J.P; M.P; P.P")

Nothing--not even liquor--can sooth the depths of Pulter's despair, until she imagines herself flying up through the permeable heavens to play a game of football with the stars. What at first sound like the inflamed fantasies of an isolated housewife evolve, by the end of the poem, into a statement of belief: when her children die, their bodies will disperse into chemical elements, which will in turn be reclaimed by interplanetary bodies which are pointedly plural: they will not be reclaimed by the mansion above, but by the mansions above, each mansion of which has an affinity for a separate element. While this is rough science, the plurality of heaven's 'mansions' is significant, for it links the notion of Copernican plurality with Jesus' democratic claim that 'in my father's house are many mansions' (John 14:2 KJV), painting a picture of an urban, populous afterlife.

It also permits the possibility of individuality in heaven, as opposed to faceless uniformity: we will still live in separate mansions, maintaining distinct elements, so that we can form a 'company,' rather than a whole. This idea of an individuated heavenly company reasserts itself in "The Lark," where Pulter again outlines her belief that the deceased are reincarnated as worlds rotating the sun. She goes on to describe the comfort that can be found from such a belief: "And when Death ceaset on thy Mortall Part/ Thou mayest indure it with a constant Heart/ And when thy Last friends, close thy Roleing Eyes/ Then chang thy place but not thy company." Heaven, for Pulter, is a social place, a crowd of other worlds and other people who have maintained a degree of their earthly individuality even as they join the intergalactic community.

Even while she is still living, in fact, the populous nature of heaven can be comforting to Pulter. In the poem she writes during the confinement of her fifteenth

pregnancy, the idea that other lives might exist on the moon provides solace because she

imagines that she is being watched by those lunar citizens as they endure the long

darkness of their un-illuminated night. This sense of being watched--an anathema to

many male poets living under excessive surveillance in the court--is a great relief to

Pulter, who often expresses frustration at her invisibility to the outside world.

"Obscurity" is one of the most heavily used nouns in all of Pulter's poetry, a refrain that

the poet returns to repeatedly. It is the topic, for instance, of "A Dialogue Between Two

Sisters, Virgins, Bewailing Their Solitary Life," in which the sisters complain about

living unwatched lives:

> These primroses like us neglected fade
> And violets sit weeping in the shade
> With us sad Hiacinths sighs out Ayes
> And lovely Aramantha doth display
> Her bewties here to noe admiring eye
> Just soe obliviated wee live and die
> And for your viol and my...Lute
> They both unstrung upon the wall hang Mute
> And in a unison will scarcely move
> They'r so unused ay mee to strains of Love
> With Philomele wee may lament too late
> Our most disastrous and too differing fate
> Oh my sad heart would we might pass our howers
> As innocently contented as these flowers
> Who shew their bewties to admiring eyes
> Than breathing dramatick odours dies.

Unwatched, obscure, the daughters begin to wish so badly for an audience that even a

quick death--if it were watched by an audience--becomes appealing. But even these

lonely girls' isolation bears no comparison to the obscurity of their mother. To make this

point, the poem ends with one of the daughters insisting that they ought to cease

indulging their sorrows in order to go console their even lonelier mother: "Then let us cease in vain to make our moan/ And goe to our sad Mother she's alone." Their mother-- Pulter herself--exists at the margins of the poem, a disembodied, voiceless character who is fully unwatched and thus even more alone than either one of her daughters. Given this fear of an unwatched life, the idea that the universe might consist of world upon world of watchful eyes, earthward focused at night, serves as a heartening solace.

In addition to finding comfort in the multiplicity of worlds and the permeability of space, Pulter is able to find comfort in that aspect of Copernicanism--heliocentrism--that is the most disturbing for Donne and the most ambiguous for Milton. For one thing, the idea of a universe that rotates around the sun provides Pulter with the hope that death might take her to a position closer to the sun. This supplies, for her, the hierarchy that Donne wishes for in a heliocentric universe. For Pulter, earth's partial obscurity, unbathed by the sun's light throughout the course of night, is a hideous flaw. Just as Donne hopes for an increased purity in space, Pulter hopes for a position of increased illumination and warmth; just as Donne mourns the mixed nature of earth's materials, Pulter mourns earth's partial darkness:

> Oh that the splendent and Illustrious Sun
> Round whom the Planets triple (various) motions Run
> Diurnall, Annual, Trepedation
> Yet that all Quickning Orb keeps still his station
> Whilst they about his Throne Dance each his measure
> According to the Great Creators pleasure,
> Oh that his Influence, his Heat, his Light,
> Would clasp this Globe, that these sad shades of night
> Might this our Horoscope involve noe more
> Nor mee the loss of Day soe oft deplore. ("The Center")

In her afterlife, after ascending into the heavens, Pulter holds on to the hope that she might ascend to a more illuminated orbit, inhabiting a body "brighter than this thy flesh" ("A Solitary Discourse").

A heliocentric universe, furthermore, reverses the paralysis that Pulter struggles against in poems such as "The Perfection of Patience and Knowledge": "My soul, in struggling thou dost ill,/ The Chicken in the shell lies still:/ Soe doth the Embryon in the Womb/ Soe doth the Corps, within the Tomb." The tomb/womb comparison is commonplace in Renaissance literature, but Pulter writes more graphically than most about the "black oblivious womb" deathtrap. In "The Complaint of the Thames," for instance, the worst punishment that she can imagine for the Rebels is that "Ocianus arke and horrid womb/ Should them involve." The most common action of Pulter's poetic wombs is to "involve," a reverse birth by which living creatures are pulled back up into an enveloping body. This heavy conflation of the womb and the tomb has grave implications for Pulter, the mother of fifteen children; in so repudiating a part of her body that must have seemed to dominate her life, she figures her own body as a trap. It is a trap within a trap, a prison locked in a bedroom, stuck in the country, unable to move as every other creature is entitled to move. To idea of existing--both in life and after--on or as a perpetually moving planet, then, serves as a great relief in Pulter's poetry, making heliocentrism a much less threatening doctrine than it was to other poets in Pulter's time.

In depicting the Copernican universe as hopeful--despite the impurity of its materials, its unmoored motions and its constant relativity--Pulter re-imagines a science that was threatening for many of her fellow poets. Similarly, in redefining what it would

mean to die in a Copernican universe, she uses science to recreate death in a less chilling mold. In her astronomic poetry, the afterlife is no longer achieved through privations of the body, its senses, and its social attachments; instead, the afterlife is accessed through an intensification of each of these states: one lives eternally with a larger, planetary body, with a heightened sense of motion and warmth, surrounded by the company of family and friends. Both of these acts of poetic imagination take privations--of earth's privileged place in the universe, of our body after death--and transform them into positive states. In the same way, Pulter transforms the state of living as a marginalized, obscured woman and turns it into a state that is common to all earth dwellers, each of whom is living on a banished planet.

For Pulter, Copernican science serves as a great equalizer: in his system, as opposed to Ptolemy's, we all live a marginalized life. In Pulter's Copernican poetry, all human beings live as obscured, obliviated versions of themselves, waiting to become the more central, less confined versions of their afterlife. The state of deprivation--and privacy, in its root--is therefore made public. Once privacy becomes general, its nature changes: it is a part of the human condition, one that can be either explored or ignored, embraced or disregarded. Our choice becomes how we live with our fundamental privacy, rather than whether or not we live in privacy, and we are all linked by that choice. Our very privacy, then, makes us less private. This is a powerful trick for Pulter to perform. Even if she cannot love her own mortal privacy, she writes it into a space where it is no longer the province of the weak or the inept, the curse of citizens who have been stripped of their public duties or the prison of people who have lost their access to

society. Rather, privacy is a state common to even the most public figures in London, a

state that is an inextricable part of public life. In a Copernican universe, one can't exist

without the other.

viii My descriptions of Donne's Copernican tendencies are indebted to William Empson's "Donne the Spaceman," in which he describes Donne's willingness to conceive of other worlds, inhabited by other civilizations, which would have required the unorthodox possibility of multiple messiahs.

viii Dennis Danielson's "Astronomy," in *Milton in Context,* Malabika Sarkar's ""The Visible Diurnal Sphere: Astronomical Images of Space and Time in *Paradise Lost,"* and Gregory Chaplin's "Beyond Sacrifice: Milton and the Atonement" all offer serious explorations of Milton's engagement with the new astronomy. These authors examine the ways in which new Copernican concepts enrich the imaginative universe of Milton's epic and uphold his heterodox views on religion.

viii For a description of Donne as stubbornly Ptolemaic, see John Carey's notes in *John Donne, The Major Works;* for a description of Donne as virulently reactionary against all developments in science, see Merritt Y. Hughes, "Kidnapping Donne," in which Hughes claims that Donne "never took natural science seriously" and saw Copernicus' new system as "a portent of evil." William Empson's "Donne the Space Man" argues that Donne's early flights of fancy were only plausible in a Copernican universe.

viii Judy Hayden's two collections of essays about the new science and literary discourse do much to remedy this, by examining the ways that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets--both major and minor--absorbed scientific discourse into their poetry. Of the essays collected by Hayden, however, only one addresses the ways in which seventeenth-century writers reacted to new conceptions of space heralded by Copernicus and Galileo.

viii As an example of the perspective that Milton was a conservative astronomer, reactionary against (or ignorant of) the new astronomy of Copernicus, see Roy Flannagan: "What was called the 'new philosophy,' the discovery that the earth revolved around the sun, was in the process of replacing the geocentric theory of the universe during Milton's lifetime, thought Milton himself took little public notice of it...though Milton deplored Galileo's persecution at the hands of the Inquisitors, he nevertheless makes the universe of *Paradise Lost* that of Galileo's Ptolemaic forebears, and Milton's cosmology is generally geocentric" (324-325). For a representative example of the perspective that Milton was an amateur or even careless astronomer, see Anita Lawson, who concludes that "as most scholars now agree, it is unnecessary to assume that Milton followed the scheme of any particular astronomer in *Paradise Lost.* Epics are not science textbooks. The breathtaking astronomical images of *Paradise Lost* come from diverse--and often contradictory--sources, and Milton took those parts that suited his inspiration and left the rest

(47). For an earlier example, see Francis Johnson, who writes that we "should read the cosmological passages of Paradise Lost as great poetry, the product of the combined influence upon Milton's imagination of the ancient astronomical poets and the recent telescopic discoveries. We should not be misled into thinking of them as important documents describing accurately the state of astronomical opinion in England in the mid-seventeenth century" (287). Earlier, Johnson writes that "Milton did not...embark upon a thorough and profound study of the basic mathematical principles of the various astronomical theories." While Milton may have combined multiple cosmological systems in *Paradise Lost,* it seems wrongheaded to dismiss this tendency as the product of haphazard or half-hearted study.

[viii] For a representative example of this new body of critics, see Maura Brady: "A growing body of criticism, however, has suggested that the "glass of Galileo" differs in some important respects from a telescope, though for the most part the point has not been argued explicitly. The instrument has been associated less with astronomy per se than with the broader project of envisioning the world anew...In none of these readings is the 'optic glass' a telescope, if by 'telescope' we mean either the instrument that transparently reveals hard truths about the cosmos, or, to borrow Albanese s definition, 'a neutral conduit for previously constituted visual phenomena to be examined with dispassion.' Rather, it is an instrument that participates in the active reconstruction of meaning amid the epistemological upheaval of the seventeenth century."

[viii] My discussion of Milton and procreation anxiety is indebted to John Rumrich's *Milton Unbound.* My examples of Milton's images of excessive fertility come from "'Comus': A Fit of the Mother," p. 79. See also Louis Schwartz, *Milton and Maternal Mortality*

[viii] For an excellent description of the rites of early modern childbirth, see Louis Schwartz, *Milton and Maternal Mortality.*

[viii] All these usages are taken from *The Oxford English Dictionary*

[viii] John Carey, ed. *John Donne, The Major Works* (Oxford, 1990), 463. While Carey notes Donne's nostalgia for the perfect circles of Plato's universe, Aristotle's universe, which inherited Plato's circles and added that the universe must be spherical--might also be the reference.

[viii] Danielson uses Flannagan as a typical example.

[viii] For this summary of Milton's relationship to the Copernican cosmos, I have relied heavily on Dennis Danielson's "Astronomy," in *Milton in Context.*

[viii] Another example of Milton's willingness to embrace an immeasurable, disordered universe is his positive depiction of chaos in *Paradise Lost.* For more on Milton's appreciation for chaotic indeterminacy, see John Rumrich, "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos."

[viii] Like Pulter, Aemelia Lanyer finds little to love in the rigidity of the Ptolemaic system when she uses it in "The Description of Cookham" as a metaphor for her frustrating lack of social mobility: "Unconstant fortune, thou art most to blame/ Who casts us down into so low a frame;/ Where our great friends we cannot daily see,/ So great a diff'rence is there in degree. Many are placed in those orbs of state, Parters in honor, so ordained by fate" (l. 103-108). It's possible that socio-political marginalization, of the sort that would have been faced by any female poet in the seventeenth-century, was a good incentive for turning away from the fixity of the Ptolemaic spheres in favor of a universe with more mobility.

[viii] For more on Milton's monism, see Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*: *Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England.*

Chapter 2: The Innovative Errata of Anne Bradstreet

If Hester Pulter uses a poetics of space travel to escape the oppressive

confinements of her life as an early modern mother, the other poets I will examine use

decidedly more earthbound strategies. Other early modern female poets--such as Anne

Bradstreet and Aemelia Lanyer--faced similarly constrained conditions in which to live

and write their poetry, and yet these poets do not find solace in interstellar flight; instead,

these poets use subtler poetic means by which to break through the walls of their

confinement in order to exist in a wider company. If Pulter hopes to exist in a larger

cohort of planets, Anne Bradstreet--a female poet confined to the distant colonies of

Massachusetts Bay, writing poetry that she knows will be read as a woman's simple

verse--writes in patterns that knock down the barriers between the company of female

poets and the company of poets in general. In her "Prologue," Bradstreet acknowledges

and even seems to accept a strict division between male and female poets. She asks only

that she be given some small recognition for her contribution as a woman poet: "Let

Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are/ Men have precedency and still excel,/ It is

but vain unjustly to wage war;/ Men can do best, and women know it well./ Preeminence

in all and each is yours;/ Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours" (Bradstreet,

16). If Pulter faces the walls of her bedroom, Bradstreet faces the walls between male

and female poets, which confine her poetic output to the realm of marginal, homely, and

small. She will be lucky if great poets deign to read her work; if they do stoop so low, she asks only that her lines be read as the humble work of a woman, rather than the product of a poet in general: "And oh ye high flown quills that soar the skies,/ And ever with your prey still catch your praise,/ If e'er you deign these lowly lines your eyes,/ Give thyme or parsley wreath, I ask no bays;/ This mean and unrefined ore of mine/ Will make your glist'ring gold but more to shine" (Bradstreet, 16-17).

Her acknowledgement of the unavoidable divisions between male and female poetics has caused critics to dismiss Bradstreet as an excessively servile poet, her poetry deformed by the misogynistic pressures of her era. What has gone unrecognized, however, is that as soon as she stipulates the divisions between the male and the female poetic tradition, Bradstreet proceeds to insert herself into a series of poetic genres that are neither domestic nor humble. In her early poetry, published in *The Tenth Muse,* Bradstreet writes histories of the world, political poetry about the division between old and new England, and elegies for the reigning male poets of her era. She writes in heroic couplets, widely considered a brave and even martial style, and she invokes martial imagery. Clearly, she is not as happy to accept the divisions between high-flown male poetry and lowly female poetry as her "Prologue" would have us believe. Even the fact of her prologue--clearly written for the benefit of male readers--demonstrates that she did not intend to write domestic verse for the eyes of like-minded feminine readers. She addresses herself to men, and writes in genres that were considered to appeal to male audiences. She was not a woman writer writing for women, but rather wrote in ways that might reach across the boundaries of gendered verse.

To address herself to a wider company, she adopts one of the most rigorous formal constraints available to poets in her time--the heroic couplet, its verses bound in tight succession by consecutive end rhymes--as though proving herself capable of a kind of style that was considered heroic, masculine, and brave. After adopting this form, however, she moves beyond it. Rather than merely parroting a 'masculine' style, she breaks open the bound parcels of her form, using irregularities of syntax, metaphor, and rhyme. After sidling up to the wall of heroic verse, Bradstreet systematically knocks holes in its veneer, creating a more open forum in which to speak about public topics-- history, war, literary genius--that would have been traditionally reserved for male poets. It is the play between the acceptance of strict, canonical form and the breaking open of cracks through which a marginalized speaker might speak, that gives Anne Bradstreet's early poetry its unique power. In these formal struggles to escape from confinement, Bradstreet positions herself at the forefront of a long tradition in American poetry, of using breaks in formal veneer to express moments of great psychic distress.

In modern scholarship, the question of Anne Bradstreet's value as a poet has often receded behind the more certain fact of her value as a pioneer of women's and American poetry. This means that while generations of students have read Anne Bradstreet's work because she was the first American poet, and a woman at that, many have emerged from the experience unconvinced of her poetry's intrinsic worth. John Berryman, who wrote a book-length homage to Bradstreet, denies all anxiety of influence by proclaiming his allegiance to this camp of skeptical readers: for him, Bradstreet was a "boring, high

minded Puritan woman who may have been our first American poet but was not a good one" (Berryman, *Freedom*, 328). Alan Golding takes him at his word, using Berryman as a keystone in his argument that poets are often drawn to write about other poets for reasons that have nothing to do with style. This argument depends on a whole-hearted disparagement of Bradstreet's artistic merit, to which cause he recruits a small army of willing critics such as Carol Johnson, who claims that Bradstreet is "an undistinguished versifier" characterized by "endearing incompetence," and Joel Conarroe, who describes Bradstreet's work as "tedious" and "extraordinarily dull" (Golding, 58-59). According to Golding and the scholars he invokes, Berryman's homage to the inept Bradstreet proves that "poets do *not* always respond to other poets chiefly on the basis of style. Berryman responds to Bradstreet's social and historical position" (Golding, 59). In the face of such certainty among prominent poets and critics, the only question that seems to remain is why, if Bradstreet is so clearly a poet who can only be valued by her sociological role, do we continue to force generations of young readers to toil through her 'tedious' Quaternions?

Since the days of Berryman's equivocal homage, an impressive number of critics have come to Bradstreet's rescue, claiming that she developed a simple but vibrant style that is expressive in its terse revelations. These are critics that Golding carefully avoids in his review of Bradstreet's critical reception; still, the camp of critics who enjoy reading Bradstreet is strong. Adrienne Rich, an early Bradstreet proponent, describes her late poetry as delicate and reticent: "neither bathos nor self-indulgence cloud the economy of these lines; they are honest, tender and homely as a letter out of a marriage in which the

78

lovers are also friends" (Rich, xvii). Deanna Fernie also praises Bradstreet's late poetry

for its stripped-down refinement: "the simple language and 'fourteener' structure of such

lines isolates and electrifies words in a way that anticipates Emily Dickinson, as well as

the dramatic urgency of her poems, placing Bradstreet within a larger American tradition

of abstract and internalized verse" (Fernie, 28). Eavan Boland similarly describes the

development of a mature and artistic style in Bradstreet's later work: "The music shifted:

the volume was turned down; the voice became at once more private and more intense.

A quick-walking cadence accompanied the neighborly, definite voice in which she now

told her story. These were cadences that came from the New England moment in which

she lived. At last the complicated England of her youth was receding" (Boland, 913).

These critics are united in their respect for the stylistic merit of Bradstreet's late,

domestic poetry. They are also united in their unwillingness to extend such a courtesy to

Bradstreet's early lyrics.[viii] Boland claims that the early poems are "only partially

successful. A heavy Spenserian shadow hangs over them, as if her girlhood ghost were

haunting the paneled rooms of Sempringham. They pay elaborate and conventional

tribute to the old heroes and graces of her past: the language rarely shines" (Boland, 913).

Fernie writes that Bradstreet only finds "a true instrument with which to convey her

metaphysical and spiritual concerns" when she is "released from the didactic aims of the

'Quaternion' poems (Fernie, 28). For Rich, the early poems can only be described as

"long, rather listless pieces (that) seem to have been composed in a last compulsive effort

to stay in contact with the history, traditions, and values of her former world" (Rich, xv).

According to these critics, Bradstreet shines only when she breaks with the masculinist

conventions of Renaissance poetry by writing 'homespun' lyrics about intimate, domestic scenes and asserting a female subjectivity that yearns to free itself from the chains of early modern verse.

In response to this dominant critical strain,[viii] some scholars have attempted to redeem Bradstreet's early poems by claiming that they, too, struggle to assert a female subjectivity within poetic conventions that seem designed for male voices only. Timothy Sweet, for instance, sees Bradstreet questioning the gender-based power relations of the male author-female muse relationship. By invoking her own muse in the early elegies, Bradstreet calls attention to the patriarchal conventions into which she was attempting to write her female voice: her poems are "*strategies of re-formation,* which make visible (even if they cannot immediately alter) the discursive strategy that allows male poets, writing in the dominant discourse, to produce a masculine subjectivity" (Sweet, 153). Her attempts cannot change the rules of discourse, Sweet claims, but they can at least point out its flaws, thus paving the way for future female authors to break real ground. Ivy Schweitzer makes similar claims for the merit of Bradstreet's early poetry as a valiant attempt to create roles for women in early modern conventions. Still, for Schweitzer as for Sweet, this project is doomed in the end: by cross-dressing to license her own speech, she reinforces the power of the male authorial conventions. In these poems, "Bradstreet shows that she may have fought and lost the requisite Oedipal wrestling match with her poetic precursors, but the fight was on their turf. She had yet to stake out her own territory" (Schweitzer, 307). The doomed project of Anne Bradstreet's early elegies, then, is to strive to be a female poet within conventions that privilege male voice; by

demonstrating the impossibility of such a task, her early poems themselves are failures that break ground for future female work.

In describing Bradstreet's early accomplishment as that of striving to create space for a distinctly feminine perspective, however, we return Bradstreet to her position as a sociological triumph whose aesthetic innovations can be overlooked as long as she is acting as a pioneer. This critical approach is, one could argue, nothing more than a progressive reformulation of Harold Bloom's patronizing observation that Bradstreet has a knack for expressing, "(the) charming sense of the difference involved in being a woman poet" (Bloom, 20). Schweitzer and Sweet's thesis leaves us with the same problem we started with: just because Bradstreet was (or attempted to be) one of the first female voices in early modern poetry, does that mean we have to be charmed by her work?

To be left with this problem is a shame, since Bradstreet's early elegies, Bradstreet actually innovates stylistically in ways that should be recognized. In fact, she innovates in ways that Berryman perhaps unwittingly emulates in his twentieth-century homage. Whether or not he was willing to admit his stylistic inheritance, Berryman's poem features strategies similar to those that Bradstreet uses in her early poetry. Like Berryman's poem, Bradstreet's elegies for Sidney and Du Bartas wrestle with what it is like to write in the shadow of a poetic precursor. Also like Berryman's, Bradstreet's elegies for Sidney and Du Bartas occasionally veer towards silence. As a result of the subject's oppressive influence over her poetic lines, in addition to her insecurities as a female poet writing far from the centers of cultural production, Bradstreet sometimes

81

threatens to give up on the process of expressing her debt. In these moments of near-collapse, Bradstreet's submissive style breaks but her voice continues. So that she can continue to speak in the face of an intimidating public order, Bradstreet creates strategic breaks in her form that perfectly express the divide between the private voice and the silencing public world.

To elaborate on the nature of these strategic breaks, this chapter focuses in particular on Bradstreet's manipulation of prosody and metaphor. In her early elegies, Bradstreet chooses to write in heroic couplets, a choice of form that has perhaps cemented some critics' sense that they are deadly stiff.   By choosing heroic couplets, however, Bradstreet demonstrates her adequacy in what was considered by many poets of the Renaissance, including Ben Jonson, to be the "bravest sort" of form,[viii] one that was appropriate to topics such as memorializing famous poets and other heroic figures. In so doing, she pays her respects to the conventions of public discourse, as well as admitting her desire to write from within an acknowledged order. But she also moves beyond this initial bravery. In moments when the public order threatens to silence her voice by reminding her of gender and locale, Bradstreet breaks the form of that public order, substituting her own unconventional prosodic style.

In her elegy for Sidney, for instance, Bradstreet astutely interrupts or overflows the limits of her chosen metrical conventions in order to weigh in on the public event of his death without losing the particular difference of her own individual voice. She enacts a similar tension on the plane of metaphor. In her elegy for Guillaume du Bartas, she demonstrates a confidence in the public domain of classical metaphors, comparing her

82

colonial existence to mythical scenes from Greek and Latin poetry; however, she also expands on the significance of those metaphors by allowing them to run together in ways that confuse traditional depictions of authorship and subjectivity. In her elegy for Du Bartas, her metaphors are mixed to the point that women are confused with men, births are blended with deaths, and agency becomes an inextricable part of passivity. In moments such as these, a rupture opens in the formal fabric of her elegies, which expresses the disinclination to be smooth, complete and obedient within a form that insists on respectful compliance. Instead of accepting the confinement of a publicly accepted form of speech, Bradstreet writes in a way that occasionally permits her language to stand outside of formal containment.

In other words, Bradstreet's early lines are not the "proportioned, spiritless poems" that Berryman has Bradstreet accuse herself of writing in his Homage (Berryman, *Homage,* 42.6); rather, they are disproportioned and spirited in ways that I will argue are strikingly similar to Berryman's own poem. Just because a poet refrains from giving credit to his stylistic precursors does not mean that he has not been influenced. By examining the ways that Berryman's homage reflects Bradstreet's prosodic and metaphorical innovations, it is possible to trace the lasting aesthetic influence that Bradstreet's poetry exerted on Berryman, and indeed the influence that she has exerted in American literary history. She is an author who should not only be read because she has pride of place as the first published poet in America, or because she clears a space for female subjectivity, but because she was an influential poet in her own stylistic right.

This argument depends on an admittedly anachronistic valuation of Bradstreet's poetics. The idea that broken style might be a positive stylistic choice--rather than a poetic failure--would not have been popular in the seventeenth century. Critics in Bradstreet's time admired harmoniousness of prosody, not prosody that functioned as what Helen Vendler calls "a cloning of the kinesthetic perceptions of the poet" (Vendler, 5). Bradstreet was aware of the standards of her time. In "The Author to her Book," she seems to subscribe to these standards obediently: speaking to her own work, she complains, "I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,/ And rubbing off a spot still made a flaw. I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,/ Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet" (Bradstreet, 221). Still, Bradstreet does not, in the end, stretch her poetic limbs so that they become perfectly proportional. Instead, she signals a willingness to publish her work despite its hobbling difference. In "The Author to Her Book," she sends her book out into the world despite its costume of "homespun cloth." Similarly, in her "Prologue," she happily invites a "thyme or parsley wreath," rather than the traditional bays (Bradstreet, 17); if bays are the reward of conquest and triumph, parsley stands for useful knowledge (especially medicinal) and joy, thyme for activity and courage. These are less grand symbols, but they are in many ways more valuable: Bradstreet admits her difference, but she does not admit inherent inferiority. She makes the decision to model her poetry in a different kind of image, one that posits merit in the fact of its difference, its fabrication out of distinct textiles, ingredients, and metaphors.[viii]

And even if Bradstreet did not signal a willingness to publish different--even experimental--poetry, I would argue that it is not wrongheaded for us to appreciate her

84

poetry in the light of modern standards, as long as those standards are not privileged over the standards of Bradstreet's time. Bradstreet may not have been aware that she was initiating a tradition of poetry, but, as T.S Eliot puts it, the fact that the tradition did in fact develop retroactively adds historical significance to Bradstreet's poetry:

> The necessity that (a new artist) shall conform (to traditions started by previous poets), that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.
>
> (Eliot, 50).

Bradstreet's poetry has a relation, then, to the modern poetics of breakage that she could not have predicted. It is, in fact, changed by that poetry, formed again into the precursor to a tradition of which Bradstreet could not have been aware when she wrote.

This chapter does not claim that Bradstreet's broken verse is better than, say, Katherine Phillips' smoother prosody; it will argue, however, that Bradstreet's breaks serve to express the tension inherent in moments of psychic strain. In choosing to include these errors, Bradstreet adapted her poetic voice to the pressures of her life, proving herself not only an adept but an inventive poet. Bradstreet's willingness to use error to express herself, moreover, is a inaugural moment of what Eliot calls 'ideal order' in American poetry, which in itself gives her an importance beyond that of first American

poet. If we imagine her as a poet of innovative errors, she becomes part of a tradition of

style-breaking that is hallowed in American poetry. In the twentieth century, this

tradition came to a head in Ezra Pound's demand that poetry break the chains of

pentameter: "as regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in

sequence of the metronome" (Pound). Since Pound's manifesto, style-breaking has come

to be equated with liberalism, style maintenance with conservatism. As Donald Davie

describes it, using the examples of Stevens and Pound, we can divide our poets by those

who are willing to err and those others who are not: "'To Break the pentameter,' said

Pound, 'that was the first heave.' Stevens has never made the break....his conservatism in

this department is part and parcel with his conservatism in structure and in rhetoric."

(Davie, 458-59). Whether or not we agree that Stevens is a conservative poet--or a poet

unwilling to make breaks--it seems clear that the art of erring has become a hallmark of

modern American poetry, and if Bradstreet can claim a place at the forefront of that

movement it would be an important place indeed.

Based on the trajectory of her later poetry, it is possible to conclude that

Bradstreet's momentary breaches of formal convention are purposeful strategies, rather

than the errors of a poet who could not perfectly control her verse. Her late poetry

similarly reveals an inclination to adopt innovative verse forms. "Contemplations," for

instance, which Bradstreet added to *The Tenth Muse* in its second edition, depends, as

others have noticed, on a single error in rhyme scheme that alters the import of the entire

poem. Alvin H. Rosenfeld has argued that Bradstreet's decision to end "Contemplations"

with a couplet—rather than the triplet that ends each of the poem's thirty-two other

stanzas—removes the poem from its religious mode in order to conclude on a

Shakespearean note (Rosenfeld, 134-135). Regardless of whether or not the couplet

implies a Shakespearean shift, it certainly implies a shift away from the rules that bound

the previous stanzas and a level of comfort with the idea of using formal error to express

an evolving sense of religious consolation. Similarly, the eighth stanza of

"Contemplations," which describes the poet's "wand'ring feet," ends with a line that

includes an extra metrical foot, making tangible the poem's wayward wandering: "But

Ah and Ah again, my imbecility!" Just as she includes these moments of metrical error

to express heartfelt shifts in her meditation on religion, Bradstreet uses prosodic errors in

her elegy for Sidney to express evolving ideas about her authority as an elegist.

This strategy of pointed metrical error is the same strategy that many modern

poets also employ. These poets, like Bradstreet, struggle with the sense that the private

voice might be lost in the attempt to represent it publicly; they exploit chinks in the

façade of public ceremony in order to provide glimpses of a more private kind of

existence. For instance, in Seamus Heaney's elegy for an Irish soldier who died fighting

for the British in World War I, "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge," the poet elegizes a

figure he knows only publicly, as a bronze statue of a historical hero:

> The bronze soldier hitches a bronze cape
> That crumples stiffly in imagined wind
> No matter how the real winds buff and sweep
> His sudden hunkering run, forever craned
>
> Over Flanders. Helmet and haversack,
> The gun's firm slope from butt to bayonet,
> The loyal, fallen names on the embossed plaque --
> It all meant little to the worried pet

I was in nineteen forty-six or seven,
Gripping my Aunt Mary by the hand
Along the Portstewart prom, then round the crescent
To thread the Castle Walk out to the strand.

The pilot from Coleraine sailed to the coal-boat.
Courting couples rose out of the scooped dunes.
A farmer stripped to his studs and shiny waistcoat
Rolled the trousers down on his timid shins.

At night when coloured bulbs strung out the sea-front
Country voices rose from a cliff-top shelter
With news of a great litter - "we'll pet the runt!" -
And barbed wire that had torn a friesian's elder.

Francis Ledwidge, you courted at the seaside
Beyond Drogheda one Sunday afternoon.
Literary, sweet-talking, countrified,
You pedalled out the leafy road from Slane

Where you belonged, among the dolorous
And lovely: the May altar of wild flowers,
Easter water sprinkled in outhouses,
Mass-rocks and hill-top raths and raftered byres.

I think of you in your Tommy's uniform,
A haunted Catholic face, pallid and brave,
Ghosting the trenches with a bloom of hawthorn
Or silence cored from a Boyne passage-grave.

It's summer, nineteen-fifteen. I see the girl
My aunt was then, herding on the long acre.
Behind a low bush in the Dardanelles
You suck stones to make your dry mouth water.

It's nineteen-seventeen. She still herds cows,
But a big strafe puts the candles out in Ypres:
'My soul is by the Boyne, cutting new meadows...
My country wears her confirmation dress.'

'To be called a British soldier while my country
has no place among nations...' You were rent

88

By shrapnel six weeks later. ' I am sorry
That party politics should divide our tents.'

In you, our dead enigma, all the strains
Criss-cross in useless equilibrium
And as the wind tunes through this vigilant bronze
I hear again the sure confusing drum

You followed from Boyne water to the Balkans
But miss the twilit note your flute should sound.
You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones
Though all of you consort now underground. (Heaney, 176)

In the penultimate line of the poem, Heaney breaks out of perfect iambic pentameter in

order to express the disharmony that must have nagged at Ledwidge while he fought in

the trenches, as well as the fluidity that would not allow him to easily pick sides: "you

were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones." The line is impossible to scan

clearly: because the "you" differentiates Ledwidge from the others, one hears it as a

stressed syllable. If this is the case, the line would scan: *you* were not *keyed* or *pitched*

like these *true*-blue *ones.* The initial trochaic substitution, as well as the mid-line

anapest, tug against a more rote iambic scan of the line. Furthermore, "true-blue ones" is

difficult to hear without stressing each of the three syllables. This three syllable spondee

causes the line to overflow its meter, or at least to heel against the even keel of its

potential iambs. It has a different personality, its own unique strains, that cannot be

controlled by the metrical forces that controlled the previous, and the subsequent, lines.

Like Bradstreet in her overflowing couplets and her broken lines, Heaney uses the

"errata" of a jarring meter to break out of the ineptitudes of speech imposed by an

overwhelming public order, to balance the flute against the drum. It is a hopeful opening

in the poem; in this line, we grasp at a key that is not true-blue, and imagine all the

shades of self that elude us. When Heaney restores iambic order in the final line it is not

because he cannot escape the drum of order, but because the subject of his elegy was

finally subjected to it.

Such instances of prosodic error can be a crafty way of inserting difference,

buckling the poem at a point of resistance. Centuries before Heaney took up the pen,

Anne Bradstreet also employed this technique. Admittedly, Bradstreet seems at first

glance to be less than audacious in her early prosodic choices. Her early elegies (as well

as nearly all the poems published in her first edition) are written in heroic couplets, a

choice of form that has led critics to dismiss them (with the exception of "The

Prologue"[viii]) as formally imitative and dull.[viii] The choice of heroic couplet, however,

need not in itself imply cookie-cutter verse. The heroic couplet is ideal for public poetic

discourse, as W. Piper has shown, because it performs a balancing act between

"persistent order" and "interior flexibility":

> The closed couplet, as it came to be produced in this dynamic fashion, was primarily a medium for public discourse—rather than a medium for dramatic effects, say, or for those of meditation. Its persistent order allowed a poet to define issues, to balance arguments, and, in the process, to give the impression of a clear and balanced mind. *Its interior flexibility and its exterior movement allowed him, on the one hand, to respond to the details, to the individual aspects and elements, of his discourse and, on the other, to extend his attention so as to comprehend the full range of its complexities; and, correspondingly, to give the impression of a responsive and comprehensive mind.* Such a medium, then, wonderfully satisfied the vital need of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to formulate public statements and to carry on public discussion. (Piper, 23-24, italics mine)

The choice of this public form, in other words, does not by itself mean that its author has consigned herself to compulsive imitation. Instead, each poet displays his or her own degree of individuality within the given form. We know this intuitively, and so we would not think to describe Pope as imitative of Donne merely because both poets chose to write their poems in heroic couplets. Rather, as Piper elaborates, we can recognize the development, over more than a century, of a spectrum of heroic couplets, from most structured to most fluid. Bradstreet's lines, which often refuse to be contained by the limits of the distich, fall on the more fluid side of the spectrum. This should not cause us to dismiss her as a poor craftsman; rather, we should consider where she falls along the spectrum, and whether the flexibility she exercises within the form is expressive or bland.

Bradstreet's elegy for Sir Philip Sidney begins squarely within what Piper describes as the earliest (and blandest) tradition of English heroic couplets. In these early lines, the poem lists Sidney's accomplishments in an accumulating catalogue that is monotonous in tone:

> When England did enjoy her halcyon days,
> Her noble Sidney wore the crown of bays;
> As well an honour to our British land,
> As she that swayed the scepter with her hand;
> Mars and Minerva did in one agree,
> Of arms and arts he should a pattern be,
> Calliope with Terpsichore did sing,
> Of poesy, and of music, he was king;
> His rhetoric struck Polymnia dead,
> His eloquence made Mercury wax red:
> His logic from Euterpe won the crown,
> More worth was his than Clio could set down. (Bradstreet, 189)

Each idea spans the length of no more than two lines, and with each new couplet one gets the sense that Bradstreet is starting again, rather than variously pursuing a fluid argument from verse to verse. If the first four of these lines at least extend the sense somewhat continuously, the rest of the lines can be broken down into one or two line items in a growing list of bemused accomplishments. There is little use of caesura, no enjambment, and the toneless result appears as hackneyed as critics have long claimed.

This sequence of individual lines written in praise of an idealized Sidney continues only through line 70, however, when it abruptly halts. Bradstreet turns to considering her own poetic voice at this point, as compared to Sidney's. The comparison seems to threaten her speech; overwhelmed by his reputation and his prowess, her verse finds it difficult to proceed:

> Fain I would show how he fame's paths did tread
> But now into such lab'rinths I am lead
> With endless turns, the way I find not out,
> How to persist my Muse is more in doubt;
> Which makes me now with Sylvester confess,
> But Sidney's Muse can sing his worthiness.
> The Muses' aid I craved; they had not will
> To give to their detractor any quill;
> With high disdain, they said they gave no more,
> Since Sidney had exhausted all their store.
> They took from me the scribbling pen I had,
> (I to be eased of such a task was glad)
> Then to revenge this wrong, themselves engage,
> And drave me from Parnassus in a rage.
> Then wonder not if I no better sped,
> Since I the Muses thus have injured.
> I, pensive for my fault, sat down and then
> Errata through their leave threw me my pen;
> My poem to conclude, two lines they deign,
> Which writ, she bade return't to them again;
> So Sidney's fame I leave to England's rills,

His bones do lie interred in stately Paul's. (Bradstreet, 191)

In these lines, Bradstreet's syntax and meter evoke her own halting progress. Rather than progressing through the sense from preposition to subject or from subject to preposition, the line moves from preposition to subject and back to preposition again: "But now into such lab'rinths I am lead/ With endless turns." If the prepositions had stayed together ("into such lab'rints with endless turns I am lead"), the direction might have seemed unified; however, the syntax of the line gives the sense that the subject is tugged in more ways than one. Her couplets seem to move in two directions at once, taking a step backwards for every forwards step. The frustration caused by this stutter-step is palpable.

As does her zig-zagging syntax, the length of her thoughts begins to countermand the orderly form of her couplets. The second line of the first couplet fits more easily with the first line of the second couplet: "Fain I would show how he fame's paths did tread/ But now into such lab'rinths I am lead/ With endless turns, the way I find not out." All three lines are enjambed, but it is the second and the third that fit together most closely, breaking the bounds of the original couplet. At the end of the first four lines, the sense continues into the next couplet, a clause modifying the previous couplet: "With endless turns, the way I find not out,/ How to persist my Muse is more in doubt;/ Which makes me now with Sylvester confess." In considering the prospect of silence before the example of a male poetic predecessor, Bradstreet's thoughts burst through the distich, refusing to be enclosed in couplets. In addition to enjambment, Bradstreet also uses caesurae to pull against the organizing form of the couplet. In the sentence describing the muses' refusal to allow her to speak, two of four lines are broken with caesurae, which is

striking given the scarcity of caesurae in the rest of the poem. The first of these lines

("The Muse's aid I craved; they had not will") marks a mid-line shift in both direction

and agency: first she is the desirous subject; then they are the empowered subjects. In

these metrical instances, Bradstreet's ideas seem disobedient to the organizing force of

her couplets, moving backwards rather than forwards, extending over their boundaries,

and fragmenting whole lines into parts. Such sudden breaks are far from the plodding

steps of her earlier couplets, and they relay an emotion more complicated than the

admiration of a simpleton poet.

In this sense, they display the kind of subtlety that Piper finds in the most

accomplished practitioners of the heroic couplet. The immature Pope, Piper explains,

writes couplets that are "oppressively alike," marked by a "short-windedness" and

"politeness that never asks the reader to stretch his mind beyond the couplet immediately

before him"; the mature Pope, on the other hand, writes couplets that are "richly and

variously composed," their sense spreading out over multiple couplets that are modified

from within by the force of inversions (Piper, 19-23). For Piper, the mature practitioner

of the heroic couplet must move away from blindly obeying the rules of his couplets. In

the place of obedience, he must become a little rude, challenging his audience to read

against the organizing flow of the couplets. Bradstreet enacts this same development in a

single poem, opening it with lines that are "oppressively alike" and writing her way

towards lines that are less obedient. As soon as it is developed, however, this innovative

new voice comes under attack from the Muses, who attempt to guard the old order by

confiscating her pen and driving her from Parnassus. But the poem does not stop with this expulsion or in an admission of defeat.

Instead, Bradstreet sits down directly at a desk, a more mundane site of inspiration than Parnassus but one more appropriate to print culture, and allows "Errata," rather than the conventional muses, to inspire her. In his defense of Bradstreet's early poetry for the ways it attempts to redefine the gender laws of the poet-muse relationship, Timothy Sweet describes this as a corrupted invocation of "erato," the muse of lyric, especially erotic, poetry whom Sidney invoked in writing *Astrophel and Stella* (Sweet, 160). For Sweet, Bradstreet's creation of this hybrid muse is an acknowledgement of her own shortcomings (Sweet, 160-161). I would argue that her invocation of "errata" is less of a self-effacing gesture than Sweet suggests. It is, instead, her creation of a new muse (as well as a punning evocation of the erotic muse), one who will allow a complicated mind to express itself without suppression within prescribed heroic forms that originated in the oral tradition. The first line of the couplet that introduces "errata" is the only one in the poem that is broken into four parts: "I, pensive for my fault, sat down, and then/ Errata through their leave threw me their pen." Crucially, the fragmented line precedes the entrance of "errata," as does the extreme enjambment uniting the lines; Bradstreet is not at the mercy of "errata," but instead *creates* "errata," to express her own struggle to speak. The line's pun on the leaves of a book further emphasizes her agency in the process. In one sense, she needs the courteous permission of the errata ("through their leave") in order to write; in another sense, she needs nothing more than physical writing materials ("threw their leave") in order to write in her own particular way. Her errata—

those caesurae, inversions, and enjambments—are not passive accidents; they are her chosen ideal, the windows through which she inserts her own rough particularity into the smooth tradition of Sidneyan verse.

The result of this new poetic freedom is that she ends her elegy on a note of dismissal: "So Sidney's fame I leave to England's rolls,/ His bones do lie interred in stately Paul's." He's dead; she's the one alive and talking. Having invented errata as a post-classical, print-culture source of varied inspiration, Bradstreet concludes her poem on a slant rhyme that relegates Sidney to England, far away from her in America, nothing more than a pile of stately bones. Here, finally, Bradstreet has found her own voice. If Sidney's ringing perfection initially threatened to silence her, and if his muses drove her out of their labyrinth, Bradstreet nonetheless finds a way to insert her own voice, proving that it is more vibrant than the perfect rattle of Sidney's bones. But this is never a poem about her voice in isolation. It is a poem about her engagement with a forbidding public order, one she first embraces in her choice of the heroic couplet and then challenges in particular instances of metrical disturbance. She wants to speak to a public world but will not fix the difference of her voice in order to do so.

This metrical opening—through which a private voice may register its indignation at a forbidding public order—is one way in which Bradstreet paves the way for modern public elegists such as Seamus Heaney or Geoffrey Hill, who also employs metrical breaks to demonstrate the point at which private voice and public order cannot peacefully coincide. In "September Song," for instance, the massive horror of the Holocaust silences the personal voice of poet:

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable
you were not. Not forgotten
or passed over at the proper time.

As estimated, you died. Things marched,
sufficient, to that end.
Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented
terror, so many routine cries.

(I have made
an elegy for myself it
is true)

September fattens on vines. Roses
flake from the wall. The smoke
of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough. (Hill, 1407)

The poem ends abruptly, cutting itself off as if the intent to write such a poem may have

been wrongheaded, or even selfish. It is difficult, clearly, for the poet to justify his

insistence on the importance of a lyric poem about the genocide that silenced millions of

others' voices: he accuses himself, in fact, of making this an elegy for himself, and not

for the actual victims. Still, Hill admits that he cannot help but want to express his own

particular sorrow within the context of this public atrocity. In the end, the solipsistic

error of this move toward self-expression causes him to mute his own voice. The poem

opens with the intention of elegizing a child victim of the Holocaust, addressing the

victim in the second person. By the third stanza, however, Hill accuses himself of

projecting his private self into a public elegy, of confusing empathy with self regard. At

this point Hill silences himself. He will not speak about the victim any more. He speaks

either in words that have been cast aside by their parenthesis or in the language of

harmless nature poetry, too far distanced from the fires of the holocaust, incapable of expressing enough. In the end, he cuts himself short; he has already spoken too much. However, something in the violence of cutting himself off so abruptly makes the end of the poem not inexpressive, but demonstrative of a certain terrible truth. His lines become broken by his own self-doubt: if the lines of his first two stanzas at least proceeded towards periods, the parenthetical self-accusation hangs in mid-air, unpunctuated. Feet are cut off from the lines. If sentences (even fragments) at least covered whole lines, four of the poem's five final sentences are cut before they even span a line. The final paragraph is nothing more than one disembodied line. The description of the holocaust was ragged enough, but the following lines about Hill's own poetic reporting are even more violent. They accuse themselves of having "marched, sufficient, to that end"; to compensate, they will neither march, nor feign sufficiency, nor even come to an end. His speech, like Bradstreet's, is riddled by "errata," by strangely knifed sentences that are not given decent ending.

 If prosodic errata are one way that Bradstreet carves points of release out of the containment of her couplets, another way she does so becomes evident in her elegy for Du Bartas, throughout which she breaks from a state of confinement by creating an overlapping web of metaphors that cannot be distilled to a singular significance. This kind of overlapping metaphor, which productively mixes various meanings in order to create a state of fantastical uncertainty, is its own kind of rebellion against a system of strict order. In "Literary Fat Ladies," Patricia Parker argues that sixteenth and seventeenth century rhetoric handbooks would have condemned such wandering

metaphors: "The errancy of a figure like metaphor is that it wanders, dangerously, from the fixed meanings that can be marshaled into the march of logical 'consequence'" (Parker, 101). According to Parker, these handbooks of rhetoric concerned themselves as much with the fixing of metaphorical order as they did with the fixing of social order and proper household roles. Metaphors were meant to shore up order, rather than question it. In her elegy for Du Bartas, Bradstreet directly contradicts the mandates of those rhetoric handbooks and creates unfixable metaphors, celebrating metaphorical "errancy" as she celebrates metrical "errata."

The poem is organized in a succession of metaphors about propagation and poetry, which merge in a way that confuses gender roles and agency. In its opening passage, Bradstreet is "ravished" by Du Bartas' poetry, a sexual union between writer and reader that, she claims, would impregnate fertile ground:

> My dazzled sight of late reviewed thy lines,
> Where art, and more than art, in nature shines;
> Reflection from their beaming altitude
> Did thaw my frozen heart's ingratitude;
> Which rays, darting upon some richer ground,
> Had caused flowers and fruits soon to abound;
> But barren I my daisy here do bring,
> A homely flower in this my latter spring,
> If summer or my autumn age do yield
> Flowers, fruits, in garden, orchard, or in field,
> They shall be consecrated in my verse,
> And prostrate offered at great Bartas' herse." (Bradstreet, 192)

Here, the mixture of two metaphors causes opposite meanings to clash. If, at the beginning of the passage, Du Bartas is figured as the impregnating sun and Bradstreet is figured as the receptive field, by the end Bradstreet's poem is represented as a flower to

99

be brought to Du Bartas' cold hearse. On one end of the metaphor, Du Bartas is the

source of all new life; at the other end, he is dead and locked away in his coffin. There is

additional error written into the metaphor when Bradstreet claims that she is barren and

yet produces a daisy, which she may then bring to Du Bartas' funeral. On one hand she

is the deadened character; on the other she is the vital character. The metaphor's shifting

tenses cause additional slippage, as Bradstreet brings her daisy in the present tense, but

goes on to express hope that she will bring forth produce in a more fertile future. Is she

claiming that she is barren or not? Is she thawed or is she frozen? Is she receptive or is

he? These are questions that her metaphors refuse to pin down to the stillness of one

definitive meaning.

Bradstreet's relationship to the poetry of Du Bartas is further modified by an

additional metaphor that directly follows the mixed metaphor of funerals and fields:

> My muse unto a child I may compare,
> Who sees the riches of some famous fair,
> He feeds his eyes, but understanding lacks
> To comprehend the worth of all those knacks;
> The glittering plate and jewels he admires,
> The hats and fans, the plumes and ladies' tires,
> And thousand times his mazed mind doth wish
> Some part (at least) of that brave wealth was his,
> But seing empty wishes nought obtain,
> At night turns to his mother's cot again,
> And tells her tales (his full heart over-glad)
> Of all the glorious sights his eyes have had;
> But finds too soon his want of eloquence,
> The silly prattler speaks no word of sense;
> But seing utterance fail his great desires,
> Sits down in silence, deeply he admires." (Bradstreet, 192-193)

Having impregnated her with the child who will become her muse, Du Bartas' poetry metaphorically shifts again: now it is the extravagant marketplace from which the mother is exiled and which intimidates the child to silence. If, at first, Bradstreet and Du Bartas' poetry were intimately involved, they are now separated by social mandates. As a woman who has recently given birth and as a colonist of America, far from the literary marketplace and the commercial center of London, Bradstreet becomes an exile rather than a lover. Du Bartas' poetry, for its part, is no longer the wholesome natural life-source that it was in the field metaphor; now it verges on the profane, the excessively opulent and expensive. Again, the metaphors make it impossible to pin down whether Bradstreet feels resentment or awe, anger or adoration.

At this point, the metaphor shifts yet again, when Bradstreet turns to comparing herself to the silent child muse. This is a strange move: to say she is *like* her muse (rather than inspired by or ignored by her muse) opens endless questions. Does she have no muse herself? Is she her own muse? Questions open also about her metaphorical relationship to Du Bartas. At first, the union of reader and writer produced a child muse. Here, however, if she is like a child muse, reading his lines no longer makes her like a wife but more like a daughter:

> Thus weak brained I, reading thy lofty style,
> Thy profound learning, viewing other while,
> Thy art in natural philosophy,
> Thy saint-like mind in grave divinity,
> Thy piercing skill in high astronomy,
> And curious insight in anatomy,
> Thy physic, music, and state policy,
> Valour in war, in peace good husbandry. (Bradstreet, 193)

At this point Bradstreet's poetics devolve into the style of accumulating list-making we

saw in the beginning of her elegy for Sidney. Figured as child and not wife, she must

speak for the first time with the prattling speech of a child rather than the fluid cadence of

an adult who has found her own voice.

In the subsequent passage, the stiffness of her childish praise deepens further into

stony paralysis:

> A thousand thousand times my senseless senses
> Moveless stand charmed by thy sweet influences;
> More senseless than the stones to Amphion's lute,
> Mine eyes are sightless, and my tongue is mute,
> My full astonished heart doth pant to break,
> Through grief it wants a faculty to speak. (Bradstreet, 193)

Three times, Bradstreet emphasizes the stony paralysis of her silence: she is "moveless,"

"astonished," more senseless than a stone under the sway of Amphion's music. There is

something off, however, about the metaphor with which Bradstreet describes her mute

astonishment under the sway of Du Bartas' poetry. The thing is that Amphion's charmed

stones moved, if not of their own accord; in the metaphor, Bradstreet is a paralyzed stone,

one who stands frozen but still full of the desire to speak on her own. In its detail, it

could be argued that the metaphor more readily calls to mind Medusa than Amphion.

Viewing Du Bartas' work, like viewing Medusa's head, causes the horror of stony

paralysis rather than the enchanted movement caused by Amphion's lute. This is an

incredibly odd reversal of the usual gender roles in the Medusa myth, which has been

read since Freud as a representation of male fear of castration (Freud, 273-274). John

Rumrich has argued that, for Milton in *Comus*, Medusa represents a male fear of

102

castration specifically by the mother, through envelopment (Rumrich, 79-80). Here, the Medusa myth could be read as representing a female fear of envelopment by an excessively generative male figure. Before the spectacle of Du Bartas' works, Bradstreet loses her agency and her speech, proceeding from woman to child to mute object as though she is receding back into the womb. Du Bartas, then, is figured as an overpowering mother, rather than the virile man he seemed to be in the poem's opening.

Mythologically, in addition to Medusa, the idea of being reduced to speechless idiocy calls to mind Circe's transformation of men into wordless animals. Du Bartas, then, would be less like a charmed city founder and more like a cruel enchantress; Bradstreet is less like a passive stone and more like an unfortunate adventurer, victimized by sorcery. Far from accepting that she is a woman who cannot praise a man, these metaphors reverse gender roles, placing Bradstreet in the role of male hero and Du Bartas in the role of female sorcerer or hideous goddess. Finally, a third myth that Bradstreet evokes in this cluster of overlapping metaphors is to the myth of Niobe, Amphion's wife, who was turned to stone by the gods after she boasted too much of her own creative power as a mother. Bradstreet is ravished by Du Bartas, after all, and eager to bear his children; her stony silence, then, could be read as a punishment for thinking too highly of the poetic children she might conceive through the reading of Du Bartas' works. This metaphor makes Bradstreet a woman turned to stone by the gods in punishment for excessively breeding with Du Bartas. It is Bradstreet's excessive creative procreation, then, that is at fault for her stony muteness, not the enchanting power of Du Bartas' poetry.

None of these three readings, of course, is the correct one; it is possible to emerge from the passage taking its invocation of Amphion at face value. Bradstreet's metaphoric phrasing, however, opens space for us to imagine other myths, and to recombine them so that the traditional mythical landscape becomes a strange realm in which Bradstreet can take on aspects of the tragic hero and Du Bartas traits of the jealous gods. It is a strange and fantastical new mythology that Bradstreet creates by merging the myths of Amphion, Niobe, Circe, and Medusa in order to describe the contours of her particular silence, and one that is rich with new possibility for Bradstreet as an elegist.

In the poem's next passage, Bradstreet adds metaphors of human tyranny to the mix of myths she has established. Here, she compares Du Bartas to great world rulers who have tamed foes through "blood and sweat" and the terrible heaping of dead bodies:

> O France, thou didst in him more glory gain
> Than in thy Martel, Pipin, Charlemagne,
> Than in St. Louis, or they last Henry Great,
> Who tamed his foes, in blood and sweat.
> Thy fame is spread as far, I dare be bold,
> In all the zones, the temp'rate, hot, and cold.
> Their trophies were but heaps of wounded slain,
> Thine, the quintessence of an heroic brain.
> The oaken garland ought to deck their brows,
> Immortal bays to thee all men allows.
> Who in they triumphs never won by wrongs,
> Lead'st millions chained by eyes, by ears, by tongues. (Bradstreet, 193)

Metaphorically, Bartas has gone from lover to father to cruel goddess to conquering, bloody ruler. At first, reading Bartas was a ravishment. Now it is an enslavement to a conquering King: if he does not heap up piles of bodies, his heroic rhetoric, like that of Hercules, leads off millions in chains. These chained millions are not much better off

than wounded bodies. In substance, they are nothing more than eyes, ears, and tongues, and these chained. It is Du Bartas who causes the terrible muteness that Bradstreet complains of in each of her three public elegies; here, it is caused by heroic chains which call to mind the heroic couplets Du Bartas used, and which Bradstreet also has felt compelled to employ. Like the rhetorical chains of Hercules, Du Bartas' heroic couplets enslave the tongues of their readers, leaving them mute.

At this point, Bradstreet's resentment swells to encompass not only Du Bartas, but heaven as well:

> Oft have I wond'red at the hand of heaven,
> In giving one what would have served seven.
> Thy double-portion would have served many.
> Unto each man his riches is assigned
> Of name, or state, of body and of mind;
> Thou hadst thy part of all, but of the last,
> O pregnant brain, O comprehension vast,
> Thy haughty style and rapted wit sublime
> All ages wond'ring at, shall never climb.
> Thy sacred works are not for imitation,
> But monuments to future admiration.
> Thus Bartas' fame shall last while stars do stand,
> And whilst there's air, or fire, or sea, or land.
> But lest mine ignorance should do thee wrong,
> To celebrate thy merits in my song,
> I'll leave thy praise to those shall do thee right,
> Good will, not skill, did cause me bring my mite. (Bradstreet, 194).

Rather than fairly distributing the wealth, heaven lavished too much on the Du Bartas who conquers nations and sets up opulent marketplaces. Both Du Bartas and heaven are indicted in an inequitable system that excludes Bradstreet from its gifts. Having unevenly distributed wealth and power, heaven even allows Du Bartas to be pregnant with ideas. Bradstreet represents herself as barren to the end of the poem, unable to

105

propagate a subjective voice, and yet Du Bartas ends the poem pregnant with ideas; even the most indisputably female realm is monopolized by the great, heaven-favored Du Bartas, who is described with the double-edged adjective "haughty."

However, this is not a defeat, a humble acceptance of subjugation. At the same time that Bradstreet accuses Du Bartas of stealing even the one gift that she, as a woman, should have over him, she turns the tables on him. Amazingly, in this final set of metaphors, the poem cycles back through each of the preceding metaphors, this time placing Du Bartas in the place of the reader rather than the writer. If, in the beginning of the poem, the reader (Bradstreet) was impregnated by Du Bartas' lines, this time he is pregnant; if, in the beginning of the poem, she was passively "ravish'd" and "dazzl'd," his wits are now passively "rapted." If his poetry turned her to speechless stone, his works are transformed in this metaphor into stony "monuments," which will last through the ages. Everything that Du Bartas metaphorically does to Bradstreet she metaphorically does back to him in these final lines. In so doing, she completely confuses gender by the end of the poem, giving Du Bartas the position of female object: she makes him the passive one, the impregnated one. If his writing becomes a stone monument, hers is the opposite, a fluid fabric of overlapping metaphors, none of which can be resolved to the permanent stillness that she finds in her predecessor's lines.

Contrary to what Timothy Sweet claims, this poem does not conclude that, "in seventeenth century feminine poetry, a female subject cannot be said to appear" because "the feminine is only objectified, in the position of object-muse" (Sweet, 165). Sweet's assertion is based on the idea that seventeenth-century discourse only permits the woman

106

to act as muse, and so for a female subject there is no opportunity for subjective voice. If a male author and his female muse produce poetic offspring, a female author would find herself stuck without a partner in conversation. Bradstreet, he claims, questions this gendered system and yet cannot reverse it in her poetry; ultimately, he says, she accepts her inescapable femininity and thus her museless solitude. I would argue that Bradstreet's metaphors in her elegy on Du Bartas unravel exactly this kind of logic. By the end of the poem, it is *he* who has become the object muse, and thus, through her dialogue with him, Bradstreet comes to occupy the position of inspired subject. By placing him in a series of metaphors that slide into each other, she opens questions about which of the two is vital, which is female, which is passive, which is cruel and which is barren.

This reading of Bradstreet's metaphors in the Du Bartas elegy also makes it a more triumphant poem than Schweitzer's reading would have it seem: for Schweitzer, Bradstreet "registers her resistance to the infantilized role by re-figuring herself, alternately, as a woman punished for the arrogance of her poetic aspirations, and as the son, seeking to inherit his rightful patrimony" (Schweitzer, 295). But Bradstreet re-figures herself as so much more than woman and boy, the boy being her empowered (and therefore disempowering) role; in her metaphors, she is hero and subject, writer and muse, in addition to mother and boy. Moreover, her metaphors have the power to transform Du Bartas as well as herself: he plays the part of woman and man, tyrant and goddess, mother and son. Power reversals do not only occur through occupation of a male role; they occur through habitation of every imaginable role in the world. Thus, the

107

power is not in the particular role, but in the ability to imagine oneself, through metaphor, as occupying various subjective positions. The seamless fluidity between her metaphors breaks down gender distinctions that separate the two authors, creating an androgynous plane on which neither gender has a greater right to speak, and on which she is able to finish the poem with a string of artful reversals. The poem's ending does not acknowledge defeat but rather, having removed Du Bartas from the position of writer to that of reader, leaves off praising him in a position of greater power.

These shifting metaphors, which allow the poetic subject to take on proliferating identities as a result of multiple conflicting comparisons, are not a failure of craft on Bradstreet's part. Rather than detracting from the art of her lines, these sliding metaphors productively collide with the poem's distinct couplets in a way that functions similarly to the enjambments and caesurae of the Sidney elegy. In these poems, Bradstreet uses metaphor and prosody to speak across the confinement of traditional categories, whether they are social or metrical. If she will not speak in the marketplace of Du Bartas' ideas, she does speak in the strange, unconfined forum of her sliding metaphors and opened couplets, a forum in which men can be pregnant and the dangerous beauty of a man can turn a female gazer into stone. In this new forum, she is neither master nor mastered, nether subject nor object, neither female nor male, but instead she is able to slip between these artificially constructed social roles. In using metaphors of this kind to anchor her elegy for Du Bartas, Bradstreet writes in an elegiac mode that uses slippage to open gaps through which the poet may speak, despite the silencing effects of grief or humility.

Like the strategy of employing prosodic 'errata,' many modern elegists also use Bradstreet's strategy of confusing gender through metaphoric blending. Derek Walcott, for instance, uses a blend of sexual and fatal imagery in his poem "Gauguin II" in order to express the relationship between silenced, ravished muse and artistic master:

> I have never pretended that summer was paradise,
> or that these virgins were virginal; on their wooden trays
> are the fruits of my knowledge, radiant with disease,
> and they offer you this, in their ripe sea-almond eyes,
> their clay breasts glowing like ingots in a furnace.
> No, what I have plated in amber is not an ideal, as
> Puvis de Chavannes desired it, but corrupt—
> the spot on the ginger lily's vulva, the plantain's phalloi,
> the volcano that chafes like a chancre, the lava's smoke
> that climbs to the sibilant goddess with its hiss.
> I have baked the gold of their bodies in that alloy;
> tell the Evangelists paradise smells of sulphur,
> that I have felt the beads in my blood erupt
> as my brush stroked their backs, the cervix
> of a defrocked Jesuit numbering his chaplet.
> I placed a blue death mask there in my Book of Hours
> that those who dream of an earthly paradise may read it
> as men. My frescoes in sackcloth to the goddess Maya.
> The mangoes redden like coals in a barbecue pit,
> patient as the palms of Atlas, the papaya. (Walcott, 1378)

Written in the voice of Gauguin, the poem describes the relationship between painter and muse in language that is as thick with sexuality as it is with death. Throughout the poem, Walcott never gives voice to the objectified Tahitian muse; the Caribbean voice is silenced. However, by metaphorically placing Gauguin in the same position as his muses (he, like the women in his painting "Tahitians with Mangoes" who hold out trays of mangoes, is offering forth "the fruits of his knowledge") and by exposing Gauguin's sexuality (and sexual disease) alongside that of the women, Walcott removes Gauguin

from the position of master and places him alongside his subjects. Gauguin becomes

something like the pregnant Du Bartas at the end of Bradstreet's elegy. Just as Bradstreet

conflates the artistic act with a sexual one, Walcott conflates the brushstrokes of painting

with physical stroking. In this image ("I have felt the beads in my blood erupt/ as my

brush stroked their backs, the cervix/ of a defrocked Jesuit numbering his chaplet"),

gender becomes confused. Does the cervix, which seems to modify "backs," belong to

the women, or is it the back of the chaplain's neck? Is Gauguin stroking the chaplain's

neck, the women's backs, or both? Is it Gauguin who is the chaplain, numbering the

beads of his diseased blood, or is it the women whose backs are like those of judging

evangelists? Even if Gauguin is allowed to speak the poem, and the women remain silent

as they always were, Walcott blurs the line between genders so that Gauguin becomes a

sexualized object in his own poem. The male artist depicting naked women (a role in

which Walcott also finds himself) is himself made naked, which makes the poem a less

voyeuristic kind of venture than Gauguin's original works.

This kind of shifting metaphor, as well as the insertion of abrupt metrical

roughness, are both techniques that are employed three centuries after Bradstreet by John

Berryman in his "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet." Like Bradstreet, the issue of muteness

in the shadow of a poetic predecessor plagues Berryman, as he suggests in one of his

notes to the poem. In the first four stanzas, Berryman explains in his notes, the speaker

addresses the ghost of Bradstreet, who threatens to elude him. In the next 21 stanzas, her

voice takes over, or, as he describes it, "his voice (modulates)…into hers" (Berryman,

30).[viii] This ventriloquism, it appears, is not entirely satisfying for Berryman, who explains the entrance of a new voice in stanza 25 with this note:

> One might say: He is enabled to speak, at last, in the fortune of an echo of her—and when she is loneliest (her former spiritual advisor having deserted Anne Hutchinson, and thus her dearest friend banished), as if she had summoned him; and only this, perhaps, is she enabled to hear him. This second section of the poem is a dialogue, his voice however ceasing well before it ends at 39.4, and hers continuing for the whole third part, until the coda. (Berryman, 30)

As it does for Bradstreet in her elegies for Du Bartas and Sidney, the voice of the predecessor threatens to subsume the voice of the remembering poet. Berryman's process of extricating his own voice from Bradstreet's one is a complicated one, in which the demarcations between the two (marked by dashes) often break down. These dashes, like Bradstreet's caesurae and inversions, break the continuity of the line, using "errata" to demonstrate a break between writing poet and poetic predecessor. Like Bradstreet's heroic couplets, Berryman's lines are halting, rent much more dramatically than hers by the system of manic dashes that he implements. This is the prosody of a voice attempting to separate itself from another, overshadowing discourse. Just as her line breaks allow Bradstreet to escape the labyrinth of excessive influence, they also ultimately free Berryman to finish the poem in his own unbroken voice: while he spends the poem competing with Bradstreet, the last two stanzas are Berryman's own, his voice separated from hers at last.

In another stylistic technique that he borrows from Bradstreet, Berryman also uses procreative metaphors to describe the relationship between the writer and his subject as a sexual one: "Ravishing, ha, what crouches outside ought,/ flamboyant, ill, angelic. Often,

111

now,/ I am afraid of you./ I am sobersides; I know./ I *want* to take you for my lover. –Do"

(32.1-5). As Bradstreet is ravished by Du Bartas' lines, so is Berryman. However, in this

case the sexual nature of the author-subject relationship does not, at first, cause Berryman

to lose his agency. If Bradstreet was ravished by Du Bartas, Berryman finds Bradstreet

ravishing, but he does not lose his power as a result: he wants to take her as a lover,

rather than to be taken. He does, however, experience a moment of syntax-altering doubt

as a result of the sexual metaphor he chooses: "Harmless I to you/ am not, not I? –No./ --I

cannot be. Sing a concord of our thought" (Berryman, 32.6-8). Berryman's self-doubt

does not come from a loss of power; rather, it comes from an awareness that there is

something in his sexual power that is harmful to the long-dead female poet. By the end

of the line, after questioning the innocence of his desire, Berryman has ceded his right to

speak, asking that Bradstreet sing the concord of their thought without him. He goes

from sexual aggressor to silenced poet, made powerless by their union. This reversal, in

which the two characters approach each other in terms of agency, is actualized by a new

confusion in the dialogue. According to the alternation of the voices between dashes, the

ensuing concord ought to be sung by Bradstreet; however, it is clearly spoken by

Berryman, who describes himself as suffering from "western lust," and losing sight of his

"mistress." By the middle of the stanza, it has become impossible to tell whether it is

Bradstreet or Berryman who is speaking: "I suffered living like a stain/ I trundle the

bodies, on the iron bars,/ over that fire backward & forth; they burn;/ bits fall. I wonder

if *I* killed them. Women serve my turn" (Berryman, 33.8-12). The character who speaks

of her life in the past tense should be Bradstreet; the character who feels guilt about

having mistreated women should be Berryman. At this point the dialogue has collapsed, the two characters approaching so near each other that their inflections are indistinguishable. Even in the dialogue portion, when Berryman is "enabled" to extricate himself from Bradstreet's voice, their voices merge, brought dangerously near by the sexual nature of their reading, so that it is difficult to say when it is the dead female speaking and when it is the living male. By depicting poet and subject as lovers, Berryman creates a kind of symbolic language that merges its vehicle and its tenor, bringing them so close that their voices can hardly be distinguished. If Berryman is momentarily silenced by the guilt of his position as a male author sexualizing a dead female subject, the collapsing nature of the metaphor confuses gender to the point that Berryman can emerge to finish the homage at last.

Noticing these stylistic choices--the broken lines, the sexual tropes, and the blurring of gender through metaphor--one becomes skeptical of Berryman's protestations that Bradstreet's style had no influence on the style of his homage. His dismissal of Bradstreet's early style--"All this bald/ abstract didactic rhyme I read appalled" (Berryman, 12.5-6)--becomes less an absolute truth than an assertion of a poet's struggle to leave a poetic precursor behind him. As his stylistic choices show, total abandonment is not entirely possible. Just as Bradstreet adopted the heroic couplets and the mythical metaphors of her predecessors, Berryman adopts the long elegiac form, the broken lines, and the sexual evocations of his predecessor. In fact, Berryman seems less able to leave his predecessor behind than Bradstreet is in her elegies. Bradstreet leaves Sidney far behind her in London, nothing more than a collection bones, but Berryman cannot

distance himself entirely from Bradstreet: "I must pretend to leave you. Only you draw off a benevolent phantom" (Berryman, 56.1-2). By the second to last stanza of the poem, Berryman is still talking to Bradstreet, still acknowledging deep loyalty despite feigned departure. Even the poem's final line invokes her, rather than laying her to rest: "Hover, utter, still/ a sourcing whom my lost candle like the firefly loves" (Berryman, 57.7-8).

This, then, might be one answer for the modern student who appreciates Bradstreet as a pioneer but not as a poet: we could choose to love her, as Berryman does, as a "sourcing." That is, we could love her as the creator of a kind of language that is expressive in the ways it breaks with traditional style just at the moments when the burden of obedient expression becomes too difficult to bear. As Deanna Fernie tells us, "*Homage* evokes her working out a relationship to tradition that Berryman himself was doing at a later date" (Fernie, 20). Both poets were trying to find a language with which to effectively break from the past, even as they described the strength of its continuing hold. If Bradstreet's willingness to break entirely from Renaissance traditions only arrived in the later, domestic poetry, the root of that impulse is present in the early elegies. These elegies are all the more expressive for the ways they dramatize, using innovative stylistic techniques, the difficult movement out of the past and into the future. Bradstreet is not, then, a poet who should be recognized, as Bloom does, for expressing just "the charming difference involved with being a woman poet." Her early poems create strategies for constructing voice that modern, male poets such as Berryman have also employed to move past their own muteness.

By employing Bradstreet's techniques of breakage, these poets are able to create rifts in the wall that divide the artist from the tragedy he is writing about. Each of these poets accuses him or herself of having no right to speak--about something as massive as the holocaust, about women already artistically objectified, about a victim who was not personally known, and about male poets who have achieved higher literary status than a woman poet could have achieved. In order to break the barriers between poet and poetic subject, Bradstreet and these modern poets use prosodic errors in order to escape out of the containers of their frustrated poetry, approaching their elegiac subjects more closely as a result.

The problem Bradstreet faces in her elegies is not the problem of being a woman or of being the first American poet, but rather the problem of fearing she has no right to speak. It is the problem of fearing that her voice will not be permitted to insert itself into English literary history and that she will be relegated eternally to the oppressively confined forum of gendered poetry. This problem--the fear of confinement within the boundaries of personal situation, when one hopes to cross over into a wider engagement with the world--plagues writers throughout much of American literary history, and Bradstreet succeeds in rising to its poetic occasion, three centuries before John Berryman used her innovations to summon her back.

[viii] The tradition of dividing Bradstreet's poetry into 'early' and 'late,' and of favoring the latter for its domestic intimacy, dates back to Bradstreet's earliest reception. In 1878, Moses Coit Tyler summarized nineteenth century disdain for Bradstreet by claiming that her poetry might have succeeded had she "bravely looked within her own heart, and out upon the real world" (Tyler, 248). It wasn't until 1930 that Samuel Eliot Morison rescued Bradstreet from this reception by distinguishing between her early, "public" poetry and her late "private" poetry, claiming that in her later years Bradstreet began to write poetry for poetry's sake, without an expectation of audience wider than her family and close friends. He sets out three ways in which Bradstreet's poetry enacts this transformation: first, she sheds her early imitative tendency in favor of a "dramatic quality which can only have come from personal experience" (Morison, 323); second, she begins to use religion to further her artistic ambitions, rather than control them; third, she begins to draw upon her local New England surroundings to furnish her poems' imagery. For Morrison, the early poems—such as her little read elegies on Du Bartas and Sidney—are failures because they are imitative, orthodox, and set in an imagined world; the late poems are successful because they are based on her actual life without dissimulation. In setting up this division, Morrison introduced the concept of weighing Bradstreet's poetry on a scale of personal revelation. Later critics have perpetuated this criterion. In 1967, Adrienne Rich called Bradstreet's early poetry "remarkably impersonal even by Puritan standards." She goes on to claim that, "had she stopped writing after the publication of these verses, or had she simply continued in the same vein, Anne Bradstreet would survive in the catalogues of Women's Archives, a social curiosity or at best a literary fossil" (Rich, xiv and xiii). In 1970, Rosemary Laughlin echoed Rich in claiming value for Bradstreet based not on her early but her late poetry, because of its compelling personality: "From a public poet concerned with historical events and personified abstractions she became a romantic lyricist who revealed herself as a unique and striking individual against the backdrop of her times" (Laughlin, 1).

[viii] For more examples of critics who set up the early-late Bradstreet paradigm, see Ivy Schweitzer, p. 291.

[viii] For a comprehensive study of the development of the closed heroic couplet, particularly its classical roots and its eminence among late sixteenth and early seventeenth century poets, see W.B Piper's *The Heroic Couplet,* 26-48.

[viii] For more on Bradstreet's willingness to write "homespun verse" that is distinct from her English peers' more "velvet" tones, see Deanna Fernie's "The Difficult Homages of Berryman and Bradstreet," which persuasively argues that Bradstreet's roughness was "fascinating, if troubling" to Berryman (Fernie, 19).

[viii] "The Prologue" has been admired for its deft stylistic and rhetorical turns in articles such as Jane Donohue Eberwein's "No Rhet'ric We Expect: Argumentation in Anne Bradstreet's 'The Prologue.'"

[viii] Adrienne Rich, for instance, writes that the early poems "read like a commonplace book put into iambic couplets, the historical, scientific journal of a young woman with a taste for study" (Rich, xiii). She excuses the "listless" choice of couplets by explaining that that, "these long, rather listless pieces seem to have been composed in a last compulsive effort to stay in contact with the history, traditions, and values of her former world…Present experience was still too raw,

one sought relief from its daily impact in turning Raleigh and Camden into rhymed couplets" (Rich, xv). See also Laughlin (1) and Requa (6).

[viii] All subsequent Berryman quotes are taken from John Berryman, *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and Other Poems*.

Chapter 3: Thomas Hardy's Alternative to the Architectural Elegy

I have argued that Anne Bradstreet writes in a way that anticipates the dissonance and breakage from form that have been often utilized by modern poets such as Berryman, Heaney, and Walcott. This dissertation now examines two other modern poets who, like Bradstreet and Pulter, employ minute formal breaks in order to escape the confinement of domestic spaces. These poets--Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost--are neither female nor early-modern, which makes the decision to combine them with early modern women poets slightly unusual. I have argued, however, that both Bradstreet and Pulter seek to place themselves in a wider frame than their narrow domestic situations permitted them in actual life. Both poets use formal strategies to escape the restrictions inherent to life as a female poet and insert themselves into male traditions, male literary scenes, and even, in the case of Bradstreet, into future poetic dialogues. It seems fitting, then, that they should be discussed in a dissertation that ranges from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, and which addresses poets of both genders.

I have also argued that Bradstreet anticipates a particularly modern tradition of using dissonance in formal poetry in order to express the discord of a private self at odds with a more public order. Bradstreet uses the strategically chosen error to express a moment of frustration too potent to mask with proper poetic veneer. Both Frost and Hardy inherit and innovate within this tradition, and it is worth placing the early example

alongside the later example, to examine consistencies and differences over the centuries. If Bradstreet, for instance, allows her thoughts to spill past the walls of her strict couplets in moments of frustration at the limits imposed on her voice, Hardy allows a formally intricate poem such as "The Voice" to physically disintegrate, becoming less and less symmetrical as his memories of his late wife start to fade. The techniques the employ are different, but the strategy is the same.

There are, in addition, topical reasons for including the poetry of Hardy and Frost under the same small roof that covers Pulter and Bradstreet. Both Pulter and Bradstreet are poets who seek to grant their poetic personae freedom from the claustrophobia of small domestic spaces: Pulter, from confinement and her lonely bedroom, and Bradstreet, from the maternal 'cot' far from the riches of the public marketplace. Hardy and Frost are poets who seek, in the poems I will examine, to grant their female subjects freedom from the claustrophobia of domestic spaces. Hardy's elegies for his estranged wife, Emma, work to posthumously remove her from the indoor spaces in which she became embittered and antagonistic, freeing her to exist under a wider sky. Frost's "Home Burial," similarly, can only draw to a close when its female protagonist has escaped from the tense interior space of her house, which has become haunted by marital discord. If Pulter and Bradstreet confront the difficulties involved with being a female poet by creating a poetics of escape from confinement, Hardy and Frost address the difficulties involved with being a female subject in a poem written by a man by creating a similar poetics of escape from narrow confinement. All four poets choose to insert their female

subjects into the miniature spaces of poems in order to give these same subjects freedom from oppressive little rooms.

This brings up a fourth relevance that Pulter, Bradstreet, Hardy, and Frost all share in the poems I have chosen to examine. In a strategy that seems, at the most literal level, to make no sense at all, all four poets use the infinitely smaller spaces of poetic forms to access a strain of life that is unconstrained by the narrowness of houses. There is a paradox at the center of this strategy, which trades a small space in the world for a smaller space on the page. Poetry has long imagined itself as a chamber (the word 'stanza' comes from the Italian for 'stopping place' or 'room'); to ask, then, that its lines provide escape from enclosure is an unconventional request. This paradox can be resolved, however, by understanding that these poets use the strictness of poetic form to demonstrate a kind of escape that may not be possible in the actual world: that of the artistic imagination which has accepted and submitted itself to conventional forms and still cannot quite be contained. These are not poets who seek the comfort of a sonnet's little room, the snow-globe confinement of a perfected verse; these are poets, rather, who work through miniaturized formal mechanisms to transform the smallness of verse into a kind of existence more vast than would be possible in the world of the living.

For these four reasons--the use of small forms to escape claustrophobic rooms, topical preoccupation with accessing freer space, the use of formal error to express the differences between public order and private dissent, and the ambition to partake of wider poetic traditions encompassing genders and eras not the poet's own--these four very

120

different poets belong together under one expansive roof, and not confined to their disparate rooms in history.

Throughout English poetry one finds examples of poets who compare their work to architectural structures, to houses or churches built of solid enough materials to reliably contain ephemeral spirits and ideas. From Chaucer to Heaney, the writing of a poetic line has been linked with the construction of a sure foundation, the use of a carpenter's level, the solidity of physical enclosure. As a one-time architect's assistant, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was extraordinarily well positioned to make an informed entrance into this genre of architectural poems, and indeed, he embraced architectural theory as an aspect of his poetics. Famously, in *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, Florence Hardy describes his poetry in terms of gothic building principles:

> He had fortified himself in his opinion by thinking of the analogy of architecture, between which art and that of poetry he had discovered, to use his own words, that there existed a close and curious parallel, both arts, unlike some others, having to carry a rational content inside their artistic form….he carried on into his verse, perhaps in part unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained. (F. Hardy, 301)

In his poetry, Hardy works to link the two art forms in many ways, from publishing (in *Wessex Poems)* elaborate sketches of buildings alongside his words to writing poems about architects and architecture.

This is not the case, however, in his *Poems of 1912-1913,* the elegiac sequence he wrote after the death of his first wife Emma. In this sequence, Hardy resists the impulse to place his poetry within an architectural frame, not only in subject but also in the

121

sequence's poetics. Nearly all of the poems take place out of doors, and the ones that do not express a yearning for escape to unbounded places that is reminiscent of Hester Pulter's yearning for free motion through the firmament. In comparing Hardy's elegies to his architectural drawings—particularly his sketches of St. Juliot, the church in whose shadow he first met Emma—it becomes clear that, as he goes about elegizing his estranged wife, he is taking a series of poetic steps to reverse the process of architectural construction. Instead, he deploys a kind of poetics that take place outside, whose visual components break down, and whose careful symmetries crumble: they are poems that evoke elaborate ruins more than they evoke grand gothic monuments. Astonished by rekindled desire for a woman from whom he had grown distant while she was living, the poet attempts to recapture the Emma of his youth, a woman who had not been changed by the confinement of a long, unhappy marriage. If at first his poems concentrate on the ghost of the later Emma, who is the ghost of closed quarters and habitation, they soon begin to reach out more towards the earlier Emma, a ghost who haunts water, air, and cliffs. In so doing, his poems move away from confined spaces such as houses, rooms, and even graves, rejecting the idea of the elegy as providing a house for the dead. Instead, *Poems of 1912-1913* represent a dismantling of poetic structure in order to revive a ghost who insists on the freedom of windy spaces in which she, as much as her elegist, can define the proportions of her existence.

Hardy's elegiac move out of doors is remarkable when one considers the history of the elegy. This monumentalizing genre tends to reflect an urgent desire to preserve a passing spirit within a physical, understandable space. In *The Life of the Poet*, Lawrence

122

Lipking describes the *tombeau* tradition, in which poets seek to provide poetic tombs for great writers of the past in order to rectify the obscurity of unrecognized graves: "the tomb of the poet is built by other poets; their verses take him in" (Lipking, 139). Not only elegies for great poets, however, seek to conflate the poem itself with a physical space in which passing spirits might reside; the desire to build a poetic tomb or house for the dead appears in elegies for all classes of subject, and the space created by the poem is often more physically defined than it is in many of Lipking's *tombeaux*. These poems are particular kinds of monumentalizing poems; they do not only seek to commemorate the dead, they seek to create a space (such as a tomb, a room, or a house) in which the spirit of the dead might reside, accessible to the living. While Peter Sacks claims that the fabric of the elegy is not solid but woven (Sacks, 18), this monumentalizing strain of elegy strives for the enclosure of a poem that is architectural, more than two-dimensionally commemorative in its potential for containment.

As an example, in Sonnet 55, when Shakespeare forecasts the death of the beloved young man in a kind of anticipatory elegy, he promises to provide a more lasting kind of sepulcher. Rather than dispensing with solidity, enclosure, and visible heft, he promises to augment the characteristics of stone: "your praise shall still find room/ Even in the eyes of all posterity/ That wear this world out to the ending doom./ So till the judgment that yourself arise,/ You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes" (Shakespeare, 273). The poet promises that his poem will be better than 'gilded monuments,' 'unswept stone,' and 'masonry,' in that it will increase the architectural soundness of the 'room' in which the youth will reside. In "The Canonization," another anticipatory elegy, Donne

plays with the meaning of "stanza" to compare the act of writing a poem about dead lovers (whether that death has been mortal or orgasmic) to the construction of a physical building in which they might coexist as saints for eternity: "And if unfit for tombs and hearse/ Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;/ And if no piece of chronicle we prove,/ We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;/ As well a well wrought urn becomes/ The greatest ashes as half-acre tombs." (Donne, 96, ll.28-34). In his *tombeau* "On Shakespeare," Milton deepens this trope by claiming not only that Shakespeare's art is its own stone sepulcher, but also that it leaves such a deep impression upon its readers that they become a fixed part of that structure: "Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,/ Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;/ And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,/ That kings for such a tomb would wish to die" (Milton, 34). Encompassed within the physical lines of Shakespeare's poetry, the elegized poet and the reader made marble may share the space of a grave. While it is clearly an ambivalent sensation for one poet to feel as though the reading of another poet causes the stony silence of death, the idea of such complete, housed union with the subject of an elegy still has its appeal. In the nineteenth century, Wordsworth found a similar appeal in the poetic creation of enclosed spaces in which the deceased might be contained. In "Tintern Abbey," his own self-elegy, Wordsworth instructs his sister Dorothy to become an enclosed space for memories: "thy Mind/ Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,/ Thy memory be as a dwelling place/ For all sweet sounds and harmonies" (Wordsworth, 135, ll. 140-43). If, at first, Wordsworth hopes that the wind will blow against his sister wildly, creating a vivid first impression, he also hopes that these first impressions will in time mature into more indoor ideas, her

124

very memory becoming an architectural structure. In so doing, he ensures that the

memories she has accumulated (including, luckily enough, memories of Wordsworth

himself) will be held safely together and guarded beyond his own death. In "Tintern

Abbey," there is great comfort in the idea of a monumentalizing poem so tangibly solid,

so three-dimensionally bracing, that it can last as an architectural habitation for deceased

spirits.

More than any of these writers, Thomas Hardy the architectural draftsman was

equipped to be a practitioner of this kind of poem, and indeed, from the beginning of his

career, Hardy was true to this tradition. In *Wessex Poems* (1898), Hardy's first published

book of poetry, each poem was printed alongside an illustration that was highly technical

in its style. As Sir John Betjeman notes, "the illustrations are distinctly architectural—a

brick-built turret with a sundial on it and a conical tiled cap; a late fifteenth-century

country church with square western tower; the cross-section of a church showing a

Transnational Gothic arcade of two and a half bays" (Betjeman, 150).

Betjeman's list of technical structures goes on from here; suffice it to say that Hardy

drew heavily from his past profession in the creation of his first book of poems. The

poet, moreover, makes the deliberate choice to place a proliferation of architectural

illustrations alongside poems that are not necessarily about buildings (Hardy,

"Illustrations," 135-54). "My Cicely," for example, a poem about a woman who had been

the speaker's lover, is illustrated with two gorgeously ornate church spires; similarly, the

illustration for "She at His Funeral" features the speaker's shadow, cast across the wall of

an elaborate church. This choice may have been a utilitarian one—he was, after all, a

professional sketcher of churches—but it also speaks to a strategy of allying poems to

buildings, transferring the solidity of the latter to the airiness of the former. The

memorial function of this transference is particularly marked in the book's elegiac

poems. In "Thoughts of Phena," for example, the refrain focuses on the woman's

departure from the physicality of her dwelling: "no mark of her late time as dame in her

dwelling,/ whereby I may picture her there." It is the graspable, visible evidence—the

mark, the lasting picture—that Hardy craves as much as the intangible presence of the

woman, a desire that cannot be fulfilled when she no longer exists "in her dwelling." In

this and other poems, Hardy foregrounds the need to build an architectural structure

around the fleeting human self, using both his lyrics' themes and their illustrations to

fortify this possibility.

One would expect, then, that *Poems of 1912-1913* would show a particular

architectural urgency, an impulse to create structures in which Emma might live past her

sudden and shocking death. However, the poems in this sequence take a different tack.

All but two of the twenty-one poems take place outside the frame of either house or

church, which element causes Peter Sacks to describe them as uniquely "unhoused"

(Sacks, 227-59). For the most part, these are not members of the group that Jill Richards

calls "the house poems," poems which "set time to play between interior spaces of

silence and echo" (Richards, 119). Like Pulter's poems, which take place within

domestic spaces of silence and echo but still set their sights on the vast reaches of space,

Hardy's elegies for his wife refuse to stay put inside houses or rooms. Instead, these

poems unfold on the windswept cliffs of Cornwall so that—composed as they are of

126

sibilance, transparent color scheme, and ebbing rhythms—they are permeated with a windswept quality.

Two poetic characteristics serve to heighten this sense of windswept transparency. First is the fact that the poems' forms tend to lack the structural symmetries (the kind of thing a reader feels strongly in those closely contained couplets and squared lines of Milton's elegy for Shakespeare, for example) that would make them evoke a reliably sturdy structure for Emma's ghost. These prosodic irregularities--reminiscent of Bradstreet's prosodic errors--persist not only individually, but sequentially as well; unlike Shakespeare's memorializing sonnet sequence and its formal monotony, Hardy's sequence is completely asymmetrical, built of twenty-one poems with twenty-one distinct forms of shape, rhyme scheme, and meter. The sequence as a whole does not offer the sense of solid containment within the repetition of form. While the entire body of Hardy's work could be said to demonstrate this same gothic irregularity, this set of poems presents itself as a unified sequence, and so the total lack of formal continuity affects the reader even more strongly. Second, in their summoning of Emma, the poems insistently rely on other senses besides the visual. Without clear visual structures, a crucial element is subtracted from the architectural poem's push towards physicality, resulting in poems that do not provide the tangible counterpoint to an intangible subject, but are instead composed of materials as airy and dispersed as the woman herself has become. By subtracting visibility and enclosing symmetry from his elegies, Hardy dismantles the architectural qualities of his poems, insisting instead that the ghost of Emma exist outdoors, under a wider sky. In so doing, he conjures the presence of the young Emma—

whom he associates with the cliffs of Cornwall—and pulls her alongside the changed presence of the later Emma who became, in the course of her unhappy marriage, the ghost of cramped habitation. By pulling that lost, younger Emma into the present, Hardy can begin to understand the two women as one.

This impulse away from architectural monumentalizing can be traced back to Hardy's experience as an architectural draftsman. His doubts about the possibility of keeping old spirits alive in new buildings culminated in "Memories of Church Restoration," the speech he delivered in 1906 to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In the original manuscript of the speech, Hardy approaches the issue of restoration with a tone far more hopeless than that of the speech's future editions. He also describes the original buildings in a way that is almost supernatural, discussing a building's phantom, a thing which cannot be recaptured in new materials: "(an architectural monument) is an idea independent of (its stones)—an aesthetic phantom without solidity" (Hardy, MCR, 15). This independent idea, for Hardy, is dependent on original form: "the old form inherits, or has acquired, an indefinable quality—possibly some deviations from exact geometry [curves were often struck by hand in Medieval work] which never appears in original work" (Hardy, MCR, 16). Rather than tamper with that original phantom-idea, it would be better, Hardy claims, to allow the buildings to slowly decline, to let them be reclaimed by the wind and the rain. This sentiment is expressed even more strongly in the gloss of the speech, edited out in editions after the

first publication. While Michael Millgate has rightly noted that the absence of the original glosses compromises these editions, his appendage of the glosses to the later editions changes them, taking out some of the glosses that are most hopeless about the spiritual destruction involved in restoration (Millgate, 240). The first page margin, for instance, bears the title "churches better untouched"; towards the end of the original speech, four consecutive margin titles read, "Restoration practically objectionable," "And well nigh impossible," "Moreover, fatal to human interest," "But the building is actually perishing" (Hardy, MCR, 1-17). By the end of his career, Hardy did not, it seems, hold much store in the ability of the architect to renovate or restore a beloved building and leave any of its humanity in tact.

But long before this point, in 1867 and 1870, Hardy was working as an assistant to a Dorchester architect named John Hicks, drawing up the plans for a renovation of St. Juliot's Church. During this project, in addition to meeting Emma, Hardy became finally convinced of the deleterious effects of restoration: "Hardy much regretted the obliteration in this manner of the church's history, and too, that he should be instrumental in such obliteration, the building as he first set eyes on it having been so associated with what was romantic in his life" (F. Hardy, 79). In Hardy's intricate pencil and watercolor drawings of the renovation of St. Juliot's Church, drawings of the church's plans in 1867 are labeled "as originally intended," drawings of the dilapidated church in 1870 are labeled "in its present state," and drawings of the renovated church in 1870 are labeled "as proposed," or "as executed." In notes penciled on the back of the drawings, it seems that Hardy has retroactively re-labeled the process: the dilapidated church is re-titled "as

129

formerly," rather than "in its present state." There are echoes of Hardy's elegiac poetry

in this re-naming, in the penciled dactyl with which he looks back on the church that he

has helped to reconstruct, and if this was the building that caused Hardy's final

disillusionment with his draftsman's role in architectural renovation, it is worth

examining what it is about the sketches of the new buildings that contributed to his sense

of rupture with the original spirit of the place.

In the renovated drawings, the church becomes almost gaudy in its colorful,

vividly demarcated separation from the surrounding environment; in the early drawings,

on the other hand, the buildings merge seamlessly with the outside air. They are

colorless and permeable, more like drawings of 'aesthetic phantoms' than sturdy,

differentiated structures. There are two qualities that most obviously contribute to the

new buildings' bright separation between indoors and out. First (and this is an obvious

point), the building in latter sketches becomes more sound; if the church is crumbling in

early pictures, missing chunks of wall, sagging on the sides uneven at its foundations, it is

symmetrical and sealed after the restoration. Second, as Hardy's sketches move from the

original to the renovation, the church becomes more brilliantly visible to the perceiving

eye. If the original church is delineated with frail gray lines and left the same color as the

air around it, the renovation plans depict a church that is washed with pink, tan, and

vibrant red. Paintings of the renovated church ("as executed") are even more brilliant,

painted in shades of lilac, slate, maroon, hyacinth, and pink, with black and white polka-

dotted foundations. These restored churches stand out from their environment with

saturated vividness. While the colors are strikingly beautiful to someone without Hardy's

attachment to the original churches, Hardy himself cannot celebrate this new clarity of vision which obliterates the phantom of the old church; there is an unmistakable note of nostalgia when he re-labels those muted and air-colored original drawings "as formerly," a turn of phrase that is echoed uncannily throughout *Poems 1912-1913*.

I propose that Hardy reverses these two developments (the firming-up of solid and symmetrical walls and foundations, and the move to a brighter visibility) as he writes his elegiac sequence for Emma, whom he met in the shadow of that church whose renovation he so regretted. In so doing, he increases the non-architectural, out-of-doors quality of his elegies, refusing to capture a phantom in new, obliterating materials. If the original idea of a church has an individual spirit that it is our humanistic duty to avoid renovating, so, clearly, does a woman have her own original, individual idea that should not be reconstructed using new materials. For Hardy, the crucial importance of this fact is made more pressing by the rift that widened between himself and Emma before she died, by what Dennis Taylor calls "the sharp gap between present reality and the past image" (Taylor, 24). Hardy is not confident of the precise nature of the phantom he is attempting to preserve: he has lost her across both distance and time. In the face of this wider divide, he must wonder how well he knew her in life, whether his relationship with her caused fatal changes in the person he once loved, whether in marriage he was as blind as a renovating architect to the original spirit of the woman he married. In elegizing her, then, the task of original-preservation becomes as pressing as the task of self-solace.

In response to this challenge, the author is true to his theories against church reconstruction, creating elegies that are not architectural structures, or solidly defined

spaces in which he might find communion with a missing spirit; instead, he composes the sequence of poems that are unhoused, permeable and crumbling vessels in which the woman asserts a freedom, beyond him, as a part of a system of loosed elements such as the wind and the air.

In terms of literal setting, the *Poems of 1912-1913* remain insistently outdoors. Just as Pulter's poems remind us constantly that even the most cramped chamber exists in a vast and moving universe, Hardy's elegies never lose sight of the world outside the domestic abode. Of the twenty-one poems in the sequence, only three—"Rain on a Grave," "His Visitor," and "The Spell of the Rose"—depict a constructed house that Hardy and Emma inhabited or might inhabit. Instead, the sequence focuses on spaces that are not confined by roofs and walls, opening, in "The Going," with an explicit description of the speaker's gravitation towards the outdoor world in order to reach for Emma's phantom: "Why do you make me leave the house/ And think for a breath it is you I see/ At the end of the alley of bending boughs/ Where so often at dusk you used to be" (154).[viii] "The Going" is followed by two poems that both take place on open, unsheltered roads. Soon after, "Rain on a Grave" sets up two kinds spaces: one is a roofed, sheltered place, from which the speaker looks out on Emma's grave, and the other is the grave itself, which is nothing more than a mound of earth on which grass and daisies soon will grow, a far cry from the stony, constructed sepulcher that we see in Milton's poem for Shakespeare. The poem makes a point of wishing not that Emma were

132

back inside but that they both were outside, in the unsheltered earth, together. After more

unhoused poems, "His Visitor" returns to the architectural dwelling, depicting the ghost

of Emma as she revisits her old abode. The return, however, is not a pleasant one. She

notices all the details that have changed since her death, and ultimately these changes are

so disturbing for Emma that she leaves, vowing never to return: "So I don't want to linger

in this re-decked dwelling,/ I feel too uneasy at the contrasts I behold,/ And I make again

for Mellstock to return here never,/ And rejoin the roomy silence, and the mute and

manifold/ Souls of old" (166).

 All of these outdoor poems consider the ghost of the later Emma, who occupied

the house and took those drives inside the container of a coach; however, this ghost is

depicted as gravitating back out to the outside world she loved in her youth, reversing the

inward-moving trend of her life. The only room in which this reverting version of Emma

will permit herself to be enclosed is that of "roomy silence," a kind of room that lacks

walls and tangible visual details.

 The last housed poem, "The Spell of the Rose," focuses most closely on the threat

of architectural enclosure. In the voice of Emma, the poem describes Max Gate, a house

that caused the married couple nothing but marital strife, because, as the poem describes

it, care for the house caused Hardy to neglect the outdoor garden:

> 'I mean to build a hall anon,
> And shape two turrets there,
> And a broad newelled stair,
> And a cool well for crystal water;
> Yes; I will build a hall anon,
> Plant roses love shall feed upon
>   And apple-trees and pear.'

He set to build the manor-hall,
And shaped the turrets there,
And the broad newelled stair,
And the cool well for crystal water;
He built for me that manor-hall,
And planted many trees withal,
But no roses anywhere. (178)

The repetition of each of those architectural details—the manor hall, the turrets, the broad newelled stair—underscores their useless stony stubbornness; apparently, Emma never cared for that kind of structured architectural tribute. Their unhappiness, in the poem, is a direct result of his inability to make outdoor tribute: "some heart-bane moved our souls to sever/ Since he had planted never a rose" (178). Later in the poem, the female narrator plants a rosebush outside in the hopes of mending the rift between the married couple; however, the gesture comes too late, and she dies before it's grown. All she can hope for, in this posthumous message of a poem, is that the site of the rose bush (as opposed to the enclosed house) will be the place her husband goes in order to re-conjure the woman he has lost: "Perhaps now blooms that queen of trees/ I set but saw not grow,/ And he, beside its glow—/ Eyes couched of the mis-vision that blurred me—/ Ay, there beside that queen of trees/ He sees me as I was, though sees/ Too late to tell me so!" (180). In this poem, Emma accuses Hardy of an inability to see her as she was, outdoors and unenclosed. It was he that caused the gap between old image and present reality because he could only conceive of her as a housed woman.

After this poem's explicit warning about the importance of unhoused remembrance, the sequence again sets its sights outside, following Emma's mandate

134

closely, conjuring her spirit on wild cliffs and in windswept picnic spots. In these poems, the mistakenly viewed Emma of interior dwelling is released into the outdoors so loved by the young Emma of Cornwall, as though, by freeing her of her confinement, Hardy could reverse the changes he witnessed and understand, for a moment at least, those two women as one.

To supplement this topical movement outdoors, the poems—both as individual works and as a conjoined sequence—formally reverse both of the renovating impulses of Hardy's architectural drawings: the impulse to make asymmetries symmetrical, and the impulse to make a blurred image more visually clear. First, the sequence dismantles symmetrical construction, creating a kind of sequence that could not be compared to a sealed interior space. On the plane of the sequence as a whole, each of the twenty-one poems possesses a different form and shape. This distinguishes them from the kind of poetic sequence that is organized by uniformity of form, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *House of Life* sonnet sequence, in which each poem possesses an identical pattern of line indentation. The uniform shape of these poems felt to him so clearly like the fitted parts of a house that Algernon Charles Swinburne's review of the sequence perpetuated the metaphor enthusiastically: "This *House of Life* has in it so many mansions, so many halls of state and bowers of music, that no guest can declare upon entrance the secret of its scheme….but the scheme is solid and harmonious; there is no waste in this luxury of genius. The whole is lovelier than the parts" (quoted in Rossetti, 9). According to Swinburne, the symmetry of the parts of *The House of Life* makes them fit together so

felicitously that they cannot be extracted from the larger work they have constructed. Hardy's poems, on the other hand, seem to undermine any unifying construction: they are long and short, thin and wide, dense and dispersed. Some are numbered, some are not; some are aligned along the left margin as though approximating some kind of solid wall; and some are elaborately perforated at the margins. Some, like "Beeny Cliff," are composed of lines so long that words nearly spill off the edge of the page; other poems, such as "The Phantom Horsewoman," or "Self-Unconscious," are composed primarily of curt dimeter lines.

Within individual poems, moreover, we see another kind of looseness of structural grip. Just as Bradstreet's metrical errors and mixed metaphors contributed to a sense of her couplets cracking open to allow for escape, Hardy uses metrical and lineation strategies to open the structures of his elegies. In a poem like "The Voice," for example, the repeated fact of doubly unstressed line endings (such as "call to me" and "all to me") make for a poem markedly different from one comprised of strict iambic lines, each ending with the firmness of a stressed beat. Instead, the double unstressed syllables feel almost as though they're the down-slanting side of an old building, and certainly as though they have run over the solidity of a line with final stress. Underscoring this sensation is the fact that the poem's final stanza is significantly smaller than the stanzas above it, undermining the regular pattern that has been established up to that point.

Highly variable line length appears in many poems throughout the sequence, such as "At Castle Boterel," a poem which lacks any mention of an actual castle. Each of its

stanzas moves from lines of five beats to four beats to two beats so that the stanza

dwindles, slipping away, undermining the reader's sense of fortified solidity. In this

sequence, Hardy will not fit his poems together according to rules of structural

soundness, nor will he give the reader the comfort of feeling as though, through the

experience of reading the poem, we are bound in a tangible space, contained with the

spirit of the woman we are trying to imagine.

In addition to this dismantling of symmetrical soundness, the visual elements of

the poems are, at various points, either absent, unreliable, unheeded, or screened behind a

combination of other sense-data. A stanza is like a room at least in part because of its

visible dark lines on the whiteness of a page, because of the collection of visual objects

that it presents, because of the way in which it calls us to imagine things with our mind's

eye. Hardy's elegies, however, not only present stanzaic shapes that are permeated by

white, open space, but they often refuse to present clear visual objects. This fact renders

his stanzas less room-like and more air-like. In many of the poems, it appears that he

cannot see at all, or else he sees what he knows is a figment of his imagination, some

"mis-vision" that doesn't correspond to the actual woman with whom Hardy shared a

fractured home.

This undercutting of vision is surprising in the elegiac tradition, in which poems

often conclude with a consolatory vision of the deceased such as the day-star at the end of

Milton's "Lycidas" (1638) or Keats' light shining through heaven in Shelley's "Adonais"

(1821). In Hardy's poetry, these lights, a part of what Peter Sacks describes as a primary

convention of the English Elegy, dwindle from bright beams to the "attenuated

retrospective glimmerings" (Sacks, 34). Such attenuated glimmerings are the best of cases in Hardy's elegies; more often, the poems entirely refrain from permitting themselves the luxury of consolation by light-vision, insisting instead upon the shortcomings of the eye.

Despite this reluctance to rely on the eye, many critics have located in Hardy a desire to write his way to a kind of heightened, sharpened vision, one that can perform its task with more representative acuity. In *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception*, Tom Paulin writes that "Hardy's wish to *see* an indubitable ghost is characteristic of his discontented skepticism, and…his imagination operates under what Coleridge terms the 'despotism of the eye'" (Paulin, 2-3). Similarly, Melanie Sexton writes that, in *Poems 1912-1913,* Hardy "strives, in fact, not simply to remember the young Emma, but to recover her—to 'gain' a vivid physical image of her, the strength of which will allow him to capture the love, innocence, and joy which are associated with her" (Sexton, 210).

I would argue, however, that while Hardy does express desire for some kind of visible proof, he is ultimately hesitant to use the eye as his main tool in reconstructing a lost love. If Hardy's architectural vision (as we see in the sketches of St. Juliot's) becomes increasingly clear, color-saturated, and vivid, Hardy's elegiac vision does not inherit these qualities. Instead, by the opening of *Poems of 1912-1913*, the speaker seems to set himself in a state of blindness as he goes about remembering Emma. In "The Going," the first poem of the sequence, Hardy bemoans the fact that he cannot—and will not ever be able to—"gain one glimpse" of Emma beyond the veil of death. The poem does not move towards a vision of Emma, either as she was originally or as she became;

138

instead, it ends with the sentiment "All's past amend,/ unchangeable. It must go." Emma slips beyond the reach of his vision in a way that appears to be willed, and Hardy does not defy this will by summoning a posthumous vision.

He continues this visual acquiescence in the second poem of the sequence, "Your Last Drive," a poem about dying light and obscured vision: "had I sat/ At your side that eve I should not have seen/ That the countenance I was glancing at/ Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,/ Nor have read the writing upon your face" (155). It is not only death that makes Hardy blind to Emma; even during her life he missed the visual details that might have helped him to know her. Having admitted this, he does not try to scrape these details together posthumously. Here, as in "The Going," Hardy permits Emma to escape him. He does not attempt to visualize her, lest he violate the separation she imposed in her quick going, and which she expresses in a firmly independent second stanza:

> You may miss me then. But I shall not know
> How many times you visit me there,
> Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
> There never at all. And I shall not care.
> Should you censure me I shall take no heed,
> And even your praises no more shall need. (156)

It is her wish to be beyond him, and he does not rein in that desire by picturing her as though she were present and accessible. Even if he were to censure her or praise her, Emma asserts an unwillingness to return, or to care about his plight; by ending the poem from her perspective, Hardy obeys her injunction on his speech. In its bereft conclusion, then, the poem leaves an irrevocable divide open between them.

Despite accepting this basic divide, however, the poem does allude to a better kind of impression that might have been received when Emma was alive, if they had taken that final drive together, and if he had seen as he ought to have seen. And how is this ideal impression described? If he *had* taken that final drive, if he *had* managed to see the meaning on her face before she died, what would he have seen? He would have noticed a "last-time look in the flickering sheen," and "writing upon your face," phrases that extend a certain amount of agency to Emma. The active verb lurking behind the noun "look" implies a gaze that she turns on him as much as a passive expression; similarly, the writing on her face implies both that she is marked for death and that she has placed a message there for him. Ideally, had he seen as he wishes he had, he would have seen *her* looking at *him* and writing to *him*: he would have been a passive, blank slate for her projected expressions, which would have had more significance than his admittedly meaningless visual imaginings. Rather than creating an impressive visual memorial—of her, or for her—Hardy seems to desire to become a palimpsest himself, an empty space onto which her message to him might be projected.

The first seven poems of the book, including the two just mentioned, are often grouped together as Hardy's poems of "rupture," or "shock" (Armstrong, 153), and they are marked by bleak sensory deprivation; after these, however, Hardy's desire for some consolation—or at least some communication—with his lost wife seems to overcome his pessimism when he introduces three poems that rather boldly attempt occult communion with her ghost. It is these poems that most arouse expectations of some kind of visible reconstitution; instead of supplying a vision, however, Hardy uses these poems to

140

reconstitute Emma's voice. In "The Haunter," Emma speaks, claiming that Hardy cannot see her; in "The Voice," Hardy is offered a tantalizing echo of the early Emma's voice in the winter wind; in "His Visitor," the later Emma speaks again, an invisible voice which vows to depart her old house because of the changes that have been wrought there, joining her earlier self in the wind. In place, then, of an elegiac sequence that is architectural—contained indoors, symmetrically enclosed, and visually present—Hardy offers us reconstitution through unenclosed voice.

This is the alternative, then, that Hardy offers. Rather than the solid comfort of an architectural elegy that is both visible and tangibly solid, Hardy offers a sequence of elegies that insist on dismantling and invisibility. In the place of clear visual structures, sounds assert new importance. In *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, Susan Stewart describes a kind of poetic architecture that is built of sounds, rather than visual components: "the poet works from the received foundations of speech—out of this inheritance, the poet makes another self, an eidictic self estranged from mere authorship" (Stewart, 89). According to Stewart, by obeying the "received foundations" of a metrical pattern, a rhyme pattern, a received set of grammar and syntax rules, Hardy steps into a frame that is common, inherited, property, belonging to the speaking community rather than himself as an individual man. By emptying his poem of the visual, then, and filling it instead with the shared currency of sound, Hardy is able to rely on a public

141

framework—rather than his fallible architect's eye—to reconstitute Emma passively, his poetic mind the palimpsest he wished to become in "Your Last Drive."

In the final three poems of reconstitution, Hardy emphasizes the importance of sound to an almost manic extent. As Stewart points out, "The Voice" is a collage of popular songs and hymns, borrowing not only from a public store of language sounds but from a communal and pre-determined store of popular music, as though Hardy's poem is "possessed" by the voices of other songwriters and singers who have preceded him (Stewart, 132-138). Interestingly, this kind of passive sound-borrowing seems to imbue the poet with confidence. "The Voice" opens with a bold claim that the poet can indeed hear Emma's calls, a claim that is surprisingly bold given his self-proclaimed deafness in earlier poems:

> Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
> Saying that now you are not as you were
> When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
> But as at first, when our day was fair.
>
> Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
> Standing as when I drew near to the town
> Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
> Even to the original air-blue gown! (164-5)

The first stanzas make clear Hardy's embrace of the shared rules of sound: his three-syllable rhymes at the ends of lines one and three call attention to the heavy influence that rhyme wielded in the construction of this poem. In a poem with three-syllable rhymes, the poet has an intensely contracted role in the choice of his words; he is intensely subjected to the form he has chosen. If his will tugs against this submission in lines two and four, where we find a slant-rhymed set of b-rhymes ("were" and "fair"), the unequal

weight of three syllables of a-rhyme counteract this tug to make us believe in the possessed quality of his speaking voice. Rhythmically, as well, the poem balances will against submission, favoring submission in the end. Throughout the poem, the poet maintains a subsiding dactylic measure, the strength of will in that original stress followed by the passivity of two unstressed beats. As in the rhyme scheme, these dactyls enact the process of will bowing out to make room for a more passive presence. In "The Voice," sound—as a method of asserting presence—is tied less to the certainties of stress than it is tied to the uncertainties of un-stress, less to the control of the rhymer than to the control of the rhyme.

This semi-passive sound-reconstitution established, it does not seem that the poem seeks to see either the woman or a structure that is intended to contain her. Nowhere in the first stanza are we given an idea of what the woman looks like: in this first stanza, she is described in nothing but vague temporal terms ("as you were," or "as at first," modifiers which, coincidentally, directly echo the penciled labels at the back of Hardy's various sketches of St. Juliot's). In the stanza's first line, she is introduced as a "woman much missed," the pun on "mist" evoking a woman who is dispersed and invisible as air. Similarly, in the stanza's final line, she is summarized not by visual details but by an indirect evocation of the atmosphere at that moment, "but as at first, when our day was fair." The woman has less visual particularity than vague resemblance to diffuse atmosphere.

Despite setting up the picture of an invisible woman, the poet in the second stanza nevertheless demands visual evidence of her presence: "let me view you then." In this

143

stanza, Hardy's desire as a viewer exchanges passivity for commanding confidence. The describing voice of the first stanza is replaced by an exclamation-pointed, twice-repeated demand, at the end of which the first visual clue (the "air-blue gown") magically appears. But as soon as Hardy's vision gets too confident—the demand to "view" is followed by the demand that Emma be as he "knew" her, a demand that verges on a kind of desirous renovation—the poem undermines itself. Even within that visual clue there exists a kind of creeping invisibility, the vividness of "blue" tied to the transparency of "air." Moreover, as soon as that clue has been uttered, the third stanza directly undermines the veracity of the statement:

> Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
> Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
> You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
> Heard no more again far or near? (165)

The previous stanza's momentum from question to exclamation is here completely reversed by a stanza that consists of nothing but one extended question about absence. Again, as he does in the final line of the first stanza, Hardy averts his eyes from a vision of Emma to a dispersed view of the surrounding atmosphere; here, however, the atmosphere is a place which he can neither see (the only visual descriptor, "wan," describes the lack of color rather than the presence of color) nor hear (her voice has waned to the point that she is "heard no more again far or near"). The poet's overconfident demands for vision have only further removed the presence of the woman, alienating the poet from his initial confidence in his powers of hearing.

This loss is reinforced in the last stanza, in which Hardy's original adherence to sound-forms such as three-syllable rhymes and dactylic tetrameter—as though those might have been the scaffolding on which an original Emma could be restored—crumbles:

> Thus I; faltering forward,
> Leaves around me falling,
> Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
> And the woman calling. (165)

The first and third line three-syllable rhymes become two-syllable rhymes, and three of the four lines become trimeter, rather than tetrameter: an audible element has been lost that can never return. Beats have fallen away from the poem as sadly as the falling leaves. The smooth melody of regular dactyls, furthermore, is replaced with a jarring composite of spondees, trochees, iambs, and dactyls, all of which break from the hymns and folk songs that Hardy drew upon. Even the architecture of sound has fallen apart.

Having enacted such a bereavement, the poem nevertheless ends on a strangely optimistic note; in the face of mourning that she will never more be heard, the voice of young Emma—lost across distance and time—does conclude the poem, as present as it was in the first line of the poem, before the stages of Hardy's doubt had unraveled that sureness. It is as though Hardy's faith in her presence depends upon the admission that he cannot see her or hear her, his powers of reconstitution depend upon the destruction of formally containing structures, whether visual or aural. Ultimately, when he ceases to make visual or aural demands upon her, she speaks, in a way that seems almost out of the control of Hardy's own poem. If he builds his poem from description and question to

145

demand and exclamation, she calls his tone back to question and description; if he insists on a vision, she denies even those remnants of sound that she offered; if he insists upon incantatory sound elements in the hopes of reconstituting her voice, she tears open his dactyls, his rhymes, and his folk song allusions. Only when the woman escapes Hardy's control (she is no longer the familiar 'you' but a third-person, de-familiarized 'woman') can the poem conclude with her voice, which appears even as the poem-as-architectural-monument is crumbling. In "The Voice," Hardy refuses to risk "mis-vision" or renovation by summoning Emma actively; instead the poem waits for her phantom to assert itself.

Even in the sequence's more visually oriented poems, vision is complicated by the press of other sensory channels. Just as "The Voice" uses sound to chastise the desire for vision, the original sequence's final poem, "The Phantom Horsewoman," checks vision by describing it as a secondary sense, comprised of a mosaic of other sense impressions:

I

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
    He comes and stands
    In a careworn craze,
    And looks at the sands
    And the seaward haze
    With moveless hands
    And face and gaze,
    Then turns to go...
And what does he see when he gazes so?

II

They say he sees as an instant thing

More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That once was in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring—
A phantom of his own figuring.

III

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain–day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright–
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

IV

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

In stanza one, the poem's central character "looks" with "his hands, his face, his gaze";

the ghostly vision is seen three times through the lens of three different organs. In stanza

two, the man's vision is described as much with modifiers that belong to other sense

categories as it is with proper visual adjectives: all that he notes is "clear" (a visual

modifier), "sweet" (a taste modifier), "soft" (a tactile modifier), "briny" (taste), "green"

(visual), "warm" (tactile), and "keen" (tactile). In the midst of this string of adjectives, "real" inserts itself with a confidence that rarely appears in Hardy's elegies: it is as though, by comprising a vision of touch and taste as well as vision itself, Hardy can ensure that it is in some way true to its original. As in "The Voice," only when the senses check and narrate each other is the author able to step outside of himself and reveal a consolatory vision. Melanie Sexton is correct when she describes the achievement of this phantom (the poem's end announces the vision of a girl-ghost-rider) as transcending "the reminder of inevitable decay" that plagues Hardy's skeptical mind (Sexton, 223). However, to think of this particular phantom as purely image—and not a figment of sound, touch, and taste as well—seems like a bereavement. Hardy does not—as an utter skeptic might—allow himself the freedom of pure visual imagining, unmoored from the tangible world; instead, he humbles his sight to sound and touch and then finds himself able to conjure a more present phantom.

This careful sense-matrix is the foundation not only for this individual poem, but for the structure of *Poems of 1912-1913* as a whole. If the individual lines of "The Phantom Horsewoman" form a matrix of competing image and sound, the poem itself is representative of the meta-narrative of the entire sequence, which itself performs the same synaesthetic trick by placing various sense poems in juxtaposition. Hardy does not seek either a vision or a voice, but seeks instead a kind of ghost that affects him through multiple senses, so that he need not worry that one sense has imagined it all in a way that is unfaithful to the "real" original. Out of the ruins of poetic imagery and

148

monumentalizing elegies, in the unroofed space of Hardy's outdoor poems, there arises a new sense of the original woman who was lost both in death and in the blindness of life.

This, then, is the alternative to architectural containment that Hardy finds in poetry. Within this kind of sequence, he can re-imagine his wife while insisting that she remain outside of himself, beyond the reach of his renovations. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Hardy so often re-imagines architecture in poetry (in poems such as "Copying Architecture in an Old Minster," and "A Cathedral Façade at Midnight"): rebuilt with verbal lines that are both visual and aural, the spirit of each church is able to assert itself more strongly than it might have been able to do in a watercolor sketch or in a renovation made of new stones. More importantly, Hardy is in the same way able to address the dilemma of his wish to reconstitute a young woman whom, in real life, he had ceased to desire. If, in life, young Emma was changed by their co-habitation, the process of elegizing Emma threatens to change her again by placing her in the enclosure of poems. As in real life, if Hardy were to poetically capture the wild young woman he loved, she would no longer be so wild. Still, his rekindled desire for the young woman he married will not permit him to let the original woman slip away unremembered, severed forever from the woman he came to know in marriage. By opening his elegies to the elements, and by experiencing these elements with other senses besides the enlightened visual sense, Hardy not only feels his loss more fully but offers each sense the chance to edit the other, to criticize and question the claims made by the other. And then, finally, having enacted this self-censuring process, Hardy can finally allow himself to conjure a vision of the woman he lost. This vision is not contained within a room, a hermitage, a

149

marble tomb, or even a poem that mimics certain qualities of these structures; instead, she

is left out in the wind, on the wild cliffs, inexplicable and unenclosed.

Chapter 4: Stealing into Houses in Robert Frost's *North of Boston*

In the previous chapter, I explored the ways that Hardy not only attempts to free his subject from the constraints of architectural, indoor elegies, but also attempts to speak back to himself in her voice. In "Your Last Drive," for instance, Hardy bestows expressive agency on his wife's facial expressions in the hope that his memories of her might speak: "had I sat/ At your side that eve I should not have seen/ That the countenance I was glancing at/ Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,/ Nor have read the writing upon your face" (ll. 13-17). Her face has a written message, and it can 'look' as actively or more than the poet himself can 'glance.' In "The Voice," Hardy denies his ability to see her at all in the hopes of reconstituting the sound of her speech, and in poems such as "The Spell of the Rose" he attempts to ventriloquize his departed wife, chastising himself for misunderstanding her when she was alive. Throughout the series, Hardy works to free Emma from the interior spaces of her married life, but this does not mean that he does not want to hear her voice. It is almost as if Hardy believes that if Emma is given enough outdoor liberty, she might revive enough to infiltrate the poem, scolding the poet in a cadence that is particular to her. Hardy, then, might be freed from confinement within the prison of his own misguided mind. Thus released, he might

151

speak in a voice that does not belong solely to him, a voice from which he has up to this point been alienated completely.

This is another kind of escape from confinement that binds Hardy to Bradstreet, who attempted to speak in the heroic cadence of previous poets, and Pulter, who attempted to see herself from the perspective of a person living on the moon. These are poets who seek to escape not only from the confinement of little rooms but from the confinement of their own heads so that they might speak or write or see from alternate perspectives. In the dialogue poems of *North of Boston*--a strange book of poems composed almost entirely in the form of dialogic conversation, spoken by a collection of characters each with their own unique accents--Robert Frost also seeks to make poetry out of the practice of slipping in and out of others' voices, escaping the insularity of his private perspective and inhabiting the speech patterns of others. In these poems, Frost seeks to escape from an even smaller confinement than that of bedroom confinement, the domestic cot, or the marital house. Rather than beating his fists against the walls of a house, Frost beats his fists against the walls of his own head, which divide him from the characters he seeks to represent.

This desire to escape from the subjective mind, so central to the project of writing a book of poems in a series of characters' voices, is not unrelated to the problem of escaping from claustrophobic architectural spaces, and in fact *North of Boston* is as heavily populated with houses, barns, hotel rooms, kitchens, and tiny cottages as it is populated with speaking characters. Walls, doors, and windows appear and reappear, opening and closing many of the poems. "The Housekeeper," for instance, begins with a

character letting himself in at the kitchen door; it ends with a character who "raised her voice against the closing door" (Frost, 82-89). The subsequent poem in the sequence, "The Fear," also opens with a door: "A lantern light from deeper in the barn/ Shone on a man and a woman in the door/ And threw their lurching shadows on a house/ Nearby, all dark in every glossy window" (Frost, 89). "The Black Cottage" opens with a house, defined by its windows and doors, and ends as the poem's protagonists prepare to leave that house behind: "He struck the clapboards,/ Fierce heads looked out; small bodies pivoted./ We rose to go. Sunset blazed on the windows" (Frost, 62). The windows are not transparent by the end of this poem; once the characters have departed, they will be divided from the house's miniature inhabitants by two kinds of opaque surface: sunset-glazed windows and clapboard walls. "Home Burial" begins with a character standing in front of a door and ends with that door opening wider; "A Hundred Collars" ends with a character shutting the door of a shared hotel room; "The Death of a Hired Man" begins with a character meeting her husband at the door of her house. The architectural structures that hold us together and keep us apart are crucial to these poems about escaping out of the subjective mind.

As a whole, in other words, the book--which boldly ventriloquizes characters of different genders, personalities, and professions, slipping in and out of others' voices-- seems riddled with dividing walls that might serve either to open out or to lock in. The book opens with "Mending Wall," and from the start it concerns itself with the walls between people and whether or not they ought to be kept up or taken down. Despite the fact that its opening poem ends with the motto "Good fences make good neighbors," the

book's main pursuit--which chooses, instead of the subjective unfolding that ostensibly defines a lyric poem, a dialogic approach--belies that initial supposition. Despite its explicit assertion that good fences make good neighbors, and despite its proliferation of fences, walls, windows and doors, *North of Boston* is a remarkably transgressive book in terms of its commitment to speaking in others' voices. The question, then, is whether or not the dialogic form of these poems allows us to escape from ourselves through doors and windows that are open in the end, or whether it only serves to demonstrate how ultimately trapped we are inside our own particular voices and our own well-mended walls.

In examining Frost's desire to access the interior lives of characters he writes about, it is helpful to compare him to Emerson, who also expressed a desire for total immersion in the artistic subject. There is a long tradition of critically bracketing Robert Frost and Ralph Waldo Emerson, one that was perhaps begun by Frost's own essay, "On Emerson." At first, according to Frost, the two men were often compared: "I have friends it bothers when I am accused of being Emersonian, that is, a cheerful monist, for whom evil does not exist, or if it does exist, needn't last forever" (Frost, 860). Despite such early conflations, however, critical essays over the past half-century have tended to focus instead on the philosophical differences that mark the two writers. Many find in Frost's poetry a skepticism that they contrast with Emersonian optimism in models such as the one set forward by Jay Parini: "Frost was not, of course, a purely Emersonian student of nature; his skepticism ran deep, and he shaded every observation with a rueful undertone of doubt (Pack, xiv)." Both the statement of comparison and the statement of divergence

154

depict Emerson as single-mindedly optimistic when it comes to the issue of artistic communion with the artistic subject.

But Emerson's arguments were more complicated than that, running the gamut, as he aged, between hopeful pronouncements of transcendence and pronouncements of despair at the total alienation that isolates us all from each other and from the world that we lived in: he was, as Frost describes him, a man of "melancholy dualism." (Frost, *860)*. Frost openly acknowledges his debt to this melancholy dualist, stating, in the same essay, that "I should like to make myself as much of an Emersonian as I can" (Frost, 860). It was not Emerson's capacity for arriving at one truth that Frost admired, but Emerson's capacity for allowing inconsistent beliefs to coexist. In his notebooks, Frost writes, "Emerson is right about consistency. Don't hope to say or do anything [with which] you will never say or do anything else inconsistent" (Frost, *Notebooks, 522)*. Frost was not a poet attempting to break away from (or conform to) an influence of pure optimism about escape from the bounds of the subjective self; instead, he embraced a poetic legacy that swung between two poles. Frost's poems—particularly the conversation poems in *North of Boston*—find means by which to accommodate both the optimistic Emerson and the pessimistic Emerson, the intimately transcendent Emerson and the alienated Emerson. In this remarkable book, which is comprised almost entirely of poems that dip in and then back out of the voices of others, Frost is able to acknowledge the impossibility of total communion with the characters that surround us while simultaneously positing a certainty that such communion must be attempted, and that out of such poetic attempts we may be changed.

155

Still, however, as did Parini, critics have wanted to find the ways in which Frost breaks away from a simpler Emersonian model. Frank Lentricchia, for instance, discusses Frost's poetry as a blend of Emersonian innocence and the "qualifying hand of the post-Emersonian mind (*Lentricchia*, 42)." Of Frost's late, lonely poems, Lentricchia writes:

> We have come a long way when we traverse the distance
> between the early Emerson, who saw man in the woods
> eternally young and fully integrated within the community of
> nature, to Robert Frost, who in "An Old Man's Winter Night"
> evokes a bleak, modern vision of self—old and failing and
> alienated from (the) world. (Lentricchia, 179)

For Lentricchia, that which distinguishes Frost from Emerson is a failure of faith that humans might find communion with the surrounding world, that we might escape the bounds of an enclosed subjectivity in order to tap into something more eternal outside of ourselves. Lentricchia does distinguish between early and late Emerson, and his analyses of Frost's poems are elegant; still, his comparisons of Frost and Emerson contribute to a criticism that sets a cynical Frost at odds with an "Emersonian" belief in true union between the poet and his environment.

Richard Poirier's exploration of the relationship between Frost and Emerson describes a more two-sided Frost, a man who shares Emerson's ability to tap into intimacy even as he sets himself apart from the outside world. For Poirier, Emerson's great gift is the capacity for union, and Frost is able to emulate this intimacy admirably: "part of his great popularity derived, most likely, from his Emersonian capacity to make people feel that in writing a poem he was being *more* like them rather than less" (Poirier,

24). Despite this capacity, however, Poirier describes Frost's occasional departures from Emerson's more idealistic depictions of oneness with the outside world: "the speaker—really the mind of the poet going through a representative consultation with itself—realizes that he is to be deprived of his platonic, or, more exactly, eleatic vision of unagitated fusion and oneness, a vision beautifully expressed in Emerson's 'Xenophenes'" (Poirier, 16). Like Lentricchia and Parini, Poirier describes Frost as departing from Emerson in moments of skepticism about the poet's ability to fuse with the world outside his own head.

This distinction—set forward by Lentricchia and Poirier in the seventies—has not been abandoned by contemporary criticism. Timothy Steele, in his 2007 introduction to Peter Stanlis' *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*, suggests that we balance Frost's objectivity against Emersonian (and Whitmanian) expressions of "organic wholeness":

> We have so thoroughly (and, often, so unknowingly)
> committed ourselves to the tradition of Emerson and Whitman
> and to the Romantic idealism or monism that underlies that
> tradition. We assume that our poets …. will partake of an
> organic wholeness of things and will, in some vague way,
> express or fulfill our deepest needs and concerns. We do not
> have to choose between the poetics of Frost and those of
> Emerson and Whitman. Yet … it would be to our advantage
> to explore, or at least to admit into discussion, a position that
> preserves for poetry both reason and instinct, both part and
> whole, both objectivity and subjectivity. (Stanlis, ix)

Here, again, Emerson is set forward as representing one pole of romantic intimacy with the entire world. Distinctively, Steele and Stanlis discuss Frost as a dualist, a poet who admits into dialogue both Emersonian inclusion and a reasoned objectivity, rather than as a poet who sets himself apart from Emerson in his skeptical relationship to "organic

157

wholeness." This chapter argues, however, that looked at from within a tradition of poetic escape, both Emerson and Frost are dualists, writers who alternate between oneness and apartness, attempting to see from perspectives other than their own even as they describe the impossibility of escaping the cage of subjectivity. In this sense, both are writers of domestic escape, for both set up enclosures from which it is impossible to find release, and yet simultaneously rail against such enclosure.

The question that ought to be asked about Emerson and Frost is not which writer favors confinement and which writer favors escape, but rather how such a dual approach to confinement and escape can be maintained without collapse, how a poet can admit the impossibility of representing others and still attempt to speak for others, without claiming that he alone, above all others, is able to perform such an impossible feat. It was Frost, in the conversation poems of *North of Boston*, who was able to come to a solution to this dilemma, writing poems in others' voices that remind him of his own status as an intruder. Total fusion with other characters is made impossible, and yet, in the attempt, in the change that the characters impose upon the narrator's voice, a balance between alienation and immersion is achieved. In these conversation poems, Frost is able to join early and late Emerson, cynical and hopeful Emerson, without choosing one at the expense of the other.

This chapter reads the conversational poems of Frost's *North of Boston*-- particularly "Home Burial"—for their alternation (both metapoetically and thematically) between the pain of enclosure within the self and the hope of participation in others' experiences. It looks also at the arc of Emerson's thought, and finds a similar oscillation

between enclosure and participation. By examining Emerson's shifting stance towards the concept of "insight," as well as Frost's alternation between separated narration and merged dialogue in "Home Burial," I hope to show that the two authors are more alike in their tenuous balance of participation and enclosure than traditional Emerson-Frost dichotomies would have us believe: both authors, then, are authors of confinement and release, imprisonment and escape. Just as Pulter alternates between mourning her confinement and describing a universe that is wildly unconfined, just as Bradstreet alternates between the desire to speak from within heroic forms and the desire to break free of their influence, just as Hardy alternates between the comfort of architectural elegy and the impulse to release is subject from those restraints, Frost and Emerson pay homage to both sides of the spectrum of containment. In Emerson's late essays and in Frost's poems of conversation (such as "Home Burial"), the crucial differences lie not in the degree of isolation or merger, but rather in the final balance that is struck between these two poles of writing. Ultimately, Frost more than Emerson manages to create a self-perpetuating dialectic between insight and insulation, one that allows him to ceaselessly move back and forth between access to and expulsion from the characters for whom he would like to speak. If Emerson inevitably ends his dialectic in a mode of first person plural, speaking for those characters' whose inaccessibility he described, Frost ends his dialectic in a mode of permissive silence, allowing a character who does not wish to be contained within a poem to escape from that enclosure.

Between "The Poet" and "Experience," Emerson's evaluation of the poet's imaginative potential shifts drastically. In "The Poet," written between 1841 and 1845,

he describes the writer's ability to escape himself and merge with his outside

environment in order to speak from within it—a gift he labels "insight":

> Why should not…we participate in the invention of nature? This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others. (*Emerson,* 233)

For the Emerson of "The Poet," imagination is not an entirely subjective

contraption. "Invention of nature," here, may stand for two different kinds of

participation in the surrounding world. If "invention of nature" is read as "creation of

nature," the imagination's subjective prerogative is emphasized; on the other hand, if the

line is read as "a thing created by nature," the imagination is a tool by which we

participate in a world that is created by an outside force of nature. By allowing both

meanings to proliferate, Emerson leaves room for belief that the human imagination is a

participatory contraption which merges with its object, not creating that object but joining

up with it, sharing a life with that object in order to make it transparent to the watcher. In

this participatory way, imagination facilitates insight.

Later, however, this confidence in the potential of imaginative merger is lost. In

Experience, written between 1844 and 1845, Emerson laments, "well, souls never touch

their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we

aim at and converse with" (Emerson, 256). Later, he laments, "I cannot get it nearer to

me" (Emerson, 256). Emerson goes on to explain that, "I take this evanescence and

lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch

hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition. Nature does not like to be

observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates … Our relations to each other are oblique and casual" (Emerson, 257). From describing, in The Poet," the artist as a lover (rather than a spy) of nature, Emerson shifts to describing the artist as the dupe of nature's mercurial tricks. From describing objects outside of the perceiver's imagination as transparent, he shifts to describing them as slippery and deceitful. In his later view, he cannot even engage firmly with nature, let alone occupy it deeply enough to speak from within, with insight. This pole is, typically enough, a stance Emerson sheds as soon as he has adopted it, but the rest of his career is marked by a coexistence of belief in both insight and insularity, in the artist's freedom from the enclosure of subjectivity and the artist's ability to escape from that cell.

Heeding the claims of both these poles presents a problem for Emerson in theorizing ideal interaction with other human beings. In *Experience* he woefully confirms all of the problems of attempting to merge with others: "Never can love make consciousness and ascription equal in force. There will be the same gulf between every me and thee as between the original and the picture. The universe is the bride of the soul. All private sympathy is partial (Emerson, 270)." Despite this admission, Emerson continues to speak in the first person plural, a form of speech that requires an assumption of more than partial sympathy. Later, in *Fate*, Emerson not only uses the first person plural, but asks that men submit their individual wills to a common, artistically created unity, one which he himself has articulated: "Let us build altars to the Blessed Unity which holds nature and souls in perfect solution, and compels every atom to serve a universal end" (Emerson, 351). He goes on to say, "Why should we be afraid of Nature,

which is no other than 'philosophy and theology embodied'? Why should we fear to be

crushed by savage elements, we who are made up of the same elements?" (Emerson,

352). Despite having articulated the impossibility of understanding the substance of

others' interiorities, Emerson ventures forward, in the first person plural, to describe the

elements that we universally share.

In some ways, one might say that the admission of this duality ultimately enables

Emerson to make a kind of deity out of his poetic voice, which speaks from a place apart

from humanity while simultaneously encouraging humanity to strive towards a closer

similitude to his heightened awareness and speech, thus achieving an "ideal unity." In so

doing, Emerson risks the possibility of collapsing the difference between himself and his

subjects, only to encourage his subjects to emulate his superior self. In *Subjective*

Agency, Charles Altieri accuses Emerson of a certain reproachable—and purposeful—

slipperiness when it comes to balancing these two ideologies in his own approach to

others: "Emerson wants to be representative in two ways that are difficult to reconcile: he

wants to be representative of a humanity we share…and he wants to be representative of

possibilities within that humanity which only he articulates, and hence which involve

treating the humanness in others as the potential to become like him" (Altieri, 195).

Altieri's describes Emersonian "insight" as dangerously close to mere projection of the

poetic self upon others: Emerson would speak for a shared humanity, but in doing so,

having already explained the inaccessibility of others' subjectivities, he does not speak

for others' actuality but for others' potential, a thing that he himself proscribes. He is not

sharing the reality of his subjects, achieving organic "insight"; instead, he is exerting a

kind of molding power over them. Despite having admitted the problems of shared

subjectivity, Emerson ends his career with a certain measure of permissiveness when it

comes to speaking for what others might be, a state which often seems a kind of

extension of himself. In some ways, the very humility of his shifting stance on insight is

the thing that makes it most aggressive: the fact that Emerson admits a general captivity

within subjectivity, and then goes on to imagine his way into other characters as he

describes them in the ideal, peculiarly enables his own particular, hierarchically

privileged power as a poet by pointing out the problems that everyone else has with such

imagination.

Is it possible, then, for a poet to establish a dualism of intimacy and insularity

without eventually insisting that others become echoes of himself, so that he might

continue to speak? Do we all merely articulate—rather than empathize with—the

feelings of others, insisting that they do not exist on their own but become replicas of our

better selves? And if we do not, how do we continue to express that tension productively,

in a way that doesn't subside into a silent admission of the impossibility of shared public

speech? This question of speech and speaking with an understanding of others'

interiorities is a question that haunts Robert Frost, one which he explores in the use of

conversation poems. In these poems, he absorbs the voices of others in ways that carry

great potential for both insight and projective intrusion, as well as for escape from the

confinement of a too-private subjectivity.

Frost's turn toward a conversational form of poetry was sudden and nearly

complete: in *North of Boston*, his second book of poems, there are only a handful of

poems that could be described as non-conversational, and even those feature imbedded

quotes. The book employs a spectrum of voices that speak from varied gender, class, and

experiential standpoints, voices with which Frost seems to identify in varying degrees as

he alternates between quoting from the outside perspective of a spying narrator, to

merging entirely with characters, speaking entire poems in a particular character's voice.

The formal nature of the book, then, begs the question of whether or not the lyric can

speak for more than the poet's constrained selfhood. As lyrics, his poems have no

obligation to stand for any self but his own, and yet the polyvocal nature of conversation

poems forces the reader to consider the poet's desire to speak for *other* characters, rather

than writing from within his own singular self, a stranded person sending out messages in

poetic bottles. The very nature of a polyvocal lyric--a phrase which could be read as a

contradiction in terms--brings up a host of questions about what it means for a poet to

seek to escape from his singular voice. The desire to speak for other characters may be

present, but this does not guarantee that such a thing is possible. Are the voices of *North

of Boston*, then, merely articulations of the author displaced onto created characters,

nothing more than ventriloquisms and minstrelsy? Or is Frost able to use forms of

dialogue to move in and out of character, balancing insight and exclusion, confinement

and escape, in a way that is ultimately less slippery and more productive than the way

outlined by Emerson in "Experience"?

 Poems that rely entirely or almost entirely on dialogue are rare; in general, lyric

poetry is thought of as the expression of one, isolated interiority that has been cast out

upon the page. Bakhtin, in fact, eliminated the possibility of dialogic poetry based on the fact of poetry's inevitable solitariness:

> In genres that are poetic in the narrow sense, the natural dialogization of the word is not put to artistic use, the word is sufficient unto itself and does not presume alien utterances beyond its own boundaries. Poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse. (Bakhtin, 1208)

For Bakhtin, the lyric is a form that is defined by boundaries, impermeable to intrusion from alien discourse and impervious to the author's attempts to escape. Frost, however, flouts this convention by including voices that he aims to make distinguishable from his own, alien in their dialect, tone, and outlook. It seems as if he is not willing to excuse lyric poetry from its involvement with the social world in order to allow it sanctity in self-sufficiency; similarly, he is not content to accept the poet's confinement within his own head, but insists instead on escaping into the heads of other speakers. Still, though, the question remains as to whether his inclusion of other voices is merely self-projection, or whether it is a genuine tapping into others' tones, a true exercise of the kind of insight that Emerson touts in *The Poet*.

In subject as well as form, the poems of *North of Boston* are uniquely concerned with issues of escaping the boundaries of the self. "Mending Wall," which opens the book, develops around the image of a barrier to human nearness, a fence that renders two lifelong neighbors unintelligible to each other. Immediately after, however, "The Death of the Hired Man" delves into a relationship of remarkable closeness, both verbal and physical. The words that Warren and Mary share throughout the poem are tightly intertwined, anticipatory, intimate; their physical actions are choreographed to imply an

165

awareness of each other's every non-verbal signal. At the same time, however, the hired man dies alone, isolated in the barn, away from the house, confined in his own private sorrows, which will never be shared with Mary or Warren. To varying degrees, each of the book's poems deal with these issues of alienation and nearness, and in each of them Frost adopts a different distance from the characters through whom he speaks. In "A Servant to Servants," for instance, Frost's adoption of a first-person narration seems to imply intimacy with a character outside of himself. The first-person speech, however, is riddled with anxiety about the intransigent walls dividing a woman of the house from the servants who work in the fields. The entire poem unfolds as a speech to an invisible listener, whose interruptions we cannot hear. The listener, then, is entirely absent, as though the narrator has imagined this listener. Is she perhaps talking to herself? She mentions a lunatic brother, and has her own fears about mental health. It's possible, then, that this whole conversation has taken place within the narrator's head. By the end of the poem, even the invisible audience threatens to move on, and the narrator concludes his poem in a desperate plea that the invisible listener not leave her alone. The narration seems to hold out hope for escape from the boundaries of subjectivity, and yet the substance of the poem insists on isolation.

This isolation is deepened in the three poems that do not include obvious personae or conversations: "After Apple-Picking," "The Wood Pile," and "Good Hours." It seems significant that the last two of these end the book as a whole, as though Frost has banished himself in the end out of the voices he has allowed himself thus far to inhabit. In "The Wood Pile," a mere bird will not speak to him, but warily keeps instead a tree

166

between itself and the author. "Good Hours" opens with another admission of silence and loneliness: "I had for my winter evening walk—No one at all with whom to talk" (Frost, 102). The book as a whole simultaneously suggests both isolation and intimacy, allowing itself heady measures of confident closeness when it speaks for characters as diverse as Mary and the woman who talks to her servants, and then denying itself any company at all in its concluding verses.

In the middle of this alternating book, "Home Burial" develops as a conversational poem about an absolute loss of human intimacy. The poem mediates a terrible conversation between a husband and a wife who, since the death of their infant, have begun to look at each other as threatening strangers. The husband speaks about the loss materially, either as a fact to be discussed in words or as a loss to be given physical substance: the carved words on gravestones or the materiality of birchwood fences; the wife, on the other hand, seems to seek some kind of closer engagement with her lost son, refusing to ameliorate the loss by memorializing it, or to distance herself from his immaterial state by symbolizing his death in material terms. As Siobhan Phillips writes in "The Daily Living of Robert Frost," Amy "resists a progress that to her would abandon her dead child" (Phillips, 606). The couple's perceptions of the world after their son's loss are fundamentally distinct, to the point that Frost is able to map out their diametric opposition both geographically and temporally in the poem's opening lines:

> He saw her from the bottom of the stairs
> Before she saw him. She was starting down,
> Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.
> She took a doubtful step and then undid it
> To raise herself and look again. (Frost, 55)

167

He sees her before she sees him, and she is divided from him by the expanse of a stairway that she hesitates to descend. At the start of the poem, although they exist within the same house, Amy and her husband are living in two different worlds. The fact that the two characters' perspectives are fractured, however, is not the only division that the poem's opening sets up; we see, from the start, their perceptions of the world are distinct from those of the narrator, who initially watches them from a perch apart, neither at the bottom nor the top of the stairs. The man and the woman remain nameless, as though Frost does not even know them personally. He does not, moreover, describe their feelings either adjectivally or adverbially. Instead, he merely reports their actions, their seeing and starting and looking; in line four, when the first adjective ("doubtful") finally appears in the poem, it describes not the person but the action, the mere step, as though to describe another's movement (something a narrator could do from a place outside and apart) is more permissible than describing their interior feelings.   When he describes the woman as "looking over her shoulder at *some* fear" (italics mine), he makes clear that her fear is unknowable to him as well as to the husband. Neither man shares her vision. It seems—to borrow terminology from Emerson—that Frost enters the home of these two characters not as a 'lover' but as a 'spy' (Emerson, 233).

When a character's voice does enter the poem in line six, it is couched within the mediation of a narrator who speaks as much or more than the voice, a narrator who keeps the character of the husband at the distance of third person:

'What is it you see
From up there always—for I want to know.'

168

> She turned and sank upon her skirts at that
> And her face changed from terrified to dull.
> He said to gain time: 'What is it you see,'
> Mounting until she cowered under him.
> 'I will find out now—you must help me, dear.'
> She, in her place, refused him any help
> With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.
> She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,
> Blind creature, and awhile he didn't see.
> But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh.'(Frost, 55)

Even as Frost makes a move to speak from within the mouth of the husband, we are made aware of the dangers of over-aggressive sympathy as the husband asserts a threatening insistence on sharing his wife's feeling. This insistence is choreographed with almost militaristic motions: he commands, he gains time, he mounts, and she finally cowers beneath him. Is this the way by which insight is gained, by which the husband might empathize with his wife, or by which Frost might enter the mouths of his characters? The husband's advances are troubling, aggressive approaches that call to mind Frost's attitude towards what he sees as internationalist threats to national individuality and individual personality: "First I want to be a person. And I want you to be a person, and then we can be as interpersonal as you please. We can pull each other's noses—do all sorts of things. But, first of all, you have got to have the personality" (Frost, 727). The husband's aggressive incursions on his wife's stubborn silence run the terrible risk of intruding upon her own, discreet personality and its particular version of mourning. The husband's insistence also reflects back upon the narrator, who is more closely allied to the man than the woman (having chosen to speak first with the husband's voice and having established a similar blindness to the ephemeral thing the woman sees). Couched in this alliance, the

169

narrator begins to seem like a "blind creature" himself, or even, potentially, a brutally

intrusive husband.

But if forcing a silent person to speak is to approach with excessive force, how

can Frost justify his dialogic poems? In them, the narrator chooses over and over again

to speak for people who, like Amy, have not chosen to do so. "Home Burial" does not

seem, at first glance, to depict such a choice in positive terms. As the poem progresses,

misunderstanding does not diminish at the husband's insistence; in fact, the husband's

(and narrator's) ability to see what Amy sees becomes even more clouded:

'What is it—what?' she said.

'Just that I see.'

'You don't,' she challenged. 'Tell me what it is.'

'The wonder is I didn't see at once.
I never noticed it from here before.
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.
The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it.
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one marble,
Broad shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind those.
But I understand: it is not the stones,
But the child's mound—

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried

She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;
And turned on him with such a daunting look,
He said twice over before he knew himself:
Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost? (Frost, 56)

170

Her question "What is it—what?" and later her command "tell me what it is" imply that what she sees is immaterial, something she cannot name from her experience. She does not ask "what do you see?" which would imply an object of the sort that the husband settles on when he describes the grave; instead, she wants to know what it *is* that he sees, wants to know if her husband has accessed a vision of something that has no name. We aren't given any clues as to what Amy thinks her husband may have seen: a ghost? an emptiness? Whatever it is, the phrasing of her question implies that she has no language with which to pin down her visitation, and she would like to know if her husband could possibly help her describe that un-wordable thing. But all that her husband sees are the physical signs of the dead child, the plot of earth and the gravestones, signs which he lists with much descriptive care. He clings to the world of objects—describing them as lovingly as a father might describe a child—while she is haunted by an immaterial presence, which can be neither named nor defined.

As in the poem's opening lines, when the husband attempts to wrongly sympathize by naming what it is that his wife has turned in response to, his intrusions are choreographed as acts of violence: she shrinks "from beneath his arm," which, its modifying clause split to the next line, seems for a moment as though it is lifted in anger. His arm is not, however, lifted in anger; instead, it rests on the balcony, and her misperception causes her to adopt her own aggressive stance, turning on him with a "daunting look." This move causes him, despite himself, to make a statement of ownership: it is *his own* child, that *he* has lost. By this point, his attempts at sympathy

171

have set the couple even more at odds, to the point that his expression of mourning is delivered as an expression of territorial repossession.

Despite this admission of basic perceptual disjunctions in sympathy, however, Frost does not banish himself from the interiorities of his subjects; instead, he proceeds with his conversational poem, even deepening his immersion in the two characters by dispensing with the distance of the narrator's voice. Through the middle section of the poem, he ceases to acknowledge any separation, speaking from the characters' voices in a torrent of unmediated words, as though he has achieved full Emersonian communion with them, sharing the "path or circuit" of their emotions. For eighty lines he continues in their voices, stepping out of them only once to narrate in the third person when he describes Amy's finger moving the latch.

As this uninterrupted dialogue continues, Frost moves further into Amy's persona, which took, in the early lines, a secondary place to the persona of the husband as a result of her curtness of response. Here Amy finally abandons her one-line responses and delivers an unmitigated monologue:

> 'You can't because you don't know how to speak.
> If you had any feelings, you that dug
> With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;
> I saw you from that very window there,
> Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
> Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
> And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
> I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.
> And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs
> To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.
> Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice
> Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,
> But I went near to see with my own eyes.

172

> You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
> Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave
> And talk about your everyday concerns.
> You had stood the spade up against the wall
> Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.' (Frost, 57).

In her speech, Amy becomes a narrator of her own impressions. She tells the story of her husband's actions, collecting into her narrative the various voices of her past thoughts ("how could you?") and her interrupting questions ("Who is that man?"). Her conversational universe is comprised entirely of herself; her past voice, her questioning voice, her explaining voice, each of which she sets apart, using semicolons and dashes in a grammatical manner similar to the way that Frost earlier distinguished his narrator from his characters.

As she grows more wild with frustration, Amy even begins to narrate her husband, repeating from memory his speech on the morning he buried the infant:

> I can repeat the very words you were saying.
> 'Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
> Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.'
> Think of it, talk like that at such a time!
> What had how long it takes a birch to rot
> To do with what was in the darkened parlor.
> You couldn't care! The nearest friends can go
> With anyone to death, comes so far short
> They might as well not try to go at all.
> No, from the time when one is sick to death,
> One is alone, and he dies more alone.
> Friends make pretense of following to the grave,
> But before one is in it, their minds are turned
> And making the best of their way back to life
> And living people, and things they understand. (Frost, 58)

At this point, it becomes clear that Amy might be directing her accusations at Frost as much as she is directing them to her husband. In her criticism of her husband's birch-

173

wood musings ("three foggy mornings and one rainy day/ Will rot the best birch fence a man can build"), she equally criticizes Frost's own poetics of symbolic rural objects: the husband's line about birch fences represents exactly the kind of language that Frost celebrates when he says that "it is the height of poetry, the height of all thinking, the height of all poetic thinking, that attempt to say matter in terms of spirit and spirit in terms of matter" (Frost, 723-724). Be this as it may, any kind of speech that will "stop just short" is not enough for Amy, whose desire is to see the invisible, to follow the dead all the way to their graves without turning back to the material world.

One might contend, on the other hand, that it is her husband's materialism, and not his symbolism, that alienates Amy, and so Frost is not included in the excoriation of her narrative. Frost himself distinguishes between materialism and symbolism in "Education by Poetry":

> It is wrong to call anybody a materialist simply because he
> tries to say spirit in terms of matter, as if that were a sin.
> Materialism is not the attempt to say all in terms of matter.
> The only materialist—be he poet, teacher, scientist, politician,
> or statesman—is the man who gets lost in his material without
> a gathering metaphor to throw it into shape and order. He is
> the lost soul. (Frost, 724)

The husband, however, is not guilty of materialism by this definition: he *has* found a kind of organizing metaphor—that of the decaying birch fence—with which to attach the amorphous forms of his loss to the material world. As much as Frost's climber of birches, or Frost's picker of apples, the husband is using earthly symbols to reach towards the spiritual world. And so Amy's disappointment speaks to Frost's poetic style as much as it speaks to her husband's style of speech; their kind of insight is, for a mother who

174

wants nothing but to inhabit a ghost world with her dead child, incomplete and violently presumptive. It almost seems that, in this commentary, Amy, once narrated by Frost, has begun to narrate not only herself, or her husband, but the poet himself, insisting that his failure of immaterial speech is the most reproachable act of the scene. According to Amy, her husband's and Frost's dedication to the material make it impossible for them to imagine their way into a more immaterial world, one in which death might be shared rather than half-heartedly represented.

Ultimately, Frost finally merges with Amy (by losing his narrative perch) only long enough to chastise himself for his own poetics of pretense. After Amy's speech, the husband, and Frost, make one more attempt at a conciliatory passage—'There, you have said it all and you feel better'—but Amy has had enough: "'*you*—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—/ Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you—'" (Frost, 58). Her speech delivered (and directed, in its anger about wordiness, as much to the poet as the farmer husband), she will not speak again, and she will neither move back towards her husband nor allow the poet to speak again through her mouth. Instead, she ceases not with a period but with a more inconclusive dash, and opens the door of the house wider, refusing to stay shut within the locked frame of a sentence or a door. She will not be trapped in the house, with material metaphors, and with words; instead, she will keep the door open to silence and air, to the ghostly world of her lost child.

In the moment that she opens the door wider, Frost is relegated back to his narrative perch (the narrator's voice reappears in the poem's last stanza), and the full force of violence re-enters the husband's tone: 'If—you—do!' She was opening the door

175

wider./ 'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that./ I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will*!—' (Frost, 58). It seems as though a terrible status quo has been restored, Frost and the husband allied in a standoff with Amy, who refuses to communicate productively. This message of tragically futile non-communication is the message that critics have tended to derive from "Home Burial." As Phillips states it, "the two fix a mutual restraint that leaves them and their poem with nowhere to go" (Phillips, 608). They are terribly stuck, a sensation that Phillips finds underscored in the poem's very punctuation: "nothing is more illustrative of 'Home Burial' than how the words of Amy and her husband hit the end of their sentences, and often the ends of their lines, in grim periods or mute dashes, halts that neither offer nor expect reply" (Phillips, 608).

I would argue, however, that in ending the poem with an incomplete sentence marked by a dash, a punctuation mark infinitely softer than a period, Amy has had an important effect. In so doing, has found the formal, material means by which to communicate her desire. If the poem's other dash silences (which Richard Poirier describes as "(suggesting) some shock of recognition" (Poirier, 18)) have been quickly filled with speech, this final one is left gaping: the poem is more open to air, to "some" unwordable spirit presence, than it was at its outset. This is what Amy has desired all along, and what her husband's (and Frost's) materialist language has rendered impossible. She herself set the precedent for ending sentences with dashes in her final speech: "*You*--oh you think the talk is all. I must go--/ Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you--" (Frost, 58). She invents a language that ends with silence, and forces a poem that was choreographed inside little interior spaces to end with an open

176

door.   The fact that her husband ends the poem using the same silences, speaking while the door opens wider, is a victory of sorts for Amy. In the silence marked off by dashes, and in the openness of a widening door, she has gotten her message across. Just as Pulter's poems bemoan a state of captivity that seems inexorable and yet simultaneously re-imagine the universe so that true captivity is impossible, "Home Burial" ends with an unresolved conflict that is nevertheless rendered more hopeful by the fact that the couple's enclosure has been rendered less obdurate. In those final, indeterminate lines there is the possibility—if not the certainty—that Amy will escape that house's intransigent stuckness, and that her husband will finally understood her sorrow. The poem is, I think, a successful poem of insight. In it, Frost has sympathized enough with Amy to allow her a final agency in the poem's structure, and to allow her the silence and the privacy she demands in order to attempt to exist with her lost child.

It might even be argued, in fact, that Amy's wish for escape from the closed boundaries of houses, words, and squared-off-forms has affected the form of the poem as a whole, and even the form of the book in which she is placed. For a poet who famously said that he would rather play tennis with the net down than write in free verse, "Home Burial" is remarkably irregular. It does not rhyme, and while the majority of the lines have five beats, very few maintain iambic rhythm and many spill over into six beats, or fall short at four. Thoughts are not parceled off, then, into the closed rooms of couplets, and lines are not strict enough to enclose the same number of beats or syllables. In a strategy that is similar to Bradstreet's strategy of opening the closed rooms of her heroic couplets, Frost uses prosodic error to express the obduracy of grief for a departed person

177

who cannot be sufficiently mourned. If Bradstreet inserts her rougher voice into the smoother heroic cadences of her poetic predecessors, Amy interrupts ("Don't, don't, don't don't!") with even less attention to the proper movement of rhythm.

Despite these similarities, Frost permits his dissenting poetic speaker even more breakage than Bradstreet does. If Bradstreet allowed herself prosodic irregularity, the dialogic form of "Home Burial" also inserts visual irregularity into the poem, so that it does not appear as a black rectangle on the page. When Amy interrupts her husband, for instance, white space floods into the dark containment of the poem:

> But I understand: it is not the stones,
> But the child's mound--'
>
>   'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.
>
> She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm
> That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;
> And turned on him with such a daunting look,
> He said twice over before he knew himself:
> 'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?' (Frost, 56)

If a long poem often resembles a dark corridor moving through the space of a page, this corridor is broken, exposed, opening out into the blankness around it. "Home Burial" is not the only poem in the book to exhibit these traits. "Mending Wall" is smooth and uninterrupted (albeit unrhymed), but "The Death of the Hired Man" is rough-edged and often broken by the spaces around interruptions. "The Mountain," "A Hundred Collars," "Blueberries," "The Code," "Generations of Men," "The Housekeeper," "The Fear," and "The Self-Seeker" all demonstrate similarly un-mended poetic walls and torn poetic nets.

It is significant that the book's first and last poems--"Mending Wall" and "The Wood-Pile" are both uninterrupted, well-fortified corridors; all of the book's chaos is enclosed them, by the bookends of these unbroken poems. Still, however, the majority of the book insists on escaping past the bounds of perfected poetics. Amy's mockery of her husband's finalizing, concrete speech seems to have perforated these poems and this entire book with gaping holes. Just as Bradstreet, for instance, opens holes in the facade of her heroic couplets by inserting metrical and metaphorical error, Amy tears the fabric of Frost's poem by inserting her forms of poetic silence.

The book, then, seems as much ruled by Amy's poetic sensibility as it is ruled by Frost's own quite different poetic approach. He does not only approximate the words she might have spoken, he also approximates the forms in which she might have spoken those words. In "Home Burial," then, Frost sets up a dialectic between complete insight, enacted by his entrance into the forms of other characters in order to speak with their voices, and complete insularity, enacted by the relationship between the couple and by his own banishment out to the position of narrator in the poem's conclusion.

The book's most famous poem, "Mending Wall," also oscillates between insight and insularity, between the possibility of intimacy and the necessity of formal division. Because the poem is too often distilled to the neighbor character's pat conclusion--"Good fences make good neighbors"--the tension that the poem builds around the concept of walls is sometimes overlooked. Rather than lauding his neighbor's affection for walls, however, the poem's narrator introduces the final conclusion in highly skeptical terms:

> Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

> If I could put a notion in his head:
> '*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
> Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
> Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
> What I was walling in or walling out,
> And to whom I was like to give offense.
> Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
> That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
> But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
> He said it for himself. I see him there
> Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
> In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
> He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
> Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
> He will not go behind his father's saying,
> And he likes having thought of it so well
> He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.' (Frost, 39-40)

Rather than celebrating his neighbor's maxim, the poem's narrator condemns it as reactionary and even savage traditionalism, carried over from the dark ages. Despite this condemnation, however, the poem's narrator is not given the final word. "Good fences make good neighbors" is the last line of the poem, and the poem's title is, after all "Mending Wall." By opening and closing his poem with two affirmations of the importance of walls, the poet--if not his narrator--signals a willingness to give some credence to the neighbor's convictions. The poem itself is a bit of a wall, a long stack of pentameter lines, each one fitted together as if the poet, like his characters with their stones, has used "a spell to make them balance." The narrator's description of mending that wall is similar, in fact, to Frost's comparison between formal poetry and tennis with the net up, both being games with arbitrary but crucial dividing markers: "Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,/ One on a side" (Frost 39). Something there may be that doesn't love a wall, but Frost's poetry is not that thing. The passage describing the

180

process of mending the wall is as beautiful as any in the poem: "We keep the wall between us as we go. To each the boulders that have fallen to each. And some are loaves and some so nearly balls/ We have to use a spell to make them balance: 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'/ We wear our fingers rough with handling them. Oh, just another kind of outdoor game./ One on a side." (Frost, 39).

Beyond its simple loveliness, this passage describes two men--who are not otherwise close--engaging in a dance together, momentarily intimate. For the thirteen lines at the center of the poem when the men are mending their wall, the narrator uses the pronoun "we" to describe himself and his neighbor as one active unit. Otherwise, the first-person plural is absent from the poem, replaced entirely by 'I' and 'he.' The wall, then, even if it is reactionary or useless, does serve to make these two men more close, bridging the pronouns that make them distinct. It challenges them to act together, even if they are acting to 'set the wall between us once again.' This is the oxymoronic and oscillating force of walls: even as they serve to set up intransigent divisions, they are constantly breaking down, and at these points of decay they form the site at which attempts at intimacy can be made. You can't, Frost seems to say, reach out to another person unless there is some space or barrier that you have to reach over. Walls heal a breach at the same time that they signify it, and the best way for these two men to approach each other is to approach under the pretext of mending a wall which breaks down yearly and yearly must be built up once again.

This same oxymoron lies at the heart of all domestic escape poetry, which erects strict boundaries in order to reach past them. The soundness of Anne Bradstreet's heroic

couplets and the intransigence of Hester Pulter's paralysis both create points of friction at which temporary or even momentary escape is made more potent because it will not last. The flickering outdoor recollections of Emma are even more potent in Hardy's poetry because those recollections are so often stifled within indoor spaces. All four of these poets seem to suggest that total freedom from boundaries is not freedom at all, but is rather meaningless incoherence. Rather than casting their vote for the liberty of formlessness, these poets seek points of escape in a well-bounded universe. Despite their very valid complaints of confinement, they choose a dialectic between wholeness and break, between form and formlessness, rather than depicting an absolutely un-walled universe, a concept which seems to be either unimaginable or undesirable in their minds.

The same dialectic between structural soundness and decay is at play throughout *North of Boston* not only on the topical level but on the level of poetic structure. From the formal wholeness of "Mending Wall," Frost slips into the ground-swell dissonance of other characters' voices, then ends the book banished again to wholeness of form in "The Wood Pile" and "Good Hours." "The Wood Pile," in fact, makes the issue of neat, measured form its main subject: "He went behind it to make his last stand. It was a cord of maple, cut and split/ And piled--and measured, four by four by eight./ Not another like it I could see" (Frost, 101). After the unsettling experience of speaking in discordant lines and channeling the interruptions of others' speech, Frost seems, in "The Wood Pile," to seek a return to the mended fences of formally perfect poetic lines.

This return to formal safety seems, at first, to be fortified by "Good Hours," which is the book's final poem and the only stanzaic poem in the book. In the neat rectangles

arranged in order on the page, it seems as if Frost has sought comfort in the little rooms of four-line stanzas, retreating at last from the sprawling houses and open corridors of the other poems. The book ends, in other words, with a resumption of the measured, piled, material forms that Frost favors in his other books. And yet the idea of such formal restraint has been changed by the poems that came before it, immeasurable and spilling out of their piles. The book's final poem, despite its measured stanzas, is about a walker who strays away from the cottages of a town and realizes that he cannot again re-enter their safety:

> I had for my winter evening walk--
> No one at all with whom to talk,
> But I had the cottages in a row
> Up to their shining eyes in snow.
>
> And I thought I had the folk within:
> I had the sound of a violin;
> I had a glimpse through curtain laces
> Of youthful forms and youthful faces.
>
> I had such company outward bound.
> I went till there were no cottages found.
> I turned and repented, but coming back
> I saw no window but that was black.
>
> Over the snow my creaking feet
> Disturbed the slumbering village street
> Like profanation, by your leave,
> At ten o'clock of a winter eve. (Frost, 102)

These stanzas are as neatly contained as any in Frost's poetry. They are formed of two couplets each, linked with perfect rhymes. Every stanza, moreover, ends with a period. These are stanzas with closed doors and unopened windows; and yet, despite this, "Good Hours" is a poem about the poignant--even pleasant--loneliness that comes with leaving

the safety of enclosing forms. This is a narrator who writes from an outdoor perspective: it could be the poem written by Amy after having left the enclosure of her house, or the poem written by the wife in "The Fear" who refuses to go into her house. While the poem admits a lack of understanding of what goes on inside other people's houses--"I *thought* I had the folk within" is not nearly so confident as "I had the folk within"--and acknowledges an ultimate loneliness, for the narrator can only peek through windows that finally go black, it simultaneously enacts the same escape that many of the poems' characters have desired. In placing himself outside, then, Frost places himself in the same position that Amy might occupy at the close of her poem. And while the poem seems to express a banished loneliness, these are after all "Good Hours," marked by snow, the sound of a violin, and lights in the windows of cottages. In the end, the "profanation" of the poet's creaking feet is a profanation "by your leave," as if his every sound has been permitted by the houses and their inhabitants.

This dialectic between confinement and escape results in a modified lyric insularity, an authorial perspective that cannot escape its own boundaries but has, nevertheless, been changed by the experience of attempting insight. In some ways, Frost has achieved in "Home Burial" and in *North of Boston* the same tensions that all Emerson's essays collected together achieve, juxtaposing the distance of skepticism and the nearness of transcendence. If Emerson, however, can be accused (as Altieri does) of synthesizing insight and insularity into a kind of presumptive, lordly subjectivity, Frost manages in the ending of "Home Burial" to insist that difference and unintelligibility check the pretenses of empathy, opening silences in which privacy might coexist with

shared insight. It is a poem as much about the white space after language has ceased as it is about finding the perfect, concluding word. These two poles of language maintained, rather than collapsed, Frost is able to set his characters and his forms in dialogue with one another, maintaining a dualism between self-containment and escape into the minds of other people.

This dialectic between confinement and escape produces, as many of Hardy's elegiac techniques also produce, a poem of architectural confinement--the house is nothing if not a prison for the warring husband and wife--that opens out by the end to an unenclosed freedom. The opening lines of the poem are choreographed entirely within the narrow scope of a stairway; when a window finally appears, it frames an outside world that is as narrow and straitened as the world inside the house: "The little graveyard where my people are!/ So small the window frames the whole of it./ Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?/ There are three stones of slate and one of marble,/ Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight/ On the sidehill/" (Frost, 56). Both the house and the outside world have contracted to tiny, angular spaces: a stairway inside, a graveyard the size of a bedroom outside. Within such shrunken circumstances, the husband and wife cannot help to approach each other in ways that seem aggressive; his every movement enters her personal space. The problem of insularity, then, is allied with the problem of living in small spaces cut off from the freedoms of outdoor existence, the problems of living within intransigent walls. On the other hand, the architectural openness that Amy threatens at the end of the book is allied to a failure of language to

contain meaningful communicative sense: if Amy exits through that door, her husband will have failed to keep her close by saying the right combination of words.

This play between cornered claustrophobia and outdoor escape appears not only in "Home Burial" but throughout *North of Boston*. In "The Fear," as in "Home Burial," a husband insists on going inside the house; the wife refuses, claiming that she will not feel protected from her phantom anxieties within its locked spaces: "I can't go in./ I can't, and leave a think like that unsettled./ Doors locked and curtains drawn will make no difference./ I always have felt strange when we came home/ To the dark house after so long an absence" (Frost, 90). "The Housekeeper" opens with a character letting himself in through a kitchen door, and ends with the old woman shouting "against the closing door" (Frost, 89). In this case, it is the woman who presides over a shut room, who will not even get up from her chair, and the man (John), who insists on speaking out of doors. In both of these poems, one character argues for interior, architectural space; the other character insists on moving outdoors. In "Home Burial," the husband is an advocate of contained graveyards, windows, and small rooms; the wife is an advocate of the invisible, the open, and the outdoors. By setting up a dialogue between an advocate of walled rooms and an advocate of unrestrained spaces, Frost is able to end his poem with an indeterminacy which suits Amy's preferences while expressing those preferences in a material language that suits his own poetics.

This oscillation between, on one hand, blankness, unworded sentiment, and outdoor space and on the other hand, enclosure, lines, and material symbolism is the backbone of "Home Burial." It is also the dialectic at play throughout *North of Boston,*

186

which begins with a statement about the importance of well-mended fences and proceeds to cycle through any number of windows and doors, looking for an opening despite having insisted on the importance of keeping things shut. Just as Bradstreet insists on the wholeness of couplets, then insists on breaking that wholeness with error, just as Pulter writes poems of confinement that are set in a universe that does not permit any type of physical stillness or isolation, and just as Hardy writes elegies that will contain his dead wife and yet undermines their architectural stability, Frost's *North of Boston* exists somewhere between the comfort of enclosure and the freedom of escape. It is the particular power of the book that it never settles on one solution at the expense of the other, but rather alternates between the two, leaving his characters sadly "unaccommodated," as Lear calls Edgar on the heath, but also unsubjected to the confinements of verse.

Works Cited

Altieri, Charles. *Subjective Agency: A Theory of First-person Expressivity and its Social Implications.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publications, 1994.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Vincent Leitch, ed. New York: W.W Norton and Co., 2001.

Beatty, C.J.P. *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy.* Dorchester, Dorset: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1966.

Berger, Sheila. *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process.* New York: New York University Press, 1990.

Berryman, John. *The Freedom of the Poet.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.

Berryman, John. *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and Other Poems.* London: Faber and Faber, 1959.

Betjeman, Sir John. "Hardy and Architecture." In *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Margaret Drabble. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976.

Bloom, Harold. *Poets and Poems*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2004.

Boland, Eavan. "Finding Anne Bradstreet," in *Seventeenth Century British Poetry,* eds. John Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 2006.

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth.* London: Macmillan, 1905.

Bradstreet, Anne. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Jeannine Hensely. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967.

Brady, Maura. "Space and the Persistence of Place in *Paradise Lost." Milton Quarterly* (41.3) 2007: 167-82.

Cavitch, Max. *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Chaplin, Gregory. "Beyond Sacrifice: Milton and the Atonement." *PMLA* (125.2) 2010: 354-369.

Cox, D. Drew. "The Poet and the Architect." Agenda 10.2-3 (1972): 50-65.

Danielson, Dennis. "Astronomy." In *Milton in Context,* ed. Stephen Dobranksi. Cambridge, 2010.

Davie, Donald. "Essential Gaudiness: The Poems of Wallace Stevens," *The Twentieth Century,* 153 (June, 1953).

Devlin, D.D. *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs.* London: Macmillan Press, 1980.

Dickinson, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960.

Digges, Thomas. 1MR-1MV. In Danielson, 218.

Ditmore, Michael G. "Bliss Lost, Wisdom Gained: Contemplating Emblems and Enigmas in Anne Bradstreet's 'Contemplations.'" *Early American Literature,* 42.1 (2007).

Donne, John. *John Donne: The Major Works.* Ed. John Carey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Eardley, Alice. "Hester Pulter's 'Indivisibles' and the Challenges of Annotating Early Modern Women's Poetry." *SEL* (52.1) 2012: 117-141.

_____. "Lady Hester Pulter's Date of Birth." In *Notes and Queries,* 57.4 (2010).

Eberwein, Jane Donohue. "'No Rhet'ric We Expect: Argumentation in Bradstreet's 'The Prologue,'" *Early American Literature,* 16 (Spring, 1981).

Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism.* London: Methuen, 1960.

Empson, William. "Donne the Space Man." In *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry, 1603-1660,* ed. John Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin. New York, 2006.

Ezell, Margaret J.M. "The Laughing Tortoise: Speculations on Manuscript Sources and Women's Book History." *English Literary Renaissance* 38.2 (2008): 331-55.

Fallon, Stephen. *Milton Among the Philosophers*: *Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England.* Ithaca, 2007.

Fernie, Deanna. "The Difficult Homages of Berryman and Bradstreet." *Symbiosis,* 7 (Spring, 2003).

Flannagan, Roy, ed. *The Riverside Milton.* Boston, 1998.

Fowler, Alastair. "The Formation of Genres in the Renaissance and After." In *New Literary History*, 34.2 (2003).

Frost, Robert. *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays.* Ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson. New York: Library Classics of the United States, 1995.

Frost, Robert. *The Notebooks of Robert Frost.* Ed. Robert Faggen. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.

Golding, Alan. *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry.* Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

Gray, Thomas. In *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962.

Hardy, Thomas. "Illustrations for Wessex Poems." <u>Victorian Poetry</u> 17.1-2 (1979): 135-154.

_____. *Life and Art: Essays, Notes, and Letters, Collected for the First Time*. New York: Greenberg, 1925.

_____. "Memories of Church Restoration": author's manuscript, signed, with author's revisions. Thomas Hardy Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 1906.

_____. "St. Juliot's Church, Cornwall: 20 Architectural Drawings in Pencil, Ink, and Watercolor." Thomas Hardy Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 1967-1970.

_____. *Thomas Hardy Selected Poems*. Ed. Tim Armstrong. London: Longman, 1993.

Harvey, Tamara. *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700.* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008.

Hayden, Judy, ed. *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse: Prefiguring Frankenstein.* Basingstroke, 2011.

Hayden, Judy ed. *Travel Narratives, The New Science, and Literary Discourse.* Surrey, England, 2012.

Heaney, Seamus. *Opened Ground.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.

Heath, Kay. "In the Eye of the Beholder: Victorian Age Construction and the Specular Self." <u>Victorian Literature and Culture</u> 34.1 (2006): 27-45.

Hill, Geoffrey. In *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition.* Ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair. New York: W.W Norton, 1988.

Hilliker, Robert. *Engendering Identity: The Discourse of Familial Education in Anne Bradstreet and Marie de l'Incarnation.* Early American Literature, 42.3 (2007).

Heinzelman, Kurt. "Williams and Stevens: The Vanishing Point of Resemblance." In *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas,* 29 (1984).

Herbert, George. *The Complete English Poems.* Ed. John Tobin. London: Penguin, 1991.

Herman, Peter C. "Lady Hester Pulter's *The Unfortunate Florinda*: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Rape." *Renaissance Quarterly* 63 (2010): 1208-46.

Horace. *The Odes of Horace.* Ed. Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

Hughes, Merritt. "Kidnapping Donne." University of California Publications in English 4 (1934): 61-89.

Hutton, Sarah. "Hester Pulter c. 1596-1678: A Woman Poet and the New Astronomy." *Etudes Epistemes* 14 (2008): 77-87.

Johnson, Francis R. *Astronomical Thought in Renaissance England.* Baltimore, 1937.

Katz, Alison. "Jude the Obscure: The (En)graven Image." <u>The Thomas Hardy Journal</u> XXII. Autumn (2006): 85-102.

Kopacz, Paula. *"'To Finish What's Begun': Anne Bradstreet's Last Words."* Early American Literature, 23.2 (1988).

Lanyer, Aemelia. *The Poems of Aemelia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum.* New York, 1993.

Lanyer, Aemelia. In *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry,* 1603-1660. Ed. John Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 2006.

Laughlin, Rosemary. "Anne Bradstreet: Poet in Search of Form," *American Literature,* 42 (March, 1970).

Lawson, Anita. " 'The Golden Sun in Splendor Likest Heaven': Johannes Kepler's *Epitome* and *Paradise Lost*, Book 3." *Milton Quarterly* (21.2) 1987: 46-51.

Lentricchia, Frank. *Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self.* Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1975.

Lipking, Lawrence. *The Life of the Poet.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Margerum, Eileen. "Anne Bradstreet's Public Poetry and the Tradition of Humility. *Early American Literature,* 17 (Fall, 1982).

Marlowe, Christopher. *The Jew of Malta.* New York, 1970.

Merrim, Stephanie. *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999.

Millgate, Michael, ed. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy.* London: Macmillan, 1984.

Millgate, Michael, ed. *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

Milton, John. In *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton.* Ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. New York: The Modern Library, 2007.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *Builders of the Bay Colony.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930.

Nicolson, Marjorie. *The Microscope and English Imagination.* Northampton, MA, 1935.

Ostriker, Alicia. "Thomas Wyatt and Henry Surrey: Dissonance and Harmony in Lyric Form. In *New Literary History,* 1.3 (1970).

Pack, Robert. *Belief and Uncertainty in the Poetry of Robert Frost.* Hanover, NH: Middlebury College Press, 2003.

Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property.* London and New York: Methuen, 1987.

Parker, Siobhan. "The Daily Living of Robert Frost." *PMLA* 123.3 (May 2008): 598-614.

Paulin, Tom. *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception.* London: Macmillan, 1974.

Piper, William Bowman. *The Heroic Couplet.* Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969.

Poirier, Robert. *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Pound, Ezra. "Imagisme," *Poetry Magazine.* (March, 1913).

Pulter, Hester. *Poems Breathed Forth by the Nobel Hadassas.* Leeds Brotherton MS Lt. q 32.

Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie.* Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1936.

Requa, Kenneth A. "Anne Bradstreet's Poetic Voices," *Early American Literature*, 9 (1974).

Rich, Adrienne. "Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry," in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Jeannine Hensley. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

Richards, Jill. "The History of Error: Hardy's Critics and the Self Unseen." Victorian Poetry 45.2 (Summer 2007): 117-133.

Richardson, James. *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Necessity.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Robson, Catherine. "'Where Heaves the Turf': Thomas Hardy and the Boundaries of the Earth." Victorian Literature and Culture 32.2 (2004): 495-503.

Robson, Mark. "Reading Hester Pulter Reading." Literature Compass 2.1 (2005).

Rosenfeld, Alvin H. "Bradstreet's 'Contemplations': Patterns of Form and Meaning," in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet,* ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford." Boston: G.K Hall & Co., 1983.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *The House of Life: A Sonnet Sequence.* Ed. Roger C. Lewis. Rochester: D.S Brewer, 2007.

Round, Phillip H. *By Nature and by Custom Cursed: Transatlantic Civil Discourse and New England Cultural Production, 1620-1660.* Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999.

Rumrich, John. *Milton Unbound.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

_____. *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation.* New York, 1996.

_____. "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos." *PMLA* 110.5 (1995): 1035-46.

Rumrich, John and Gregory Chaplin, eds. *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry: 1613-1660.* New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2006.

Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985.

Sarkar, Malabika. "The Visible Diurnal Sphere: Astronomical Images of Space and Time in *Paradise Lost." Milton Quarterly* (18.1) 1984: 1-5.

Schwartz, Louis. *Milton and Maternal Mortality.* Cambridge, 2009.

Schweitzer, Ivy. "Anne Bradstreet Wrestles with the Renaissance." *Early American Literature,* 23.3 (1988).

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet.* New York, 1975.

_____. *Shakespeare's Sonnets.* Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. London: Arden, 1997.

Sexton, Melanie. "Phantoms of His Own Figuring: The Movement Toward Recovery in Hardy's 'Poems of 1912-1913." Victorian Poetry 29.3 (1991): 209-226.

Shields, David S. "Poor Performance: Incompetence in Conversation, Manuscript, and Print in British America." In *Cultural Narratives: Textuality and Performance in*

American Culture before 1900, ed. Sandra M. Gustafson and Caroline F. Sloat. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.

Stanlis, Peter. *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007.

Stewart, Susan. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Surrey, Henry. In *English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology.* Ed. Richard S. Sylvester. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1984.

Sweet, Timothy. "Gender, Genre, and Subjectivity in Anne Bradstreet's Early Elegies." *Early American Literature,* 23.2 (1988).

Taylor, Dennis. *Hardy's Poetry, 1860-1928.* New York: Columbia University press, 1981.

Tyler, Moses Coit. *History of American Literature, 1607-1765.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1949.

Vendler, Helen. *The Breaking of Style.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Walcott, Derek. In *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition.* Ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair. New York: W.W Norton, 1988.

Whicher, Stephen E., ed. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957.

White, Peter, ed. *Puritan Poets and Poetics.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985.

Whitman, Walt. *The Complete Poems.* New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

Whitman, Walt. *Poetry and Prose.* Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: The Library of America, 1996.

Wordsworth, William. *The Major Works.* Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Wroth, Mary. *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth.* Ed. Josephine Roberts. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.

Wyatt, Thomas. In *English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology.* Ed. Richard S. Sylvester. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1984.

Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Works of W.B Yeats.* New York, 1989.